

Images of *Amor de Mãe*: Gridlines and Escapes

Imagens de Amor de Mãe: Quadriculamentos e Escapatórias

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ABSTRACT

The essay discusses framings and gridlines in images of the telenovela *Amor de Mãe*. The analysis lies on the functioning of family bonds/convivialities, their labile articulations amid anesthetic landscapes/aesthetic spaces, and fiction/reality interchanges. In this context, the following issues are examined: (1) meaning effects and sensorial gaps which may provide aesthetic appropriations; (2) escapes that enable active bodies to assume affective dispositions and sustain synesthetic relationships. It is concluded that the framings that show checkered characters immersed in restrictive practices and routines also reveal fissures that allow physical and symbolic exits.

Keywords: Telenovela *Amor de Mãe*, gridlines and escape, anesthetic landscapes/aesthetic spaces

RESUMO

O estudo discute enquadramentos/quadriculamentos na telenovela *Amor de Mãe*, analisando a imagética de vínculos/convívios familiares, a labilidade com que se articulam entre paisagens anestésicas/espaços estéticos e os intercâmbios entre ficção e realidade. Examinam-se, em tal contexto: (1) efeitos de sentido e brechas sensíveis facultativas de apropriações estéticas; e (2) escapatórias que possibilitam a corpos ativos assumirem disposições afetivas e sustentarem relações sinestésicas. Conclui-se que os enquadramentos que dão a ver personagens quadriculadas em práticas cotidianas estruturadas a partir de apresamentos revelam, não obstante, fissuras que permitem a construção de saídas físicas e simbólicas.

Palavras-chave: Telenovela *Amor de Mãe*, quadriculamento e escapatória, paisagens anestésicas e espaços estéticos

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¹On March 21, 2020, the screening of *Amor de Mãe* was interrupted due to the COVID-19 pandemic. With the proliferation of the virus in the country, the Globo Network studios were closed and recording sessions suspended indefinitely. The network then began to rebroadcast telenovelas that had been aired previously. After five months dedicated to defining health safety protocols, in August, the recording of the telenovelas in hiatus – *Amor de Mãe* and *Salve-se Quem Puder* – was resumed. *Malhação: Toda Forma de Amar* and *Éramos Seis*, already in their last chapters when activities were suspended, managed to finish their stories. The second part of *Amor de Mãe* aired on March 15, 2021, almost a year after its interruption.

THE TELENÓVELA *AMOR de Mãe* (Dias & Villamarim, 2019-2021) premiered on the Globo Television Network on November 25, 2019¹, in the 9pm time slot, with the song “É” by Brazilian singer-songwriter Luiz Gonzaga do Nascimento Júnior (known as Gonzaguinha) as its opening theme. It is also with this song that, in the second chapter of the telenovela, the character Camila (Jessica Ellen), a newly graduated history teacher, begins her first class in a public school: “Yeah, we want to be worth our love, we want to be worth our sweat, we want to be worth our humor, we want the best of the best, we want affection and attention.” After humming this excerpt and earning the attentive glances of the previously dispersed class, the teacher tells the teenage students that the song was released in 1988, shortly after Brazil got rid of the military dictatorship imposed in 1964. In the sequence of the chapter, the class is interrupted by the sounds of rifle fire and helicopter engines flying over the school.

Considering fiction as a document of its time, the telenovelistic narrative under analysis adopts an imagetic-discursive language that reveals a close relationship with the social reality of contemporary Brazil, enabling a *documentating reading* (Odin, 1985). In the case of the gunshots and buzzing that plague the school, the plot, set in the city of Rio de Janeiro, recalls the controversial police action ordered in 2019 by then-governor Wilson Witzel (“Helicóptero...,” 2019) in the community of Morro do Alemão. It was reported then: “At least three people were reportedly beaten and two killed. Because of the operation, at least 14 daycare centers and schools in the region have suspended classes. Some areas of the favela were left without power because the shots hit power transformers” (“Helicóptero...,” 2019). From this perspective, the images of particular stories experienced by the characters of the telenovela come to function as metonymy and metaphor of society; they are accounts of a people, a nation, that take shape, in this case, from “a kaleidoscopic, multidimensional narrative of everyday life experienced by Brazilians,” as notes Maria Immacolata Vassallo de Lopes (2009, p. 24).

The predominant genre of telenovelas is melodrama, which Peter Brooks (1976), based on the analysis of 18th century plays, particularizes as the *drama of recognition*. Jesús Martín-Barbero (2003) attributed to this resource one of the reasons for the success of melodrama among Latin Americans, because the plots develop “the ignorance of an identity and the struggle against injustices, appearances, against everything that is hidden and disguised: a struggle to make oneself recognized” (p. 317). In other words, Martín-Barbero observed how the drama of recognition can illustrate historical and cultural processes, suppressed origins, and absences of parts of who we are. *Amor de Mãe* addresses

several problematic issues that disturb contemporary societies, unfolding in narrative conflicts: child trafficking, attacks on the ecosystem, violence against women, racism, drug trade, widespread corruption etc. The misdemeanors, perversions, and social distortions interconnect the lives of the characters – making relationships and affective constructions possible that, at one time, shelter and imprison them in ties, moorings, and knots that are established predominantly in the form of family ties.

In the perspective defined by Ana Amado and Nora Domínguez (2004), family ties gain conflicting meanings between bonding/union and entrapment/fraud: bonds that unite also establish borders and separate. Family links install contradictory meanings, forms of coexistence, and ways of life, and function as promoters of junctions and disjunctions, ties and cuts, identifications and differences – in discursive, cultural, social, and theoretical categories. Therefore, family ties can be constituted in the mobility of the aesthetic circulation or in the immobility of the anesthetic paralysis of the bodies and their relations with the physical and social space.

We shall summarize some of the family links that are interwoven in *Amor de Mãe*, weaving cross-cutting relationships that support and motivate the characters, on the one hand, but on the other, keep them tangled and enmeshed in intricate networks of disorder and perversion. In Foucauldian terms, in the architectural and symbolic places that fit them in the fictional space of the telenovela, the characters will be – all of them, explicitly or not – imprisoned, trapped inside very tight powers that impose limitations, interdictions and obligations. To scrutinize, to probe the construction and the functioning of the audiovisual product on screen implies glimpsing there – even if from a distance – the reflection, even if distorted, of what also happens in the field beyond the screen. From this point of view, the question is: how is these gridlines, as machines/methods/formulas of control and domination, experienced, lived (intra, extra and inter-screens), and how can they (or not) be fractured, re-signified, overcome?

Lurdes (Lucy Alves/Regina Casé) – the central character in the plot – was separated from her son Domênico when he was 2, in the fictional town of Malaquitas, in Rio Grande do Norte. Getting rid of Jandir (Daniel Ribeiro), the boy's father – who sold him to Kátia (Stella Rabello/Vera Holtz), a child trafficker who lives in Rio de Janeiro –, the woman gathers her other three children and sets off in search of her son; On the way, she comes across an abandoned newborn girl, whom she takes in as her daughter, and starts living in Rio de Janeiro, working as a maid and a nanny, eternally on the lookout for Domênico. Thelma (Adriana Esteves), owner of a restaurant inherited from her father, lost her only son in a house fire that also killed her husband. She replaces



the child with another, “adopting” a baby by illicit means – whom she named Danilo (Chay Suede) – pretending he was the child that was gone and becoming an overprotective mother; once grown up, the boy finds himself imprisoned by the excessive maternal care and resents the arbitrary interference in his life. Sandro (Humberto Carrão), a good-natured young man raised by the drug dealer Katia and initiated by her into the world of crime as a child, is in prison, under a death sentence. A car accident during a couple’s argument leaves Leila (Arieta Corrêa) in a coma for eight years. Magno (Juliano Cazarré), then, is doomed to survive stuck in a marriage that was already in decline, caring for a paralyzed body in a hospital bed. Vitória (Taís Araújo), a successful lawyer, haunted by guilt for having abandoned a newborn child in her youth, in maturity wants to become a mother at any cost: after adopting a child, she ends up getting pregnant, which complicates her love and professional lives. Amanda (Camila Márdila), an environmental activist whose father is disabled due to years of working in the pipelines of the PWA, a plastic manufacturing company, where he got contaminated by the waste dumped there, is determined to destroy Álvaro (Irandhir Santos), the factory owner.

It is to this network of relations that the study will direct its analytical lenses², to the *mise-en-scène* of the telenovela *Amor de Mãe* and its effects of meaning, taking as corpus the chapters aired between December 3, when Lurdes meets Sandro and, believing to be her son Domênico, manages to get him out of prison; and December 19, when Sandro rescues Lurdes from a kidnapping.

TIES, CONVIVIALITIES, BONDS: BANDIT MOTHER LOVE?

Starting from the premise that the gridlines imposed by the various instances of society affect both the subjects considered to be subversive and those who strive to ensure compliance with the norms, laws, and conventions in a dynamic of *verse/inverse* functioning that implies both sides, it is considered that all are – to a greater or lesser extent – trapped in restrictions and physical and affective delimitations. Looking at the aesthetic politicalities articulated between the expression plane and the content plane³ of the audiovisual product in question, it is necessary to first focus on the advent of physical imprisonments and their concrete spaces of containment of bodies, and then, to deepen the lens on issues related to symbolic imprisonments.

Imprisonments stem, in particular, from a disciplinary ordering of bodies that, for Michel Foucault (2014), will require “the fence, the specification of a place heterogeneous to all others and closed in on itself” (p. 139). The structures that guide the buildings of colleges, barracks, hospitals, convents,

²Note that the analytical perspective proposed here focuses on the narrative and the production of meaning of the television product in question from the understanding that television fiction, as happens with the cinematographic, as it communicates with the society in which it is inserted, can work as a field of the symptom – thus extrapolating, eventually, the dimension of the so-called pure and simple representation. Specifics strictly pertaining to the “television” device and peculiarities restricted to the platform will not be delved into.

³For Jean-Marie Floch (2001), the meanings given by the *expression plane* and the *content plane*, placed in juxtaposition, constitute semi-symbolic systems. The expression plane is the one where “the sensitive qualities that a language has for manifestation are selected and articulated among themselves by differential variations”; The content plane, on the other hand, is “where signification arises from the differential variations thanks to which each culture, in order to think the world, sorts and chains ideas and discourse” (p. 9). A distinction is made between form and substance levels of each plane: “*form* is the organization, invariant and purely relational, that articulates the sensible matter or the conceptual matter of a plane, thus producing signification”; and “*substance* is the matter, the variable support that form articulates. Substance is thus the realization, at a given moment, of form” (p. 11).

schools, and factories are examples, among others, of this architecture of incarceration. Disciplinary apparatuses work with the principle of immediate localization, the *gridlines* that installs and confines “each individual in their place; and in each place, an individual” and whose logic requires the avoidance of “distributions by groups” and the decomposition of “collective deployments” and the analysis of “confused, massive, or elusive pluralities” (p. 140). This is in order to nullify the effects of undecided distributions: so that individuals do not disappear (escaping the control in force) and so that they do not have the opportunity to agglomerate (in common actions) it is necessary to control presences and absences, stimulate useful, convenient communications, and abort threatening and/or dangerous contacts. Disciplinary organizations create, reiterate, preserve, and attempt to perpetuate – with considerable strategic efficiency – their own systems of surveillance.

The dynamics that articulate the walls and cells that make up the dungeons – those typical of detention centers – can also be extended to buildings that are not primarily such. There are family homes – the so-called “welcoming homes”? – which to a greater or lesser degree harbor the most varied types of physical and psychological domestic violence, tyrannies, and the most complex types of coercion. This dynamic reconciles the *principle of gridlines* (Foucault, 2014), related to the situation of the subject who occupies categorized and organized physical environments for the sake of order and domination, in which experiences are flattened and diluted. The importance of observing the resignifications of hierarchical and repressive regimes within the family institution is scrutinized by Foucault (2014) in *Discipline and Punish*: “one day one will need to show how intrafamilial relations, essentially in the parent-child cell, have become ‘disciplined,’ absorbing since the Classical Era external, scholastic, military, then medical, psychiatric schemes...” (p. 208). Thinking about how disciplinary politics sneak into our daily lives will always be coated with a sense of urgency. Investigating how the failure of political institutions succeeds in lodging itself in domestic convivialities is of entire pertinence so that we can identify the reasons why the places of affective sharing become aesthetic or anesthetic⁴.

In *Amor de Mãe*, at the very moment when Sandro – who is then in prison, condemned to live in the bordering cells assigned by the state – is introduced to Lurdes as her lost son, the first affectionate relations between the boy and his supposed mother begins. In her efforts to live with her son, Lurdes ends up entering a world that is entirely unknown to her, but that, related to the supposed son, also becomes part of her personal universe. The daughter Camila comments:

⁴ According to Fischer and Vaz (2018), from the place of dwelling and the dynamics of family relationships, which can both welcome and shelter as well as encase and oppress, it is possible to analyze the images that concern the question of inhabiting, according to topicalizations that can be filled by relational movements or by inert bodies, translating into aesthetic spaces or anesthetic landscapes.



[Camila] Sorry, Mom, but I find it very weird, I find it very weird seeing you recognize a criminal on TV, taking cigarettes to jail.

[Lurdes] I have to help my son, he needs help. Sandro is from that faction of Marconi's. Can't you see that they are killing all of Marconi's people?

[Camila] Mom, for God's sake, look, you can't mess with criminals, we're not part of this world. You have four other children who love you and are worried about you. Promise me, swear to me, that you won't do anything wrong to help Sandro.

[Lurdes] No need to swear anything, I won't swear, of course I won't do anything wrong, now I need to swear... (Dias & Villamarim, 2019-2021, Chap. 12, 20:28)

Later, another daughter, Erica (Nanda Costa), will also reproach her: "It seems that our mother has become a criminal's mother now". That's when Lurdes answers, incisively: "A criminal's mother? What am I? Isn't my son in jail? What does that make me? I am a criminal's mother. So what? I am a criminal's mother" (Dias & Villamarim, 2019-2021, Chap. 12, 42:35).

Lurdes gets to know the boss Marconi (Douglas Silva) and the members of the criminal faction Sandro had joined. They often address her as "tia", an expression indicating kinship (in this case, a forged and somewhat ironic family tie), and show respect towards her – sure that the new mother of their accomplice is "fechamento" (reliable, faithful). Lurdes helps her supposed son and, consequently, the faction, when, at Sandro's request, she agrees to take a cell phone chip from the prison to Marconi; later, on another visit, she gives Sandro, at Marconi's request, a cell phone: "I brought a cake. Chocolate, with brigadeiro icing, and a cell phone inside". Subversively, going against the family prescriptions, making it possible for the newly met boy to regain his freedom (legally, with the support of a lawyer), while guaranteeing his survival (by illicit means, collaborating with Marconi), Lurdes becomes Sandro's mother (even though he is not the Domênico she so desperately wanted).

By openly and warmly taking the maternal place in Sandro's life, Lurdes gives the young man the opportunity to become her son, and thus establishes a genuinely virtuous circle of affective sharing. Free from the State's sentence, but still tied to crime, Sandro, during a violent police confrontation, sees his mother in the midst of the crossfire, in the line of fire, and throws himself in front of her to take the bullet. Attentive to the boy's moral dilemma (if she promises to be on his side from then on, as the bandit Marconi had been until then), Lurdes goes to the crime office willing to negotiate a sum of money to release her son from his obligations to the faction. There, she is kidnapped by opposing thugs, and he rescues her – and Marconi, with his gang, frees Sandro from his bonds.

The family bonds between Lurdes and Sandro are built and consolidated through the mutual support, the gift they offer each other, both willing to risk themselves to maintain the ties that bind them. Their respective modes of appropriation of the restrictive circumstances to which they are subjected make possible, in the diegesis, the construction of escapes⁵ that allow them to subvert fictional reality and produce unusual privileged sites – then to some degree in conformity with their own desires.

This article deals with the telenovela *Amor de Mãe*, dealing with (1) the placement of these two characters in the frame; and (2) the resulting images on the screen, analyzing the affective constructions operated by these figures – despite the limitations, interdictions and obligations imposed on them – and the resulting effects of meaning. The approach relates to the recognition that, in their diverse nuances and perspectives, the routine subjects of public and private life are the ones to provide material to telenovelistic plots, and relies on the understanding that the staging of facts and themes of social and political nature refers, in the terms of Lopes (2009), to the mentions about the “naturalistic’ character of telenovelas”, as well as explicit references to “the life of the nation”⁶. Lopes (2009), in fact, advances the hypothesis that telenovelas exert the function of *agenda setting*, “such is their power to set a thematic agenda that is followed and discussed by the country during its eight-month duration” (p. 27). In this sense, the author continues, sets of themes such as

land reform, coronelism, real estate speculation, multinational companies, political corruption, racism, minorities, among others, are some examples of this vocation of telenovelas to incorporate themes of the public sphere to the private universe in their narratives. (Lopes, 2009, p. 27)

Such issues obviously do not exist and do not develop in isolation. In the reality of daily life and in the diegesis of fiction, they are articulated, in their various aspects, in the weaving and unfolding of both narratives (the fictional and the non-fictional):

These themes are inseparable from romantic plots, family plots, love, marriage, and separation. It is the logic of personal and family relationships that presides over the narrative of social problems. That is where the power of this narrative seems to reside, its ability to translate the audience through affective relations, at the level of the lived, mixing itself in the experience of everyday life, lived itself in multiple facets, subjective, emotional, political, cultural, aesthetic. (Lopes, 2009, p. 27)

⁵We appropriate relatively freely the notions of *fracture* and *escapement* established by Algirdas J. Greimas (2002). In Greimasian terms, the fractures are effected by moments of dawning, which enable aesthetic and aesthetic experiences. The escapes, on the other hand, present a possibility of the aesthetic and aesthetic that, unlike the fracture, is not an accidental effect, but a constructed one; it is the effort for a construction of the sensitive and a dynamic search for the deautomatization of daily life.

⁶In this regard, see also studies by Maria de Lourdes Motter, such as *Ficção e Realidade: A Construção do Cotidiano na Telenovela* (2003).



In the case of *Amor de Mãe*, we will see that, even in the apparently borderline and interdicted enclosures of the cloister, emphasis is placed on the display of *modus vivendi* that allow the characters not to submit to the hindrances, conventions, and consequent anesthetic paralysis imposed on them: seeking slivers of space in the eventual inconsistencies of the repressive system, they move towards the aesthetic experience, appropriating the physical and affective places in the most diverse environments, be they marginal, stigmatized (detention house) or legitimized (family housing). Considering that the “fusion of the public and private domains performed by the telenovelas allows them to synthesize broad problematics in figures and punctual plots and, at the same time, to suggest that personal and punctual dramas may come to have a broad meaning” (Lopes, 2009, p. 27), besides functioning as a field of the symptom (see note 4), it seems quite plausible to establish more or less close connections, metaphorical or not, between what is seen on the screen (regarding the telenovela in question, militias, children trafficking, concentration of income, racial prejudice, abuse of authority, illicit procedures of child adoption etc.) and what is experienced on the outside (particularly, although not only, regarding contemporary Brazil). The exercise of glimpsing, from these entanglements, opportunities of constructions that can make transgressions possible, in the realm of extraterrestrial reality, of crystallized prejudices and alienating determinisms, is encouraging.

DUNGEON AND SHELL, GRIDLINES AND GAP

The ways in which we daily construct and accommodate our affections in the convivial gridlines imposed on us by architectural and hierarchical mechanisms etc., determine whether the peculiar appropriations we make of them are built in dungeon-houses (Fischer, 2006) and/or shell-houses (Bachelard, 1989), the first insidiously imprisoning, the second benevolently welcoming. The same place can be configured as a specific, particular type of *corner in the world* (sheltering dreams, memories, daydreams) or be structured based on containment mechanisms which, aiming at protecting/preserving memories, conventions, traditions, vicious/deleterious relations, end up configuring, to a certain extent, a sketch of a mausoleum (a tomb-house?). However, a site originally defined with more or less explicit purposes – of limiting or restricting experiences, hindering possibilities of coming and going, can nevertheless be fractured by symbolic escapes, transforming itself, subversively and upside down, into a place of affective welcome (a mother-house?).

This lability in the constitution and characterization of the physical and/or symbolic topologies will be given by the vivacity of the bodies that may settle (1) in the anesthetic landscape of an environment delimited by gridlines and compressed by the rarefaction of physical and affective appropriations (the image of the dungeon-house) and (2) in the aesthetic space of a landscape constituted by the fluid and undulating relational movement inherent to the vicissitudes of shared dwelling that enables, in the measure of the conformation of its environmental characteristics, the appropriation and understanding of *being* in the world (the image of the shell-house).

The telenovela *Amor de Mãe* privileges framings of addresses, and moves the characters Lurdes and Sandro, focused here, between (1) the environment of the detention house in which Sandro is serving time for armed robbery and (2) Lurdes' house, shared with her four children, Magno, Ryan (Thiago Martins), Érica (Nanda Costa) and Camila (Jéssica Ellen); and (3) the former house of Sandro's adoptive mother, which, taken over by Marconi, becomes the *crime office*. These environments will be paradoxical, making up a physical and affective architecture that is both an instance of repulsion and welcoming. In other words, neither the detention house nor the crime office are strictly configured as dungeon-houses, just as Lurdes' house is not just a shell-house. The grids of this gridlines present fissures and in them the transitory movements organize themselves, mutating, into anesthetic landscapes/aesthetic spaces.

When assuming Sandro as her son Domênico and visiting him in the fictitious Afonso César Prison, the figure of Lurdes in the penitentiary is repeatedly framed appearing between bars (Figure 1) – a clear allusion to the fact that, as the mother of an inmate, she is subjected to the coercive gridlines of the state prison even without being sentenced. The framings equalize the “between bars” situation in which we see Sandro, the convict, and Lurdes, trapped by family ties (Figure 2). Were it not for the content plane in juxtaposition to the expression plane, if we looked only at the framings detached from their narrative context, we would not identify which of the two characters would be, in the staged prison environment, serving time. At the same time, the situational coincidence that can be seen in these framings gives an affective tone to the grayish physicality of the cell, *despite...*⁷: it minimizes, rarefies the barriers between prisoner and visitor. Thus, both taken in identical positions, it is inferred that the vertical concreteness of the bars cannot hinder the flow of affections. Lurdes and Sandro may be trapped, but they find fissures, they inhabit the gaps in the imposed railings and overcome the oppressive ordinances that separate subjects who are on the inside and outside, becoming at that moment only mother and son.

⁷Taking Jacques Fontanille's idea (2014, p. 70) regarding the subject's attitude of “continuing the course of life despite X,” we employ the expression *despite...* Punctuation, here, functions as a shelter for interrogations, exclamations, dots and commas (uncertainties, perplexities, pauses) of a life whose course is not interrupted. The ellipsis indicates the omission of something that one does not want or cannot reveal, a suspension or hesitation, besides the allusion to openings of possibilities, which in the tracing of the three dots would represent paths to be traveled (except for the uncertainties that nestle between the cracks of the unknown).

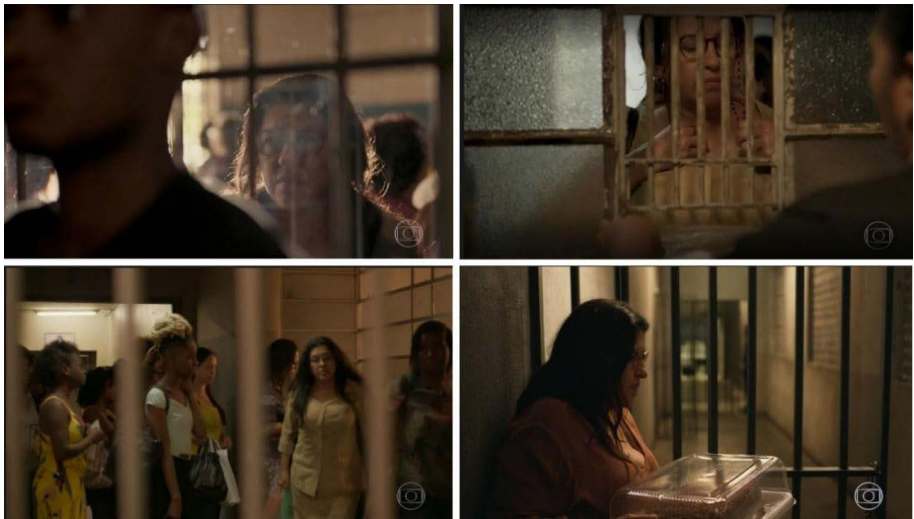
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in principle, what seemed to be only condemnation can also be perceived as freedom, since the failures in the communication processes create gaps – and, through such gaps, established from what is not fully said or simply not said (there is an unfathomable dimension contained in the genesis of every communicational relationship, especially regarding the field of word) we can be saved from the “horror of the real”. (Fischer, 2006, p. 204)

Figure 1

Lurdes between bars



Note. Dias and Villamarim (2019-2021).

Figure 2

Lurdes and Sandro: Physical and emotional bars



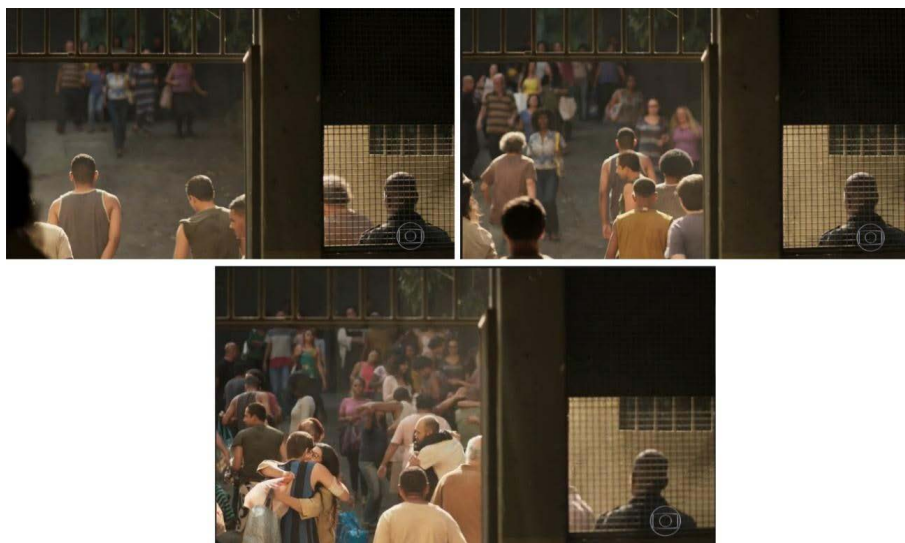
Note. Dias and Villamarim (2019-2021).

If there are communicational barriers (properly architected, symbolically overcome) between the inmates and their families, the gathering of these subjects is enhanced, in the telenovela, in the sequence that reveals two gates opening

simultaneously to the prison yard (Figure 3). While one of them allows the entrance of visitors (coming from the outside, from the shared living in society), the other one allows the entrance of interns (coming from the confinement in the building, lives shrunk at *the borders of*). In the movement of steps and hugs, the bodies that meet in the space – although regulated, delimited, and watched – of the “open” patio, are mixed and confused.

Figure 3

Openings and closings



Note. Dias and Villamarim (2019-2021).

The courtyard destined for socializing no longer shows blatant divisions and differences – indistinctly, everyone appropriates the place through affective encounters, through sharing in the scope of what seems to be a space *in between*: not the enclosure of the cell, not the vastness of the streets. A fissure, a gap that lodges itself in the architectural grid of the prison and becomes an escape route, physically uniting – temporarily, that is – people separated by legal systems theoretically designed to protect those outside the walls and discipline the ones inside.

Such outside world, however, also reserves gridlines for its occupants. If Lurdes is frequently framed between the bars that structure the environment that imprisons Sandro, the house where she lives with her other four children is also a place that constantly places her between bars (Figure 4).

Figure 4
Barred household rooms



Note. Dias and Villamarim (2019-2021).

In addition to the striated and opaque glass of the barred windows, sparse beams – support columns planted amidst the cramped interior of the rooms that make up the suburban family’s home – outline verticalities that not only give the environment a certain air of enclosure but also allude to the bars of the detention house (Figure 5).

Until the moment Sandro is recognized as a member of the family, Lurdes’ address proves to be welcoming, and there the channels of communication are considerably unimpeded. As soon as the woman learns that the boy could be her son, the residents of the house clash. The children believe that the mother should arrange for DNA tests to prove Sandro’s parentage, but she refuses: she does not accept the idea of subjecting her son – for whom she had searched for so long – to an uncomfortable situation. Lurdes *wants* Sandro to be her son, and that is enough for her. Family disagreements then intensify, as she admits the young man into the residence, “my house is your house, you are my son.” Although Lurdes’s house is also the house of her children, as she claims, she insists, when her decisions are contested, in saying that the house belongs to her, and that she is the one in charge: “He didn’t ask to come here, no, I offered it to him, I insisted for him to come, you hear me? . . . in this house, you hear me, I’m in charge, this is my house and this is how it’s going to be, you hear me?” (Dias & Villamarim, 2019-2021, Chap. 18, 16:26).

Figure 5*Domestic barriers*

Note. Dias and Villamarim (2019-2021).

One way or another, family gatherings make the house an environment that germinates ambiguities, in such a way that the rooms (and discomforts) bring together welcoming and domination in networks of affections that imply sharing and splitting, in a hierarchical-repressive ordering:

domestic comes from the Latin term *domus* (house), which in turn is linked to *dominus*, meaning *lord, chief, sovereign, owner*: whoever is inside the house, therefore, is either the master or under the dominion of a master (it is, more or less, something like one of his possessions) – and one does not trespass with impunity on a place that has an instituted owner. (Fischer, 2006, p. 23)

In this perspective, all architectural buildings would be destined to fulfill a certain paralyzing dynamic, operationally instrumentalizing the “submission to specifically established parameters, modeling for the perfecting of such subjection, and containment in determined positions and places – so that the preservation and continuity of this domination process is guaranteed” (Fischer, 2006, p. 22). The images of the telenovela under analysis do not only frame Lurdes’s dwelling with railings (and verticalizations) that refer to the oppressive gridlines of the detention houses. Other spaces bear explicit grids, and several characters appear gridded and/or in gridlines on the screen. Combinations of horizontal and vertical lines, in the foreground,

are superimposed on figures placed, for example, in their work environments (at the school where Camila teaches and in Álvaro's office, owner of PWA, a company that pollutes the Guanabara Bay); in their homes (at the entrance of Vicente's [Rodrigo Garcia] building); and even in public spaces, as demonstrated by the framing in which the grid pattern is practically inked on the surface of the body of a dog centered in the video (Figure 6)

Figure 6

Framings and gridlines



Note. Dias and Villamarim (2019-2021).

In addition to these, one of the scenes that most evidences this hypertrophied and gridded gridlines is the house of the character Betina (Isis Valverde), Magno's girlfriend, who was a victim of domestic violence committed by her ex-husband and who, at a certain point in the plot, starts a love affair with Sandro. Access to the site is through a doorway that resembles the entrance to a prison cell or penitentiary (Figure 7).

Notwithstanding the profusion of bars that are repeated on the expression plane, the content plane makes it clear that no security is guaranteed there: the residence is repeatedly invaded, and more than once the young resident suffers physical aggression on its premises. It is not the bars, the plot reveals, that in the domestic environment or outside ensure that the characters are protected and sheltered. In Betina's case, this seems to be provided by the physical presence and

the gesture of affection that takes shape, through the gaps in the railing, in the relationship – about to escape her, it must be said – built with Magno (Figure 8).

Figure 7

House or prison?



Note. Dias and Villamarim (2019-2021).

Figure 8

Insecurity railings



Note. Dias and Villamarim (2019-2021).

Although the bars, in the background or in the foreground, are visible in all the frames brought here, one can see, in Figure 9, peculiar framings that are particularly similar: they are images of Magno and Betina, taken against the backdrop of the girl's house, and of Lurdes and Sandro in the detention house.

Figure 9*Grids of multiple prisons*

Note. Dias and Villamarim (2019-2021).

In a decontextualized way, it is hard to believe that one of the frames puts in the scene and presents not the facilities of a penitentiary complex, but the room of a residence; it is the image of the house that reveals itself even more claustrophobic, because the railing and the wall are superimposed and appear practically glued, while in the chiaroscuro of the image of the penitentiary, the railings lead to a corridor that extends, interspersed with several thresholds. An almost *mise en abyme* perspective is constructed, producing a depth effect that evokes the sensation, somewhat vertiginous, of multiple movement. What is in the foreground, in both frames, is the corporality of the characters: very close to each other, they are in physical contact; and, despite..., they appropriate the places (not very welcoming, at first), by means of the sensitive relationship, constructing escapes in the alleys – seemingly dead ends – in which life has put them.

However, if in the interior spaces in which the characters move, squares and grids acquire protagonism, in the external environments references to grids are also present. That is, enclosures that in one way or another still encompass certain figures are expressively reiterated on the screen. Sandro, for example, after serving the sentence imposed on him in the detention house, is released and allowed to leave: it is, however, a conditional, limited freedom – a situation readily homologated by the expression plane. In the scene in which the young man, after leaving the building in which he had been imprisoned until then, walks down the street next to Lurdes, his supposed mother, in the background the presence of electricity poles build verticalizations that evoke grids, and high voltage wires, in a polluted tangle of crossings and labyrinthine horizontalities are suggestively stamped on the screen and present themselves to the screen and present themselves to the spectator (Figure 10).

Figure 10*Urban verticalization*

Note. Dias and Villamarim (2019-2021).

In the diegesis in question, the content plane emphasizes that, if Sandro “paid his debt” to the State/society – an expression popularly used with regard to ex-prisoners – an outstanding debt to organized crime remains. On the level of expression, the character remains imprisoned. His figure is displayed amidst frames that reiterate the presence of verticalized bars. There are moments when his corporality is captured behind explicit bars – as in the occasion when he is inside Marconi’s office building, the gang boss, trying to negotiate his dismissal from criminality (Figure 11).

Sandro is finally freed from the world of banditry when Lurdes goes to Marconi and pays for his freedom, stipulated at R\$ 50,000. During the negotiations, an opposing gang surprises the boss and his accomplices, taking Lurdes hostage. Sandro arrives on the scene and joins the faction, striving to rescue his supposed mother. On the way to the fleeing car, Marconi grants him the debt paid receipt, and Sandro and Lurdes disembark – now free, one from the kidnapping and the other from the underworld he had been introduced into during childhood. The framing that ends this sequence blurs the entire background of the scene, leaving the two characters in the foreground, framed by the diffused light of the clear day. The clean image, then, is revealed to be unsquared and devoid of any grids, metaphorical or literal (Figure 12).

Figure 11
Imprisonment of crime



Note. Dias and Villamarim (2019-2021).

Figure 12
Grids come out of the picture



Note. Dias and Villamarim (2019-2021).

There is a horizon of possibilities, it is inferred, for mother and child. An opening declared in the flash that surrounds both characters, in a blur that can work as an indication of uncertainties and questionings, yes, but that can

also suggest the erasure of suffering and helplessness that preceded the encounter (even if mistaken) and the mutual welcoming.

The relational movement between Lurdes and Sandro is motivated by a sense of care: in gestures of support and construction, they build an affective “family” togetherness. There are several situations implied in the scope of family bonds; conflicting and paradoxical conjunctures – inclusion/exclusion, openness/closeness, attraction/repulsion, comfort/discomfort – that are tensioned and can be joined in the same sensitive interaction, operating controversial and simultaneous feelings. In *Amor de Mãe*, it is possible to observe that the inclusive and exclusive, comfortable and uncomfortable family relationships that develop in the content plane end up being imaged homologically in the expression plane by the way in which the characters are framed and squared in scenographic environments sketched at times as welcoming houses (shell-house), at other times as oppressive spaces (dungeon-house).

In the telenovela under analysis, the scene of the house-dungeon is actualized in the anesthetic landscape delimited by relational squares and shortages. The image of the shell-house, on the other hand, will accommodate the aesthetic space constituted by the fluid and undulating sensitive movement of the escapes that install themselves, sneakily or not, in the cracks of the disciplinary orderings. It is a content woven by values and passions that insist, persevere, and build passionate movements of resistance, demolishing obstacles and breaking institutional barriers of the most diverse natures. In this perspective, it is inferred, to *coexist* is to *overcome*, to continue together despite... The economy of images in *Amor de Mãe* aesthetically assures that the topology of anesthetic landscapes can be altered, to a lesser or greater extent, by breaches in relational dispositions that allow both the accident that fractures crystallized conventions and the escape that prevents or avoids numbing. Diegetically, the aesthetic space is drawn in a kind of search for *how* and *why* a life takes shape in the physical-affective-social place. It is possible to exist, to survive, in the anesthetic landscape. But one only acquires existence (*re-existence*?) animated in the aesthetic space that reveals the course of life in its phases of sensitization and perseverance: despite... it is possible to continue as an active body, assuming and sustaining the synesthetic relations and affective dispositions. The character Sandro exists in the television plot as a subject linked to misdemeanors that confined him to marginality; nevertheless, he acquires re-existence – despite... – in the figure of the misguided Domênico, and starts experiencing the (co)experiences of a son. Lurdes, in turn, despite having had her two-year-old son taken away from her, resists and perseveres: indifferent to the aridity of the search and the passage of time, she insists and



never abandons the search. Assuming and sustaining the (mistaken?) fracture constituted by the advent of the chance encounter, she constructs escapes and (unmistaken) ways to re-exist, establishing with Sandro a maternal coexistence.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

The purpose of this study was to look at how the language and aesthetic options of a popular audiovisual product⁸ – in this case, the telenovela *Amor de Mãe* – support reflections about images that deal with bonding, coexistence and family groupings and their ways of accommodation to the physical and psychological factors that make up the environment of places of residence. To consider the affective movement in juxtaposition to the movement of bodies in architectural spaces is to look at how social dynamics are, in turn, given *body*. The framings that show squared characters, whether in the realm of exteriors (on the street, in prisons, in the maladjustments of economic and social marginality etc.) or interiors (in domesticity, the family home, the maladjustments of non-belonging etc.) communicate with everyday practices that are often ultimately organized between bars. In domestic environments, the same dynamics that supposedly tend to provide welcoming and safeguard warmth and intimacy, privileging regimes of privacy and security, also lend themselves to viciously create and implant barriers. Thus, ensuring the maintenance of deleterious interpersonal relationships and hierarchical orderings long established and reinforced by architectural solutions that oppress and hide – preventing possibilities of opening, interrupting lines of escape and installing regimes of confinement typical of incarceration – the images of imprisonment – symbolic or literal – that intertwine in the narrative of Manuela Dias allude in greater or lesser intensity to the oppressive reality manifested in an increasingly polarized and violent Brazil. As a symptom field, the telenovela re-presents, critically and metonymically, the syndrome of a world recognized by the spectator in the paradoxical figure of a city considered wonderful (Rio de Janeiro), which at the same time dazzles and horrifies, welcomes and oppresses, condemning its inhabitants to compulsory confinement. This sometimes occurs due to living on the borders of..., which penalizes them to social exclusion (concretized in prisons, impoverished schools and public hospitals, deficient public transportation, proliferation of poor communities permanently exposed to militias and police arbitrary actions and abuses etc.). And, in other circumstances, by the enclosure in social stratifications that multiply barred condominiums and residences, automobiles (expensive or not, armored or not), discriminatory and excluding consumption centers, full of guards and security

⁸The narrative has significant and reiterated power of communication, as it reveals the thickness to reach diverse audiences, and not only because it was produced and shown by the largest – and most controversial? – television network in the country. In a way, it also becomes “militant”, considering what, at the moment, the broadcaster is interested in “appearing to be”.

cameras (shopping malls, village malls, fitness center complexes, elitist private educational institutions, luxury clinics etc.). Added to the obvious evidence is the relative invisibility of claustrophobic domestic routines, largely shaped not only by socioeconomic factors, but by naturalized customs and crystallized traditions. The opening theme of *Amor de Mãe*, hummed by Camila in the second chapter, is Gonzaguinha's, a musician who is on the list of most censored musicians during the Brazilian military dictatorship – of the 72 lyrics he wrote that were submitted to the dictatorial government for analysis, 54 were censored. “The 30 NIS reports on the ‘named LGJ’ (Luiz Gonzaga Júnior) show that the singer and songwriter was persecuted from 1972 to 1985, amidst the democratic transition. Almost all of these accounts make reference to protest concerts in which he participated” (Eboli, 2012).

The lyrics of the song “É”, whose original recording dates back to 1988, the year in which the current Constitution of the Federative Republic of Brazil was promulgated, claims, already in a supposedly democratic country, the “full right”, “all respect.” And he assures that “we want to live freedom”. Even living in the Democratic State of Law, eventually building/inhabiting houses that are shells, not dungeons, experiencing aesthetic spaces, not anesthetic, one recognizes in the expression of popular creativity the need to keep alert, asserting the saying “our love,” untying bodies, installing possibilities of promoting libertarian physical-affective coexistence. In *Amor de Mãe*, grids show in fiction the obstacles that permeate the attempts to move in a so-called democratic reality, but not always able or willing to guarantee the experience of effectively emancipatory freedoms. When Sandro is shot, Lurdes, indignant, rebels: “My son was shot, he was under the responsibility of the State.” Visiting him in the hospital, his wife hears from the policeman guarding the door of his room that, “if he was a worker that wouldn't have happened.” The mother replies, “There are plenty of honest people out there getting shot.” Without a doubt, we know – the policeman manifested on the television fiction screen and us, part of the people seated on the “sofa” of reality – that both sides resist and persist with institutionalized orderings – militarized or not – that distinguish, classify, separate. And imprisons, one way or another. In the condition of social actors, however, gathered in the making of the plot that has been developing in Brazil – for a long time and especially in contemporary times – before our eyes and by our hands, we ask: in which chapter, exactly, did the progressive erasure of principles guaranteeing social justice, of individual liberties, of effective mechanisms to reduce inequalities begin? What images, what – inter-screen? – landscapes reveal fractures and possibilities of escape that lead to narratives – intra-screen and extra-screen – with less grids? ■



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