

Melodrama, Excess, and Media Narratives: A Systematization Based on the *Intellectual Kinship* Approach

Melodrama, Excesso e Narrativas Midiáticas: Uma Sistematização Baseada na Abordagem de Parentesco Intelectual

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ABSTRACT

This article presents four possible ontologies through the nature, composition, purpose, and location of the relations between excess and melodrama in media narratives. The concept of *intellectual kinship* is methodologically used over three categories: identification of the common antagonist, evidence of similarity in intercommunication, and enhancement of dissimilarity as the maintenance of autonomy. The conclusions point to the non-consensual nature of melodrama; the binomial understanding of the relational composition between excess/melodrama; disputes concerning the purposes of the action of excess in melodrama; and the recognition that the materialities on which excess and melodrama focus are multiple.

Keywords: Comparative study, intellectual kinship, media, melodrama, excess

RESUMO

O artigo apresenta quatro ontologias possíveis por meio da natureza, composição, finalidade e localização das relações entre o excesso e o melodrama nas narrativas midiáticas. A concepção de *parentesco intelectual* é metodologicamente mobilizada em três categorias: identificação do antagonismo comum, evidência da semelhança na intercomunicação e valorização da dessemelhança como manutenção da autonomia. As considerações finais destacam a não consensualidade sobre a natureza do melodrama; o entendimento binominal sobre a composição relacional excesso/melodrama; disputas de sentido sobre as finalidades de ação do excesso no melodrama; e o entendimento de que as materialidades nas quais incidem o excesso e o melodrama são múltiplas.

Palavras-chave: Estudo comparativo, parentesco intelectual, mídia, melodrama, excesso

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¹The Global North and the Global South are denominations that extend beyond the geographical separation between the southern and northern hemispheres, according to one of the possible definitions brought by Iqani and Resende (2019). For the authors, we are talking about a complex movement of links and distinctions (not necessarily stuck in a binary logic) of nations and societies that share a history of exclusion and oppression by processes of colonization and geopolitical projects that end up silencing or relegating certain societal experiences (including knowledge and understanding of the world) as inferior, illegitimate or not worthy of being taken into consideration. With equal importance, authors and communication theories coming from the Global South tend, and not rarely, to be seen as exotic or even confined to local experiences, without any epistemological validity of interest or pairing with other scientific processes coming from the Global North (Iqani & Resende, 2019).

²The term ontology is used according to its pre-established meaning within the field of communication. In this way, ontology is understood from the relational premise, that is, the relation that permeates the nature, reality, and existence of the entities (texts, authors, concepts, contexts) in communication. In this sense, as Martino (2019) recalls, the communication process viewed by the ontological reference is read according to “the elements that enter into relation.”

- a) Man, animal, machine.
- b) Between humans, with the divine, with the world, with aliens, with the dead.
- c) Human communication: with oneself, with others, with the world” (p. 15).

THE RELATIONS BETWEEN excess and melodrama are well-known not only in the academic world but also, in general, with the public, critics, and the content creators themselves, who understand such relations as key elements in the fruition process of a melodramatic work. On this subject, Singer (2001) reminds us that “Attempts to define melodrama can take a few tacks. . . . The essential element perhaps most often associated with melodrama is a certain ‘overwrought’ or ‘exaggerated’ quality summed up by the term *excess*” (pp. 38-39). That said, melodramatic excess tends, then, at least in a broad sense, to be seen as something that “appeals to what is most vulgar in the soul and taste of the audience” (Thomasseau, 2009, p. 15).

Accordingly, it is worth pointing out that the marginalization of melodramatic television objects (such as telenovelas and other broadcast TV shows) qualified as excessive – in a pejorative view, as Thorburn (1976) reminds us – is out of step with the present time. It is noticeable today that excess and melodrama invade any and all serial narrative spaces of television and streaming platforms; moreover being part of a series considered more sophisticated or (potentially) exempt from such excess (Smit, 2010, p. 154).

Hence, the objective of this work is to discuss the thinking of six recognized authors (Thomas Elsaesser, Peter Brooks, Jesús Martín-Barbero, Linda Williams, Mariana Baltar, and Agustín Zarzosa), from different intellectual generations, from the Global North¹ and the Global South, whose reflections are organized by four possible ontologies² in the relations between excess and melodrama, namely: the nature, the composition, the purpose, and the location of the relations. Therefore, the structure of the article is subdivided into eight axes: (1) presentation of Freire’s conception of *intellectual kinship* and its methodological use in the article; (2) excess and melodramatic *mise-en-scène*; (3) excess and melodramatic imagination; (4) rhetoric of excess and the mass popular; (5) excess as a potential quality in pervasive melodramatic modes; (6) excess as anticipation, exacerbated symbolization, and obviousness; (7) melodramatic mode and excess in the visibility of suffering; and (8) discussion of the four ontologies.

The criterion for choosing these six authors is based, first of all, on the pioneering nature and originality of their work on the relations between excess and melodrama in Anglo-Saxon and Latin American countries and the continued reverberation of their ideas, even today, in the academic environment. Logically, like every empirical cut-off point, such choice is also fraught with arbitrariness since relevant authors like Jean-Marie Thomasseau, Christine Gledhill, Ben Singer, Carolyn Williams, Ira Bhaskar, and David Mayer, for example, ended up being left out of the comparative analysis presented (without entirely dismissing their

reflections). Moreover, this work makes use of the theoretical-affective expression *intellectual kinship* (Freire, 1997) as a way to demonstrate the approximations between the thoughts of these authors who, despite being from different realities, have certain ontological affinities in their research.

THE CONCEPTION OF INTELLECTUAL KINSHIP IN PAULO FREIRE

The first time the theme of intellectual kinship was made explicit by the Brazilian educator Paulo Freire was in the preface he wrote to Peter McLaren's *Multiculturalismo Crítico* (1997). Republished in the anthology *Pedagogia da Tolerância* (Freire, 2016) and now entitled "Parentesco Intelectual [Intellectual Kinship]", the text follows a pattern that transitions between a freer essay and, at the same time, a testimony by Freire about his experiences and affective relations in the academic world (Freire, 2017). At the beginning of his explanation, the researcher states that "Since long ago, as a result of my personal experience, I became convinced of the existence of what I usually call 'intellectual kinship' between people who are strangers to each other from the point of view of blood" (Freire, 1997, p. 9).

Thus, what Freire understands by intellectual kinship refers to the concept that it is possible to visualize encounters (also sometimes permeated by mismatches) between thinking subjects who are not necessarily from the same generation, gender, race, class, culture or sociopolitical realities (Freire, 1997, p. 10). More than an intellectual affinity demarcated only by a common epistemological path that unites these subjects, the *kinship* is also revealed by shared subjectivities, affection, respect, intercultural communication, recognition, and admiration between one thinker and another. Therefore, intellectual kinship allows:

a pleasant atmosphere in which intercommunication occurs easily, with a minimum of disturbance. In which the subjects about which one speaks are apprehended through similar experiences of epistemological approach to them. In which affectivity, by "softening" "sharp corners" in the subjects, helps them in their relationships, instead of hindering them. (Freire, 1997, pp. 9-10)

According to Freire (1997), it is also possible to see that intellectual kinship occurs in two ways, in two gradations (in different degrees of intensity and depth, but potentially sequential): (1) first of all, through what he calls a "suspicion" that sees its birthplace occurring through contact and sharing of read texts; and (2) "in the personal encounter in which the discourses go on completing themselves" (pp. 10-11) and, soon, the kinship is confirmed.



Something very important to consider in understanding Freire's concept is precisely the possibility that intellectual kinship thrives beyond the shared similarities: it is also through difference, dissent, and even the dispute of senses that the interwoven voices will build a "family tree" with asymmetric "branches" that at times point in one direction, and, at others, point to another slightly different path. It is necessary, he says, that the dissimilarities and mismatches be appreciated, understood, and valued in the analysis of the facts (Freire, 1997, p. 9). Clearly, once again the discourse of tolerance to difference is not only exalted, but significantly, Freirean alterity is not omitted from the dialogue: the other's experience and point of view are important because the other may become my intellectual relative even if their ideas are not exclusively a reflection of my theoretical and methodological framework. The other's view, even if refracted, is tangent to mine and soon we find steps in common even in the midst of dissidence:

If someone asks me if the "intellectual kinship" is a sine qua non for us to influence and be influenced, for us to work together, exchange points of view, add knowledge, I say no. In such a case, because we need to cultivate in ourselves the virtue of tolerance, which teaches us to live with what is different, to learn from it, to teach it, so that in the end we can fight against the antagonistic. In general, unfortunately, academics and politicians use a lot of our energies in unjustifiable "fights" among us, provoked by adjectival differences or, even worse, by purely adverbial differences. While we spend our time in petty "bickering", in which personal vanities flare up, scratch and buffet each other, we weaken ourselves for the real fight: the fight against the antagonist. (Freire, 1997, p. 11)

Consequently, relocating spatially and temporally what is meant by antagonistic in each case, situation, and context, one sees that Freire (1997) is inviting the academic world not to abandon its points in dissent, but to look at all of them and analyze them through a lens of mutual respect and intellectual collaboration among peers. In summary, the educator further explains that "Sometimes it matters little, the 'kinship' is even smaller than it seemed at first, but a stronger similarity keeps it alive and burning" (p. 9).

Following the alteritarian perspective of difference and similarity as a guiding point, this article proposes to understand the conception of intellectual kinship from a first contact, that is, from the first *suspicious* that are created between the texts discussed here. The idea of bringing such a Freirean conception is also to demonstrate the analytical potential and the elasticity of the empirical application of the intellectual kinship approach to the field of comparative observations in

the areas of communication and media studies. To this end, three foundational points of the conceptualization of intellectual kinship are used as categories of analytical and comparative discussion:

- Identification of the combat surrounding a situation or an antagonistic element common to intellectual debate;
- Evidence of intercommunication through the similarity of ideas in the construction of the theoretical and methodological bases;
- Valuing dissimilarity (mismatching) as something necessary for the maintenance of alterity and intellectual autonomy.

Next, the article presents the ideas about excess and melodrama in the media and the cultural context for each author, and finally, in the “Discussion of Ontologies” section, discusses the approximations and distances of the views that demonstrate the configuration of an intellectual kinship among the authors.

EXCESS AS A STRUCTURAL ELEMENT OF THE MELODRAMATIC MISE-EN-SCÈNE

Thomas Elsaesser’s seminal work, “Tales of Sound and Fury: Observations on the Family Melodrama” (1991) was first published in the journal *Monogram* in 1972 (since then, authors such as Christine Gledhill and Marcia Landy have been concerned with reviving Elsaesser’s ideas by republishing the author’s essay in academic collections). Interested in unveiling the processes of melodramatic sense production, the researcher calls attention to his primary goal “to indicate the development of what one might call the melodramatic imagination³ across different artistic forms and in different epochs” (Elsaesser, 1991, p. 68).

In this way, the German author postulates that it is possible to extend the understanding of emotion and its link to music as elements producing other derivative meanings, that is, to increase the understanding of the melodramatic *mise-en-scène* from the way in which the meaning of “‘melos’ is given to ‘drama’ by means of lighting, montage, visual rhythm, décor, style of acting, music” (Elsaesser, 1991, p. 78). According to Zarzosa (2013, p. 107), Elsaesser’s location of excess is from the plane of rhetorical stylization, in terms of representation. This claim is reinforced by what Elsaesser (1991, p. 74) classifies as a punctuation system, that is, the melodramatic elements (including excess) as part of a grammaticalization of the forms of the story: a punctuation system that gives “expressive colour and chromatic contrast to the storyline, by orchestrating the emotional ups and downs of the intrigue” (Elsaesser, 1991, p. 74).

By placing excess as a structural element of the melodramatic *mise-en-scène*, the author makes use of Douglas Sirk’s cinematic melodramas – such as

³ As interchangeable terms, one can see that the author walks through the nomenclatures of melodramatic imagination and melodramatic mode throughout his discussion (Elsaesser, 1991, pp. 68, 72).



A Scandal in Paris (1946), *Take Me to Town* (1953), and *Written on the Wind* (1956) – as empirical exemplifications. More than that, one of the central ideas of Elsaesser’s (1991) talk is to perceive in what way the aesthetic elements put on stage fulfill their function of symbolization within these. “The advantage of this approach is that it formulates the problems of melodrama as problems of style and articulation,” reaffirms Elsaesser (1991, p. 74). As a result, excess, categorized as a rhetorical stylization, lends melodrama a symbolic plausibility in the narrative. And thus, it creates a *mode of experience*, in Elsaesser’s (1991, p. 73) words, that is entirely particular, historical, and socially conditioned in which the plausibility in melodrama was not questioned.

Another point raised by Elsaesser (1991) concerns how melodrama is able to create patterns of identification, emotional involvement, empathy, and catharsis in media narratives, i.e., “on the ways the *mise-en-scène* translates character into action . . . and action into gesture and dynamic space” (p. 76). On that account, the author brings the relation of melodramatic music to the center of the debate, as in the case of 19th century opera. Therefore, in an attempt to correlate Elsaesser’s structural thought to the universe of television studies, we bring the discussion undertaken by Fuenzalida (2011) when speaking about the similarities between opera (especially Italian opera) and the melodrama presented in telenovelas. About excess as unavoidably responsible for lending plausibility to the melodramatic narrative, Fuenzalida also seems to dialogue with Elsaesser – the Chilean author highlights that, in opera, the rhetoric of excess is appreciated as belonging to the fruition of the elements inherent to the work by high culture, but in TV telenovelas, on the contrary, the rhetoric of excess is seen as disqualification (p. 31).

As for the critical character of melodrama, in its possibility to question or reaffirm the social status quo, Elsaesser (1991) points to the melodramatic *mise-en-scène* as permeated by a conflicting “radical ambiguity,” that is, there is an oscillation between characterizing melodrama as a “healthy distrust of intellectualisation and abstract social theory” while seeing in it an “ignorance of the properly social and political dimensions” (p. 72) of the world surrounding the narratives and their representations. By way of conclusion, it is also necessary to clarify that excess can also be seen under the aesthetic conformation of “emotional extremes [that] are played off in such a way that they reveal an inherent dialectic” (p. 83) to the melodramatic texture, according to Elsaesser. Thus, as a possible argumentative pairing, it is evidenced how excess acts in the *mise-en-scène* of television melodrama (telenovelas, miniseries, series, serials, and other possible formats) in order to create constant and coherent narrative discontinuities in its structure. In other words, there is an interweaving of emotional *highs* and

lows, metaphorically, like a roller coaster that operates incessant inputs and outputs in the dramatization of emotions, comic relief, crying, suspense, and eroticism throughout the duration of the dramatic arc. Even the existence of the boredom caused when traditional filler episodes (known as “barrigas”⁴) impede the progress of the narrative indicates an ephemeral destabilization of this mechanism of discontinuity and its dramatic effects in the course of, for example, just one episode or sequence of episodes.

⁴In the jargon of scriptwriters and television critics in Brazil, “barriga” (literally, belly) is the term that defines a certain phase of the telenovela in which, apparently, no new fact occurs in the dramatic arc and, thus, the spectator has the impression that he is being bamboozled by the plot.

EXCESS AS A MODE OF MELODRAMATIC IMAGINATION

The American researcher Peter Brooks (1995) discusses the concept of melodramatic imagination making a thorough epistemological rescue of the definition of melodrama and the historical context that, in a certain way, has surrounded it since the dramatic theater of Ancient Greece. However, through the literary path of Honoré de Balzac’s (1799-1850) works, his focus stops at the melodrama of the French classic, and thus, according to Brooks (1995), the use of the term melodrama, as a label that carries a “bad reputation” and “has usually been used pejoratively” (p. 11), needs further explanation, with the notion of melodramatic imagination as a starting point.

In the original publication of his work in 1976, Brooks (1995) defines melodramatic imagination thinking of melodrama not only as a genre but as a transgeneric imagination that goes beyond the barriers of formats and current of thoughts, besides transgressing the demarcation between high culture and popular entertainment⁵. Understanding drama as “an exciting, excessive, parabolic story – from the banal stuff of reality” (p. 2), the author brings his stance of melodramatic imagination close to this very definition. To it, the researcher adds the “polarization into moral absolutes” and an “underlying manichaeism,” in addition to the idea of the moral occult and the mode of excess as parts of the understanding of a melodramatic imagination (Brooks, 1995, p. 4) – elements which are extremely noticeable in the model of telenovela produced, for example, in Brazil and Latin America in general.

⁵It is worth noting that understandings of melodrama as a mode and genre also pass through Brooks’ (1995) discussion, but to a much lesser degree compared to his repeated use of the term imagination (pp. 12-14).

Therefore, with the melodramatic mode being “located” and “articulated” by the moral occult in fiction, according to Brooks (1995, p. 5), it is important to note the similarities and differentiations between each of these two bipartite concepts (moral occult and mode of excess). Brooks explains that moral occult can be understood as the reordering of the modern world (disinterested in religion and science but attached to melodrama and its representations). It would then be something that presents a function of highlighting the “polarization of good or evil” in terms of representation in melodrama (Brooks, 1995, p. 13). In this



sense, the basic principle of the moral occult is to subtly bring out some lesson in the fictional field. In this way, the statement that melodrama is not only a moralizing drama, but a “drama of morality” (Brooks, 1995, p. 20), becomes very suggestive for the understanding of the fictional television discourse. That is, it is through the moral occult of melodrama that the social order is purged and the ethical imperative is made comprehensible to society (Brooks, 1995, p. 13).

As such, the author states that, in melodrama, nothing escapes the mode of excess in the melodramatic imagination, whether in the dramatization of words and gestures or in the intensity and polarization of feelings (Brooks, 1995, p. 4). Bringing the examples of the theatrical dramaturgical production of René-Charles Guilbert de Pixérécourt (1773-1844) and the literary work of Henry James (1843-1916) to the center of the debate, the author is assertive in saying that nothing is unnecessary or not “amenable to discussion” under the aegis of the mode of excess in media narratives:

The desire to express all seems a fundamental characteristic of the melodramatic mode. Nothing is spared because nothing is left unsaid; the characters stand on stage and utter the unspeakable, give voice to their deepest feelings, dramatize through their heightened and polarized words and gestures the whole lesson of their relationship. (Brooks, 1995, p. 4)

Moreover, a compelling point of the question of excess in the construction of the melodramatic imagination centers on the way the structure of melodrama is worked, in Brooks’ (1995) words, by a “fundamental bipolar contrast and clash”, for the “world according to melodrama is built on an irreducible manichaeism. . . . Melodramatic dilemmas and choices are constructed on the either/or in its extreme form as the all-or-nothing” (p. 36). By conceptualizing the aesthetics of melodrama as “surprising” or “impactful” in our free interpretation of the term, Peter Brooks draws attention to the rhetoric of melodramatic narrative in terms of the uses of language. He states that the typical figures of the mode of excess are hyperbole, antithesis, and oxymoron. Of these figures of speech, hyperbole is regarded as a “natural’ form of expression” (p. 40) of the melodramatic.

In a Latin American context, a caveat opens: hyperboles, as constitutive elements of melodramatic imagination, are present in all telenovela productions on the continent, but not homogeneously, as Erlick (2018) points out when discussing the theme from a perspective she calls pan-Latin. Thus, it is also worth pointing out what the Chilean researcher Santa Cruz (2003, p. 28) – under strong influence of Martín-Barbero – says about the Brazilian model of television production being considered a modernizing model in opposition

to the Mexican one. However, between both models – modern and classic – the space for the occurrence of the mode of excess is extremely fertile. Just as a way of understanding the intensity of this occurrence, one sees that it often presents itself as more explicit in plots outside Brazil (Thomas, 2003, p. 12), without this, however, erasing the excess from Brazilian melodramatic television works, whether they have realistic or naturalistic characteristics (Borkosky, 2016, p. 138; Lopez, 1991, p. 601).

RHETORIC OF EXCESS AND MELODRAMA AS MEDIATIONS OF THE MASS POPULAR

In the Latin American context, Martín-Barbero (1993) observes melodrama as an extremely potent force in shaping the contradictions, limitations, and potentialities of the region's multiple cultural cosmovisions. The author (who was of Spanish origin but lived in Colombia for many decades) observes that the roots of melodrama are extremely linked to the notion of the popular, but it is worth noting that in Latin America the processes of hybridization and miscegenation between the popular, the massive, the cult, and the erudite make melodrama a composite element. In other words, melodrama generates and is generated by the cultural processes of the mass popular, which can be understood as the complexity of hybridization between positions that shape Latin American socio-cultural and political-economic relations that, apparently, could seem to be opposites. However:

The phenomenon of mass in this kind of society is not some isolated social mechanism or one aspect of the society but a new form of sociability. . . . Nevertheless, to perceive popular culture from the perspective of mass does not necessarily imply alienation and manipulation. It is a new condition of existence and struggle. Mass society is a new mode of operation of hegemony. (Martín-Barbero, 1993, p. 230)

For this reason, more than just locating melodrama in a purist (and even naive) notion that only views the exaltation of its popular roots or judging it as a mere serialized industrial product useless for social transformations (once it is part of hegemonic capitalist interests), the author points out the need to unite plural views that ignore nothing of what was said above and still account for melodrama's structural complexity. It is important to understand how melodrama is built based on a doubly anachronistic language, according to Martín-Barbero (1993), i.e., symbolic operations that fall on the moralizing question "of familial and kinship relations as the basis of primordial fidelitics in life and the language



of rhetorical excess” (p. 118). It is precisely from the second anachronism that the author speaks of a rhetoric of excess. “The anachronism thus becomes a metaphor, a way of symbolizing the social context,” Martín-Barbero (1993, p. 119) points out. Or, in other terms, the rhetoric of excess as part of melodramatic narration brings with it the social gaze in a way that is not merely punctual, but structural: “The social emerges not only as a problem of content, but also as a style of telling” (Martín-Barbero & Rey, 2001, p. 172).

For Martín-Barbero, melodrama, in its structural and symbolic means and procedures⁶, uses excess as a form of expression of affections, emotions, feelings, sensory understandings, and aesthetic visions about the society in which it is reflected and refracted. Such rhetoric of excess concerns the subversive reading of melodrama by the popular. Unlike the cultures considered sophisticated and refined, the mass popular melodrama is histrionic, exaggerated, unruly, “too much,” and imbued with a vision of affections that is not economical:

Everything must be extravagantly stated, from the staging which exaggerates the audio and visual contrasts, to the dramatic structure which openly exploits the bathos of quick and sentimental emotional reactions. The acting tries to provoke a constant response in raucous laughter, sobs, sweaty tension and gushy outbursts of identification with the protagonists. Cultured people might consider all this degrading, but it nevertheless represents a victory over repression, a form of resistance against a particular “economy” of order, saving and polite restraint. (Martín-Barbero, 1993, p. 119)

This statement unfolds into another equally important reflection: melodrama as a mode of staging in media narratives. Thus, it becomes relevant to understand how this performance through the rhetoric of excess allows melodrama to express itself beyond the written textuality traditionally present in cult theater; that is to say that, unlike “a dramatic complexity sustained entirely by verbal rhetoric, melodrama sustained its dramatic action with a quite peculiar form of staging and acting” (Martín-Barbero, 1993, p. 114). In turn, corporeality gains prominence in melodrama: it presents itself as an embodiment of a scene mode, it projects itself from another textuality than the one trapped in the formal literary register.

In the wake of this thought, Martín-Barbero (1993) also speaks of an “excess of gesture” in melodrama as a way of reaffirming the centrality of the body in this mode of staging and of perceiving a voice, a text and a tone in corporality that were previously suppressed by the dominant, oppressive classes who held a univocal “way of knowing.” Meyer (1996), when speaking of the process of acclimatization of the pamphlets generated in Europe when they were received

⁶Examples of this are the presence of the melodramatic quadrilateral structure – Punisher (hero), Traitor (villain), Victim (young lady), and Fool (buffoon); the four basic feelings of fear, excitement, pain, and laughter; and, finally, the mélange of four genres (action novel, epic, tragedy, and comedy) in the melodramatic composition. Read in this light, Martín-Barbero’s melodramatic quadrilateral – tied to the moral occult – produces one of the most striking languages of the serial, since it is through them and in them that moralities are embodied.

in Latin America, also points out that the “shamelessly expressive romanesque literature” found a warmly welcoming space in Latin American cultural practices which (also due to its Iberian heritage) had a “taste for the excessive gestures and the exaggerated words that make up the oratory so appreciated by the illiterate populations” (pp. 383-384). In other words, the excess of gesture is still maintained today in Latin American telenovelas, for example, because it is part of a cultural matrix that can adapt to the most varied industrial formats. The possible cause of this maintenance of melodrama and the rhetoric of excess is, in the author’s words, exactly due to the mediation processes of the mass popular.

EXCESS AS A POTENTIAL QUALITY OF PERVASIVE MELODRAMATIC MODES

The discussion undertaken by American researcher Linda Williams (2018) acknowledges the works of Thomas Elsaesser (1991), Peter Brooks (1995), and Ben Singer (2001) as precursors. However, Christine Gledhill (1987) is the most revered name because, according to Williams, Gledhill manages to take a small step forward in the discussion about the understanding of melodrama not as a watertight genre but as something endowed with a certain fluidity, modulation or permeability capable of transforming and *contaminating* several other genres that, at first, would never be considered as endowed with a melodramaticity since they are still seen as *classic* and *realistic* works (Williams, 2018, p. 211). Williams expands on the British author’s understanding of excess in melodrama and audiovisual studies as something that needs to be seen through the lens of malleability and reciprocal contamination between the most possible genres and narrative formats. But what is the established reference point to understand a production as *excessively* melodramatic (*disproportionate*) in relation to the world of sobriety and artistic quality?

Williams’s answer is that melodrama is the “scapegoat” undoubtedly because, in it, is allocated everything that appears to be illegitimate, old-fashioned, and tiresome in media narratives (Williams, 2018, pp. 213-214). In the case of the pioneering research of Gledhill (1987) and Mumford (1995), it is notably clear that gender relations permeate this construction of demerit in relation to melodramatic productions since they were seen for a long time – using a reasoning that can be questioned today – as works directed mostly to the feminine, to the domestic environment, to the space of absence of reflection and purely understood as objects of alienation and cheap entertainment for women.

However, the core of Williams’ (2018) argument lies in understanding excess as a potential (but not exclusive, defining or monolithic) quality of pervasive



melodramatic modes. The author throws light on the discussion by no longer seeing melodrama as a genre, but rather, from another perspective, she proposes to think of “modes of melodrama” (p. 214). These modes can be present in other works, other productions, and even other genres that at first glance would “not dialogue” so traditionally with melodrama. An empirical example of this, thinking about contemporaneity, is that Williams (2014) dedicates the totality of her book to the discussion of the American series *The Wire* (Simon et al., 2002-2008), seen by her as a television melodrama par excellence (although much of the audience, specialized critics, and even the creator of the work, David Simon, refuse to categorize it this way exactly because of the crystallization of unfavorable meanings that encompass such terminology). It would be possible, then, to understand melodramatic modes that emphasize pathos, action or even the sensations of repression and sublimation in narratives that are infinitely different from each other. This demonstrates the pulverizing, pervasive, and modular character of melodrama to which excess, as a quality, would also be linked in potency (and not as a premise). Tied to an understanding of melodrama as not only a rigid set of elements that would configure it as a genre *stricto sensu* in distinctive character or exclusive to other genres, the author seeks to discuss that the possible modulations of melodrama reallocate the discussion to understand how any kind of work, production, and genre can intersect, contaminate, and interact with melodrama (and perhaps, as one of its potential qualities, also with excess) in the most varied levels. In this evaluative reframing, it is possible to say that the melodramatic modes may be permeated by excess, but they in themselves are not the *essentialized* excess and depend much less on it to be classified as melodramatic.

It is worth noting that, in the academic circle of melodrama studies, there are distinct interpretations of Williams’ reflections on excess and melodrama. Such interpretations go in the direction of saying that Williams’ most recent works propose to abandon the notion of excess completely, to deny the qualification of excess as a possible part of melodrama characterization, and, furthermore, that such conceptual pairing (excess-melodrama) would already be outdated in the author’s statements from any potential angle. However, the reading made in this article understands that Williams (2012, 2014, 2018) does not deny, abandon or completely overcome the possible relations between excess and melodrama. On the contrary, she strongly relativizes the inherence of excess and questions its intrinsic conception and even the understanding that it would be the monolithic element of melodrama characterization since, like Williams (2012, p. 526), her criticism is directed to the distinctive conceptualization of the *classical* canon created by authors such as Bordwell, Staiger, and Thompson

in American film theory. Therefore, by not exhausting the discussion about the possible pairings, it is understood that the author does not remove excess from the scene entirely since she reminds us that, even though excess is not an exclusive or sine qua non condition of melodrama, it can also prove to be present in melodramatic productions as a *quality*; alongside suspense, moral legibility, and the need to locate morality, it configures itself as one of “These qualities that are not [necessarily] hallmarks of melodrama, although it is possible to delight in them” (pp. 525-526). Thus, it is reiterated that the interpretation brought in this article attests to the understanding of the pervasiveness of melodrama that sets Williams’ work apart from other configurations (such as those of Brooks and Elsaesser, for example) by presenting a considerable dissimilarity as to the relational composition of excess and melodrama (and not quite a complete erasure of the possibility of this relationship).

Complementing this, this article will reflect on a notion of excess as a possible quality (aesthetic, stylistic, and narrative) which, by osmosis within the fluidity of the melodramatic modes, can also be seen in a dispersed way in several uses and in different works. This view stands in contrast to the idea of excess as something that can be thrown away (the *exceeded*) in function of a *sobriety* or of something *idealized without excess*. Thus, besides thinking of excess as a concept understood and restricted only in narratives that dialogue directly with the body genres (melodrama, horror, and pornography⁷), as Williams (1991) pointed out before, a new understanding of the term appears and displaces it to a category of quality in potency (and no longer as a substantially necessary element or univocal characterizer of melodrama). Such a view, in the interpretation of this article, reframes excess and presents it in a new conceptual reading in which it can propose effective modulations through distinct intensities and recurrences as a quality in potency in melodrama.

Thus, displacing the inherent essentialization of excess as something always linked to melodrama, it is possible to realize that melodramatic modes can participate in other audiovisual fields and transit through other modes taken, for example, as, at times, more realistic and at others, more comic (Williams, 2018, p. 214). And, even leaving aside the essentialist character, the idea of excess as a quality in pervasive melodramatic modes does not at all abandon the moralizing character of melodrama proposed by Brooks (1995) when discussing melodramatic imagination and moral occult. This is perhaps where both Williams and Brooks seem to find themselves (partially) in potentially compatible agreements, in seeing morality as an important feature (for him, an end in itself in melodrama; for her, a possible path to social justice) in thinking about the relevance of melodramatic works to the societies that experience

⁷ According to Baltar (2012, p. 127), the term body genres is a formulation by Carol Clover, borrowed by Williams (1991) and expanded by her to encompass the characteristic mobilization of this genre in a double articulation of excess in terms of ecstasy and spectacle. In turn, Elsaesser and Hagener (2010, p. 121) exemplify that the excess of body genres in Williams’ work is linked to the direct reactions of bodies in relation: the weeping in melodrama, the sweating of anxiety at the disfigurement or viewing of bloody bodies in horror, and the bodily response of the (male) spectator in pornography. To Elsaesser and Hagener’s definition, this article also adds the bodily response of the (female) spectator as a direct reaction.



them fictionally: “Melodrama is the form by which timely social problems and controversies can be addressed. . . . Melodrama has tended to be on the side of the oppressed, and thus, seemingly on the side of social change, even revolution” (Williams, 2018, p. 215). Therefore, she ends her discussion in a limpid manner by making her position clear in the understanding that “Neither excessive music nor the defeat of evil by good is essential to melodrama.” Indeed, “What is essential, I contend, is the dramatic recognition of good and/or evil and in that recognition, at least the hope that justice might be done” (Williams, 2018, p. 215).

EXCESS AS ANTICIPATION, EXACERBATED SYMBOLIZATION, AND OBVIOUSNESS

As one of the most prolific researchers of theories of excess in Brazil, Mariana Baltar is responsible for bringing the understanding of excess as a powerful element of signification of image and sound in the language of documentaries, pornography, videographies available on streaming (YouTube), and, of course, melodrama. Gathering her discussions around what she calls *weaves of excess*, the author states that it is in audiovisual narratives that one finds the locus par excellence of “passionate/affective engagement.” These weaves of excess in the audiovisual are extremely understandable, precisely because it is proper of the “visual and sensorial nature of image and sound” to propitiate such manifestation (Baltar, 2012, p. 132).

Based on empirical audiovisual objects located in the sphere of media narratives, she highlights that the view of excess could be perceptible in three modulations: excess as anticipation, exacerbated symbolization, and obviousness (Baltar, 2007, p. 112). The author approaches excess, a common denominator among melodrama scholars, as a paradoxical aesthetic-stylistic element to the extent that “it is at the same time easy to understand, on the one hand, because it is supported by multiple and palpable experiences; difficult to define, on the other, as an impossible unity” (Baltar, 2005, para. 1).

For Baltar (2012), excess is, through its reiterated stimuli and reactions embodied in the narrative, greatly responsible for the connection between “works and genres as distinct as the theatrical melodrama, its cinematographic and television strands, to literary works that range from the classic novel to the writings of Balzac and Henry James” (p. 131). In this way, she continues, excess is a form of “pedagogization” that trains the look, the fruition, and, mainly, the action of/in the bodies that experience the audiovisual. That is, excess activates “an effective sensory-sentimental knowledge as an agent of perception and experience of reality” (p. 132).

Baltar's emphasis on the centrality of the body, excess, and affection in melodrama (2007) is a position equally shared by Singer (2001) and Smit (2010). The confluence between the authors is toned down by Baltar (2012) when she states, "Spectacular and reiterative visuality is fundamental to the rhetoric of excess. Especially the expression of the body as the primary focus of the machines of the visible, thus embodying the fascination, wonder and will to know that they arouse" (p. 128).

Making use of the reflections brought by Steve Neale (who, in turn, finds the Italian Franco Moretti to be a source of inspiration), Baltar (2007) presents excess as anticipation from the idea that it is a mechanism that can, in the case of melodrama, signal the "coming of the tears," that is, the anticipation demonstrates a "call" that is quickly interpreted by the spectator. It is, in the author's words, "a summons to commotion and empathy" because "anticipation strategies lead to a sense of suspension, as they put us waiting for what is about to happen, as in a chronicle of a death foretold" (p. 126). In this sense:

Anticipation works in narrative when the audience holds a knowledge regarding plot paths that the characters do not. . . . By knowing more, viewers anticipate what is to come, projecting onto the narrative something that is not yet fully expressed, but is indicated. (Baltar, 2007, p. 127)

About the excess as exacerbated symbolization, Baltar (2007) uses Elsaesser as a reference to describe this modulation of excess as a form of metaphorical effect that creates presentification from the key elements of the melodramatic narrative, "almost in a structure of substitution of conflicts and values in symbol" (p. 122). This exchange (conflicts and values versus symbols) operated by excess as exacerbated symbolization finds parallel from

an exacerbation of the "scene", where the materiality of the actors' voices and words, every object of the set and costumes, the light and the cuts and movements (on stage and on camera) are guided by a grandiloquence and a metaphorical sense of characterization. (Baltar, 2005, para. 15)

In its complementary duality (aesthetic-stylistic and cultural), excess as a form of exacerbated symbolization manages, once again, through reiteration, to present "the experience of reality and the moral values" of modern society and the processes of subjectivation (Baltar, 2012, p. 134).

On the other hand, excess as obviousness, far from being seen as an element of depreciation of the narrative construction, fits within melodrama



as “a regime of expressivity,” that is, “The obviousness becomes strategic so that one recognizes ‘at once,’ immediately, indubitably and sensorially, what is placed, from the moral point of view, by the narrative” (Baltar, 2007, p. 89). Consequently, in this modulation of obviousness, it is possible to see excess acting as an agent of melodramatic didacticism. “Through a pedagogy based on sensations, the moral teachings put on stage by the narrative” (Baltar, 2007, p. 89), it offers a kind of *spelling book* to the spectator about the virtues and deviations present in the plot. One of the empirical examples given by the author is connected to the visibility strategies built around the protagonist of *Ônibus 174* (Padilha, 2002) which, through obviousness, outline Sandro’s trajectory from his poor childhood as a street kid to the paths that led him to the crime that stopped Brazil: soon, the melodramatic elements are put into play not only for the progress of the documentary story but they also serve as a conforming narrative element of this primer that teaches us to create empathy and have sentimental engagement (Baltar, 2007). The excess as obviousness explains in detail (by reiteration) how the elements that give the formal aesthetic finish to the melodramatic work have a teaching on the level of moralization (a primer that is not always accepted, but negotiated, resigned or even repelled/resisted by the audience).

MELODRAMATIC MODE AND EXCESS IN THE REDISTRIBUTION OF THE VISIBILITY OF SUFFERING

Known as one of the authors who most contradict the classical reflections of melodrama studies, Mexican researcher Agustín Zarzosa (2010b) demonstrates how melodrama can be understood as a mode (and not as a genre), and this terminological choice of the term “mode” needs, according to him, an urgent and thorough analysis.

Modes run across genres lines (and apply to more works than genres) not because they are broader or more abstract, but rather because they involve the primary need of dramatizing experience. (Zarzosa, 2010b, p. 237)

Accordingly, Zarzosa (2013, p. 4) advances this terminological search by identifying four conceptualizations of mode in studies of melodrama within media narratives, namely: (1) mode as part of a taxonomic group larger than that of genres; (2) mode as a cultural imaginary; (3) mode as a representational strategy; and finally, (4) mode as a category that follows classificatory principles incompatible with that of genres. In addition to these four aspects, a fifth could

be added from Frye's (1973) elucidative stance by clarifying that "a mode⁸ constitutes the basic tone of a work of fiction" (p. 56).

Still, as a watershed feature in his writings, without tergiversation, Zarzosa (2010b) warns that "My understanding of melodrama as a mode of mediation is at odds with one of the most entrenched ideas about melodrama, namely, that its ultimate aim is to evince the presence of good and evil" (p. 246). Thus, for him,

melodrama does not really attempt to rebuild a shattered ethical order; on the contrary, melodrama operates on a social ground in which ideas [about ethics] debunk one another by showing how competing ideas bring forth suffering. In this sense, melodrama is more ambitious than tragedy; melodrama seeks not only to explain suffering but also to eliminate suffering altogether. Put differently, rather than dramatizing suffering to demonstrate the existence of virtue and evil, melodrama dramatizes virtue and evil to eliminate or ameliorate suffering. The clear display of virtue and evil is not an end in itself but rather a means – among others – to ameliorate suffering. (Zarzosa, 2010b, p. 246)

Thus, in Zarzosa's (2013, p. 70) critical opinion of Brooks' (1995) work, instead of thinking of melodrama as the re-establisher of a morality and sacredness in a world lacking direction in identifying virtue and deviance, he proposes to think of conflicting systems of exchange as systems in dispute. Thus, his thought that the essence of the melodramatic mode "consists in redistributing the visibility of suffering" gains strength as the author establishes that "The world in melodrama appears as a suffering totality – that is, as an expression of the social whole in terms of passion" (Zarzosa, 2013, p. 14). More particularly, he separates suffering into two confluent planes: "The first involves the totality of bodies affected or influenced by other bodies. The second involves the distribution of visibility of that totality" (Zarzosa, 2013, p. 14).

First, it is necessary to understand that, when addressing the debate about the epistemological combinations between excess and melodrama, Zarzosa (2013) points out that the state of the art on the subject divides its understandings into three perceptions: excess as action, excess as quality, and excess as a state of being. In other words, "Despite this dispersal [of understandings] across different levels, melodrama critics have regularly theorized excess in terms of representation" (p. 107). For him, on the other hand, the conceptualization of excess is as a mode of exchange, that is, "The primary medium through which melodrama redistributes the visibility of suffering in the social sphere is exchange" (p. 4). The empirical analysis of the film *The Piano* (Campion, 1993) is mobilized by the author as a way to exemplify unequal acts of exchange derived from cinematic melodrama.

⁸ An explicit definition of the term "mode" in Frye's work (1973) can be read in: "Conventional force of action admitted to the principal characters in fictional literature, or the corresponding attitude adopted by the poet toward his audience in thematic literature. Such modes tend to succeed one another in a historical sequence" (p. 361).



Soon, when talking about the character Ada McGrath and her troubled affective and social life in the newly colonized New Zealand, Zarzosa (2010a) makes explicit that the connections between excess and melodrama dramatize the consequences of putting into circulation objects and ideas to which no exchange value should be assigned. Finally, such an understanding of excess as exchange, for the author, is directly linked to the George Bataille's perspective of excess as expenditure.

Such exchanges of incommensurable values wrapped in excess and melodramatic modes need, according to Zarzosa (2013), to have their meaning extended beyond the notion of an action that involves giving something and receiving something else in return in the same space of time. Thus, according to the author, another definition of exchange makes it possible to understand excess in melodrama as when "one relinquishes something that one does not quite own or possess, but that one could have possessed: the thing is not given but rather given up" (p. 71). From this point of view, the researcher emphasizes that it is salutary to realize that melodrama, as a way of redistributing the visibility of human suffering, has its character of representation evidenced to the extent that the very practices that conform the exchange process (as well as its dramatizations) also involve the register of representations: "Melodrama expresses the incommensurability that representations of equivalence necessarily involve" (Zarzosa, 2010a, p. 397). Finally, it is emphasized that the theoretical bases on which the understanding of melodramatic modes and their addressing the problems of human suffering, discussed by the author, are situated in the Hegelian triad (stoicism, skepticism, and conscious unhappiness).

DISCUSSION OF ONTOLOGIES

By reaffirming the importance of a discussion that sees in the search for intellectual kinship (Freire, 1997) the possibility of understanding the complex genealogical tree of knowledge about media, excess, and melodrama; a necessary starting point is to scrutinize the ontological nature from which the intellectuals cited start to discuss what melodrama is. That is, before observing the myriad of branches that point to multiple directions, it is relevant to observe what are the roots that sustain the whole theoretical framework of Thomas Elsaesser, Peter Brooks, Jesús Martín-Barbero, Linda Williams, Mariana Baltar, and Agustín Zarzosa.

Just like Freire (1997) says in his explanation about the conception of intellectual kinship, the search for the common roots of the six authors discussed finds its primary axis in the combat against the *antagonistic*. The antagonist, rejected under the theoretical and methodological bases of the researchers, is

precisely the limited and simplistic belief of a melodrama which, if before it was already seen as of little cultural importance because of its exaggerations and clichés throughout the literary and theatrical history, now, when entering the media universe of cinema, television, and streaming, shows itself even more unnecessary, subordinate, and, above all, alienating. It is the combat against this dated view that unites the reading strands of the authors since all of them understand the melodramatic texture as a cultural manifestation endowed with complex discursiveness and rich narrativity. In what the authors brought to the debate, one can see a reinforcement of their intellectual kinship exactly because of the deep analytical look that they share towards the valorization of melodrama. Therefore, as Freire (1997) reminds us, this similarity is the “strongest” element that “keeps kinship alive and burning” (p. 9) (in all its possibilities of rearrangements and relations).

Although, as we can see, there is a dispute of meanings in the classification nomenclature of melodrama: it is sometimes understood as a genre, sometimes as a mode, sometimes as imagination. It is worth pointing out, however, that beyond a mere nominal decision, the choice of these terms also presupposes what is addressed or excluded in these investigative lines. It is still pertinent to state that the concern to conceptually determine the notion of genre, mode or imagination is not always treated with the same depth by each of the authors, that is, the almost precious way in which Zarzosa dwells on explaining why the term *melodramatic mode* is used cannot be compared to Baltar’s more rapid, punctual, and pliable discussion of genre of melodrama. Thus, one sees that it is possible for some authors to transit, with greater or lesser frequencies and explanations as to why this or that nominal election, through more than one notion (generic, modal or imaginary). One very important fact in this ontological setting is that the nomenclatures, and not their epistemological understandings (which in itself deserves another study), of each of the authors are registered here⁹.

One notices that the intellectual kinship, in the case of the ontological nature of melodrama and excess in media narratives, is not absent from the scene. Even though there may be confrontations or terminological disputes, looking at the dissimilarity is also a way to attest that the intellectual kinship is solid enough to know how to deal with internal dissidence and reinforce the independence of non-consensual analytical readings: “Belonging to the same intellectual ‘family’ does not mean the reduction of one into the other since it is the autonomy of both that is the cornerstone that grounds the true kinship” (Freire, 1997, p. 12).

Regarding the ontology of the composition of the relations between excess and melodrama, it is undoubtedly noted that the ideas of pervasiveness and fluidity are still little discussed in the academic environment, in opposition to

⁹ For example, the reading of the term genre, for Martín-Barbero (2009, p. 189), has its ubiquity in the field of anthropology and sociology of culture while the term genre, for Elsaesser (1991, p. 84), is read from the systemic perspective of formal narrative conformation with its thematizations, motifs, and specific archetypal structure.

the most widespread version of a certain intrinsic essentialism of excess within melodrama (Table 1). It is clearly noticeable that the intercommunication between the authors occurs due to the evident similarity of ideas in the construction of their theoretical and methodological bases. Under this line of thought, the intellectual kinship determines the understanding of the composition of the relations between excess and melodrama in media narratives as something inclined to an essentialist reading. Even if there are divergent views (such as those of Williams and Baltar), the reinforcement of intercommunication happens precisely because of a position of similarity that privileges excess in its inherence to melodrama.

Table 1

Ontology of nature and the composition of relations

POSSIBLE ONTOLOGIES BETWEEN EXCESS AND MELODRAMA (A)					
Scholar	Regarding the nominal nature of the relations:			Regarding the composition of the relations:	
	<i>"Melodrama is understood as a..."</i>			<i>"Excess is potentially understood in melodrama by its... characteristic"</i>	
	Genre	Mode	Imagination	Essential/Intrinsic	Pervasive/Fluid
T. Elsaesser		√	√	√	
P. Brooks	√	√	√	√	
J. Martín-Barbero	√			√	
L. Williams		√			√
M. Baltar	√		√		√
A. Zarzosa		√		√	

Note. Elaborated by the author.

Without discrediting or disqualifying either of the two binomial perceptions, it is valid to postulate a hypothesis: the more one expands the study of materialities other than just telenovelas or films taken as *traditional melodramas* par excellence, the more one understands the fluid penetration of melodrama as a *modus operandi* permeated by excess and, thus, potent enough to produce senses that infect, immerse, and affect materialities (generic or modal) such as pornography, horror, action, documentary, journalistic narrative, etc. In other words, displacing the fixity of thought that excess is an exclusive element of fictional melodrama consequently makes other

contributions from fields not always linked to film and television studies potentially emerge, such as, for example, the study of the discourses of public figures in political science and communication – and a very successful display of this can be seen in the work of Anker (2014).

Therefore, as much as there is no consensus or univocality on how the relations between excess and melodrama are read, as the previous discussions have shown, even so, it is possible to see that some of these thoughts walk side by side with Freire’s expression of intellectual kinship. That is, it is possible to see that even coming from different socio-demographic conditions, from asymmetric academic environments and institutions in the production of knowledge, and with stances that cross race, gender, class, and body through cultural matrices that are not always close, there are still many points of contact between the authors and their ideas (Table 2). Proof of this is the ontology of the purpose of the relations between excess and melodrama that, in an unbalanced way, presents a much greater tendency to approach one pole (*excess acts in melodrama to highlight morality and human virtue*) than the other (*excess acts in melodrama to redistribute the visibility of human suffering*).

¹⁰Even though, for Williams (2012), morality is not an end in itself in melodramatic modes, since she postulates the need for social justice as the ultimate goal, here we choose to place Williams on the side of morality because she does not shy away from moral elements as a preponderant part of melodrama at all. Unlike Zarzosa, the only one to create dissonance among the majority views, Williams (2012, p. 525) reiterates that moral legibility and the need to locate goodness are qualities in potency (but not intrinsic or exclusive) of melodrama. In this way, it is even possible that there is a possible similarity in process between Zarzosa’s thinking (of the highlighting of virtue and evil as a means of ameliorating suffering) and Williams’s thinking (that the moral legibility of melodrama aims to highlight a situation of injustice and thereby the hope that it can be improved) as possible deviations from the dominant understanding. However, for there to be recognition of injustice, first of all, the author clarifies that “dramatic recognition of good and evil” is essential (Williams, 2018, p. 215). Hence, morality reigns again as the primary (concrete) thread and hope or the quest for social justice as a secondary (becoming) consequence.

Table 2
Ontology of purpose and location of relations

POSSIBLE ONTOLOGIES BETWEEN EXCESS AND MELODRAMA (B)			
Scholar	Regarding the purpose of the relations:		Regarding the location of the relations:
	Evidence Morality and Virtue (good/evil)	Redistribute the Visibility of Human Suffering	“Excess and melodrama are read preferentially by the...”
T. Elsaesser	√		Cinema
P. Brooks	√		Theater and Literature
J. Martín-Barbero	√		Multiple Media-Cultural Practices
L. Williams ¹⁰	√		Cinema and Television
M. Baltar	√		Cinema, Television, and Streaming
A. Zarzosa		√	Cinema and Television

Note. Elaborated by the author.



The ontology of the purpose of the relations, again analyzed comparatively by the intellectual kinship approach, demonstrates that the alternative path outlined by Zarzosa is presented as a kind of “disturbance” (Freire, 1997, pp. 9-10). In other terms, even though it does not completely preclude intercommunication between the authors, this *disturbance* represents a possibility of a temporary rupture between the visions or, in more metaphorical terms, an isolated branch which, starting from the same trunk and root that sees the common antagonist, deviates to another direction in search of new (epistemological) airs. Moreover, this signaling of dissimilarity is seen as something necessary for the maintenance of otherness and, by extension, also provides an opportunity for the continuity of the intellectual autonomy of researchers.

With equal importance, this article enabled the understanding that the fourth possible ontology concerns the location of relations between excess and melodrama in empirical materialities rich in production of meaning and, even more, complex in their peculiarities. Therefore, it was possible to see (Table 2) that the authors transited through several loci of analysis and reflection (not mutually exclusive), involving, with distinct intensities and recurrence, the cinematographic, literary, theatrical, and television fields, and even streaming platforms. More than just identifying the locus of each of the enunciations, discussing the location of the relations allows us to understand that melodrama takes peculiar and non-universal forms depending on where it is constructed and/or enjoyed. Put another way, the multiplicity of media narratives through which excess and melodrama can materialize not only emphasizes the constant (re)adaptation of melodramatic language to old and new media but, mainly, makes explicit that there are still many paths to be prescribed in future comparative analyses. In other words, the ontology of the location of relations between excess and melodrama in the media hints that unfolding an investigation which may focus only on the particularities of a television or film materiality is possible or even a study that aims to see the specific stylistic traits of each materiality that are replicated or swallowed from the contact with new languages, discourses, and media narratives that are emerging at a fierce pace in everyday communication.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

The greatest challenge faced by this article lies in the difficulty of bringing together multiple voices coming from extremely distinct eras, generations, cultural realities, and television contexts. Paradoxically, this is also the best scenario a researcher can wish for when searching for the common grounds

of intellectual kinship in a researchable universe as complex and *sui generis* as the space of discussion about melodrama, excess, and media. That is, even if the risk of superficiality surrounds the summarized explanations of the ideas of each one of the authors (precisely because of the amount of dispersed information), it is by the original diversity of views that it becomes possible to search for traces of kinship that are not on the surface of the texts but that require, as the work has shown, an analytical comparative study that dwells on the similarity-dissimilarity relation as its first focus.

An important point to consider is the analytical potentiality of Freire's conception of intellectual kinship beyond its reading as an affective expression in the testimonial context of the Brazilian educator. The analytical potentiality opens the way to think about intellectual kinship based on organizing, systematizing, and classifying categories such as the three main ones created and used in this article: (1) identification of the combat against a situation or an antagonistic element common to the intellectual debate; (2) evidence of intercommunication by the similarity of ideas in the construction of theoretical-methodological bases; and (3) valorization of dissimilarity (disturbance) as something necessary for the maintenance of alterity and intellectual autonomy. Logically, as this is an experimental attempt at comparative methodological observation within communication and media studies, many other categories can be created, for example, aiming the analytical angle only at the disturbances that constitute the intellectual autonomy of the field and its objects or even approaches that privilege the maximum reduction of variables (over a universe of epistemological proposals), seeking to find the combat against the common antagonistic element that brings them together.

Of equal importance, the elasticity of empirical application proved that the methodological approach made from intellectual kinship can focus on the first gradation discussed by Freire (1997, pp. 10-11) and not necessarily move towards the concrete, lived, and shared encounter of real experiences between the authors (whether these experiences are academic collaborations or life encounters). The concept is elastic because it is possible to stick to it, as the article did, only in the "suspicion" phase in which the reading of texts and authors who, at first sight, are very different, providing an investigative start, a first trigger. But nothing prevents other observations from going to the second gradation in search of the existence or not of collaborations and academic experiences that shape the thinking of these authors.

It is worth noting that such suspicion speaks volumes about how important the field of subjectivity is to comparative studies (both from Freire's perspective and for the liveliness of research as a whole), that is, how the



curiosity fostered by the *suspicion* that something in this or that text/author seems to communicate with this or that other text/author can become the lure that primarily captures the researcher's attention. Not abandoning suspicion is essential to the first step in the search for the intellectual kinship of any work, author or set of ideas. And, from then on, the analytical potentiality (with the replication or creation of new observation categories) is allied to the elasticity of empirical application (it can be centered on the first gradation or not), making a leap from curiosity to the search for materialities that evidence the comparative study.

The article highlighted four types of possible ontologies in the intercommunication between thinkers and texts that address melodrama, excess, and media narratives, namely: the nominal nature of relations, the composition of relations, the purpose of relations, and the location of relations. As a result, it was possible to realize that such ontologies represent the following considerations: the non-consensus on the nature of melodrama (genre, mode, and imagination); the binominal understanding of the relational composition between excess and melodrama (essentialism and exclusivism versus pervasiveness and fluidity); two sense disputes about the purposes of action of excess in melodrama (highlighting morality and human virtue versus distributing the visibility of human suffering); and, finally, the understanding that the discussion about excess and melodrama is located in multiple and non-excluding empirical materialities.

Finally, given the need for the expansion and improvement of these four possible ontologies, it is necessary that new research be done to also listen to other voices besides those linked only to Anglo-Saxon countries which, to a large extent, produce a lot of research and sometimes end up monopolizing the debate centered on a single vision. In other words, it is fundamental to redirect the focus to works that permeate the excess-melodrama relation outside the Western view and not located only in the Global North, e.g., the studies by Lila Abu-Lughod (Egypt), E. Deidre Pribam (India), Panpan Yang (China), Giuliana Cassano Iturri (Peru), Tom Odhiambo (Kenya), Rosário Sanchez (Uruguay), Maria Immacolata Vassallo de Lopes (Brazil), Maria Cristina Palma Mungiolli (Brazil), B. Senem Çevik (Turkey), Amporn Jirattikorn (Thailand), and Belinda Maria Smaill (East Timor), among other sources. Thus, only by widening the horizons of reading and reflection to incorporate dissonant or unheard thoughts will it be possible, at last, to glimpse a tiny fragment of the whole international academic panorama about excess (in its many meanings as a mode, rhetoric, gesture, stylistic-aesthetic element, cultural category, and structural-structural characteristic of/in melodrama). As Freire (1997)

reminds us: “Based on certain similarities and affinities, the kinship is being ‘invented’ and reinvented and is never finished” (p. 11). ■

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