

## THE MATERNITY DISPOSITIF IN *ALL ABOUT MY MOTHER*: ENTEXTUALIZATIONS AND SCALAR PROCESSES

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- **ABSTRACT:** In this article, we understand motherhood as a dispositif that shapes social life and gives support to the nuclear family, but that is subject to mutations and reappropriations. Our purpose is to think about the extent to which the film *All about my mother*, by denaturalizing maternity performances, as well as those of gender and sexuality, stimulates reflexivity on this subject and leads to possible resignifications. We have selected two moments of the textual trajectory (BLOMMAERT, 2005) the film has been following since 1999 and submitted them to the analysis of the entextualization (SILVERSTEIN; URBAN, 1996; BAUMAN; BRIGGS, 1990) and scalar processes (CARR; LEMPERT, 2016) mobilized in order to gauge such reflexivity. We have observed that a large part of the queer destabilizations that the film narrative promotes inspire positions in new entextualizations that, in most cases, ratify such destabilizations and manage to expand the concept of motherhood beyond biological and instinctive associations, which prevail in common sense (SCAVONE, 2001; FIDALGO, 2003; PINHEIRO, 2014).
- **KEYWORDS:** Almodóvar. Maternity performances. Dispositif. Scalar processes. Entextualization.

### Introduction

As expected, a film whose title is *All about my mother* (AAMM henceforth, except in citations) takes into consideration themes related to maternity. However, as also expected, due to the fact that it is directed by Pedro Almodóvar, the way these themes are approached evades many of the maternity performance clichés.

However, before we discuss the ruptures that the film may entail, it is interesting to understand the upheld hegemonically constructed meanings about how maternity must be performed. For this purpose, we will chart a brief genealogy of maternity

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love. Since Rousseau proposed that the social contract that would make conviviality among society members ‘more harmonic’, this kind of love became one of the cornerstones of contemporary society and was associated with a view of maternity as a project (PINHEIRO, 2014). Besides being related with the physiological condition of pregnancy and childbirth, this view presupposes a long-term action (BADINTER, 1991), which involves care-taking, commitment, ‘pleasurable suffering’ and resignations (PINHEIRO, 2014). This is the definition of maternal love which orients the ideal form of enacting motherhood performances and “the macrosocial concepts of (good) maternity”<sup>1</sup> (PINHEIRO, 2014, p.20, Our translation).

Notions of good maternity, however, have not always been associated, as today, with a view of motherhood as a project. This is a relatively new invention which has now become established (PINHEIRO, 2014). As Badinter (1991, p.74, Our translation) reminds us, in the urban 17th and 18th century France, for example, “the death of a child was a banal episode”<sup>2</sup>, and the risk that it would not survive would be much higher if the mother, rather than taking care of the baby herself, handed it over to a wet nurse. However, this fact did not make the help of wet nurses less common on those days.

When analysing maternal love between the 17th and the 20th century, Badinter makes clear that this kind of love begins to gain today’s meaning contours when stopping the high child mortality rates and recruiting healthy work-hands became a state imperative. Healthy citizens were “the riches of the State”<sup>3</sup> (BADINTER, 1991, p.79, Our translation). In order to account for this imperative, mothers were then encouraged to take care of their own children from their first days including breastfeeding them, rather than giving this task to someone else. According to Badinter (1991), only from 1760 onwards one starts to see a change of mentality, which was to a great extent due to a flood of publications, encouraging mothers to be in charge of a series of care-taking practices. By repeating these practices for more than 200 years, they materialized ‘maternal love’ as we know it today.

Maternal love however is under constant reformulation. More recently, another change, the contraceptive pill, collaborated with making this kind of love more nuanced, deconstructing the woman = mother equation (SCAVONE, 2001). If in the past procreation was situated within the sphere of biological inevitability, with the introduction of this contraceptive method, maternity became a choice and favored a greater participation of women in the socioeconomic life as well as a freer experience of their sexuality. However, despite these reconfigurations, maternity did not totally disassociate itself either from adult feminine subjectivity (FIDALGO, 2003) or from a biological and instinctive matrix (BADINTER, 1991). And social ideologies, supported by nuclear family oriented-discourses (DE DIEGO, 1992), which press women to

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<sup>1</sup> Original: “*concepções macrossociais de (boa) maternidade*” (PINHEIRO, 2014, p.20).

<sup>2</sup> Original: “*la muerte de un niño era un episodio banal*” (BADINTER, 1991, p.74).

<sup>3</sup> Original: “*la riqueza del Estado*” (BADINTER, 1991, p.79).

become mothers, seem not to have been disturbed (BARBOSA; ROCHA-COUTINHO, 2007; PINHEIRO, 2014).

Identifying how this dispositif (see below) was historically forged allows us to deconstruct the maternal love myth (BADINTER, 1991) by perspectivizing it discursively (FIDALGO, 2003). The operation of such deconstruction is relevant not to understand this type of love as intrinsic to 'women' (i.e. women as socially-constructed subjects).

Likewise, there are cultural artifacts, such as AAMM, which have collaborated with understanding the maternity dispositif as discursively forged. As such, it can equally be deconstructed by discourse. Rather than entextualizing common-sense discourses, the film would have the potential to forge dissident perceptions, challenging points of views (CARR; LEMPert, 2016), which have operated from hegemonic perspectives.

Counter-discourses/counter-narratives<sup>4</sup> (BAMBERG; ANDREWS, 2004), as those found in the AAMM film narrative, fathom maternity as well as gender and sexuality as performance (BUTLER, 2007). By describing non-hegemonic maternity performances, the film narrative makes them possible: as a performative event, the film narrative creates what it describes. By travelling and by sometimes following an intense textual trajectory, as is the case focussed on here, since AAMM continues circulating and inspiring reflexive exercises many years after its premier, the film brings about counter-discourses/counter-narratives which are specially relevant if we take into account the ruptures they may forge. After all:

Texts – understood broadly as an ensemble of associated signs (linguistic and non-linguistic) – act in the social world. They are performative in that they affect people and incite their bodies, making them respond, verbally and non-verbally in specific ways. (MOITA LOPES; FABRÍCIO, 2018, p.462).

This research is based on a performative view of language (AUSTIN, 1990), which takes it as a social action (BAUMAN; BRIGGS, 1990; MOITA LOPES, 2016), and centers on two reflexive exercises (two reviews) which the textual trajectory of the film AAMM followed. We aim at analysing how some of the fissures, which this cultural artifact brings about in relation to the maternity dispositif, are entextualized (BAUMAN; BRIGGS, 1990; SILVERSTEIN; URBAN, 1996) and how such entextualizations mobilize scalar projections (CARR; LEMPert, 2016). However, before we move on to the analysis, it is necessary to define what we understand by dispositif and queer theories. These theories provide us with arguments for the deconstruction of the dispositif. Such theorizing does not conceive of either

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<sup>4</sup> Counter-discourses/counter-narratives are those that challenge hegemonic discourses, presenting themselves as alternatives, as resistance focuses (BAMBERG; ANDREWS, 2004).

gender or sexuality or motherhood as essence or as something instinctive, but as a product of reiterated discursive practices, which in this process are crystallized and, as such, normalize particular meanings or forms of acting.

### **The maternity dispositive**

Dispositif, according to Agamben (2009), would be “anything” which would make governmentality possible (FOUCAULT, 1977-1978/2088), i.e. “[...] the capacity of capturing, orienting, determining, intercepting, modelling, controlling and ensuring living-beings’ gestures, conducts, opinions and discourses.” (AGAMBEN, 2009, p.39-40, Our translation)<sup>5</sup>. As for Agamben, everything that exists fits two basic categories, living-beings and dispositifs, the subject would result from the relationship between both. The dispositif therefore would have a decisive role in subjectification processes.

In this article, such a role is demonstrated by the maternity dispositif, which produces mother as a subject and captures, orients, determines, intercepts, models, controls and ensures the gestures, the conducts, the opinions and the discourses of the living-being named woman (MAHER; SAUGERES, 2007).

In constant expansion of its domain, the maternity dispositif allows for the fact that mother is not only the one who gives birth but also the one who takes care of the child, looking after it and watching over its education although pregnancy and labor are intrinsically associated with the idea of motherhood (BADINTER, 1991, p.8). Things have not always been that way, but that is the prevailing view in our times: mother is the one who pays attention to the child’s needs before her own, who takes up a double shift (SCAVONE, 2001), and who fathoms maternity as a whole life project (PINHEIRO, 2014). Mother is this being, driven by social prescriptive demands, who has her gestures and conducts molded by the discourse of maternal love (FIDALGO, 2003). This discourse keeps women in the private sphere, in the domestic domain and makes her responsible for the care of herself, of the children, of the family as a whole, becoming its supporting pillar (DE DIEGO, 1992), and ‘along with’ the State she operates in the development of the social welfare (BADINTER, 1991)..

This ‘partner’ rarely rebels against the status quo because she is made submissive. Dispositifs also aim at the production of docile bodies (FOUCAULT, 1999). These however do not stop being free since this position does not imply total domination, but the operation of docility-constructing governmentality strategies which recruit both bodies and subjects. This way, if the woman socially-made subject conflicts with the generated expectations of the maternal love status, she is the target of a society that was molded to believe that maternal love is unailing and inherent to feminine subjectivity (FIDALGO, 2003).

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<sup>5</sup> Original: “[...] capacidade de capturar, orientar, determinar, interceptar, modelar, controlar e assegurar os gestos, as condutas, as opiniões e os discursos dos seres viventes.” (AGAMBEN, 2009, p.39-40).

Nevertheless, it is worth having in mind that these dispositif-created docile and free bodies “[...] take over their identity and freedom as subjects in the very process of their subjectification.” (AGAMBEN, 2009, p.23-24, Our translation)<sup>6</sup>. Paraphrasing Derrida (1995), this means that in the very dispositifs and in their mechanisms of capture, one finds the means to challenge them. Dispositifs have capillarity. However, they do not focus on subjects as a superstructure that suffocates any possibility of insurgency.

To think of motherhood as a dispositif also helps us to understand how maternal love is molded, disassociating it from a supposedly-instinctive nature. Nowadays, the theorizations that conceive it as a discursive construction (FIDALGO, 2003), and as a governmentality strategy (FOUCAULT, 2008b), are increasingly supported. By historicizing it, Badinter (1991) reveals some of the devices that forge it and make it acquire its contemporary meanings, as previously pointed out. She firstly emphasizes the discursive apparatus that ends up (performatively) creating what it describes as maternal love, projecting it as inherent to the feminine condition. Therefore, it shows how this is converted into a dispositif which molds behaviour, establishing how maternity performances must be enacted. Effectively, the motherhood dispositif is woven by discourses which ‘encourage’ women to be (good) mothers, impose on them a life of sacrifices and renunciations on behalf of their offsprings and make those that are not captured by such dispositif feel guilty. If the woman does not behave accordingly or resists to having her behaviour shaped by the maternal dispositif, she may be predicated as egoistic or unqualified as a woman (PINHEIRO, 2014).

Biological determinism lies in the core of this discursive apparatus, including an essentialist and deterministic notion of gender and sexuality, which equals sexual features to a certain manner of being in the world, highly regulated by a cis-heteronormative matrix of intelligibility<sup>7</sup> (BUTLER, 2007). This matrix is also feedback by the motherhood dispositif. In order to deconstruct the discursive entanglement supporting biological determinism, we will operate with queer theories.

## Queer theories

The word queer<sup>8</sup> is used to signal performances that somehow go against the normativity parameters of cis-heteronormativity (BUTLER, 2007; SULLIVAN, 2003; WILCHINS, 2004). Its use is paradoxical: if on the one hand queer refers to the

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<sup>6</sup> Original: “[...] *assumem a sua identidade e a sua liberdade de sujeitos no próprio processo de seu assujeitamento.*” (AGAMBEN, 2009, p.23-24).

<sup>7</sup> The prefix ‘cis’ is used in reference to people who act in the world according to the gender identity, which is assigned to them on the basis of their exterior sexual features: if he has a penis, he must perform masculine gender; if she has a vagina, she must perform feminine gender.

<sup>8</sup> In the past the word ‘queer’ was used as a manner of insulting people who enact male homosexuality performances. Gender and sexuality theories operating with a post-identitarian notion of the subject, the so-called ‘queer theories’, have given the term another meaning: rather than being used as injury. ‘Queer’ started to be used as an instrument of self-affirmation and resistance (BUTLER, 2007; SULLIVAN, 2003).

attempt at destabilizing identity labels, on the other, it is frequently used to embrace several identity categories as an ‘umbrella’ term (WILCHINS, 2004). This would cover everybody that, when enacting their gender and sexuality performances, would not somehow fit the expected (cis/hetero) normativities in a biological–deterministic system. This system legitimizes certain practices, normalizing them socially, and, at the same time, it delegitimizes others, pathologizing, to a greater or lesser extent, those that perform them.

Thus, the deconstruction of the notion of biology as destiny is one of the main targets of queer theories (BUTLER, 2007; PENNYCOOK, 2007). As such, it argues that there is no essence or truth which determines that, if a person is born with exterior sexual features which are similar to a vagina, she must be socialized as a woman and orient her desire to the opposite sex. Likewise, there is no essence or truth determining that, if such exterior sexual features look like a penis, this person needs to learn from very early on to engage himself in masculinity performances and must necessarily have sexual-affective interest for women.

Taking into account the coverage of certain dispositifs and their rush in operating captures, it is perhaps not an exaggeration to say that we begin to perform the gender which is assigned to us before we are born. When through ultrasonography the doctor manages to identify the foetus’ exterior sexual features, it begins to exist as a subject (BUTLER, 2007). Imbued with the authority that medicine provides the doctor with, when he delivers his verdict, he inserts the foetus in an engendering process that will construct his/her identity, endowing him/her with social intelligibility (BUTLER, 2007; CHAZAN, 2007). The statement “it’s a girl”/“it’s a boy”, due to its performative nature, produces material effects which will orient certain choices, determining the colors of their bedroom and of their clothes. They will be given toy cooking-pans and dolls or toy cars and balls and the manner through which the child will be brought up/socialized and will make use of language will be different. Thus, even before the subject comes into the world, it is already entangled in a dynamics of (cis)heteronormative engendering-capitalist consumption (CHAZAN, 2007; BUTLER, 2007).

This logic however spreads itself beyond gender and sexuality. A myriad of dichotomic projections (woman x man, trans x cis, non-hegemonic x hegemonic, mother and not mother, single x married) is used to limit – and broaden – the range of what is “inside” or “outside” the norm (DERRIDA, 1973). Being inside the norm, becoming intelligible and enjoying certain social privileges, besides following the cis-heteronormative guidebook, the subject also needs to account for other developments, which, related to the maternity dispositif and its support, the nuclear family, produce subjective effects.

In order to understand how such effects are produced, it is necessary to make clear what performative means. This concept, coined by Austin (1990), relates to a view of language that fathoms “saying as doing”, i.e. utterances not only describe a state of things, but also produce it. Utterances are called performative because they perform something, act on people, affecting and inciting them (BUTLER, 2007). Based on such

a theorization, Butler (2007) elaborates the concept of gender performativity, which may be defined as socially regulated and constrained processes. These processes govern social life, which defines how gender must be performed, without however making the subject submissive to them and preventing him or her from transgressing them. In Kullick's words (2003, p.140), performativity would be "the process through which the subject emerges". In turn, Pennycook (2007) makes up an operational distinction between performative and performativity. While the concept of performative involves repetition, inherent to the production of meaning (DERRIDA, 1988), performativity alludes to ruptures and transgressions in meaning that people can bring about, i.e. the production of difference amidst repetition.

Cis-heteronormativity weaves its identity-normalizing process by inscribing on bodies an 'identity' and providing it with a particular performance based on supposedly-biological evidence. Largely, the lengthy predominance and 'efficacy' of cis-heteronormativity is due not only to how cis-heteronormativity expands its dominion but also to the fact that it is constantly renovating its capture mechanisms. Not by chance did Hall (2013) alert to the fact that one should not contemplate cis-heteronormativity as something that is stable in time and space.

Thus, queer theorizing helps us to indicate how hegemonically-oriented discourses at a particular socio-historical moment materialize certain dispositifs, constituting the 'standard' and 'correct' form of doing gender, sexuality and maternity. Likewise, we also make recourse to an analytic-theoretical framework, which rightly takes into account how texts are not stable in time and space as it will soon be shown.

## **Analytic-theoretical framework**

Moita Lopes, Fabrício and Guimarães (2019) put forward a scalar view of language, related to entextualization processes, to cover diverse themes in discursive practices. By taking for granted that social life is highly scalable, this type of approach draws attention to the perspectives, discourses and the levels of comprehension/interpretation of the phenomena at play (CARR; LEMPERT, 2016). In our contemporary society, in which everything and everybody is in constant flow, an infinite number of texts, discourses and socio-historical repertoires converge amidst multidimensional semantic processes, which a traditional and representational view of language could not account for. That is so because such a view does not consider the multiple and indexical<sup>9</sup> nature of the mobilized signs in the production of meaning (MOITA LOPES; FABRÍCIO;

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<sup>9</sup> When advancing the notion of scale as a theoretical-analytic construct, Carr and Lempert (2016) emphasize the indexical nature that is typical of this construct. Such indexicality bears the fact that the linguistic sign exceeds its context of enunciation, pointing to orienting discourses which cross its use (SILVERSTEIN, 2003). This is possible because, whenever we make use of language, we mobilize signs that are vested with meanings, bringing along a history of uses (BLOMMAERT, 2005). These meanings, in the face of the multiple indexical potential of the sign, are not pre-given. They are negotiated in situated practices as in the case of the reviews analysed here. Having said that, it is relevant to point out that operationally we will use scales to indicate how certain indexicals that emerge in the review



GUIMARÃES, 2019). Therefore, in order to evaluate how the maternity dispositif is accounted for in the film AAMM and in texts, we will show how this cultural artifact continues to motivate trajectories in digital contexts, generating an intense reflexive production, deploying the notions of scale and entextualization.

Scale is a construct which allows us to investigate how space-times, identities, perspectives, perceptions, dimensions, comparisons, analogies, categorizations, evaluations, qualifications, contrasts, positionings, rankings etc. are forged (CARR; LEMPert, 2016). Because we understand that language has a performative bias, the manoeuvring of scales as an analytic-theoretical construct seems to be quite useful in the analysis of dispositif construction or dismantling, as the case in point in this article. This construct helps us in the task of denaturalizing crystallized meanings, the monoliths about which Tsing (2015) talks. These draw attention to precise, well-established and sedimented meanings. Operating analytically with scales helps us identify the strategies which guide the discursive action and how some perspectives and perceptions are privileged when a particular space-time scale, for example, prevails over the others (BLOMMAERT, 2010; CARR; LEMPert, 2016). Thus, this comparative and relational construct will be used to identify how meaning construction about maternity is enacted in the film. In pragmatic terms, we will focus on identifying how scales are evoked and how they project particular perceptions.

Entextualization, a lexical item formed by the prefix ‘en’, which indicates proximity, introduction and movement, and by the noun ‘textualization’ – the process of transforming something into text – is a construct which suggests an approximation between texts and (different) contexts, involving textual movements and transformations as well as configurations and textual reconfigurations. This notion evokes the possibility that when a text is moved, by being introduced into new processes of entextualization, it brings about resignifications. Moita Lopes, Fabrício and Guimarães (2019) draw attention to the fact that entextualization simultaneously gives rise to change and repetition, independently from the systems of meanings being shared or, on the contrary, being conflictive.

Bauman and Briggs (1990, p.73) define entextualization as “[...] the process of rendering discourse extractable, of making a stretch of linguistic production into a unit – a text – that can be lifted out of its interactional setting.” Silverstein and Urban (1996, p.2), in operational terms, make clear that entextualization first involves a movement of decontextualization (“take a fragment of discourse and quote it anew”) and then its reconfiguration (new interpreters project new senses on the text, expose it to metadiscursive interpretations). Such dynamics may be repeated infinitely. Bauman and Briggs (1990) also underline the reflexive and referential capacity of discourse, the capacity of making it an object to itself.

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authors’ discursive production show how they perspectivize the motherhood performances projected in the film by making recourse to qualifications, analogies, interpretations, categorizations, evaluations etc.



These two constructs that will guide the analysis are in fact quite complementary since one focuses on how texts can be resignified when moving into new contexts (entextualization) and the other on how texts in circulation forge perceptions/perspectives (scales). Having detailed the analytic-theoretical constructs, we now move to the analysis. This involves a possible analytic-theoretical approach (MOITA LOPES, 2009), and therefore, cannot be considered the only option.

## Analysis

We chose two recent moments (November 3, 2015 and February 25, 2015) of the textual trajectory the film has been following since 1999 for the analysis, by focusing on reviews related to maternity. Both were extracted from the Rotten Tomatoes<sup>10</sup> site, whose title alludes to the practice of throwing tomatoes at artists who perform below expectations. Created in 1998, the site assembles different film and TV series reviews published in other sites (such as that of *Time* magazine, for example) and those written by users registered in the site itself. When one clicks on one of the film posters found on the home page or types in a title on the web browser, the site redirects the internet user to the page of the film being searched. Just below a frame of the film and its title, one finds the ‘tomatometer’ with the percentages of positive evaluations. In the case of AAMM, as checked in February 5, 2018, at 8 AM, the score showed 98% positive evaluations by specialized reviewers against 93% by the regular site users. Next, there is also some space for the visitor to evaluate the film: he or she may choose how many stars, from one to five, the film should be given, besides publishing his/her own review. Next Rotten Tomatoes presents photos, general information (age classification, synopsis, technical staff), sites which make the film available online (Amazon, iTunes, for example) and the cast. Adjacently, one finds the reviews. These are accessed through a link which sends the user to the complete text. First the user finds the “critic reviews”, and then the “audience reviews”. Such a structure projects a hierarchical scale by putting some reviews (those written by critic reviewers) ahead of the others (written by audience members).

We will analyse two reviews to which we had access by means of the links provided by Rotten Tomatoes. The first review, extracted from the audience review section, was published in December 25, 2016. Rubens Fabrício Anzolin, the author, describes himself as somebody that “writes about films without being accredited as a reviewer”. The second text comes from the critic review section and was published by Josh Larsen in November 3, 2015. Here we have two types of reviews, published in different idioms (Portuguese<sup>11</sup> and English) and years (2015 and 2016). Both excerpts are presented below as published, which is to say that no grammatical changes (or of

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<sup>10</sup> URL: <https://www.rottentomatoes.com/>. Access on: Dec. 20, 2017.

<sup>11</sup> The review in Portuguese is translated into English in the Annex.

any other kind) were made in the texts. Rather than transcribing them, we opted for inserting screen prints in the text.

## Figure 1 – Screen printing (Medium)

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Escrevo sobre filmes sem estar autorizado.  
Dec 25, 2016 · 3 min read



Cecilia Roth no papel de Manuela, esperando um autógrafa com o filho em frente ao teatro.

### **Tudo Sobre Minha Mãe (Todo Sobre Mi Madre, 1999)—O filme fetichista e feminista de Pedro Almodóvar.**

Transexuais nunca tiveram diálogos tão marcantes.

*Tudo Sobre Minha Mãe* (*Todo Sobre Mi Madre*, 1999) começa nos dando a impressão de ser um filme melancólico. A cena de abertura em um hospital, tratando de transplantes de órgãos, nos passa a impressão de que esse é um filme de perda, de sofrimento—algo tipo a trilogia do *Íñárritu*, mas mais perto de *Amores Perros* e *21 Gramas*. Entretanto, *Tudo Sobre Minha Mãe*, definitivamente, não é um filme de *Íñárritu*. Para os cinéfilos mais treinados, os próprios planos iniciais já entregam cores. Esse é um filme de Almodóvar. Um filme fetichista, feminista, aguçado e tocante. É, praticamente, uma película fatal. E é, inclusive, de fatalidades que se moldam as tramas (ou a trama) de *Tudo Sobre Minha Mãe*.

Manuela (Cecilia Roth, em performance marcante e muita realista) interpreta uma mãe solteira que parte de Madri para Barcelona após ver seu filho aspirante à escritor ser morto em um trágico acidente de carro. É através da chegada de Manuela em Barcelona que o filme se desenrola, como um retorno ao seu passado e uma saída para o seu futuro. E é, basicamente, a partir daí que Pedro Almodóvar nos delicia com os seus simbolismos, as suas personagens femininas marcantes, os seus diálogos cheios de sublimaridade e ironia.

Manuela volta a se encontrar com sua amiga transexual, a afetadíssima Agrado de Antonia San Juan, quem lhe apresenta Rosa (uma melancólica Penélope Cruz em um dos papéis que lhe alçaram à Hollywood e ao estrelato), uma portadora de HIV que acaba de engravidar. E se já existiam mulheres demais nesse enredo, é porque ainda Manuela ainda iria se tornar amiga da atriz de teatro Huma Rojo (uma Marisa Paredes retirada de um filme de Woody Allen), a moça “responsável” pelo acidente de seu filho.

E é exatamente isso que faz com que *Tudo Sobre Minha Mãe* seja tão interessante: as mulheres que Almodóvar constrói (e desconstrói). Aqui, não há vulgaridade na transexualidade de Agrado, ou no fetichismo de Huma Rojo; elas são requisitadas, poderosas e, principalmente, dotadas de humanidade. As mulheres de *Tudo Sobre Minha Mãe* se colocam em patamares de igualdade, onde as poderosas atrizes são recebidas cordialmente na casa de enfermeiras para tomar champanhe casualmente.

Mas se *Todo Sobre Mi Madre* é um filme feminista, também não deixa de ser familiar. Tudo aqui tem a ver com a questão da paternidade (ou

melhor, da MATERNIDADE). A relação entre Manuela e Rosa passa a ser de mãe e filha (quando bem que poderia ser de 'cumadres'), bem como Huma cuida de Nina (sua parceira de atuação) como se fosse a sua mãe, e Manuela (e posteriormente Agrado) cuidam de Huma e de seus compromissos como se a atriz fosse filha delas. O papel da maternidade, no fim, é transvertido em amizade, em companheirismo, em casualidade. As mulheres de Tudo Sobre Minha Mãe, tão diferentes, e tão parecidas ao mesmo tempo, tem cada uma a sua força interior justamente no seu papel de mãe, sendo os seus filhos reais (o Esteban falecido e o Estaban para nascer) apenas metáforas ou caminhos usados por Almodóvar para empoderar estas mulheres, falando de fetichismos, sexualidade, sensualidade e feminilidade.

Se para a geração X, Azul é a Cor Mais Quente, Almodóvar vêm para nos provar que o vermelho diz (e sempre dirá) com muito mais força e intensidade o que é, realmente, ser mãe, ser mulher, ser empoderada e ser sexy. Seja com roupa de freira, uniforme de enfermeira, ou com litros de silicone e um pênis de baixo das pernas. Com isso, Almodóvar nos explica que mães não precisam dar a luz e que pais podem compartilhar seios e pênis em um mesmo corpo. É o diretor espanhol subvertendo a sexualidade, e reivindicando a liberdade sexual muito antes do fervor das discussões políticas e sociais. É Almodóvar dizendo que é, não só sexualmente, como também intelectual e artisticamente, muito à frente de seu tempo.

COTA: 5/5

**Source:** Anzolin (2016).

In the review published in the site Medium<sup>12</sup>, an online platform which addresses different issues (technology, culture, entrepreneurship, creativity, self, politics, media, productivity, design etc.), Rubens Fabrício Anzolin makes use of different scale strategies (CARR; LEMPERT, 2016) to analyse the film AAMM.

From the title, the film is looked into from an evaluative perspective: “Pedro Almodóvar’s fetishist and feminist film”. In the subtitle (“Transsexuals never had such distinct dialogues”), one notes a clear scalar exercise: viewing the relevance of the film from a particular angle (the importance given to the dialogues of the characters who perform transsexuality). In fact, rather than erasing transsexuality performances, the film diretor highlights them, aligning himself with a queer perspective: he does not judge, omits or disqualifies performances, which do not fit the cis-heteronormative matrix (GONZALEZ; MOITA LOPES, 2015, 2016). On the contrary, he seems to challenge the hegemonically imposed normality regimes, as put forward by queer theorists (BUTLER, 2007; SULLIVAN, 2003; WILCHINS, 2004).

In the first paragraph, Anzolin predicates the film with his first impressions: “a melancholic film”, which focuses on “loss, suffering”, a standpoint reinforced by a space-time scale, which sets “the opening scene in a hospital”. Next, the reviewer makes use of a comparison scale with two other films.<sup>13</sup> *21 grams* and *Amores Perros*. This move draws attention to how relational/referencial the entextualization process can be (BAUMAN; BRIGGS, 1990), explaining the manner through which texts refer to other texts. Next, however, Anzolin re-evaluates the comparative scale he

<sup>12</sup> URL: <http://medium.com>. Access on December 20, 2017.

<sup>13</sup> Both films were directed by Alejandro González Iñárritu: *Amores Perros* (2000) and *21 Grams* (2003), URL: <http://www.imdb.com/name/nm0327944>. Access on: Feb. 2, 2018.

had just projected: “All about my mother is definitely not a film by Iñárratu. To the better-trained cinephiles, the initial scenes give away who the director is: the colors. This is a film by Almodóvar. A fetishist and feminist film...”. If on the one hand he emphasizes the colors as a visual difference, on the other, he points to fetishism and feminism as thematic difference, recontextualizing a section of the review title (a fetishist, feminist film).

It is likely that Anzolin evokes fetishism and above all feminism as a crucial difference of Almodóvar’s cinematography because of the leading roles he gives to the characters who perform femininity although this femininity does not fit in with a biological-deterministic logic. In *AAMM*, as transgender characters Agrado and Lola seem to show, biology is not destiny (BUTLER, 2007; PENNYCOCK, 2007), quiet along the lines of queer theorizing.

The author ends the first paragraph by stating that the film is molded by fatalism. The second paragraph begins by describing the protagonist as well as the fatality that drives her to another city. Anzolin does so by re-textualizing events of the filmic narrative, which he points to through mostly evaluative scale projections (“Cecília Roth in a distinct and very realistic performance”) and qualifications (“distinct feminist characters”).

In the third paragraph, the author presents the other “distinct feminist characters” through qualification scale projections – *Agrado* (very camp), *Rosa* (melancholic) – or through analogy (“a Marisa Paredes taken out of a Woody Allen film”). In this paragraph, it is also worth noting that, among such characters, the author includes Agrado, Manuela’s transexual friend. The use of the feminine gender inflection (“amiga” – female friend - in opposition to “amigo” – male friend) is coherent with a queer perspective and attests to the character’s gender self-determination, pointing out that the author is neither captured by the cis-heteronormative dispositif nor by the performative speech act – it’s a girl, it’s a boy (BUTLER, 2007). Such an act prescribes the performances one has to enact based on his or her genitals (WILCHINS, 2004) when one is born.

In the fourth paragraph, the scalar exercise merges perspectives (“the women who Almodóvar constructs (and deconstructs”), evaluations (“there is no vulgarity in Agrado’s transexuality, neither in Huma’s fetishism”), qualifications (“they are frequently booked-up, powerful”) and features which relate to social circulation (“powerful actresses are welcome at nurses’ houses”). As regards Agrado’s transexuality performance, by praising the way it is different from the vulgar manner these performances are usually depicted, Anzolin alerts us to the relevance of the circulation of new discourses, which contest crystallized analogies (transexuality - vulgarity). Such sedimentation is a consequence of iterated repetitions (PENNYCOCK, 2007), which end up prefiguring some subjects (PINTO, 2013).

The fifth paragraph starts with an effort to categorize the film: “But if *All About My Mother* is a feminist film, it also relates to the family”. Without considering the reason why the author sets feminism and family life in opposition scales, we share

the perception that AAMM is a family-oriented film, which does not prevent it from tightening the structures of what one understands by a nuclear family (DE DIEGO, 1992). This is such an astounding paradigmatic and hegemonic model that it outperforms other possible parental possibilities (GROSSI; UZIEL; MELO, 2007). Soon afterwards, Anzolin refers to paternity and maternity: “All that has to do with the issue of paternity (MATERNITY).” Perhaps he uses the lexical item ‘paternity’ in allusion to Lola, who is both a mother and a father at the same time, although canonically she/he is neither. It is also possible that the author uses the word ‘maternity’ in juxtaposition to ‘paternity’, in capitals and in brackets to point out how Lola’s performance blurs the borders separating them. This may be understood as a queer view.

This view is also shared by some authors, who have studied the film and likewise perspectivized it as queer (for example, the categories of maternity and paternity in the film) as in Gutiérrez-Atabilla (2012). This author suggests that, by getting away from what traditionally counts as maternity performances, Lola becomes another type of mother, queering both maternity and paternity, at the same time that her performances signal that there are other performativities possible, i.e. amidst institutionalized repetitions and differences, there is room for difference. Because Lola does not fit in with monolithic projections, which in a scale exercise forge a strict and widely disseminated perception of what maternity is, she queries the maternity as well as the gender/sexuality dispositifs. She does so by drawing attention to the fact that both are usually intertwined. By making explicit how maternity performances are intrinsically related to a (cis-heteronormative) form of performing gender/sexuality, Lola destabilizes both dispositifs in such a manner that besides not being captured by both of them, she let us know that language cannot account for creating an embracing category for these both dispositifs.

By presenting paternity such as Lola’s, which is far from the tutelary authority typical of what the father image has in our patriarchal society, the film narrative signals the deterioration of the nuclear family as an organizing axis in social life (FIDALGO, 2003). Besides this, the film makes visible kinds of paternity that are frequently imperceptible (GROSSI; UZIEL; MELO, 2007). Moreover, effectively, as regards care and responsibility, AAMM shows how women end up performing the double role of mother and father (SCAVONE, 2001), obscuring the borders which project these categories in opposition.

Next, Anzolin goes as far as talking about feminine empowerment and projects maternity as something that accounts for the emergence of “an interior force” in the film characters: “each one has her own interior force exactly in her role as a mother”. This positioning is contradictory: at the same time that the author understands maternity as a performance that can be enacted by anyone, suggesting that such performance may take up multiple forms, the notion of “interior force” relating to essentializing processes. This view, reinforced by the author’s lexical choices, associates such force with maternal performance, implying that “[...] a woman’s

fulfillment compulsorily involves maternity.”<sup>14</sup> (BARBOSA; ROCHA-COUTINHO, 2007, p.163).

It is in this paragraph that Anzolin approaches research in details: the manner how maternity performances are focused in the film and its impact on those who discuss them. What one sees is essentially a scalar activity based on categorizing different types of bonds, which involve care, such as maternal care: Manuela takes over Rosa’s maternity, rather than only performing the role of friend; Huma becomes her stage partner’s mother and her bed partner (even if the relationship between them is little or not sexualized), rescuing her from the streets when she was on drugs; Manuela first and Agrado later in the film take over the role of Huma’s mother, providing for everything she needed so that she could worry only about being a star on the stages. However, the author does not mention that Manuela also takes over other maternities: after losing the role of Esteban’s mother when he dies, the first person she takes care of is Agrado, who had been the victim of an act of violence. In any event, such an enumerative scalar exercise helps the author to put into perspective these practices as a whole: “in the end the role of maternity is transformed into friendship, companionship, chance”. In fact, the enumerative performances have something in common: they mobilize care-taking practices, which characterize maternal love such as we are familiar with today (BADINTER, 1991; PINHEIRO, 2014). Nevertheless, the author concludes the paragraph by constructing a difference between “transformed-into-friendship” motherhood and “real maternity” by questioning if “the real sons (the dead Esteban and the to-be-born Esteban) [are] only metaphors or ways chosen by Almodóvar to empower these women, by discussing fetishism, sexualities, sensuality and femininity”.

The author starts the last paragraph by appealing to another analogy, between colors and films this time: “If for *generation X*,<sup>15</sup> Blue is the Warmest Color, Almodóvar shows us that with much more force and intensity red expresses (and will always do so) what it is really like to be a mother, to be empowered and to be sexy”. This chromatic-cinematographic analogy, which derives from an entextualization (the author cites a lesbian French film – *Blue is the Warmest Color*<sup>16</sup> - and explains the reference to this, by capitalizing the initials in the title), is a scalar exercise in itself. Nevertheless, this is not the only scale that Anzolin mobilizes. By contrasting red with blue, he makes use of conter-positioning scales. While the meanings usually evoked by red point to pain, passion and intensity, blue refers to placidity and tranquillity. Red pulsates like blood, blue is horizontally static like the sky and the sea. In AAMM, red provides maternity

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<sup>14</sup> Original: “[...] a realização de uma mulher passa obrigatoriamente pela maternidade.” (BARBOSA; ROCHA-COUTINHO, 2007, p.163).

<sup>15</sup> ‘Generation X’, an expression coined by the photographer Robert Capa in the fifties, alludes to the generation born after World War II. However, as Ulrich (2003) emphasizes, there is no consensus on its use (sometimes ironic) and on the exact time period it comprises (usually it refers to people who were born at the end of the 50’s and the beginning of the 80’s).

<sup>16</sup> URL: <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt2278871/>. Access on: Feb. 2, 2018

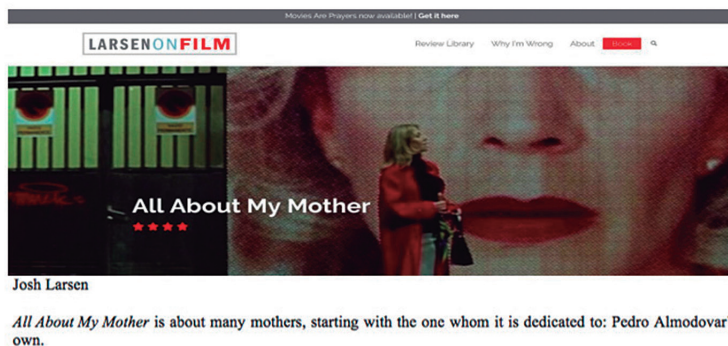


with a color and displays a child loss pain. In *Blue is the warmest color*, the color in question, besides dyeing an adolescent girl's hair, refers to the sweetness of a first love affair. On another scale exercise, the author relates blue to generation X. Such an exercise presupposes a space-time scale jump, which not only situates the protagonists – and the public – of *Blue is the Warmest Color* (2013) in a particular generation, but also suggests that the film, despite approaching non-heteronormative sexuality performances, is less intense and strong than AAMM. A possible interpretation for the projection of this intensity scale relates to the contemporaneity of AAMM. although it was filmed many years ago (1999). AAMM equally approaches themes that challenge heteronormative parameters with “more strength and intensity”.

Certain scale processes (analogies, comparisons, differences) – and the dichotomies derived from them (red/blue, more/less intense) – seem to point to wider structuring processes, which support the binary construction of gender and sexuality as queer theories have argued against (BUTLER, 2007; WILCHINS, 2004). Because of its capillarity, the doxa (cis-heteronormative, in this case), as Derrida (1973) has pointed out, ends up spreading itself and affecting other performances such as motherhood.

Finally, by alluding to clothes which index particular professions (a nun's habit, a nurse's uniform) and to esthetic surgery procedures (silicone implants), coexisting with signs which do not index femininity (a penis between the legs), Anzolin evokes the different types of maternity which the film brings about. The latter type is a clear allusion to transmaternity performances. The author therefore does not support orienting discourses based neither on biological determinism (BUTLER, 2007) nor on maternal instinct (BADINTER, 1991). He ends his review by emphasizing Almodóvar's boldness (“he is the Spanish diretor who subverts sexuality and has demanded sexual freedom long before the enthusiastic fervor of socio-political discussions”). He does so by making recourse to a final evaluation about how Almodóvar addressed maternity and sexuality. The author projects a space-time scale, which predicates the director as being “ahead of his times”.

**Figure 2 – Screen print (Larsen on Film)**





From there the movie expands to firstly include Manuela (Cecilia Roth), a nurse who lives with her 18-year-old son Esteban (Eloy Azorin), an aspiring writer. Esteban pesters Manuela for information about his father, whom he has never met. Manuela refuses to answer, partly because that father is now essentially his other mother, living as Lola, a transgender woman. Manuela's decision to quit her job and reconnect with Lola (Toni Cantó) brings her into contact with a variety of other actual mothers and mother figures, including a transgender prostitute (Antonia San Juan), a troubled stage actress (Marisa Paredes) and a pregnant nun (a young Penelope Cruz).

As promiscuous as ever, Almodovar isn't content to merely ruminate on the theme of motherhood. And so *All About My Mother* is also — and perhaps mostly — about the ability of melodrama to speak to, and rise from, our mundane lives. Melodrama not only defines *All About My Mother*; it also feeds it. At the movie's start, Manuela and Esteban watch *All About Eve* together on television. Later, they attend a local production of *A Streetcar Named Desire* starring Huma Rojo, the aforementioned actress. (The movie's definitive shot is one of Manuela standing before a giant advertisement featuring Huma's face.) Soon after seeing the play, Manuela's life is dramatically turned upside down, sending her on a healing journey in which she, ironically, becomes the healer.

## Melodrama not only defines the film; it also feeds it.

One of the delightful pleasures of *All About My Mother* is the way these chaotic characters fall so easily into each other's upended lives, so that those in need of care become indistinguishable from the caregivers. Rosa, the nun, tries to find Manuela a job, only to have Manuela become her unofficial doula. Huma grants Manuela a favor, only to be greatly comforted by her presence. Almodovar's trademark empathy is in full flower here, as *All About My Mother* suggests that the best way to care for someone is simply to be there.

Visually, the film is delicious, thanks to the way Almodovar heightens the emotional element of each scene. Even an overhead shot of cars circling the prostitutes in a forsaken field has the elegance of a ballet. He also favors interiors with wild wallpaper, bright colors and busy floor patterns; save for the hospital visits, there's hardly a boring room in the movie.

All of this helps blur the line between the aesthetics of melodrama and the realities of everyday life. *All About My Mother*, like so many Almodovar films, bridges the gap between great actresses of the past who expressed big feelings; his own characters, who admire and emulate them; and those of us sitting in the audience. It's not so much that we see our own lives as little movies, but that Almodovar's movies make small lives — all lives — matter.

Source: All... (2017).

The second excerpt is a review published in the site 'Larsen on Film', signed by Josh Larsen, who begins his text with a generalizing scalar exercise: "*All About My Mother* is about many mothers". Soon afterwards he moves onto a more specific scale by partially entextualizing the film dedication. He highlights one among these "many mothers": Almodóvar's to whom the film is dedicated. This entextualizing movement points to another scalar exercise: the connection between the film reality (to which the narrative mothers belong) and the extra-film reality, in which Almodóvar's mother is situated. Next, Larsen elaborates a brief synopsis of the film, emphasizing the relationship between Manuela and her son Esteban and above all the questioning of the boy about his father's whereabouts. From the author's perspective, Manuela refuses to reply to her son's questions because the father would be what Larsen categorizes as "essentially his other mother, living as Lola, a transgender woman". Here one detects the difficulty of naming maternity performances as well as those of gender and sexuality, which escape the established visibility and speaking regimes (DELEUZE, 1990), the cis-heteronormativity intelligibility matrix (BUTLER, 2007). Larsen refers to Lola as "[Esteban's] other mother", by describing her in terms of what she is not (WILCHINS, 2004). Despite the fact that there are no obstacles to Lola's motherhood performances (anyone could perform them), she could not be framed within "[...] the predominant maternity model in our contemporary western societies."<sup>17</sup> (SCAVONE, 2001, p.48).

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<sup>17</sup> Original: "[...] modelo de maternidade preponderante nas sociedades ocidentais contemporâneas." (SCAVONE, 2001, p.48).

Further developing the synopsis, Larsen narrates Manuela's decision of going in search of Lola. This puts her in contact with what he first categorized as a whole ("a variety of other actual mothers and mother figures") and later from a specific manner: "a transgender prostitute (Antonia San Juan), a troubled stage actress (Marisa Paredes) and a pregnant nun (a young Penelope Cruz)". Just as in the beginning of his text, when constructing his narrative, the author again resorts to a general-to-specific scale exercise. Perhaps he does so to suggest a metonymic route: first he glimpses the 'whole', and then the parts which provide the whole with meaning. This allows him to evaluate how each performance separately affects the whole set, i.e. what one means by maternity. Operating within the generalization-specificity flux collaborates with the elaborations of comparisons, evaluations and categorizations. The fact is that the characters mentioned by Larsen enact maternal performances, which are very distant from the so-called nuclear family ideology (SCAVONE, 2001). Such ideology started to be drawn in Modernity, due to the discursive turn brought about by Rousseau and some of his contemporaries (BADINTER, 1991). Perhaps that is the reason why the author makes recourse to a space-time scale to highlight that the characters in point are 'contemporary' mothers, acknowledging that, although hegemonic maternity performances assert themselves in an overwhelming manner, these may be resignified and revised. In other words: amidst repetition (the performative), there are scapes for revisions and new configurations (performativity). When maternity performances as well as any other are entextualized, they may involve repetitions or changes (MOITA LOPES; FABRÍCIO; GUIMARÃES, 2019). As AAMM seems to signal to, such changes and repetitions may mobilize other possible performativities.

The third paragraph begins with a scale exercise which qualifies ("promiscuous") and temporally situates ("as always") the filmmaker, without presenting any argument supporting such projection. Later, Larsen moves into the theme which will orient his review from there on: the way the film relates to the melodramatic genre. From the author's perspective, "*All about My Mother* is also – and perhaps mostly – about the ability of melodrama to speak to, and rise from our mundane lives". In a sequence of scale exercises, the author forges a perception of the film, by emphasizing that melodrama feeds itself on "our mundane lives": after all it emerges from them and is about them. Next, Larsen evaluates that the film not only frames itself within the melodramatic genre but also feeds on it. Thus, he puts into perspective both the filmic and the extra-filmic reality, suggesting that one feeds back on the other. He soon cites two entextualizations, a filmic one and a dramaturgical one, having both a strong melodramatic component in AAMM. The first is the film *All about Eve*<sup>18</sup>, which both Manuela and her son watch on TV. This title has inspired Almodóvar to baptize his own film. AAMM and *All about Eve* however have something else in common: both focus on certain women's capacity to act on the stage. The second entextualization narrates an event which would change Manuela's life radically: after attending a performance of

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<sup>18</sup> URL: <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0042192/> . Access on February 2, 2018.

the play *A streetcar named desire*,<sup>19</sup> Manuela's son died. He was run over while trying to get an autograph by Huma, the actress who played the protagonist Blanche DuBois. These entextualizations draw attention to how texts' circulation in a semiotic-scalar movement (MOITA LOPES; FABRÍCIO; GUIMARÃES, 2019) can establish analogies and forge perceptions which expand the interpretative possibilities projected by a play. Also, these interpretative possibilities performatively produce effects/affectations on the audience (BRIGGS, 2005), having as such the potential to act on everyday practices by denaturalizing what seems to be innate, whether it is gender and sexuality or a sedimented view of maternity.

Let us center now on *A street-car named desire* by Tennessee Williams, evoked several times in AAMM. The play reverberates both visually and linguistically in the film. The photo, which illustrates this review, for example, pictures Manuela standing in front of the play poster, which could be taken as an "imagic entextualization". Added to that, we can list sentences spoken by Blanche DuBois (as "I always relied on strangers' kindness"), which are uttered not only on the stage but also off-stage by Huma, the actress who performs her in AAMM. These entextualizations would point to how both life and art are interconnected ("the ability of melodrama to speak to, and rise from, our mundane lives") and to a metalinguistic scalar exercise: Almodóvar "feeds" himself on other melodramas to build his own, as Larsen points out. We however go somewhat beyond: we understand that the filmmaker draws upon melodrama to reinvent it. Despite the fact that AAMM has many of the elements, which characterize this genre, as Singer (2001) points out (family dramas, extreme situations, losses, plot twists), it subverts not only the melodramatic genre expectations but also those related to gender and sexuality. The film narrates the drama faced by a woman, who after losing her son goes searching for his father who "liv[es] as Lola, a transgender woman". Without being necessary to move further into the film narrative, this piece partially-entextualized from Larsen's review synopsis already provides samples of how the film brings about ruptures and destabilizes hegemonically-constituted motherhood/paternity performances, which are not usually brought about in melodramas, at least not in these terms. AAMM manages to make visible performances, which are mostly erased (GONZALEZ; MOITA LOPES, 2015, 2016).

The fourth paragraph focuses on how the characters relate to one another. According to how Larsen perspectivizes them, their relationship is based on care, mobilizing as such maternal feelings (PINHEIRO, 2014). On a scalar comparative exercise, the author projects as indistinguishable the performances of care-taking and care-receiving. Without making recourse to a clear argument for his positioning, the author points out that Almodóvar's difference is empathy and that AAMM suggests that "the best way to take care for someone is simply to be there". In the fifth paragraph, by entextualizing scenes (the cars circulating around prostitutes) and film settings (the hospital, wall-

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<sup>19</sup> A play written by Tennessee Williams in 1947, which honored him with the Pulitzer Prize. It premiered on Broadway under the direction of Elia Kazan, who also first adapted it to film. URL: <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0044081/>. Access on: Feb. 2, 2018.

papered ambiances), Larsen highlights film images, qualified as “delicious”, which match emotional conditions in the film. In the sixth, through a scalar-semiotic exercise, he concludes that all of that “blur[s] the line between the aesthetics of melodrama and the realities of everyday life”. Next, he highlights the manner through which “great actresses” and their performances as well as their relationships with the audience produce mutual affectations. He comes to the end of his review comparing films and everyday life (“it’s not so much that we see our own lives as little films”). And he soon predicates Almodóvar’s films as a whole, operating a scale jump, since previously he had evaluated only AAMM: “Almodóvar’s movies make small lives – all lives – matter”.

## Final words

As the issues raised in the analysis above point out, AAMM brings about crucial fissures in the maternity dispositif, collaborating with its deconstruction. Such fissures come about when the film separates maternity performances from blood bonds: there would not be a manner of establishing an intrinsic convergence between a socially-designed subject as a woman and maternity performances (SCAVONE, 2001). More than a physiological, gestating, blood or sexual question, AAMM implies that maternity performances are based on people’s performance enactments. For Almodóvar motherhood is a performance. The filmmaker seems to indicate that anybody, independently of how he/s has been socially assigned<sup>20</sup>, may become a mother if it is capable of repeating a set of practices which evoke sedimented meanings about what being a mother is, mobilizing as such performative effects<sup>21</sup>.

Because it emphasizes the performative natures of social life, AAMM dialogues with queer theories. The film may be understood as a creative-reflexive exercise which carries out many of the theorizations inaugurated with *Gender Trouble*, Butler’s iconic book (2007), which was first published in the same decade that AAMM was and which until today brings about intense destabilizations (cf. the way the author – one of the most important philosophers of our times – was attacked in her last visit to Brazil).<sup>22</sup> Like Butler’s theorizations, the film undermines essentialist and crystallized views about gender and sexuality, collaborating thus with the problematization of maternity. Such a problematization gains performative materiality in the contemporary public sphere (in Brazil and, in fact, elsewhere) in debates about maternity and non-maternity, new ways

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<sup>20</sup> Such a position is made explicit in the dedication at the end of the film: “For Bette Davis, Gena Rowlands, Romy Schneider... For all the actresses who have performed actresses, for all the women who perform on the stage, for the men who act on the stage as women, for all the people who want to be mothers, for my mother.”

<sup>21</sup> It is relevant to emphasize that this statement does not imply a voluntarist perspective. Becoming a woman is a process regulated by a series of social constraints which define the social-designed subject as a woman; it is not a product of a sudden will, of a will which may be instantaneously satisfied. Looking into Butler’s gender definition (2007, p.98) helps to understand that “[...] gender is the repeated stylization of the body, a set of repeated acts within a highly rigid frame that congeal over time to produce the appearance of substance, of a natural sort of being.”

<sup>22</sup> Gobbi (2017).

of performing maternity, conception and contraception, alternative parenthood etc., responding to the Foucauldian demand (FOUCAULT, 1982, p.785, Our translation)<sup>23</sup> that what matters “[...] is not to discover who we are”, but “to imagine and construct what we can become.” (FOUCAULT, 1982, p.785, Our translation)<sup>24</sup>.

This perhaps justifies the fact that until now AAMM provokes such a high degree of reflexivity, making possible its recontextualization in reviews such as the ones analyzed previously. In the analyses, by drawing attention to entextualizations and scale projections, we highlighted how the reviews authors reflected on the film. They did so by perspectivizing sociocultural hegemonically-constituted/kept conventions about maternity among other themes. Most of the times they ratify the ruptures that the film narrative gives rise to<sup>25</sup>. These ruptures call into question the nuclear family, i.e. the supporting basis of a cis-heteronormative and capitalist regime (DE DIEGO, 1992; CHAZAN, 2007), which, among other dispositifs, constitutes maternity as a social controlling tool.

As rigid as the hegemonically-constituted/kept conventions about maternity, gender and sexuality are the conventions that characterize melodrama as a narrative genre. Just like the famous Saussurean diagram (SAUSSURE, 2012), melodrama presupposes a clear and direct communication, without misunderstanding and ambiguity in meaning-making. That is one of the reasons why Singer (2001) projects melodrama as a reflection of Modernity: what is identifiable in the narrative situations and in the characters’ performances in such literary and cinematographic genre is disambiguation. However, this genre, just like language, seems to be subject to continuous performative resignifications and ambiguities, such as Almodóvar points out and our analyses draw attention to. Narrative genres and sexually-performed genders are never pure: they are increasingly fluid, in line with the world of flows and hybridities in which we live (MOITA LOPES, 2015).

In a comparative scale exercise, we highlight that in the same manner that Agrado, one of the film characters, bodily and discursively constructs herself, by enumerating the many surgical operations and silicone implants she went through, in a performance which brings about particular performative effects, the film may be fathomed as a reflexive invitation about the relevance of considering alternatives not only about maternity, gender and sexuality, but also about how we can reinvent ourselves, envisaging other ways of being in the social world by projecting other possible performativities. By fostering the circulation of counter-narratives (BAMBERG; ANDREWS, 2004), films such as AAMM performativize alternative semantic effects about social life.

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<sup>23</sup> Original: “*não é descobrir o que somos*” (FOUCAULT, 1982, p.785).

<sup>24</sup> Original: “*imaginar e construir o que podemos ser*” (FOUCAULT, 1982, p.785).

<sup>25</sup> Regardless of how much she tries to deconstruct the maternity dispositif, in some moments Anzolin is captured by it: in the fifth paragraph of her review she states that a woman’s “interior force” is associated with her role as a mother. Monoliths (TSING, 2015) such as this, projected from a circumscribed and precise angle, signals that even such more subversive practices - and discourses - are crossed by normativities (MOTSCHENBACHER, 2011).

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GONZALEZ, C.; LOPES, L. O dispositivo da maternidade em ‘Tudo sobre minha mãe’: entextualizações e processos escalares. *Alfa*, São Paulo, v.64, 2020.

- *RESUMO: Neste artigo, entendemos a maternidade como um dispositivo que molda condutas e dá sustentação à família nuclear, mas que está sujeito a mutações e reapropriações. Propomo-nos a pensar em que medida o filme ‘Tudo sobre minha mãe’, ao desnaturalizar performances de maternidade, bem como as de gênero e sexualidade, estimula a reflexividade sobre o tema e ensina possíveis ressignificações. Para isso, selecionamos dois momentos mais recentes da trajetória textual (BLOMMAERT, 2005) que o filme vem percorrendo desde 1999 e os submetemos à análise, que privilegia, em termos de construtos teórico-analíticos, entextualizações (SILVERSTEIN; URBAN, 1996; BAUMAN; BRIGGS, 1990) e processos escalares (BLOMMAERT, 2010; CARR; LEMPert, 2016) para analisar tal reflexividade. O que observamos é que grande parte das destabilizações queer que a narrativa fílmica promove inspiram posicionamentos, em novas entextualizações, que, muitas vezes, ratificam-nas e logram expandir o conceito de maternidade para além das associações biológico-instintivas, que prevalecem no senso comum (SCAVONE, 2001; FIDALGO, 2003; PINHEIRO, 2014).*
- *PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Almodóvar. Performances de maternidade. Dispositivo. Processos escalares. Entextualização.*

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## FILMES

21 GRAMS. Director: Alejandro González Iñárritu. USA: This Is That Productions: Y Productions: Mediana Productions Filmgesellschaft, 2003. 1 DVD (124 min.), color.

ALL about eve. Director: Joseph L. Mankiewicz. USA: Twentieth Century Fox, 1950. 1 DVD (138 min), B&W.

ALL about my mother. Director: Pedro Almodóvar. Spain; France: El Deseo, 1999. 1 DVD (101 min), color.

AMORES perros. Director: Alejandro González Iñárritu. México: Altavista Films: Zeta Film, 2000. 1 DVD (154 min), color.

A STREETCAR named desire. Director: Elia Kazan. USA: Charles K. Feldman Group: Warner Bros, 1951. 1 DVD (122 min), B&W.

BLUE is the warmest color. Director: Abdellatif Kechiche. France; Belgium; Spain: Quat'sous Films: Wild Bunch, 2013. 1 DVD (180 min), color.

## ANNEX

### MEDIUM

Rubens Fabricio Anzolin

I write about films without being authorized to do so.

Dec 25, 2016 – 3 min read

All About My Mother (Todo Sobre Mi Madre, 1999 – The fetishist and feminist film by Pedro Almodóvar).

Transexuals have never had such distinct dialogues.

All About My Mother (Todo Sobre Mi Madre, 1999) starts by giving us the impression that it is a melancholic film. The opening scene, focussing on organ transplants, gives us the impression that this is a film about loss, about suffering – something like the Iñárritu trilogy, but more similar to Amores Perros and 21 Grams. However, All About My Mother is definitely not a film by Iñárritu. To the better trained cinephiles, the very first initial scenes already give away the film director: the colors. This is a film by Almodóvar. A fetishist, feminist, sharp and moving film. It is practically a fatal film. And the plots (or plot) of All About My Mother are holistically molded on fatalities.

Manuela (Cecília Roth, in a distinct and very realistic performance) plays the role of a single mother who leaves Madrid for Barcelona after witnessing her aspiring-writer son to be killed in a tragic car accident. It is through the arrival of Manuela in Barcelona that the film develops, as a return to her past and as a way-out to her future. And it is basically from this moment on that Pedro Almodóvar delights us with his symbolisms, his feminine distinct characters, his dialogues filled with subliminal meanings and irony.

Manuela meets again her transexual friend, the very camp Agrado, played by Antonia San Juan, who introduces her to Rosa (a melancholic Penélope Cruz in one of the roles that lifted her up to Hollywood and to stardom), an HIV carrier who has just got pregnant. And if there were already too many women in this plot, it is because Manuela would still become friends with the theater actress Huma Rojo (a Maria Paredes taken from a Woody Allen film), the lady “responsible” for her son’s accident.

And it is exactly this that makes All About My Mother so interesting: the women who Almodóvar constructs (and deconstructs). Here there is no vulgarity in Agrado’s transexuality, or in Huma Rojo’s fetishism: they are booked-up, powerful and mainly humane actresses. The women in All About My Mother are set in egalitarian levels,

where the powerful actresses are cordially received in the nurse's house for a casual champagne glass.

But if *All About My Mother* is a feminist film, it is also a family film. Everything here has to do with the question of paternity (or better with MATERNITY). The relationship between Manuela and Rosa becomes that of a mother and a daughter (when it could well be of 'friends'). Also, Huma takes care of Nina (her acting partner) as if she were her mother, and Manuela (and later Agrado) takes care of Huma and of her appointments as if the actress were their daughter. The role of maternity, at the end, is changed into friendship, companionship, chance. The women in *All About My Mother* are so different but so similar at the same time. Each one of them finds her interior force exactly in the mother role, being their true sons (the dead Esteban and the to-be-born Esteban) only metaphors or ways devised by Almodóvar to empower these women, by speaking about fetishism, sexuality, sensuality and femininity.

If for *generation X*, *Blue is the Warmest Color*, Almodóvar shows us that, with more strength and intensity, red expresses (and will always do so) what it is like to be a really empowered and sexy mother and woman. No matter she is wearing a nun's clothes, a nurse's uniform, or carrying litters of silicone and a penis between her legs. By doing this, Almodóvar explains to us that mothers do not need to give birth and that fathers can share breasts and a penis in the same body. This is the Spanish director subverting sexuality, and claiming sexual freedom long before the enthusiastic fervor of political and sexual discussions. This is Almodóvar saying that he is not only sexually but also intellectually and artistically, quite ahead of his times.

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