

Abstract

This diploma thesis deals with various possible ways in which the formalized expression of emotions that is characteristic of the melodramatic mode can be reinterpreted in the context of experimental cinema, with the work of the director Werner Schroeter being used as a main (but not exclusive) example. The main argument is based on two interrelated ideas. First, the melodramatic mode as a genre-bending category offers a wide repertory of stylistic features designed to express extreme emotional states or situations which can be encompassed by the term “melodramatic excess”. This type of excess manifests itself most visibly in moments of intense passion when the plot breaks down and freezes in a static or symbolic arrangement, either through close-up or tableau vivant. All attention is thereby focused on the heroes’ gestures and poses which express their emotional state face to face with an intense situation for which they cannot yet find an adequate response. Second, certain experimental films manage to transform the melodramatic excess through “expressive and performative operations” with filmic space, time and bodies, turning the exterior representation of emotions into the immanent expression of affects. In this case, affect is understood as a certain variation of emotions which demonstrates the capacity of bodies to transform while suffering intense pathos, without ever stabilizing in recognizable gestures or symbols. Between the melodramatic excess and the concept of affect (or affect theory) therefore emerges a “bidirectional movement”. On the one hand, certain experimental films (e.g., the films of Werner Schroeter) are able to transform the melodramatic excess in such a way that it becomes affective, on the other hand, the term affect, often defined in abstract or negative ways, thereby gains a specific stylistic variant, the melodramatic one. This thesis strives to show how this bidirectional movement works and which new impulses it can bring into the contemporary affect studies and film theory.