

Satiric Infotainment in Mexico: The case of Brozo, el Payaso Tenebroso

Infoentretenimiento satírico en México: el caso de Brozo, el Payaso Tenebroso

Infoentretenimento Satírico no México: o caso de Brozo, el Payaso Tenebroso

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ABSTRACT

Brozo, the Shady Clown, is considered one of the most popular TV “journalists” in Mexico. This article analyzes the carnivalesque role of Brozo as an influential and critical voice in Mexican media: he is the court jester who, through vulgar and harsh humor, is able to say “truths” with impunity, in a country with widespread violence against journalists and a tradition of institutionalized corruption in the profession. At the same time, this article examines Brozo as an influential political actor from his TV show *El Mañanero* in Televisa, one of the most powerful media conglomerates of the world, with historic adhesions to the Mexican political elites. Finally, the case of Brozo is interpreted in relation to the emergent trend towards global infotainment.

Keywords: Infotainment, satire, Mexico, political communication, spectacle, journalism.

ABSTRACT

Brozo, el Payaso Tenebroso, es considerado uno de los “periodistas” televisivos más populares de México. Este artículo analiza el rol carnavalesco de Brozo como influyente voz crítica en los medios mexicanos: es el bufón que, a través de un humor ácido y vulgar, puede decir verdades impunemente en un país con uno de los más altos índices de violencia contra periodistas y una tradición de corrupción institucionalizada en el oficio. Al mismo tiempo, este artículo examina a Brozo como influyente comunicador político en el contexto mediático mexicano, desde su tribuna en Televisa, uno de los conglomerados de medios más poderosos del mundo, con una cuestionable tradición de adhesión al poder. Finalmente, Brozo es relacionado con la emergente tendencia hacia el infoentretenimiento global en los medios televisivos.

Palabras clave: Infoentretenimiento, sátira, México, comunicación política, espectáculo, periodismo.

RESUMO

Brozo, el Payaso Tenebroso, é considerado um dos “jornalistas” televisivos mais populares do México. Este artigo analisa o papel carnavalesco de Brozo como influente voz crítica na mídia mexicana: ele é o bobo da corte que, através de um humor ácido e vulgar, pode dizer verdades impunemente em um país com um dos mais altos índices de violência contra jornalistas e uma tradição de corrupção institucionalizada no ofício. Ao mesmo tempo, este artigo examina a Brozo como influente comunicador político no contexto midiático mexicano, a partir de sua tribuna na Televisa, um dos conglomerados de mídia mais poderosos do mundo, com uma questionável tradição de adesão ao poder. Finalmente, Brozo é relacionado com a emergente tendência ao infoentretenimento global na mídia televisiva.

Palavras-chave: Infoentretenimento, sátira, comunicação política, espetáculo, jornalismo.

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INTRODUCTION

In November 2014, the wax figure of Brozo, the Scary Clown [Brozo, el Payaso Tenebroso], began to be part of the pantheon of the Museum of Wax of the City of Mexico, which pays tribute to 230 of the most prominent historical personalities of the political, artistic and sporting environment in the country. The tribute was fourteen years after the first transmission of *El Mañanero* [The morning], the news program with which Brozo burst into political communication in Mexico. Created by comedian Víctor Trujillo, Brozo is considered today one of the best known television “journalists” of the country (“Micha, Alatorre, Doriga, Aristegui and Rocha, communicators with the best image in Mexico: Parametría”, 2015). And, according to *Forbes* magazine (2015), this clown is the most influential Mexican journalist on Twitter.

In times in which infotainment and entertainment have colonized much of the public discourse, this article analyses the character Brozo as a symbol of the carnival tradition: he is the jester who, through a critical and vulgar humor, can tell truths with impunity in a country with one of the highest rates of violence against journalists and a tradition of corruption institutionalized in the profession. At the same time, this article examines Brozo as an influential political communicator in the context of Mexican media, from his rostrum at Televisa, one of the world most powerful media conglomerates, with a questionable tradition of adherence to power. Finally, Brozo is related to the emerging trend towards global Infotainment in the television media.

METHODOLOGY

This work is based on textual and discursive analysis of the television performance of Brozo, the fictional character created by the comedian Víctor Trujillo. Textual analysis is a methodology that focuses on the interpretation of texts from a literary perspective (Jensen & Jankowski, 1991), to understand how these texts define general culture and how they work as part of communicative and ideological practices. In this way, the main axioms of textual analysis are hermeneutics and interpretation (Potter, 1996). Textual analysis aims to immerse in the study material, find recurring patterns and review the interpretations as more material on the topic are being gathered (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002;

Potter, 1996). For this study, the material available online related to Brozo was reviewed, with a special focus on the *El Mañanero* videos available on YouTube, which were selected according to what seemed to be the most representative of the relationship of Brozo with power (his interviews with presidential candidates, for example). Descriptive notes on the dynamics, aesthetics and organization of the program were taken, journalistic material available was collected digitally, and during several months of 2015 Brozo’s Facebook and Twitter were monitored for updates, which were quite active. As more material was collected, interpretations of the texts already made were reviewed and connecting them with other thematic aspects. In other words, Brozo videos were linked with the angles of interpretation of this research and the context of the case study. According to Van Dijk (1991), much of the information of a text is not expressed explicitly, but it is implied. This information may involve concepts or ideas that must be inferred from other knowledge, context or background, and has important ideological dimensions. “The analysis of the “unsaid” is sometimes more revealing than the study of what is actually expressed in the text” (Van Dijk, 1991, p. 114). Thus, the analysis of the case of Brozo included bibliographical research on issues related to the situation of journalism and the media in Mexico, the story of humor and Mexican satire, and about the global trend towards Infotainment in political communication.

CORRUPTION, CONCENTRATION OF MEDIA AND VIOLENCE AGAINST JOURNALISTS IN MEXICO

For more than seven decades (1929-2000), the Institutional Revolutionary Party [Partido Revolucionario Institucional] (PRI) held in Mexico an authoritarian regime disguised as democracy. The writer Mario Vargas Llosa referred to this system of a single party as “a perfect dictatorship”, which was sustained by political repression, institutionalized corruption, electoral fraud, control over worker’s unions and a corrupt press control. During the regime of the PRI it was common that reporters received payments (called “embutes”, “chayos” or “chayotes”) or bribes from officials or politicians to cover their version of the news, while the owners of media received money disguised as State advertising, subsidies and other fiscal benefits (Alves, 2005).

Over that period, moreover, in Mexico media concentration was encouraged through a tacit alliance between the PRI and Televisa, the biggest media conglomerate of the country and one of the main participants in the business of entertainment worldwide (Calleja, 2012; Fernández, 1982; Mancino, 2007; Mejía, 1998; Sosa & Gómez, 2013; Trejo, 1985; Villamil, 2010). Thanks to this relationship, Televisa has operated almost in a monopolistic way in Mexico, and even its owner (the “Tiger” Emilio Azcárraga Milmo) was considered “a PRI soldier”. After the end of the cold war, the installation of neo-liberal economic policies and the wave of democratization of Latin America in the 1990s, the regime of the PRI was broken in the midst of corruption, which showed the deterioration of the political system. The continuous pressures from the right (National Action Party [Partido de Acción Nacional], PAN), left (Party of the Democratic Revolution [Partido de la Revolución Democrática], PRD), and civil society added to the tensions between reformists and traditionalists inside the PRI. Also, an independent press slowly emerged (Alves, 2005; Hughes, 2008) which played an important neutral role in the federal elections of 1997, when, for the first time, the PRI lost its majority in the Chamber of Deputies. By then, and after the electoral reform of 1997, which gave political parties access to buy space in the media for their electoral campaigns, Emilio Azcárraga Jean (son of the “Tiger”) already affirmed that democracy was “a good business”.

The momentum of political opposition was consolidated with the victory of PAN in the 2000 presidential election, which led Vicente Fox to power and marked the end of 71 years of PRI government. During Fox’s administration a law began to be discussed and worked to put media at the service of democracy; however, these efforts culminated with the scandalous Televisa Law of 2006 (approved stealthily in less than two weeks, in the dead of night), favoring the media giant (Esteinou Madrid & Alva de la Selva, 2009; Gaytan & Fregoso, 2006). Following a polarized election with a virtual tie, Felipe Calderón (from PAN) took power in 2006 facing protests of thousands of followers of Andrés Manuel López Obrador (PRD’s candidate), who questioned the outcome of the election. In the midst of this political crisis, Calderón’s administration decided to embark on an unprecedented war against drug trafficking, which had grown exponentially in recent

years. This war resulted in a blood bath - more than 121,000 people were killed during the administration of Calderón (“More than 121 thousand dead, the balance of Calderón’s drug war” [Más de 121 mil muertos, el saldo de la narcoguerra de Calderón]: Inegi, 2013) – without practical results.

In this scenario of violence, journalism has been one of the visible victims of the drug war. According to the Committee to Protect Journalists (Witchel, 2014), Mexico has become one of the most dangerous countries for journalists. Between 2000 and 2014, the National Human Rights Commission [Comisión Nacional de Derechos Humanos] (CNDH) was informed of the death of 88 journalists or media workers, allegedly murdered for their work, while 89% of attacks against journalists remain unpunished, according to the Knight Center for Journalism in the Americas (Badgen, 2014).

During Calderón’s government, the 2007 electoral reform limited the times of political propaganda, entailing reduction of revenue for television stations. The media reacted with fury and called it an attack on freedom of expression. Although Televisa was still receiving privileges from the State, many of its journalists attacked this measure. In the midst of a crisis of legitimacy, a questionable and ineffective drug war, Calderón had to yield, because he needed favors from mass media:

[The Calderon Administration] countersigned hundreds of concessions violating the criteria of the Court, becoming a lobbyist for broadcasters before Congress for tax exemption, breaching its word against the PRI and the PRD to promote a new media law, deferring until the last of its mandate the third national network television and inappropriately interfering in regulatory bodies so that their acts were in the interests of the television stations. The cherry on top of the cake was the approval of the concentration law -Cell-Televisa, which meant the largest concentration of communication resources like never before in the history of this country. (Calleja, 2012)

Calderón’s prostration to private media contrasted with the support that Televisa gave the PRI in presidential elections in 2012. Having turned into “factual power” (Lay, 2013) due to their influence on the public agenda and political decisions, the biased coverage of Televisa was, for many, a decisive element in the election of PRI’s Enrique Peña Nieto (former Governor of the State of Mexico). This result prompted a wave of criticism

and protests against the media (especially Televisa) for misinforming and not playing a democratic role in elections (Parish, 2012). One of the consequences was the creation of the citizen movement YoSoy132 [IAm132], formed initially by Mexican students who called for the democratization of the media and the rejection of the media imposition of Peña Nieto as President of Mexico. After taking over the Government, however, Peña Nieto passed a controversial reform to the Telecommunications Act, which – according to *El País* (Calderón, 2013; Martínez, 2015) – supposedly severed the duopoly of Televisa and TV Azteca. Nevertheless, some critics have described it as a political instrument that finally benefits Televisa and is detrimental to América Móvil, of the billionaire businessman Carlos Slim, according to the Knight Center for Journalism in the Americas (Martínez, 2013). In this political and media context, Brozo, the Scary Clown, became one of the most influential “journalists” of Mexico, first from an independent channel and, starting from 2002, from Televisa, the heart of Mexican media and factual power.

JOURNALISM VERSUS GLOBAL INFOTAINMENT

In today’s society of the spectacle, there is a global trend towards infotainment in the media. According to Baym (2008), infotainment refers to a certain group of programs that erase traditional distinctions between informative genres and television entertainment (Baym, 2008, p. 2276). It also refers to the globalization of a type of commercial television journalism, guided by *rating*, which favors flighty news – on celebrities, crimes, corruption and violence – and presents them in the form of a spectacle, thus replacing the news on political, civic and public interest issues (Thussu, 2007, p. 8). Delli Carpini and Williams (1994, 2001) suggest that infotainment is a phenomenon that crosses generic boundaries, problematizing the common idea that news are necessarily serious and that entertainment contains little socio-political significance. In reality, media content and public discourses are increasingly marked by hybridization: the mixture of genres in a media stage marked by streaming content in porous forms. Baym (2005) calls this process “discursive integration”, characterizing it where news, politics, entertainment and *marketing* languages have developed inseparably. These speeches, which once could be differentiated, have lost their distinctive ability and

merged into formerly unthinkable combinations.

In general, the infotainment and entertainment have been interpreted negatively in relation to democracy and political communication (Bourdieu, 1998; García Canclini, 2001; Postman, 1985). However, in times when American comedians Jon Stewart (*The Daily Show*) and Stephen Colbert (*The Colbert Report*) are considered two of the most influential “journalists” of the United States (“Today’s Journalists Less Prominent”, 2007), a large wave of academic work explores these new types of satirical Infotainment as critical voices that challenge the authority of traditional journalism and which have proven to be effective in political communication (Baym 2005, 2007, 2010; Borden & Tew, 2007; J. Jones, Baym & Day, 2012; J. P. Jones, 2010; Painter & Hodges, 2010; Smolkin, & Groves, 2007; Warner, 2007). Some critics have called these programs “neo-modern journalism” (Baym, 2005) or new types of “public journalism” (Faina, 2012), while others accuse it of promoting cynicism rather than civic engagement (Hart & Hartelius, 2007). Beyond the intense debate about the real effects in the audience (Amarasingam, 2011; Baumgartner & Morris, 2006; Feldman, 2013; Holbert, Lambe, Dudo & Carlton, 2007; Cao, 2010; Young, 2013), the existence and success of international cases of satirical Infotainment in countries as diverse as Australia (Harrington, 2012), Romania (Bardan, 2012), Germany (Kleinen - von Königslöw & Keel, 2012), Italy (Cosentino, 2012), India (Kumar, 2012) or Iran (Semati, 2012) give an account that this hybrid genre is globally consolidated as one of the main ways of political communication. Despite the importance of the global phenomenon of satirical Infotainment (Baym & Jones, 2012), works on Latin American cases are still emerging. With this academic framework, the case of Brozo is symptomatic to understanding the relationship between satire, journalism, popular culture and power in the Mexican context.

BROZO AS A MARGINAL AND JOURNALIST

Brozo, the Scary Clown, is the decadent contrast of the stereotypical child clown embodied by the remembered Bozo, the Friendly Clown [Bozo, el Payaso Amistoso], who entertained children on television during the 1970s. While Bozo had innocent stories to tell and used “white” humor, Brozo is a libidinous clown, misogynous, politically incorrect, a drunk and with a raspy voice from tobacco. With his green hair

and decadent appearance, Brozo is a bitter, indignant personage, who speaks with resentment and cynicism. He uses a sharp and biting humor, as well as vulgar expressions to criticize the social and political reality with a special focus on elites in Mexico. Unlike Brozo, Victor Trujillo, its creator, is a comedian and an educated journalist, who has worked as an announcer, Mexican voice actor, musician, and television presenter.

Besides the contrast to the stereotypical Bozo, the clown created by Trujillo also plays with the word "broza", Mexican slang that refers to "common people" and that, according to the Real Academia Española [Royal Spanish Academy], alludes to "waste or scrap". These two meanings reinforce its link with the popular classes and marginality. At the same time, the narrative of the character alludes to its marginal settings: Brozo was born in the Santa Martha Acatitla prison, where his mother (Brozamaría) was imprisoned for attempted murder. When she was released, she left him abandoned in the cell. Brozo went out to the world as an adolescent, he traveled to Tijuana, where he learned that his mother had died at the hands of drug traffickers. He met the hardness of the streets and won his daily bread telling stories. This is how he publicly debuted in 1988 in a bar in Mexico City. With a raspy voice he announced to the attendees: "Things are a bitch and it's going to get worse". Then he insulted the audience, mocked the President and joked about the recent electoral fraud. That same year, Brozo also debuted on television in the program *La Caravana* [The caravan], where he adapted classic works of children's literature, such as "The Pint Soldier" [El Soldadito de Pomol], "The tin soldier" [El Soldadito de Plomo], "Peter Pants" ("Peter Pan"), "Don Cogito de La Mancha" ("Don Quixote de La Mancha"), "El Priscilito" ("The little Prince" [El Principito]) and "King HIV" [Rey Sidas] ("King Midas" [Rey Midas]). Many of these stories were then compiled in the book *Cuentos tenebrosos* [Dark Tales].

The preamble of his stories was: "Children, do you want me to tell you a story? No? Well, screw you, I will tell it anyway". In this way perhaps he was announcing his destiny to be a presenter of, often, negative news.

The most recognized and influential facet of Brozo is precisely as a conductor of the popular news *El Mañanero* (whose different versions have been issued both on the radio as well as on Mexican television since the year 2000¹), whose name alludes, in slang, to a fleeting sex encounter after waking up. Under this

premise, Brozo has commented the news, interviewing personalities of the political, social, and cultural elite and in many cases marked the national agenda. A note on Brozo in *The New York Times* (2002), Trujillo explains his approach to journalism from comedy:

Comedy has always seemed the best way to deliver hard news. And within the realm of comedy, the best personality is one who is not vulnerable to attack. Brozo is misogynous. He is an alcoholic, a drug addict, irresponsible and dirty. There's nothing anyone can call him that he has not called himself. (Thompson, 2002)²

Already in 2001, Brozo's influence as a television commentator was evident: his coverage of the terrorist attacks on the Twin Towers on September 11 was the first and most viewed in local programming (Gaytan & Fregoso, 2002)³. After conducting programs at Imevision (later converted into TV Azteca) and CNI Channel 40, Brozo was acquired since 2002 by Televisa, Mexico's most powerful media group and one of the main television conglomerates in Spanish. Although Trujillo had been consistently critical of this television station and had suggested that he would never work in that media giant, the new phase of *El Mañanero* began at Televisa in 2002. For many critics, Brozo was a sell out. However, Trujillo has rejected repeatedly to have suffered any type of censorship and has ensured that his program maintains his critical stance towards power.

One of the most controversial unveilings of Brozo was the scoop of March 2004, the video scandal of René Bejarano, Deputy Coordinator of the PRD in the Legislative Assembly of the Federal District and functions. After receiving a video from a federal deputy of PAN in which Bejarano is shown receiving money from a businessman as part of an act of corruption, Brozo showed the images in his program. Coincidentally, Bejarano was giving an interview in another study of the same channel. Not knowing of the existence of the video, Bejarano agreed to appear in *El Mañanero*, where he was confronted by the clown and was exposed to the public. Thus, Brozo consolidated himself as one of the most incisive journalists on television. "Brozo was on top. We wanted to get into the news but we did not plan to have the media attentive of what we did or have them interview us or talk about us in a German newspaper (*Spiegel*), or a French one (*Le Monde Diplomatique*), the Yankees (*Seattle Times*), or Spanish ones (*La Voz de Galicia*)", said Trujillo over that period

to *Chilango* magazine (Vallejo, 2009, p. 2). After the Bejarano case, Trujillo received death threats and, according to his close collaborators, there were even attempts to link him to drug trafficking to discredit him. By then, Brozo was an influential voice in public debate and interviewed the most influential political leaders. “If Superman bends rods with a look, well, Brozo can eat up whatever politician you put next to him”, Trujillo told the newspaper *El Universal* (Alessandrini, 2005).

In its most recent version, *El Mañanero* airs Monday through Friday on Foro TV (Televisa’s channel) at 6:30 a.m. for two hours. With a backdrop that represents a solemn building of classical columns, as if it were a temple or institutional building, various images of Brozo are shown (illustrations, paintings, cartoons) as a popular culture icon. A trumpet sounds and a voice in off announces - “Arranca” [Start] – the beginning of the show. Brozo introduces the program saying the date of the day and then adds: “Kids, we are alive, only for today”. Thus begins the first segment of the program, where Brozo comments on the most important issue on the political agenda and the day’s news headlines are broadcasted. For example, a few days after the forced disappearance of the 43 normalistas of Ayotzinapa in Iguala, Guerrero, on September 26, 2014, Brozo editorialized about the national tragedy: he accused the degree of symbiosis between Government and organized crime, before satirically criticizing the procurator in charge of the case⁴.

The following main segment is called “Debatitlán, the Knights of the Polish Table”. This segment usually starts with images of Brozo’s “reata” - a woman in a thong with her eyes covered by a mask - sensually dancing a bolero or another musical genre at a bar. After this Carnival nod, the environment becomes serious. In “Debatitlán”, Brozo appears together with four other commentators and analysts, dressed in formal wear as in any political analysis television program. The commentators, mediated by Brozo, discuss issues on the agenda. For example, on the program of January 23, 2015⁵, one of the commentators presented to Brozo how the session would be organized: first, discuss the country’s political and administrative problems (beginning with the “wreck of the figure of a Commissioner from Michoacán”); Secondly, talk about issues related to the political violence in Mexico; and finally, review the internal movements of the main political parties. On the table there is a sign that says “days”, a reminder of the time that has passed since the tragedy of Ayotzinapa in Iguala.

Finally, “La Vaya Informativa” [The informative go] is the international segment, in which several fictitious correspondents report real news from sets that simulate different parts of the world. For example, John Lemon reports about the drastic reduction of fines and arrests made by the police in New York⁶, Juan Naranjo, the re-poet of news, reports from Spain about an art exhibition in Madrid focused on the issue of corruption⁷, or Jean Piña reports from South Carolina on immigration law⁸.

One of the controversial aspects of the program is the character of the Brozo’s secretariat, a woman dressed in a bikini with blindfolds that he calls his “Reata”⁹. The treatment that he gives to this character has provoked criticism, and he was even accused to the Gender Equality Commission of the Chamber of Senators for possible violations to human rights and the dignity of women (“Comisión del Senado verificará ‘El Mañanero’ de Brozo, por considerarlo ‘sexista y discriminatorio’” [Commission of the Senate will verify Brozo’s ‘El Mañanero’ after accusations of ‘sexism and discrimination’], 2012). Similarly, the renowned writer Carlos Monsiváis criticized Brozo’s humor as “inconsistent and shamefully homophobic” (Thompson, 2002). These critics, however, also understood the transgressor facet of the clown who ridicules the powerful: its vulgarity connects to a popular audience that feels represented (and avenged) in the criticisms the clown performs against the ruling classes. Or in the words of journalist Álvaro Cueva: “Brozo represents the dreams and vices of Mexican society” (Thompson, 2002).

SATIRE AND CARNIVAL

Satire is originally a literary genre that attacks and ridicules vices and human stupidity through caustic and corrosive humor. It uses parody, irony, farce and the grotesque to criticize what it considers “dangerous religious, political, moral or social standards” (Cuddon, 1991, p. 202). While comedy seeks for laughter as an end in itself, satire uses humor as a weapon to attack something it deems reprehensible (Abrams, 1985). The function of satire implies saying what is being silenced or has not yet been enunciated within a particular socio-political climate, often combining the impression of a social sector of not being heard (Colletta, 2009). Similarly, the satirical tradition is connected to the idea of Carnival - a state of fun mixed with social criticism. The Russian theorist Mikail Bakhtin (1984) developed

pioneer notions on the Carnival of the Middle Ages based on the analysis of French popular culture of the 16th century, that led him to locate the satirical and grotesque literature of Rabelais in a context of fun, rituals and spectacle. According to Bakhtin, the Carnival captures and reinterprets the sharp humor of ordinary people expressed in unofficial areas of popular culture, where it can mock the authority. Thus, he says, the Carnival is marked by a suspension of hierarchies, social barriers, rules and prohibitions of everyday life.

In the context of the aforementioned, Bakhtin emphasizes the Dialogic nature of the Carnival, which becomes a second universe organized around critical laughter over the institutional power. In this Dialogic discourse, our “first world” is suspended in the “second world” of the Carnival through the denial of their social rules (for example, the explicit impropriety or the references to bodily functions, as copulation and defecation). Carnival culture emphasizes the worldliness and the body through the use of grotesque imagery and language. By demoting a privileged subject, grotesque realism lowers it to the shared condition of a human being, of flesh and blood. And this brings people together: no matter the power that one holds, we are all united by our physical and mortal condition. At the same time, the Carnival language regenerates and reproduces new ways of thinking, by making fun of the conventions of the “first world”. It is a playful discursive space whose rhetorical posture shows that nothing is sacred and that the world may have different interpretations. Thus, “carnavalesque” behavior is transgressive and its most representative figure is a jester or “buffoon”, perhaps the only one who can tell the rawest truths in front of the King without getting beheaded.

BROZO, AS A CARNIVAL JESTER

Following the tradition of the jester, Brozo adopts the vulgar humor of “the commoners” to give voice to the dissatisfaction of ordinary people. It also criticizes, parodies and ridicules leaders, authorities and powerful figures of the country without suffering major consequences. Ruggiero (2007) discusses the character of Brozo as a jester’s subversive humor, which portrays the Mexican elite as stupid, immoral, and prone to illegal conduct. For example, it attacked and ridiculed Enrique Peña Nieto, then candidate of the PRI, for his bookish ignorance and political opportunism¹⁰.

It started as an intervention at the International Book Fair in which Peña Nieto presented a work, and Brozo satirically deconstructed the improvised and superficial speech of the politician. In the show, not only did he expose the inconsistencies in literary themes, but also revealed how these public demonstrations as a cultured authority were propaganda farces. Finally, after mocking the public appearance of Peña Nieto, Brozo incorporated his audience in his criticism on power: he read the hilarious and irreverent messages that his audience posted on Twitter. In this way, he directs a Carnavalesque collective space from where to “throw stones at power”.

The function of Brozo, however, is not limited to commentary and analysis, but it also comes to direct confrontation. In an interview with Peña Nieto in 2012¹¹, shortly before his election, Brozo reviewed the highlights of the national agenda, embodying at various times the outraged voice of the common citizen (for example, in regards to the widespread violence and the corruption of institutions). With similar authority and in the middle of a circus atmosphere, he also interviewed lengthily Andrés Manuel López Obrador, the candidate of the Party of the Democratic Revolution (PRD) in the 2006 presidential campaign¹². Amid a humorous environment and excessive comments from Brozo, his questions (and cross-examination) were incisive and in depth (for example, he questioned the electoral adherence of Sub-commander Marcos to the candidacy of Lopez Obrador, his relationship with the enterprise-class, tax matters, among others). Similarly, in 2006 the then National Action Party (PAN) candidate Felipe Calderón¹³ was interviewed, when he was first in the polls, finally being elected President of the country. In that interview, in addition to the political topics of the agenda, Brozo even managed confidences of the intimate life of the candidate. Three years later, however, Brozo used his program to confront the Calderón Government with the promises (or lies)¹⁴ of the campaign. These interviews to the most exclusive Mexican political elite are good examples of how Brozo is positioned as the influential jester who confronts power. Even the interviews begin with a recount and acknowledgement of the history and relationship between interviewer and interviewee, securing the figure of the clown as one of the political elite. Through his grotesque costume and marginal settings, this rude, boisterous and vulgar character is positioned immune

and critical in a privileged place from Televisa, the Royal Court of the structure of Mexican power in a democratic transition after 71 years of authoritarian rule:

Whatever Brozo says is news in this country. Because he is not a man, because he is a character, he can have total and absolute freedom of expression without suffering any consequences. He represents the opening of Mexico, the opening of the government of Fox and the opening of Televisa. He is a symbol of the new era we are living in this country. (Quoted in Ruggiero, 2007, p. 9)¹⁵

There is a long Mexican tradition of subversive and transgressive humor. Since colonial times, literature - as the poetry of Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz (Jhonson, 2000) or the narrative of Fernández de Lizardi (Ozuna, 2004) - already had a critical streak towards social and political elites. This is a tradition that has been enriched by writers such as Jorge Ibarguengoitia, Augusto Monterroso and Carlos Monsiváis. From the press, *El Hijo del Ahuizote* [*The son of el Ahuizote*] was a satirical magazine of cartoons founded in 1885, which held a lone critical position against the repressive dictatorship of Porfirio Díaz (Díaz-Duhalde, 2010; Escamilla Gil, 1982)¹⁶. In the Twentieth Century, critical humor also found spaces in the theatre and the modern audiovisual media. From 1911 until the end of the 1960's, the "carpas" [tents or "marquees"] were a kind of popular itinerant theatre in Mexico (Granados, 1984; Merlin, 1995). Unlike the classical circus, theatrical, representations of the carpas were simple and without greater scenic production. It combined satirical, musical representations and other genres close to popular magazines. Combining the Spanish medieval tradition of public theatre with the Aztec one, the carpas developed, first in the city of Mexico, and then in the rest of the country, in contrast to the "theatre of the rich" and their functions were accessibly priced to the economy of the village. With a sense of anarchic comedy, it also offered a space for social criticism and dissenting humor (Alzate, 2010; Pilcher, 2001). The characters included were marginalized stereotypes, such as of the "pelado" [baldie], the type of characters that were later immortalized in Cantinflas by actor Mario Moreno (Esterrich & Santiago-Reyes, 1998). Emerging from the slums, Cantinflas, mestizo and proletarian, with the aspect of a tramp, uses popular jargon and makes a mockery of the middle classes and elites, questioning the social differences (Pilcher, 2000,

2001; Stavans, 1995). Cantinflas became a symbol of Mexican national identity, and its creator was deemed Mexico's Charles Chaplin, acquiring great political influence¹⁷. One of the most remembered aspects of Cantinflas is his particular manner of speaking, which incorporated puns, slang and word plays. Like this character, Brozo incorporates the popular oral tradition and has a particular vocabulary. For example, one of his famous phrases is "prau, prau", to allude mainly to sexual intercourse. Trujillo coined this phrase in an era in which you could not speak directly of sex in Mexican television on primetime: he used verbal experimentation, combined with popular complicity, as a way to avoid censorship.

Although Brozo shares important characteristics with Carnival characters of Mexican audiovisual culture (such as Cantinflas or the Chavo del Ocho), it is essential to remember his particular distinctive characteristic: Brozo is a journalist, he comments the news, interviews and criticizes real characters of the political elites, and influences the public agenda of the media. Brozo's shows are broadcasted from news studios, which acquire a Carnavalesque shade through the combination of serious or traditional elements with other extravagant or absurd ones. His programs have included traditional commentators of news and parody characters that embody correspondents, traffic reporters or other related roles to journalistic work. In this way, he reaffirms the global trend towards satirical infotainment, while modern traditional journalism, largely financed by the State in Mexico ("El gobierno: Gran financiador de la prensa en México", 2015) [The government: Grand sponsor of the press in Mexico], 2015), faces an economic and legitimacy crisis.

CONCLUSIONS

Several critics argue that the Carnival is not really effective as a tool for change and that it can even serve to the purposes of power - people are amused, hierarchies inverted, power is mocked; then it returns to a thoughtless life, and hence end the transgression (Eco, 1984). In modern times, the Carnival spirit has been degraded and its utopian character reduced to a harmless and conservative humor (Bakhtin, 1984, p. 33). According to Glynn (2000), it was tabloid media who appropriated the characteristics of the Carnival culture to connect with popular audiences,

and gave it a melodramatic approach, with scandal and sexual intrigue (p. 115). Convoy (2002) says that the journalistic tabloid media often adopts a Carnival tone to cling to its authority as the voice of the people, doing mimicry of transgression. These media say they are on the side of the common man against power, but in reality, as media institutions, they belong to the structure of the capitalist elite. Thus, media tabloids commercialize Carnival impulses by transforming them into consumerism. The case of Brozo exists within this tension. On the one hand, it has been an influential agent of criticism against social and political elites during the democratic transition after 71 years of censorship and control of the monolithic and authoritarian PRI system. In the midst of an institutionalized corruption, in which journalists have served to power, Brozo has been part of the democratic anxiety to manifest criticism to power in the public discourse. Operating in the tradition of the Carnival jester, this clown has also achieved critical impunity in an environment ruled by violence against journalists (whether by public officials or organized crime). On the other hand, Brozo's Carnavalesque impunity exists within the limits of the Televisa media hegemony. Although it would be useful to have an analysis of detailed content to evaluate if there are substantial changes or not in its coverage before and after joining Televisa, it is evident that its critical discourse operates within commercial capitalist structure frames from the media giant. How much does this affect or not his specific treatment of political power is also a pertinent question to illuminate the borders of freedom of expression in the media and democracy in Mexico.

The influence and celebrity of Brozo not only evidences the deterioration of the authority of modern journalism, but also the consolidation of a tabloid mentality and the circus show of political communication. With the self-referential humor (and meta-references as well) associated with the postmodern media, the tradition of satirical infotainment to which Brozo belongs to grows and evolves in Mexico. For example, the case of *El Pulso de la República* [*The pulse of the Republic*], a satirical online

television show broadcasted independently via YouTube from 2013, which has become quickly one of the most influential and popular new mediums. In the manner of Jon Stewart and Stephen Colbert, Chumel Torres (the creator and host of *El Pulso de la República*) critically parodies the news agenda. Following the success of the program on Youtube, Televisa attempted to hire Torres, as it did with Trujillo. But, unlike Brozo (at least until this article was finished being written), Torres had not accepted and answered to the media giant: "You're the enemy" (Breiner, 2014). It is likely that the new landscape of digital media will open avenues for greater independence within the emerging phenomenon of satirical infotainment. However, in countries where television and radio are still the leading mass media, pressures from the Government or efforts of co-opting from large conglomerates are still recurring strategies.

In times in which spectacle and entertainment have colonized much of the news agenda and public debate, the satirical infotainment (and its subgenre of "false news") and media satire have gained great global importance. In Latin America there are revealing examples in various media platforms, such as magazines (*The Clinic* from Chile, *Barcelona* from Argentina or *Dedomedio* from Peru), television (Diego Capussoto and his videos from Argentina or Jaime Bayly from Peru) and numerous examples in digital media. The rise and critical potential of this phenomenon in Latin America demands a comparative analysis of representative cases in the region. Some outstanding questions for future research on satire media in Latin America are: how does satire negotiate its critical space within a commercial media system? What are the global aspects of the genre that are kept in different contexts and how is it adapted to local realities? What is its real impact beyond entertainment and how do the audiences interpret it? What are the special features of the contemporary Latin American satire? What is the importance of the national context for interpreting the discursive strategies of a satirical product? Has social criticism in the media become a meta-joke or does it have a real potential for political action?

FOOTNOTES

1. His most memorable infotainment programs are different versions of *El Mañanero*, *El Circo de Brozo* [The Circus of Brozo] and *El NotiFiero* [The NotiFier]. *El Mañanero* currently airs on the channel Foro TV (Televisa) Monday through Friday at 6:30 a.m.

2. "Comedy has always seemed the best way to deliver hard news. And within the realm of comedy, the best personality is one who is not vulnerable to attack. Brozo is misogynous. He is an alcoholic, a drug addict, irresponsible and dirty. There's nothing anyone can call him that he has not called himself". (Thompson, 2002)
3. Part of the program aired on 9/11 can be seen here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qGk2TljvOp0>
4. You can see Bronzo's monologue on the subject here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EXI9cDibbtg>
5. This episode can be seen on https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jv8N_-xeDi8 Other segments of "Debatitlán" can be seen on <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=P56oSyoST-M> ; <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=puhUfbLvhiA>
6. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y89Af5VzcRY>
7. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ki59Yuab-ro>
8. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=n09DuXTqYx8>
9. An appearance of the "Reata" can be seen at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tLGygyI27ZY>
10. The online video can be seen at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xAafGUVdYvk>
11. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TSGh28BdxEA>
12. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vZm2UEcFPIY>, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jA1ZaDnyQq4>
13. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SaM3I91Wigo>
14. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kYYru_cM8YM
15. "Whatever Brozo says is news in this country. Because he is not a man, because he is a character, he can have total and absolute freedom of expression without suffering any consequences. He represents the opening of Mexico, the opening of the government of Fox and the opening of Televisa. He is a symbol of the new era we are living in this country. (Quoted from "Nobody's fool: Brozo shakes up the status quo in Mexico" (2002). Retrieved Nov. 15, 2004 from online San Diego Union Tribune. <http://foros.enlaweb.com.mx/viewtopic.php?t=1427&sid>
16. There is a long tradition of satirical magazines and political caricature in Mexico. Two current examples are El Chamuco y los Hijos del Averno [The Chamuco and the children of the underworld] and the online animated caricature Mario Netas, posted on the web site of the newspaper Reforma which was later co-opted by Televisa under the name of Terapia Intensiva [Intensive therapy]. The column Política Cero [Zero Politic], by Jairo Calixto Albarrán, is also a satirical referent from the written press, while the radio program El Weso (broadcasted by W Radio of Televisa) also uses sociopolitical humor.
17. The success of Cantinflas in the Mexican Twentieth Century is only comparable perhaps to the one of the Chavo del Ocho, created by the comedian Roberto Gómez Bolaño (or "Chespirito"), another marginal character who questions the injustices and social differences.

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