Film as Aesthetic Experience and Work of Art

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Abstract: This study aims to show that cinema can produce works of art, especially in the current period, one that is still hyper-aesthetized, at least for a significant part of the audience, where watching movies has reached a climax. The approach we have followed in shaping the subject is progressive, drawing upon the theoretical and methodological framework of Aesthetics, Hermeneutics and Continental philosophy. The study begins with the characterization of art films, in order to distinguish them from mainstream films that contain certain artistic aspects and aesthetic features, at least in their shape or form. Afterwards, we shall highlight the features of the film as a work of art, the aesthetic categories that can be found at this level, the developed aesthetic experience, and other relevant theoretical aspects. In order to illustrate the theoretical notions of our study and to reveal the content in a concrete manner, we also included an applied part, in which, through the tools offered by the above-mentioned qualitative methodology, we analyzed three films. The interdisciplinary analysis shall reveal the aesthetic language and categories specific to each film as well as how they contain a message of a philosophical nature that can act through certain scenes and sequences as an analogy for various philosophical concepts. The study will end by highlighting some conclusive ideas.

Keywords: *Art film; aesthetic categories; aesthetic experience; hermeneutics.*

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1. Introduction

Art is the synthesis of aesthetic elements resulting from the blending of form and content. In this respect, the present study is intended to be an incursion into cinematic aesthetics, aiming to illustrate the fact that there are two types of films, namely *films* and *art films*. The films in the second category have a special meaning because, through their deeply aesthetic form and content, they can be formative, expressing some philosophical, religious, aesthetic and existential reflections, and so on. The aim of our study is to show that the art film is able to clarify some philosophical notions by efficiently and ingeniously cutting the scenes. In this sense, it is necessary to conceptualize the screenplay under aesthetic and narrative aspects, and also the in-depth knowledge of the concepts depicted or intended. On the other hand, the relevance of the discussed subject is supported, in the context of the assumed methodology, by the perspective of the formative-educational role of the aesthetic assessments and appreciations that are formulated, and can also be regarded as an introductory study of cinematic hermeneutics. Motivated by its ability to appreciate, that in a relatively accessible field, like that of films, the interest in philosophical reflection and especially in aesthetics can be raised and increased, because beauty is an inherent part of life and all that it encompasses, aesthetic interest and education in this regard can be beneficial. Thus, in the following lines, we will initially show that art cinema has its roots in the avant-garde films that were born as experimental projects, followed by the description of the constitutive elements of film as a work of art. Then, we will argue that an art film has a unique aesthetic language, which mandates hermeneutical involvement from the viewer, both emotional and intellectual, and in the end we will outline an applied, aesthetic and philosophical interpretation of the films: *The Matrix*, *Persona*, *Stalker*.

2. Cinematography and art

Cinema is called “the sixth art”, later “the seventh art” (Canudo, 2013: 12), meaning that all films, artworks or not, contain aesthetic elements. That is why we considered necessary to signal the distinction between art films and mainstream films. Art films are those that, in their thematic, compositional and stylistic aspect (Aristarco, 1965: 25), lean towards the artistic outlook, as well as cinematic art, which requires profound emotional involvement for an adequate reception. Mainstream films, by contrast, are devoid of the characteristic substance that arouses aesthetic pleasure and inner feelings, being made in a commercial system that exclusively pursues

profit. In such films, the main focus is to highlight the protagonist and the subject through effortless technical means, often being of a non-aesthetic cinematic quality. In art films, the emphasis is not only the cinematic quality and the depth of the themes, including the philosophical aspect, but we also find the author, the creator of the film, at the forefront, by means of their own artistic vision. In the context of this distinction, we can appreciate that art movies have somewhat begun to be neglected, while, more recently, films without artistic vision, without a narrative that requires deciphering or interpretation are more prevalent. As a result, the potential of art films is not fully exploited in the current period, when, paradoxically, we are witnessing an unprecedented diversification of the means of promotion, distribution and viewing. The targeted audience segment of this genre being still very limited, perhaps attributed to a precarious aesthetic education.

The film was born in the period between the centuries, but it was then considered a form of entertaining targeting consumerism. In the 20's, the silent film appears, which embodies various forms of artistic expression, and facilitates the affirmation of a number of consecrated filmmakers, such as C.Chaplin, F.W. Murnau, F. Lang etc. In the following period, important theorists of cinema, each with their own definitions, appeared: L'Herbier who perceived cinema as a printing machine of life; G.Bofa claimed that cinema was the mobilization of the absurd, and for J.Tedesco, it represents the state of a new sense (Aristarco, 1965: 48).

How did cinema come to be considered new art form? Nevertheless hard to define, we could say that art refers to human creativity built up in profound and expressive structures, while aesthetics is a branch of philosophy that seeks to analyse beauty, the main aesthetic category, along with the other, positive and negative categories, in order to study the forms of art but also of non-art and to interpret the aesthetic creations and objects in general. Thus, the two intertwine, since art is the main field of aesthetics, which through its forms and contents invites to sensory knowledge as a form of phenomenal knowledge. Artistic creation can be perceived as the materialization of thoughts, ideas, feelings, beliefs, with the aim of externalizing them in a unique, timeless and authentic manner, the latter constituting the very features of artistic objectives. Art "symbolizes the meaning of our existence" (Tarkovski, 2015: 12), it sensitizes the receiver, makes it flexible, and creates an atmosphere of philosophical, moral, religious, mystical, unrepeatable and unique connotations.

On the path of German idealism and Hegelian philosophy, at the end of the 19th century the aesthetic writings admit that there are five arts: architecture, sculpture, painting, music and poetry. Later, Canudo argued

that both sculpture and painting are subsumed to architecture, taking into account the rhythm of space, while poetry and music are subsumed by the rhythm of time and saw the film as the midpoint between this two rhythms (Aristarco, 1965: 39). All of these arts involve two fundamental elements, orbiting around the aesthetic act. First, the artist, the one who creates, materializing the artistic objects and the perfect forms through his significant experiences, which supplies them the necessary expressiveness. Second, the aesthetic receptor (the audience) who becomes a part of the aesthetic creation by capturing and deciphering the message transmitted by the artist, embodying his emotional, psychological, moral, religious or other philosophical implications. Together, the artist, the work of art and the audience form an indivisible unit. Thus, the aesthetic experience takes place, beginning with astonishment, where the object is presented under two aspects: sensory and then intellectual, the pleasure related to it, manifesting as a distinctive one, not one of general access.

Watching an art film produces a specific aesthetic experience, due to the form (style) and content (the ideas and messages contained and transmitted). Art films originate in avant-garde, which is a starting point for potentiating specific expressive means, such films somewhat representing the mass not being produced for the large audience, they symbolize what is expressed beyond rationality, the rhythm being the condition of film poetry (Aristarco, 1965; Yates, 2006). They are experimental, to the extent that they experience images, ideas found in the behaviour of the actors, not a commercially oriented aspect. They also have their roots in the desire of surrealist painters to expand their artistic horizons in a whole new way. The avant-garde filmmakers considered that the topic was not important, but focus on the rhythm and dynamic expressions to determine the human eye to meditate, to be involved in artistic creation, having to shift its attention from a sequence, detail or from one part to another, which can be endless, thus creating a vastly different sensation from the rest of the arts. The attributes of the art film include the provision of creating authentic, original schemes, different from the current standards, as well as a niche audience with aesthetic sense, art film being able to express indefinable emotions and experiences (Bazin, 1968: 121).

3. Art-film elements and cinematic language

The technical elements that make the film an art are: the frame, the close-up, and the cutting (Martin, 1981: 84). Through the frame, we encounter the experiences of the characters, as well as those of the creator,

the artist, the one who reveals emotions, irony and sympathy. Regarding the close-ups (the cinematic framework in which the performers are filmed up-close), if a face suddenly appears visual dominating the frame, it must have a meaning point where the receiver participates in the discovery of that drama. It is not just the face or the physical appearance that is elevated, but also the intimate and psychological values of the character. Through the close-up shot, the filmmaker reveals his artistic sensibility, that is, by choosing the right actor, the director makes poetry. Unlike theatre, film allows the readings of the faces by our appropriating them and by their isolation from the environment that can distract attention. Therefore, in a film, any facial expression takes the form of a fundamental feature of that character, supplying clues about the characters inner feelings. The close-up shot is complementary to the arrangement of the cutting of the film by which a director ensures the fluidity of the film rhythm, in which the details are merged by merging and fading from one to the other but at the same time without losing its sense and meaning. The cutting process is almost inscrutable from the viewer's perspective; by using it, the filmmaker creates that intuitive sense that is not actually contained in the images, but which is inferred from the fluid relations between them.

Most theorists consider cinematography being diverse and abundant in aesthetic elements (Bordwell & Thompson, 2012). The aesthetics of the film postulates the existence of a certain cinematic language, discovered only through regular film viewings, not to forget adding an appropriate aesthetic education. We have seen that aesthetics is means considering a reflection of significance phenomena, considered to be artistic phenomena. Therefore, the aesthetics of cinema follows the study of cinematography as art and, implicitly, of films as bearers of artistic messages; it orbits around beauty, the aesthetic category of excellence, but also taste, audience and theorist.

Cinematic language has as its central focus on the image. It materializes because of a technical device that renders or reproduces reality in an objective way. The cinematic image reproduces what is captured by the camera, and the recording of reality is by definition an objective perception. The cinematic image contains almost all appearances of reality, hence the sense of reality is created for the viewer, Tarkovsky asserting that "film is a perceptible art and so is perceived by the spectator as a parallel reality" (Tarkovski, 2015: 28). In the context of art films, cinema expresses general or abstract ideas based on images that may be more or less symbolic. Here is where the spectator's consciousness steps in, extracting the symbolism of the scene or scenes through the resulting shock when faced with the conflation of the images, known as ideological montage. Being always present, it joins

the present of our perception and conscience. It is only reason that can perceive the temporal gap and place the events in the past in relation to us or determine more temporal levels in the action thread of the film.

The cinematic image reproduces reality, the realism of the reproduction being dynamized by the artistic vision of the filmmaker, emphasizing the affective perceptions of the audience provided by condensed and passionate images about reality. For example, we are often touched by certain scenes in films, which, if they happened in reality, perhaps would not move us at all, or at least not to the same extent. The film image therefore contains both a sensory and an emotional coefficient that has its roots precisely in the way it transcribes reality, not being a simple representation. We are dealing with the concept of photogenesis, this being that something that conveys reality to the cinematic world (Martin, 1981: 31). It remains, however, a subject of discussion if photogenesis inherently exists in things, or just in cinematographic representation. The art film is indeed an elite creation that contains a multitude of meanings and significances, where the dramaturgy combines with the poetic personal vision of the filmmaker (Damian, 2003: 26) being specific to directors such as: M.Antonioni, F.Fellini, I.Bergman, A.Tarkovsky, O.Welles, A.Kurosawa and many others. Such a film invites a special type of reflection, conveys a message to be contemplated, with obsessively long-lasting sequences, in clear to contrast commercial films.

4. Cinematography and philosophy

Films are not only aesthetical, they also include philosophical ideas or themes of their own truth revealed by stylistic means, as well as various perspectives on the human condition (Falzon, 2002: 75). From an aesthetic perspective, films can address philosophical issues in a concrete way, that is, they can outline and give expressiveness to existential, metaphysical, ethical, religious visions, which are sometimes lost in abstractions and universalizations, forgetting connections with real state of human existence.

Some films have a more pronounced philosophical character than others, and philosophical issues are encountered in both mainstream and art movies in a wide range of genres. Thus, Falzon references P. Verhoeven's *Total Recall* (1990) (Falzon, 2002), which he mentions startled to realize that a commercial science fiction film, which addresses a wide audience, raises a lot of interesting questions not only about personal identity, but also about what we can definitely state we know or have knowledge of. It could be argued that, with sufficient ingenuity, any film could be philosophically relevant

insofar as it relates to an aspect of human existence. However, it is necessary to note that some films require more aesthetic ingenuity in order to be more philosophically relevant than others. Other films are easily presented in connection with various philosophical themes. This circumstance also supports the assertion that, in identifying philosophical positions, themes or questions that are presented in certain films, we do not only reveal meaning, but reveal something deeper than what happens in the films.

In terms of content and form, an art film is presented as unconventional and symbolic, with a distinct metaphorical component that differentiates it from commercial films, gravitating around purely aesthetic motifs and reasons. Such films sometimes appropriate an ambiguous appearance, with philosophical characters that allow exploring the ideas of directors with strong personalized elements. So, depicting a part of reality chosen and captured from a special perspective, in which the director expresses within the frame of the film his subjective will. In such films, most of the predominant philosophical visions are existentialism, nihilism, mysticism, deconstructivism, postmodernism, and as aesthetic categories - the sublime, absurd, tragic, alienation, estrangement, unfolding against a background of beauty (or its correlated medium, the negative), the essential aesthetic category. This appreciation can be sustained also for the three films we will be referring to in the following, namely, *The Matrix*, *Persona* and *Stalker*. Both, the form and the content of this films, present several attributes of the artwork, such as originality, uniqueness, symbolic stylization, specific aesthetic categories, as we are about to see. In addition, we can appreciate that, regarding the philosophical problems addressed, the three films have a postmodern character, especially due to the accentuation of the idea of the crisis and loss of the self, of the end, alienation, despair, anxiety, anomie, absurdity. All these attributes can be found both in the characters of the films, as well as in the role of the human, generally speaking, and society.

The postmodernism of the three films also resides in their ability to express, through artistic language, the fall of the human being, fragmentation, anguish, loneliness, such as Elisabeth and Alma in *Persona*, uniformity, anonymization, and artificiality of the human - society as a whole in *The Matrix*, nihilism and loss of faith, if we refer to the Writer and the Physicist in *Stalker*.

Another interesting aspect, specific to philosophical postmodernism, is that, in all three films, the exclusive cult of reason as a (modern) way of knowledge is criticized, the emphasis being on the split between rationality-sensitivity and the emergence of extra-rational factors (sensitivity, aesthetic

emotions, in the case of *Persona*) or supra-rational (imagination and mystical meditation, in the case of *The Matrix* and *Stalker*). The ambiguous and strongly metaphorical character of some contents and messages, the narrative techniques specific to the three films, as well as the refusal to suggest a certain ending, are also elements of philosophical postmodernism.

4.1. *The Matrix*

The Matrix, directed by The Wachowski Brothers, is a science fiction film about which the two have stressed in an interview that it has several levels of philosophical sense. About this particular film, Falzon feels that it operates as a philosophical paradigm in itself, and can be associated with the "brain in a vat" or "Descartes' demon", as there are many references to the dream issue and the fact that we can dream without knowing, which the philosopher pointed out in his argument (Falzon, 2002: 29). The rebel leader, Morpheus, played by Laurence Fishburne, refers to the Greek god of dreams. His name express also the linguistic root of morphine, a medicine that induces sleep and relieves pain, but also "morphing" as "using informational technology to seamlessly glide from one reality to another" (Schuchardt, 2003: 16) referencing the distinction between the two worlds, the one of the dream (which seems to be the real world) and the world of the waking state (Matrix). When Morpheus recruits Neo (Keanu Reeves), he offers him the opportunity to awaken from the state of illusion he is in, asking him a Cartesian question: "Have you ever had a dream, Neo, that you were so sure was real? What if you were unable to wake from that dream? How would you know the difference between the dream world and the real world?" (Falzon, 2002: 30). Moreover, because the matrix is a collective illusion, with people sharing the same illusory reality, the resemblance to the myth of Plato's cave is clear. Cypher (Joe Pantoliano), a modern Judas, betrays those on the Nebuchadnezzar to escape the harsh reality, preferring the fake comfort produced by the matrix. He is like the prisoners in the cave, who, once their illusions are overcome, overwhelmed and confused, prefer the initial state, choosing illusory happiness over truth. The film can also be interpreted as a religious parable, targeting mankind marked by wrong ways, where hope or salvation are missing if there is no miracle. Therefore, Neo symbolically fulfils the role of Christ, Morpheus interpreting the role of God, instructing the Nebuchadnezzar inhabitants and guiding Neo. Trinity states at one point about Morpheus that: "He is like a father for us." The techno-slavery in the film can be associated with the biblical conception of the bondage that man creates by his own will. Morpheus tells Neo "You're a slave"; "You are born in captivity," referencing "the analogy

of the Judeo-Christian understanding of slavery as damnation" (Schuchardt, 2003: 13-14). The name of the female character, Trinity, clearly references the three divine beings, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

In this way, *The Matrix* combines in a novel way cinematographic art and philosophy, being a metaphorical film that offers the opportunity for various interpretations, which are useful to penetrate its content beyond the artistic imagery. The Wachowski Brothers did not simply create a film, but a highly suggestive philosophical framework, namely a reflection exercise, whose work can be summed up in questions such as: What is The Matrix and what is our role? Do we accept our condition or try to overcome it? Like any other art film, we need to examine it thoroughly to understand the important aspects. Thus, *The Matrix* is a sort of mirror reflecting a post-human reality, a hyper-technological society, driven to the extreme. Also, the society presented in The Matrix and the people as individuals are uniformed, both as behaviour and as external features, anonymous, lacking a critical perspective, juxtaposed with an existential super-technological background, in the last instance of a hyper-reality "simulacrum", in J.Baudrillard terms (Constable, 2004: 52), artificial, these being elements that bring the film closer to the ideas of philosophical postmodernism.

4.2. *Persona*

Under the original director category, we find Ingmar Bergman, whose archive includes shattering films, often filled with sadness and disappointment, which put the meaning of life under question. *Persona* was written, directed and produced in 1966. The film is a psychological drama about the relationship between two women, a successful actress named Elisabeth Vogler, who stopped talking during a play, though according to the doctor's diagnosis she is perfectly healthy, both physically and mentally, and Alma, a nurse taking care of her. The two retreat to the doctor's vacation home, where therapy seems to be reversed, that is, Alma talks openly about her life, often speaks without receiving any response, even revealing a lot of her secrets (the fact that she deceived her husband, that she had an abortion) and finds it increasingly hard to separate. It is known that "alma" means soul in the Spanish and Portuguese languages, while "persona", etymological (from Latin) refers to a theatrical mask, a role taken by someone, for example by an actor. In Jungian psychoanalytical theory, to which Bergman often refers (Vermilye, 2007: 85) "persona" is the mask that man shows others, allowing them to adapt to the surrounding world, often in conflict with their own personality (Livingston, 2009: 16). Gradually,

during the film, Alma loses persona, that mask of lies and self-preservation that defines her identity and gives meaning to life.

This art film has been subjected to many analyses, neither of them being final nor absolute, dealing with topics specific to postmodern philosophy, such as: alienation, duality, personal identity, sexual identity, otherness, schizophrenia, abortion, maternity, the absence of any transcendent meaning, the rejection of traditional moral values, moral relativism, and so on. It's a complex and ineffable film, not easily accessible. Bergman has always considered this film as one of his most important, mentioning: "Today I think in *Persona* - we went as far as I could. In this case of total artistic freedom, I have touched on secrets that cannot be uttered in words and which only cinema can discover" (Livingston, 2009: 19).

As the predominant aesthetic category of the script or of the subject itself is the tragic (the loss of human values, a complex of penitent feelings), while at the level of the the artistic beauty and the naturally-human image, both actresses being surprised in suave hypostases, delicate and tender, with concern for the symmetry of the elements of the body, such as the face, the eyes, thus the body as a whole. The dramatic also appears, by destroying a balance, in this case, the inner balance marked by the relationship between identity and otherness. We also encounter two negative categories: the inferior and the obscene, through the negative performance defying the elementary moral principles (also among them, the revelation of Alma's secrets).

As functions of the work of art found in *Persona*, we delimit three. First, we can identify the function of communicating emotions, feelings, sensations, visions (of the director, but not only). In this sense, cinematic creation can also act as a therapist for the director. Second, we note a function of knowledge, in the sense of the development of human consciousness and knowledge, revealing a form of truth, that is, revealing the specificity of human existence, the fact that is marked by a duality. This function is particularly reminiscent of the interesting dialogues of the film, inserted with existential problems, feelings of the characters designated by those qualities of form that compel us to decipher their meaning. We distinguish the purely aesthetic formative function, the film being able to form aesthetic taste, especially through its original visual dimension, through the specific, beautiful, sublime minimalist frames, through exceptional acting.

The content of the film is one that encompasses obvious philosophical elements, appropriate for various levels of interpretation. For example, it can be considered a metaphor of the subconscious or the

unconscious, expressing metaphorically a personality that consumes the other, the merger of two personalities into one or a person with different personalities who get to merge (Vermilye, 2007: 93). From another angle, regarding the postmodern philosophy, we might consider that *Persona* reveals the loss of identity (the fragility of the ethical landmarks of the two characters being significant in this regard), namely, the assumption of a new one: the actress relinquishes talking because of the fact that she can no longer lie or no longer say only what society expects of her, after which Alma loses, as we have seen before, also her own identity. Therefore, understanding such a film requires the complex involvement of the personality of the receiver, aesthetically, emotionally and intellectually.

4.3. *Stalker*

Stalker is directed by Andrei Tarkovsky in 1979, based on the novel "Roadside Picnic" (1972) written by Arkady and Boris Strugatsky, but is largely distant from the initial vision presented in the book, with the common ideas of the *Stalker* and *Zone*. Although, in a very general, first glance, *Stalker* seems to belong to the science fiction genre, however, taking into account the aesthetic dimension and the artistic language, the original link between the form-content and the novel way of approaching the film is rather experimental, both visually, narratively and conceptually. Multiple visual symbols have varied cultural and spiritual connotations, enticing to decipher them, that is why we can appreciate a hermeneutic approach of the film can only be a postmodern one, namely "perspectival" (Nietzsche, 1969) and "open" (Eco, 1989) one, so in the next part we will outline one of the various possibilities of interpretation.

There are three characters who aim to reach the so-called *Zone*, which the Stalker considers to be a corner of Heaven, where a room where desires are fulfilled exists. Access being prohibited, a new job, the one of Stalker, was created to help people get there, only being appropriated by the outlaws of society. The main character, the Stalker, whose name is not mentioned, travels to the *Zone* together with a *Writer* and a *Physicist*, that is, symbolically, the artist (the disobeying, rebel, nonconformist, cynical type) and the scientist (rigorous, disciplined, methodical, pragmatic). This art film impresses through the depth of images and content, thus of cinematic language, which raises the aesthetic sensitivity of the receiver and at the same time calls for reflection on the spiritual and existentialist approach of the three characters in search of the room of desires. The central idea is that ultimately the two, the Writer and the Physicist, do not know what they really want and are afraid to enter the room because they have been warned

by the Stalker that only the deepest desires are fulfilled, the pure, sincere, born of suffering, which concur with the nature of each individual.

The film has two parts (each with specific cultural and spiritual connotations) that are directly observable by the fact that at first, before traveling, that is outside the *Zone*, the world seems to be fallen apart (symbolically, it can be interpreted as a post-Christian world, post-apocalyptic, post-industrial), the frames of the film depict seemingly abandoned buildings and homes, industrial ruins, mud and rust. All of these aspects are filmed in sepia, emphasizing an aesthetic correlation to the external degradation, but at the same time to the interior of the characters marked by spiritual disintegration, despair, desolation. In contrast, in the *Zone*, the images are colourful, reminiscent of life, naturalization, vivification, paradise, spiritualization. We could say that the beginning part reflects the inner states of the characters, desperation, which in the case of the Stalker disappear once they arrive in the *Zone*, where everything is colourful and looks alive, dynamic, that is, in aesthetic language, a spiritualized vital dimension. So an ingenious use of form and aesthetic content to accentuate the distinction between the outside world and the inside of the *Zone*, namely the distinction between ignorance-rescue, doubt-belief, disintegration/ fall - spiritualization/ purity.

From the visual point of view, the main aesthetic categories identified (in antithesis) are the ugly and the beautiful. In the first part of the film, the ugly is accentuated by the frames of relentless, muddy and industrial areas, some negative features of the human condition (evil, pride, envy, helplessness), while the beauty of the *Zone*, especially the natural beauty, (forests, trees, in this context the green symbolizing life, rebirth, paradise, hope, joy, eternity), but also rivers and waterfalls, which appear in another hypostasis in the second part, water being also a cosmogonic and religious symbol for life and regeneration. The poetic is also present because it consists of metaphorical or allusional rendering, Tarkovsky's film is extremely expressive on both visual (in its form) and content level - in an emotive sense of being human, being an individual without faith, prone to failures and sinful, but one which does not lose hope. The interesting is found in what the film communicates in a novel way, as an original synthesis of the known-unknown, claiming a decipherment of meanings. In this way, the end of the film is representative, because we know that we have desires, but we do not really know the deepest ones. The film poses more questions than gives answers, moment when our perception is awakened, and our appreciative-aesthetic attitude is strengthened. We realize through Tarkovsky's films that there are so many things about ourselves that we do

not know. The main aesthetic category is the sublime, perceived both during and after watching the film, when contemplation occurs, because it is then we become aware of the association with religious and ethical symbols and values. First of all, we tend to withhold in the face of content, but by echoing the characters and engaging empathy, pleasure occurs at a later stage, generating deep inner tensions. The film goes beyond the discourse of intellectual persuasion and looks at the state of anxiety that engulfs man, precisely in order to open new spiritual and moral facets.

As a cinematographic work, the film has a religious function, being reminiscent of many sacred symbols and apophatic Eastern theology elements. This is most evident from the analogical layout of the characters throughout the movie as the *Trinity*, from the very beginning when the characters are in the tavern where the atmosphere is sordid and unwelcoming. At first, the spectator is excluded; the Writer and Physicist are having a tense discussion while the Stalker looks down. In a second phase, all three are positioned with their backs to each other, suggesting lack of communication, lack of hope, cold atmosphere and environment, and towards the end of the film, again in that tavern, the protagonist looks at the spectator, where we explicitly find the communication function. We can also appreciate that the film has a knowledge function (reveals aspects of the human existence), a formative-aesthetic function (due to visual poetry), and a soteriological function (the purifying effect of the possibility of salvation).

The *Stalker* expresses a cryptic message that must be distinguished by interpreting images, scenes, dialogues and the narrative, and Tarkovsky provides symbolic landmarks throughout the film to guide the viewer. In *Stalker* we are dealing with "the theme of human dignity and suffering from the lack of own dignity" (Tarkovski, 2015: 67). This is what the director wants to communicate, that we are all desperate at some point in the sense that we have doubts about our own beliefs. The Stalker, irrespective of his or her own state of affairs and emotions (oppressive), does not refuse the call and accepts to help (offer salvation) those who have lost their hopes, faith being an evident symbolic Christian dimension, being the only character able to enjoy the penetration of the Zone. Also, the Zone is in aesthetic language a metaphor of life, faith, love, hope, salvation, and taboric space, in contrast to what lies outside it - a dimension of lack of faith, passive nihilism, boredom, and abstract lucidity. The sublime perception of the Zone consists in the fact that the effect of its presence is ambivalent: it attracts and frightens, fascinates and terrifies at the same time.

The film's meanings are multiple and are partly based on education, aesthetics, culture, experience, spirituality/ religiosity and age the audience.

The theme of the film is "the meaning of life, the purpose of man on earth" (Vacariu, 2013: 75) in other words, it refers to the specificity of the human condition. The theme around which the whole story orbits becomes clear at the end of the trip, when the Stalker tells his wife about those he accompanies in the Zone which call themselves "intellectuals, writers and researchers, but hold no belief. For them, the organ of faith is atrophied for lack of use" (Tarkovski, 2015: 98). All three face lack of faith, the writer losing faith in himself as an artist, the Professor does not believe in the Zone's ability to fulfil desires, nor in humanity, while the lack of hope of the Stalker stems from the inability to fully complete his messianic role of guiding people, observing the superficiality and intentions with which they enter the Zone. Moreover, the Zone induces a strong sense of self-contempt and introspection in those who travel inside it, which intensifies their states.

Tarkovsky denied that he used symbols, confessing that he preferred metaphor as a form of expression, since the symbols contain definite meanings, while the metaphor is an undefined image in what sense is concerned, an image possessing the same distinctive features as the world it represents (Tarkovski, 2015: 118). However, this does not mean that we cannot identify symbols to which we attribute interpretations and meanings. In this way, the scene in which the black dog appears, one of the most important animal symbols, we could say that it has the role of contrasting between something that has consciousness and something that does not, as we see how vulnerable people are in the Zone, falling prey to doubts and despair, while the dog wanders effortlessly. It is known that animals show more compassion than some human beings, hence the fact that he sits next to the Stalker, and not next to the others, when exhausted, he lies down, symbolizing not only loyalty, attachment, protection, vigilance, but also mediation between dead-life, underground space-celestial space. Another very important element is water, which is present throughout the film, a symbol of thirst, baptism (at one moment we see an icon in the water depicting John the Baptist), but also purity. During the trip, the three encounter waterfalls, rivers, flooded tunnels, leaking roofs, rains, and even after they have to travel through a flooded tunnel, none of them attempt to dry themselves down, as a purification process before they reach the *Zone*.

Conclusions

The film, the last of the arts, is a bridge to the inside of human reality, requiring both intellectual and affective involvement in its reception, as art films communicate meanings and visions, including philosophical

ones, in an original aesthetic language, generating profound and unique aesthetic experiences. Art cinema is represented, as we have seen, by those metaphorical and symbolic films, whose themes trigger profound experiences when we contemplate the image together with the content, resulting in a new form of knowledge that seeks to decipher and understand the meanings. Thus, cinematic aesthetics imply a hermeneutics that is based, on the one hand, on the symbolism of the forms and, on the other hand, on a complex - psychological and intellectual analysis of the content through which the external world is replaced by the images on the screen. In the art film, aesthetic categories reveal reality with a therapeutic, soteriological or purely aesthetic purpose, especially through pronounced emotional characteristic. In this sense, the film as a work of art has a distinctive language, in which the meaning is rooted in both the suggestive images and the content rendering, which once projected into the viewer's consciousness, gives it its own aesthetic experience and interpretation.

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