

Notes on the contributions of Franco Moretti's sociology of literary forms to journalism studies¹

Apontamentos sobre a contribuição da sociologia das formas de Franco Moretti para os estudos em jornalismo

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ABSTRACT

The study presents notes on the theoretical-methodological contributions of the literary critic Franco Moretti's sociology of forms to Journalism studies. The discussion is based on two background hypotheses from the author's work: 1) a certain aesthetic-expressive pattern just disseminates itself socially when it finds support on broader cultural patterns; 2) the symbolic codification process of such cultural patterns are not only established on the content level, but on its own form, on the aesthetic-expressive dimension of narration. Moreover, the article lists six theoretical-methodological premises for an interdisciplinary interface with the field of Journalism.

Keywords: Journalism, Sociology of forms, Franco Moretti

RESUMO

O artigo apresenta apontamentos sobre a contribuição teórico-metodológica da proposta de uma sociologia das formas do crítico literário Franco Moretti para os estudos em jornalismo. A discussão sustenta-se em duas hipóteses de fundo extraídas da obra do autor: i) determinado padrão estético-expressivo apenas se dissemina socialmente quando encontra respaldo em padrões culturais mais amplos; e ii) o processo de codificação simbólica desses padrões culturais não se dá apenas no plano do conteúdo, mas sobretudo na própria forma, na dimensão estético-expressiva da narração. Na sequência, elencam-se seis pressupostos teórico-metodológicos do autor passíveis de um diálogo interdisciplinar com o campo jornalístico.

Palavras-chave: Jornalismo, sociologia das formas, Franco Moretti

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² The chronicle *The old smuggler* is in several collections. This article uses a 1979 version with a selection of chronicles by Sérgio Porto under the pseudonym of Stanislaw Ponte Preta.

SITUATING THE DISCUSSION

THERE IS AN old anecdote, transformed in a chronicle by Sérgio Porto under the pseudonym Stanislaw Ponte Preta², which tells the odyssey of an old lady, an experienced smuggler, who used to diurnally cross any frontier driving a scooter with diverse products in her luggage. It was not long before the unsuspecting presence of the contravener bothered an attentive customs prosecutor, who used all resources in attempt to find the focus of contraband, always unsuccessfully. Day after day, a different product was identified; and the contents of the baggage never denounced the crime of the skillful smuggler. The moral: by only looking at the contents of the luggage, the prosecutor did not notice the heart of the smuggling. The mischief was in the *packaging* itself, that is, on the motorcycles that the old lady drove.

The unremarkable lesson of the character of Stanislaw Ponte Preta is worth mentioning in the context of the present discussion as it constitutes more than a mere metaphor. It is a caricature for the different angles of analysis of some of the main theoretical traditions of studies in journalism, especially those aimed at understanding the news. Why are news the way they are? The rhetorical questioning present in the reflections of authors from different epochs and schools – namely, the classic study inspired by mathematical equations of Galtung and Ruge (1965)³, with the sociological approach of Herbert Gans (2004)⁴ in the North American context and reaching European works of significant reception in Brazil, such as the works of Nelson Traquina (2008) and Mauro Wolf (2003) – form an array of theoretical formulations that value the constitutive substance of the news (in sum, they turn to classifications from the content); although they do not superficially disregard other perspectives.

In this sense, in an analogy to the methodological shift proposed by Martín-Barbero (2003), the pertinence of the change in place of questions – without relying on the parallax error –, moving from the uniqueness of the newsworthy events (the constitutive substance of journalistic narration) to the understanding of news as symbolic forms in its broad sense. Still, surely, it is not a matter of neglecting the advance of the state of the art of other rather substantial reflections for the journalistic field – in this sense, the Marxist reading of Genro Filho (2012) stands out for the concepts of singularity and particularity; Schudson's (2003) understanding of news as narratives; and the view of the journalistic narration of Sodré (2009) in parallel to the daily rhythmic scores, among others. On the contrary, what is proposed here, in the interim of the peculiarities of an article, is one more breath of advance for the state of the art of the field. The aim is to valorize the social meaning of

³ From an empirical research, the Danish authors place themselves as the first theoreticians to formalize the existence of a typology in the academic environment for the parameters guiding the selection of news.

⁴ *Deciding what's news*, by Herbert J. Gans, was originally published in 1979. The 25th anniversary edition is used here. See: Gans (2004).

symbolic forms – by adopting the understanding of the news in this spectrum – similarly to studies of literary objects of György Lukács (2010), but also from the refinement achieved by the sociology of the forms of the theorist Franco Moretti, the focus of this article.

In this sense, the literary critic Roberto Schwarz (2012), one of Moretti's main interlocutors throughout the world, is quite precise in the recourse to the perspective of Luckács for fictional texts:

It is not the case that the contents are not social, but the form, when working and organizing them, or also when being modified by them, something more general is configured, analogous to the precedence of society over its separate contents. If the works are of interest, it is because they are organized in a revealing way, in which there is some foundation in the organization of the historical world. (Ibid.: 288). [free translation]

It is not by chance that the literary critic born in Austria and rooted in Brazil, author of the essay on *Posthumous Memoirs of Brás Cubas* in the collection *The Novel*, organized by Franco Moretti⁵, is one of the main interlocutors of the Italian theorist in his studies on the literary forms⁶. Another one of Schwarz interlocutors was Antonio Candido – with whom Schwarz interacted with at the University of São Paulo in the mid-1960s – Schwarz acclaims Candido's work in the social sciences, and particularly in the field of literary criticism in Brazil, from a key understanding that interfaces with the analytical perspective of his interlocutors: the marriage between stylistic analysis and historical-social reflection⁷. This is certainly one of the points of intersection between Schwarz's work and Moretti's theoretical-methodological investment in the study of symbolic forms.

The objective of this work, in this context, is to develop a theoretical-methodological discussion based on preliminary remarks on the contribution of Franco Moretti's sociology of forms to theoretical studies in journalism (and especially for the study of news). These remarks are neither definitive nor conclusive, since this is a first systematic effort to bring the theoretical and methodological framework of the Italian author to a field that communicates with his work – in approximations and distances, but especially in tensions – but which is not at the center of his analytical gaze. As a course, the present systematized remarks are based on three works by the Italian literary critic – “A alma e a harpia” (The soul and the harpy) (1983)⁸ and “O século sério” (The serious century) (2001)⁹, essays present in the author's more comprehensive compilations, and the book *O burguês* (The bourgeois)

⁵ The collection organized by Franco Moretti, which brings together essays from experts from around the world, was originally published in Italian covering five vast volumes. Two volumes have already been published in English in the United States of America, including the version of Schwarz's essay on Machado de Assis. In Brazil, only one of the volumes, with the subtitle *A Cultura do Romance*, was published in 2009 by the publisher Cosac-Naify.

⁶ In addition to collaborating in the collection *The Novel*, Roberto Schwarz has a significant reception in the more general work of Franco Moretti.

⁷ See, in this sense, the work *Martinha versus Lucrecia*, but also the interview granted by Roberto Schwarz to André Botelho and Lília Schwarz for the Brazilian Journal of Social Sciences.

⁸ Originally dated 1983. In the version published in Brazil, the essay composes the collection *Signos e estilos da modernidade*. See: Moretti (2007).

⁹ Originally dated 2001, the essay *O século sério* has three versions published in Brazil. The first one, used in this work, dates from 2003, and was published in edition n. 65 of the *Revista Novos Estudos* of the Brazilian Center for Analysis and Planning.



¹⁰ In Brazil, the book was published in the following year. See: Moretti (2014).

(2014)¹⁰ –, besides the works of some of his interlocutors, commentators and critics.

MORETTI'S GAZE

In an afterword by *Fama & anonimato*, a well-known collection of the American journalist Gay Talese published in Brazil, the writer Humberto Werneck (2004) suggests that news, in its crudest forms, do not premise the need to present themselves as “palatable” to the public:

In what Gay Talese writes, there is nothing that has not been pinched from reality and thoroughly checked and double checked before going on paper. It's journalism. But not the usual, predominant journalism, in which the reporter, in the name of the indispensable quest for objectivity, feels free to serve the reader more than a pile of raw information – as if that were the reality. As if the information should be swallowed whole by the reader, a kind of astronaut pill, which nourishes without the obligation to be palatable. As if, from the same Latin root, *knowledge* (*saber*) and *taste* (*sabor*) could not go together (Ibid.: 524). [free translation]

As a postword to Talese's work, it would be natural to discuss the limits of journalism and its interfaces with literature in a comparative scenario – particularly around the rhetoric of *seduction*. Ultimately, however, Werneck's (2004) hypothesis arises in a different sense from what is argued in the present reflection from the point of view of Franco Moretti. That is, if symbolic forms are generally important as an object of study – and here the news are recognized as a hegemonic symbolic form of everyday narration at least from the turn of the nineteenth century to the twentieth century in the modes of sociability of the Western world –, they matter insofar as they find resonance in extralinguistic elements present in private life and everyday life.

In historical terms, therefore, the first hypothesis of the author's background lies in the study of the news: ‘When such a prosaic and modest novelty can spread everywhere, there must be something in the surrounding culture that is found in profound harmony with it’ (Moretti, 2003: 15). The statement, of course, is not originally intended for the news world. In the extract in question, the literary critic refers to the specificities of a particular modality of the European of the novel nineteenth century. In theoretical-methodological terms, however, Moretti's view denotes a more comprehensive premise, that is, it is the understanding that a certain aesthetic-expressive pattern only spreads socially when it finds

support in broader cultural patterns paved in the spectra of life and daily life. In the author's words, it is a kind of "narrative pleasure", either by the enunciatees in consuming it (and therefore refers to something "palatable"), or by the enunciators in operating it.

It is possible to state that, in the interim, if news – as symbolic forms – are socially disseminated as they have spread throughout the last century in the manner of modern sociability, such a dynamic is established – once again paraphrasing Moretti – from the Constitution of "imaginary solutions" in the expressive level to "real contradictions" in the daily life level. The author says when referring to the area of literature:

I still think of literature as a form of "compromise," of possible symbolic adjustment, of "solution" to the conflicts of an era. I believe that, in fact, novels allow people to feel less uncomfortable amid these conflicts. Literary historians generally seek an explanation for this increase in book sales in the very structure of novels – which would be better written, more realistic, more interesting to readers, and so on. I looked for an alternative explanation for the fact that, suddenly, the novels sold more. I argued that the reason should be similar to the one that led, in the same period, to a greater production and consumption of watches, for example (Moretti; Cariello, 2009). [free translation]

The author's theoretical-methodological approach does not escape his speech situation. Born in Sondrio, Lombardy, Franco Moretti was a very young doctorate in Modern Literature at the University of Rome in 1972. Born into a family of prominence in the artistic-intellectual scene in Italy – his brother, filmmaker Nanni Moretti, stood out as the director of internationally acclaimed films such as *The Son's Room* (2000) and *Habemus Papam* (2011) – Franco Moretti became recognized outside the European continent, becoming a visiting professor at the American universities of Berkeley, Duke, UCLA and San Diego. Based in the United States of America, he is currently the professor of English Literature at Stanford University. In the field of research, one of his most breathtaking initiatives was the organization of the series *The Novel*, a five-volume collection that brings together essays by scholars of this genre from different parts of the world. The author is also a leading contributor to the *New Left Review*.

As a Marxist in his political-intellectual affiliation, Moretti projects a strong emphasis on the historical analysis of his objects of study. From the point of view of his background, as argued by the critic McKenzie Wark (2013), while having as his main predecessors not so well-known Italian Marxist thinkers outside the



European context, such as Galvano Della Volpe and Lucio Colletti, Moretti's mature works are based on the criticism of some of the leading exponents of critical tradition, from György Lukacs and Antonio Gramsci to Raymond Williams and Roland Barthes.

Inspired by Lukacs' literary theory, Moretti understands that "forms are densities of social relations: thus, formal analysis is, in its modest way, an analysis of power" (apud Wark, 2013). In this sense, the author pictures less scenarios and characters than the rhythmic structuring of narratives. His theoretical-methodological apparatus seeks, as in a backward step, to trace the meaning of substantial keywords and the texture of particular types of ways of organizing narration – methods that are often controversial in the level of literary studies (Wark, 2013). It is at this conjuncture that the second hypothesis extracted from Moretti's work is located as a contribution to the theoretical studies of Journalism.

SECOND HYPOTHESIS

At the beginning of his studies, Franco Moretti focuses on the nineteenth-century European novel, especially those that pervaded the nuances of bourgeois ideology. In historical terms, it is a narrative style contemporary to the rise of the daily news narration in the modern way of Western sociability. That is to say, journalism, which flourished in the seventeenth-century Europe from the confluence of factors such as the development of the Gutenberg's typography, the expansion of technical mechanisms that allow an unprecedented flow of information and the consequent transformation of this flow into merchandise in the core of an economy in expansion (Sousa, 2004), witnessed in the nineteenth century the configuration of a new modality of public opinion that demands from those old news compendium an immersion in the daily life.

In this respect, as he relies on the logic of the nineteenth-century bourgeois novels, Moretti does not casually use the rhetorical option of using examples extracted from the fictional representation of journalistic narration by the literary narrative. The case of *Lost Illusions*, a classic work of the French Honoré de Balzac dissected by the Italian critic in his analyses, is significant in this sense. Take an extract from *O século sério* as an example:

Balzac, second part of *Lost Illusions* (1839). Lucien de Rubempré is writing (finally!) his first article, which will constitute a true "revolution in journalism." It's the opportunity he's been waiting for since the day he arrived in Paris. But in the

folds of this episode another one is hiding: there are no articles in the newspaper, anything will do, fast, no matter what, just to fill in the blanks; and a friend of Lucien's, introduced by an unpretentious comma, also begins to write. It is almost the Platonic idea of the Romanesque filler: an extract that fills a little space, nothing more (Moretti, 2003: 24). [free translation]

In this case, it is a problematization – through the metaphor of journalism – about how the daily narration begins to *fill* the scenes of the bourgeois novels. Once again, Moretti reinforces a methodological inversion for the analysis of the historical relationship between literature and journalism: no longer is literature used as a historical parameter to explain (or even adjectivize) journalism, but journalism as a parameter – through the metaphor of page filling – to clarify literature; an inversion conducted specifically by a literary critic without experience in the area of nonfiction.

The relationship, of course, is strained. Take the example of Gay Talese again. In the foreword to *The Kingdom and the Power*, a book about the history of The New York Times, the journalist states his position:

In each of my books there is a fascination with the most obscure truths of human nature, a desire to go beyond the facade and touch the nerves and nuances of private life. I have long believed that realism is fantastic, that the *dreams and impulses* of modern America, if *accurately narrated*, can be as *socially significant and historically useful* as the lives and fictional situations created by playwrights and novelists (Talese, 2000: 9, author's highlights). [free translation]

“Realism is fantastic” – and “dreams and impulses”, if they are “accurately narrated” – approach features as fundamental as “fictional situations created by playwrights and novelists”. Fiction *versus* accuracy to get in the understanding of reality in your nuances. It is not by chance that both – Moretti and Talese – generally use the conceptions of private life and everyday life to support – and justify – their analytical and methodological options. The difference, however, seems to be again in shifting the place of the questions. While the detailed narration – “with exactness” – of the “most obscure truths of human nature” is substantial to Gay Talese and his search is methodologically conducted through private and daily immersion, Franco Moretti works with rhythm and rituals (or keywords, as it will be mentioned later) for the social dissemination of certain symbolic forms and narrative styles. In *The Soul and the Harpy*, for example, the Italian author uses a classic text by Lukács,



originally published in Hungarian at the beginning of the 20th century, to reinforce his point of view:

The form is sociological not only as a mediating element, but as a principle that connects author and public, making literature into a social aspect, but it also relates to the material to be formed. [...] Form, in a piece, is what organizes, in an encompassed whole, the life that is given to it as subject, what determines its time, rhythm and fluctuation, its density and fluidity, its rigidity and smoothness; what accentuates the sensations perceived as important and distances those of minor importance; *what puts things in the foreground or the background and arranges them in order* (Lukacs, 1981, pp. 69-71 apud Moretti, 2007: 24, author's emphasis). [free translation]

In this context, Moretti's analysis – although it is not particularly focused on journalistic narration under an empirical vertex – provides a second theoretical-methodological hypothesis pertinent to studies on the organization and dissemination of news narration: the process of symbolic codification of cultural (and hegemonic) patterns present in everyday life is not only a matter of content – in this level, in characters and scenarios, it is not much addressed in the perspective of the Italian critic¹¹ – but in the proper form, in the aesthetic-expressive dimension of narration. It is no wonder that Moretti makes a point out of demonstrating that one of the most basic premises of the narration – “a story deserves to be told whether a norm has been violated (a moral or probabilistic norm, or both), it presents an ‘unprecedented fact’” (Moretti, 2003: 9) – permits the protagonism at a certain moment in the history of bourgeois novels and goes to the second level to give rise to a more determinant dimension: adherence to the more comprehensive (and less unheard of) cultural patterns present in everyday life.

¹¹ Moretti (2003: 17) argues: “Indeed, this is exactly the world of the bourgeois novel, but not for its contents [...] – on the contrary, contents are not much addressed: it is through the filling that logic of rationalization acts on the very form of the novel, its narrative rhythm.” [free translation]

SOME “MISPLACED IDEAS”

But what, after all, can be understood by the idea of *cultural pattern* – a key conception in the relations abovementioned – and which *patterns* do we speak of when the modern ways of sociability in the journalistic narration are at stake?

As a form of methodological distinction, the cultural pattern is understood as the set of symbolic elements that communicates with both the theoretical notion of *cultural value*, which is distinguished by its greater comprehensiveness (since a cultural pattern involves different sociocultural variables), as well as

with the definition of “social imaginary” elaborated by Cornelius Castoriadis (1987: 229), with which he shares his constitutive process: “a system of norms, values, language, instruments, procedures and methods of doing when facing things and doing things.” Thus, although the noun *pattern* is diluted in different definitions etymologically derived from the Latin term *patronus* – *protector*, in the literal translation –, the idea of cultural pattern adopted here does not contradict, by its non-hermetic character, the complex game of continuities and discontinuities present in the culture. In short, as Faro (2014: 100) elucidates, it is an element of a symbolic nature that “shapes the sensible existence” and, at the same time, grants it the components with which “the social being reads and interprets the world.”

In addressing the modern modes of capitalist production from a culturalist perspective, Stuart Hall (1977: 317), in a similar direction, points to the existence of a complex network of structures and social relations established in the different levels of daily practices – which culminates in a standardization, a “way of life” that serves as a parameter for individuals and social groups. According to the author, in addition to the material manners of production itself, this fabric involves the forms of social organization of labor, the technical development of productive activities, the social institutions through which the circulation of goods and the social perception of values take place, as well as the forms of civil association, family life and political structures appropriate to this context. It consists, ultimately, in the configuration of a pattern of cultural order that communicates with the concept of hegemony coined by Antonio Gramsci. In this context, the premise that the social relations of modernity are mediated by hegemonic cultural patterns – such as the patterns of temporality and objectivity that intersect in everyday experience through modern sociability – typical of a substantially instrumental rationality (Adorno; Horkheimer, 1985); a scenario in which domination and controlled access are coupled to the daily life and the elements that break with its regularity.

That said, it is understood that the reasoning of Franco Moretti, from the field of literary criticism, is also amenable to interpretation in the field of Journalism. That is, the aesthetic-expressive pattern of the news narrates reality, in this case, it befits the double dynamics of transcoding and the dissemination of a social sense of regularity and rationality in the culture. This study seeks once again the contribution of Roberto Schwarz:

The form – which is not evident and which falls to the critics to identify and study – would be an individual ordering principle, which regulates both an imaginary universe and an aspect of external reality. In varying proportions,



it combines artistic fabrication and the intuition of preexisting social rhythms. [...] The exchange requires a structured description of the two fields, both of the work and of the social reality, whose connections are a matter of reflection (2012: 48). [free translation]

Roberto Schwarz, a frequent interlocutor of Franco Moretti, is the author of the essay *As ideias fora do lugar* (Misplaced Ideas), originally published in Brazil in 1977 in the collection *Ao vencedor as batatas* (To the winner the potatoes). The book's subtitle could not be more appropriate to the present debate: *literary form and social process*.

THE DIALECTICS BETWEEN FORM AND SOCIAL PROCESS

Schwarz (1977) focuses on the test of misalignments – the “metamorphoses in the semiperiphery of capitalism,” in the words of Moretti (2014) – between the western models of capitalist development and the Brazilian reality in the period of the development of canonical novels such as the works of Machado de Assis and José de Alencar; hence the overwhelming metaphor of “misplaced ideas.” In an epistemological movement, however, misplaced ideas are interpreted in this article not as “malformations” or “metamorphoses,” as in the original context, but as a possible contribution of a theoretical-methodological framework (a way of analysis) developed by Moretti in the field of literary criticism for the field of theoretical studies in Journalism.

It is pertinent to recall, in this sense, that Franco Moretti often uses in his rhetorical analyses other symbolic forms beyond literature as examples to demonstrate the codification, on the expressive level, of values present in the sphere of daily life. The paintings by the Dutch painter Johannes Vermeer, properly explored in the essay *O século sério*, are significant cases in this respect. The critic McKenzie Wark (2013), when discussing Moretti's work, is also precise in mentioning the use of the Italian author's analytical method in analyzing other objects that also relate to the manners of organization of everyday life in contemporary terms:

Such a world has no place for either the bourgeois novel or the keeper of its hermeneutic flame – the literary critic – for the simple reason that it is no longer a bourgeois world. Our ruling class still lives to exploit the work [of subaltern classes], but in cultural terms it is not bourgeois. *The literary form in which that is most revealing is probably the self-help book or the business biography. Such forms would probably yield interesting ideas if assembled and studied as a vast database,*

except that such texts, unlike the largely forgotten and outdated novels analyzed by Moretti, are zealously protected as “intellectual property” (Wark, 2013, our italics). [free translation]

In this line of reasoning, some of Franco Moretti’s main theoretical-methodological premises can be presented as feasible contributions to the extra-literary sphere – and particularly to the field of Journalism, the focus of the present discussion. It is, once again, to use Schwarz’s (1977) reference, of ideas misplaced from their original places, but not in their anomalous and decontextualized sense.

MORETTI’S THEORETICAL-CONCEPTUAL PREMISES

Franco Moretti develops his analytical style with affinity in the *rhetoric of argumentation* and mobilizes his theoretical-methodological framework in the construction of a “social history of literary forms” (Chagas, 2013: 194). The struggle invested in the organization of the five volumes of *The Novel*, the collection that brings together scholars from different parts of the world, demonstrates such commitment.

In a study of Moretti’s analytical methodology, Dolabela Chagas (2013) lists four presuppositions present in the rhetoric of the Italian literary critic – two other premises will be added to them in this study – that enable a dialogue as a form of interdisciplinary contribution to the field of Journalism:

- i. *Discomfort with the supra-historical and autonomous character of symbolic forms as to social determinations*

For Moretti (2007: 22), “knowledge of the socio-historical context of a literary work or genre” is not an “extra” to remain separated from rhetorical analysis, since “literary texts are historical products organized according to rhetorical criteria.” This analytical perspective demonstrates the “Moretti’s discomfort with the hesitation deriving from the long dominance, in the critic and in the literary historiography, of certain conceptual and methodological presuppositions of enlightened and romantic origin”; namely, the supra-historical, antinstitutional and aesthetically deviant character of literature, the “genius” artist’s autonomy as well as social determinations, as well as recurrence as the greatest exemplarity of “great works” as cases of a totalizing system (Chagas, 2013: 195). The discomfort of the Italian critic ultimately refers to the dichotomy between the traditions of formalism and historicism interpreted as caricatural

by Schwarz et al. (2008: 156). Roberto Schwarz is emphatic in mentioning the legacy of Antonio Candido in Brazil as an example of overcoming the reductionism of such dichotomy. Franco Moretti, inspired by Marxist authors such as György Lukács and Raymond Williams, also seems to escape from this dichotomous thinking through the dialectic, but emphasizes that the social character of a work is eminently located in its symbolic form. From the point of view of the interdisciplinary contribution to the field of Journalism, the assumption enlightens the pertinence of observing the theoretical studies on news in contrast to mere content analyzes (such as news-value categorizations, for example), which not infrequently neglect the aesthetic-expressive character of news, as well as analyses focused on the supra-historical formalism of the periodicals (the functionalist studies of journalistic genres that do not exceed the limits of mere classification, for example) and historizations devoted exclusively to hegemonic vehicles.

- ii. *Emphasis on the non-literary components of literature / Understanding of the locus of specificities of the literature from the symbolic management of social contents under aesthetic codes:*

Moretti (2007: 34) says that the “extra-literary phenomenon is never more or less important as ‘object’ Or possible ‘content’ of a text, but rather due to its impact on evaluation systems, and therefore, on rhetorical strategies.” The literary critic criticizes the corollaries of “ambiguity,” “polissemia” and “non-referentiality” as a guarantee of “artisticity” of the literary text. In the words of Dolabela Chagas (2013: 196), instead, to identify the literary “indices” of literature in the immanence of the “text” – as a great part of the twentieth century critique – Moretti would emphasize the non-literary components of literature by extending argumentative rhetoric to its analysis: Rhetorical-argumentative approach of social contents under selected aesthetic codes would reveal many of the specificities of literature as discourse.

In the case of journalism, referentiality and verisimilitude, by themselves, already constitute basic presuppositions, although under the historical paradigm of the hegemonic model of information-based journalism (the so-called hard news in the American tradition), other similar corollaries are disseminated – not infrequently under the constraints of an unreflecting realism – as a guarantee of journalistic deontology in the news. Well, in an interdisciplinary reading, using an adaptation of the words of Chagas (2013: 196), it is understood that in the “rhetorical-argumentative approach of social contents under selected aesthetic codes” can verify the revelations of “many of the specificities” of journalism as

a social discourse. The historiographical work of Michael Schudson (1978) is representative in this respect. In turning to the historical study of American newspapers (a hegemonic model of journalistic practice that is dear to the West), the sociologist, in general, focuses on the historical matrix (the non-journalistic components of journalism) of some of the major paradigms of news reporting (the idea of objectivity treated as ideological value disseminated after World War I, for example) instead of merely listing and concatenating the historical emergence of medias and techniques. It refers, therefore, to the symbolic management of social contents under aesthetic codes.

- iii. *The integration of symbolic forms to regular cultural exchanges established in everyday life / Isonomy between culturally sanctioned values and socially disseminated symbolic forms:*

In “The Soul and the Harpy”, Moretti (2007) proposes the analysis of literary production outside the closed boundaries of the work and the text. As explained by Chagas (2013: 198), “a ‘piece’ would be the production that is ‘whole within itself’, made by an author singled out in his historical and social context; a ‘text’ would be the matter itself objectified in its autonomy in relation to that specific context and to its own authorship.” Moretti aims to break with such a dichotomy. For the author,

A history of literature that could be rewritten as sociology of symbolic forms, as history of cultural conventions, might finally find a role and a dignity in the context of a complete history of society (Moretti, 2007: 33). [free translation]

In other words, the Italian critic works with the proposition that, beyond the boundaries of the piece and the text, literature, “integrated with regular cultural exchanges, would act as means to arouse the reader by dealing with common places, consensus and socially disseminated values” (Chagas, 2013: 198). From an interpretative point of view, Moretti (2007) advocates an “isonomy” between culturally sanctioned values and socially consensual symbols. In this sense, a dialogism between the literary critic’s proposition and the analogy proposed by Muniz Sodré between journalistic practice and the rhythmic score of a musical composition. The Brazilian author points out: “the microaspects of fact, like notes, flow rhythmically within a ‘metric,’ which is temporality marked as ‘everyday’” (Sodré, 2009: 92). In turn, this rhythmic punctuation has different cyclic intervals, which leads all news to have “a cycle whose duration varies, in fact, according to the journalistically value attributed to the it”



(Sodré, 2009: 94). In turn, Franco Moretti refuses to rank literature as a “high cultural production” and emphasizes his link with “contextual patterns and expectations in his willingness to make the reader feel at home in his world” (Chagas, 2013: 198). In *The serious century*, in discussing the cultural pattern of seriousness that was established in the daily life of the European bourgeoisie, in the mid-nineteenth century, and its literary symbolic codification, the author is quite illustrative:

But what exactly does “serious” mean in literature? For Diderot, who introduces the *genre sérieux* in 1757, in the *Conversations on The Natural Son*, it is an intermediary form between tragedy and comedy. It’s a great intuition. Because, effectively, with the advent of serious *ethos*, and with the concomitant multiplication of fillings, the novel finds a new, quiet rhythm, a type of narrative “neutrality” that allows it to function without ever having to resort to extreme measures. One writes and reads with a new prosaic spirit, without expecting unknown things when turning the page. (Moretti, 2003: 8) [free translation]

Making the enunciator “feel at home in your world” with a “narrative neutrality” that leads you, without expecting scares, “when turning the page.” From this perspective, the passage is related to a universe that is also peculiar to the journalistic narration of daily life. To use Sodré’s (2009: 94) analogy once more, the “microaspects of fact” which, “like notes, flow rhythmically within a metric,” resonate between the expectations and consensus of everyday life – which will be mentioned in the next presupposition.

iv. *Valuing the role of literature as a value-affirming discourse (aesthetic conventions integrated into common repertoires):*

In this topic, the author refers once again to the first hypothesis raised in the article: an aesthetic-expressive pattern (a way of narrating the world) only spreads socially if it finds support in the wider cultural patterns present in everyday life. Regarding the perspective analysis of Franco Moretti, Chagas (2013: 199-200) discusses:

If, in modernity, literature was established as an utopian instance of harmonization of the tensions provoked by the fragmentation of social structures of meaning, the very necessity of the agreement resulted from a complexity given to social life which had potential for disorientation would have impelled the search, in the fiction, of unavailable reconciliations in the “world of life”: literature would offer

the public the experience of almost impossible solutions in practice, but affectively shareable; their success arising from their pragmatic sense of belonging to social routines, and not from distancing themselves from criticism or by the negativity of the aesthetic. [free translation]

Well, it goes back to the concept of *pontuação rítmica do cotidiano* (rhythmic punctuation of everyday life) defended by Sodré (2009). In the journalistic narration of everyday life, it is understood that the complexity of the “world of life,” in order to use Moretti’s expression, is reduced in the hegemonic model of journalism to the singularity of the journalistic fact and its explanation based on the elements of the present – the here and now characterizing such narration. This dynamic of symbolic character is mediated by aesthetic-expressive elements that are supported in the cultural patterns of the modern day experience (in its rationality and regularity). The use of the lead – which, who, when, why and how – is a symptomatic element of the singularization of events by modern journalism, or, more specifically, the presence of statistics and graphs to explain – in a rational and mathematical way – the unfolding of singular facts. As Moretti points out (2003: 8), “one writes and reads with a new, prosaic spirit, without expecting unheard-of things every time the page turns.” For traditional news consumers, it consists of the daily task of “turning the page” of the newspaper and visualizing, one after another, “rational and objective” approaches, segmented in notebooks and sections, of everyday events without encountering – day after day – drastic surprises that have not been properly singled out and scrutinized by the narration.

v. *Understanding the definitive social root that penetrates everyday life:*

The pressupposition once more addresses the two hypotheses previously highlighted. For Franco Moretti, social dissemination in a symbolic way is established in an environment permeated by common conventions located in private and daily life; it is an analytical view that observes the aesthetic organization of contents based on previous social conventions. In *The Soul and the Harpy*, in discussing Lukacs’ literary theory, the author stresses that the idea of “convention” is a “fundamental concept as it indicates when a form has assumed a definitive social root, penetrating everyday life, encouraging and organizing it in an increasingly imperceptible and regular way – and therefore more effective” (Moretti, 2007: 25). The concepts of “imperceptible,” “regular” and “effective” can be understood in parallel to the Gramscian concept of hegemony. In this sense, the hegemonic way in which journalism



leads the narration of the world of life (aesthetic organization of contents) is also established in a dialogue with previous social conventions present in everyday life from historical cultural matrices. The work of Michael Schudson (1978) to constitute a history of American journalism from a backward reading – “seen from afar” to use an expression of Franco Moretti – based on the dissemination of widespread values in Western sociability is significant in this regard. However, an even more emphatic contribution seems to be Martín-Barbero (2003), in the chapter *The long process of enculturation*, as he established since the Middle Ages the historical matrices of mass mediation that will pave the way for the modern diffusion of languages such as melodrama and journalism itself.

vi. vi) *Understanding the history of aesthetic forms as a component of a history of values and structures of thought:*

Franco Moretti develops an understanding of literature as “a type of discourse that, although governed by its own values, conventions and codes, among the other cultural productions, is neither more nor less ‘special’ or ‘important’” (Chagas, 2013: 209). Consonant with *The soul and the harpy*, the author argues that:

An artistic procedure assumes its total meaning not in the light of other artistic phenomena, but of the products of scientific and philosophical thought. Indeed, it is in correlation with the latter that their ‘form’ becomes understandable and reveals their own cultural function (Moretti, 2007: 31). [free translation]

Hence, a history of aesthetic forms – or aesthetic-expressive patterns, to justify a nomenclature more appropriate to the extra-artistic sphere – does not lie outside the broader scope of the history of hegemonic thought structures. This premise finds strong adherence to the aforementioned work developed by Martín-Barbero (2003) when turning to the historical matrices of mass communication. From the culturalist perspective of the Latin American author, the valorization of rational-objective knowledge in modern ways of life – an aspect understood as an essential component of the “long enculturation process” – finds support in the structuring elements of society and it is projected directly in the “transformations of knowledge and popular manners of transmission” (Martín-Barbero, 2003: 144). In this sense, among other examples, Martín-Barbero refers to the way in which historically the “school” institution plays a “preponderant role” in the overlapping of a popular consciousness and in the deconstruction process instituted by modern rationality against “magical knowledge”:

The learning of the new sociability begins by replacing the noxious influence of parents – especially the mother – in the conservation and transmission of superstitions. And it goes mainly by the change in the manners of transmission of knowledge. It used to be learned by the imitation of gestures and rituals of initiations; the new pedagogy will neutralize learning by intellectualizing it, by converting it into a dispassionate transmission of knowledges separated from each other and from their practices (Martín-Barbero, 2003: 145-146).
 [free translation]

It is at this point that one of the main results highlighted in modern sociability by the secularization of knowledge is stressed: the emergence of the mode of experimentation of the world determined by a particularly quantitative technical-scientific rationality (characterized by calculability and mathematical precision) in reading about things and nature – operationalization that results, as stated, in the increase of the sensation of power of the individuals over nature and the world itself. Well, the development of the journalistic way of narrating everyday life from a deontology of its own (the inverted pyramid, criteria of news, experts as sources, paradigms of objectivity, impersonality and impartiality etc.) – based on regularity and rationality – cannot be understood as disembodied from this mode of experimentation of the world, that is, outside a history of broader and adherent values penetrated in daily life as structures of thought.

A FEW FINAL REMARKS

The presuppositions extracted from the work of Franco Moretti and interpreted in this article as pertinent to potentiate, in an interdisciplinary perspective, the studies in Journalism in theoretical-methodological terms. They integrate a more comprehensive and instigating (but no less controversial) framework conducted by the Italian author throughout his academic trajectory. According to the literary critic Luís Augusto Fischer (2009), since Moretti's first works that put him in the spotlight in Brazil, it is possible to undress

The size of the fight that this Italian, an expert in English novels, got into: no more, no less, he was critically reviewing the main alternatives conceived so far towards a world history of literature. Nothing obvious, not easy. [...] [Moretti] does not want to study abstract narrative structure; his battle is with the empiricism that structures novels. City, field, the street, the division of classes by space, proximity or distance, these geographical variables are summoned in parallel with the plot design. [free translation]

The idea of methodology in Franco Moretti is challenging insofar as the author sets himself to observe literature “from afar,” in perspective, “to the point of being able to discern the great veins, tendencies, paths” in which the novel turns in the course of the story (Fischer, 2009). More than that, however, Moretti seeks to establish a view that culminates – beyond the literary criticism – in a sociology of symbolic forms. This is the point that is most interesting to the extraliterary universe sphere, for example, in the field of journalism and particularly in the field of news – a privileged symbolic form among the forms of expression that are disseminated in the modern way of Western sociability.

Turning to the veins, tendencies and paths, Moretti develops his own methodologies and an efficient rhetoric in his analyzes. In *The Bourgeois* (Moretti, 2014), for example, a work in which he studies the “rise and fall” of the figure of the bourgeoisie in literature, he makes use of the incessant search for “keywords” – in lexical terms – present in narrative styles and which are established as fundamental explanatory keys for understanding the mediations between “culturally sanctioned values” and “socially disseminated symbolic forms.” Due to the limitations of this article, focusing on introductory notes on the contribution of Moretti's sociology of forms to the theoretical studies of journalism, it was not intended as a detailed development of such a perspective – which should be done in another moment. However, what are the ideas of “accuracy” and “realism” in the abovementioned self-description of Gay Talese if not significant keywords that appear as clues to unveil a whole set of social values on which journalistic deontology is paved? How many and which other keywords cannot be identified in the historical set of hegemonic journalistic production that explains the social dissemination of concepts such as newsworthiness criteria, news-values, to assess, scoop, deadline, among others? It is, as said, a subject for a new discussion.

For now, it is worth highlighting the feasibility of the hypotheses raised in the article, as well as the theoretical-methodological presuppositions listed, as contributions to studies in Journalism. It is thus a line of reasoning similar to that of Sodr  (2009) when the concept of daily life is placed in the foreground and the journalistic narration is understood as a specific rhythmic punctuation regulated by the temporality of capitalist production. It also consists of an extended way of interpreting journalism – and news – from its aesthetic-expressive configuration and its interface with socially disseminated cultural values in everyday life.

Finally, a comprehensive reading of the journalistic narrative is proposed as a *symbolic form* beyond the restriction of its explanation as a *piece* or as a

text – in the understanding of Franco Moretti –, nor beyond the aridity of the strict concept of the *content*. Otherwise, like the customs agent of the emblematic chronicle of Stanislaw Ponte Preta (1979), at the beginning of this article, there is a risk of looking too much into the content of the phenomenon to the point that one will not be able to see the complexity behind its symbolic form.

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