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*SIGN AND SENSE IN CINEMATIC IMAGE: FROM
STRUCTURALIST SEMIOLOGY TO POSTMODERNISM*

-SUMMARY OF THE Ph.D. THESIS-

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*The technical field demultiplies, disassembles,
endlessly disorientates the infinite welding of Sense.*

Jean-Luc Nancy, *Une pensée finie*

Key words: Image, scopic regime, cinematic image, aura, structuralism, semiology, sign, signified, signifier, code, ideology, motion-image, time-image, simulacrum, postmodernism, pastiche, parody, sense, *medium-specificity*.

This Ph.D. thesis focuses on the research of the theories on the cinematic image as a sense-producing medium.

The term "cinematic image", in its common acceptance, comprises a sequence of distinct phenomena, each of them part of a specific theoretical approach. If we were to mention but a few important aspects: it makes reference to an institution, a signifying production and to aesthetics, as well as to a set of consumption practices. Although the reflection on cinematic image was traditionally based on expressive (focusing on the artist), mimetic (art as imitation of the world) or formalist (art conceived as object) fundamentals, **our approach seeks to demonstrate** that the impact of structuralist semiology, and later of postmodernism, meant adding something different to these theoretic fundamentals of the cinematic image and generated a kind of fusion of interests, despite having a completely different focus, namely: investigating the social and ideological process of producing sense. At the border of the two approaches lies Gilles Deleuze's complex 2-volume project, *Cinéma 1. L'image-movement* and *Cinéma 2. L'image-temps*, which aims to separate the cinematic image from the idea of representation, in order to invest it with its

own internal, extra-linguistic, post-logocentric strength. The semiologic approach to visual messages - and implicitly to cinematic images – was based on the following questions: "what makes an image become senseful?" and "does the cinematic image use a specific language?" If so, what is this language, what are its components and what distinguishes it from the verbal language?"; representational images and language share a dependency on some specific cultural codes. This is the point in which in Postmodernism the ideological cannot be separated from the cultural, the representational, and thus, from the cinematic images. We must here discuss the politics of representation because, as we well know from Marx, through Althusser and through to Fredric Jameson, "ideology is the representation of the imaginary relationships that individuals in a given society consider to be real conditions of existence"¹. Therefore, what postmodern theory and practice suggest is that it has always been a cultural issue, that is to say, it has been mediated by representations. But, as Linda Hutcheon notes, this does not mean "that the representation dominates and cancels the referent, but rather that now, it consciously recognizes its status, i.e. it recognizes that it interprets (creates) its referent, without providing direct and immediate access to it"². In doing so, postmodern films suggest that the narrative derives its reality from the cultural conventions that determine not only the narrative, but also the construction of reality.

We believe that the **novelty and importance of this topic** lies in the fact that our approach proposes a study of the theories on cinematic images as a sense-producing medium in a philosophical area that has been somewhat ignorant of this theme, despite the many disciplines that deal with the study of the cinematic image (audio-visual communication, film studies, etc.). But the importance of our approach is also given by the fact that our research is carried out by a double methodological route: philosophical and interdisciplinary.

The assumption on which this research is based is that the contemporary world gives itself away and signifies through image as well, while the cinematic image is essentially a discourse about the world. In fact, the film "speaks" about the existence of the world as an image and thus becomes a means of signifying and preserving the collective memory. Thus, our assumption is superimposed on Martin Heidegger's remark that proves to be more modern than

¹ Louis Althusser, *Citindu-l pe Marx*, Editura Politică, București, 1970

² Linda Hutcheon, *Politica postmodernismului*, Ed. Univers, București, 1997

ever: "the image of the world (*weltbild*), understood in its essential form, does not represent an image of the world, but the fact that the world itself is conceived as an image (...) this marks the essence of the modern era."³ Moreover, in this case, cinematography assumes an almost anthropological dimension, being a vehicle of the representations the world constructs about itself. We can safely say that cinematography takes over the role of the great stories, which, as Lyotard showed, support knowledge, to the extent that it is able to reproduce not only its own representation or articulation systems, but also the world's.

The essential research hypothesis of our approach supports an approach of the cinematic image in terms of significance, analyzed in its semiotic form, i.e. in terms of evaluating it as a system of signs. This is because with the emergence of medieval nominalism, then with the articulation of semiology in the seventeenth century (The Port-Royal Logic), the image started to be treated as a sign; and the image as a sign is defined as something that takes the place of something else for someone else (*aliquid stat pro aliquo*), and which thus serves, above all, as a reference. To study it in these terms is to consider the way in which it produces sense.

As a thesis of the thesis we state that the cinematic image does not have its own essence- if we assumed that we would involuntarily become trapped into a metaphysical mirage typical of the modernist enterprises that have examined the phenomenon. As the language, the cinematic image is a tool that can equally seduce and entice, entertain, manipulate or deceive, but which can also thus communicate an idea about the real world. As a medium of expression, cinematography is the reality of the image test, or , we might say , according to Wittgenstein's definition of the image, that it is " a measurement unit applied to reality " , in that it transforms the conscience and sense of existing, which ceases to be bound exclusively or primarily to the perception of the original or to the verbal relay. The cinematic image is ultimately senseful, but this sense cannot be accessed using pure intellectual resources, as it requires an agreement of the faculties and not least an active, critical look (critical in the sense of assuming an appropriately distant position with respect to the object concerned).

³ Martin Heidegger, *Timpul imaginii lumii*, Ed. Paideia, București, 1998, p. 47-48

Given the subject of this thesis, **the research and analysis methods** are based on conceptual arguments, descriptions, interpretations, cultural studies, film theory and study. To support our approach we used analyses of the key theorists of any study that aims to understand the cinematic image in terms of the semiological chain and expanded to the scope of postmodernism. These are: Ferdinand de Saussure, Charles S. Peirce, Roland Barthes, Christian Metz, Gilles Deleuze, Theodor W. Adorno, Jean -François Lyotard, Gianni Vattimo, Jean Baudrillard, Fredric Jameson, and many others. Our choice is justified precisely by the fact that these theorists have all assumed a specific interdisciplinary means of analysis. Last but not least, our approach will present the position of scholars such as David Bordwell and Noël Carroll, a position which rejects the semiological model applied to cinematography, in line with the postmodern theories.

Although the main research axes are given by the establishment of structuralist semiology as the pilot theory of cinematic image analysis (60s and 70s) and then by the postmodernist theory and practice, we believe that they can only be analyzed in a broader context, through their effects and dialectics, taking into account both what precedes them, and what relates or contrasts them, separates them - being therefore, a question of organization, clarification and legitimacy. Thus, in order to meet the above stated objective, this doctoral thesis is structured in four chapters and one final section fulfilling the role of a Peroration. We continue with a summary of these:

Chapter 1. entitled *On the image in general and on the cinematic image in particular* plays an introductory part in understanding the image in an ontological discourse. The chapter opens with Section 1.1. *Indices along the image path and values of the scopic* - which outlines the observations on ontology and terminology fluctuations of the image, as preliminary reference, stated by Jean -Jacques Wunenburger in *The Philosophy of Images*. It then mentions Plato and Aristotle's theories on image as a sensitive representation. These serve to point out that from ancient times, the philosophical interpretation of the image fits in a general theory of the creation as reproduction. Therefore, the image moves within a semantic registry that oscillates between the idea of visible form and the idea of unreal, fictitious content. It is these variations in the definition and comprehension of the image that enable one to place it in the centre of the major philosophical issues concerning the distinction between reality and appearance, people's

relationship with the world around or the status of the imaginary and its productions, and finally, the sight. In this context, we provide a detailed presentation of the geometrical optics (experiments on light refraction undertaken by the arab researcher Ibn al-Haitham who has the merit of having used a functional model of the *camera obscura* long before the Renaissance), the Quattrocento painting based on the illusionist representation of reality, the perspectivist sciences (using projection technology) and especially the Renaissance experiments with *camera obscura* and *camera lucida*, that all clearly prefer optical devices aimed to reconstruct an image that is not related to direct reproduction, but to a specular artifact supposed to guarantee the appearance that is most consistent with what the eye sees, but which actually reflects only the illusion of reality. In this sense, we would like to mention the contribution of Descartes, since he is the one who compared the activity of the brain with that of the camera obscura and, last but not least, who overthrew to a certain extent the Platonic ideal of mimesis: where Plato sees silhouettes play, from ancient skiagraphy - forms that are misleading because of their similarity - on the contrary, Descartes sees a formal incompleteness due to the power of representation. When perceived as representations, the images follow certain rules of construction and also of convention, in order to be understood. Therefore, the image of the world depends on specular artifacts presumed to guarantee the appearance that is most consistent with what the eye sees. This section concludes with a detailed presentation of the scopic regimes separately proposed by Martin Jay and Jonathan Crary in order to show the existence of ocularocentrism dominated epochs, epochs that anticipated the interest for the visual, as well as the dominant role of visual images, in particular of the mechanically reproduced images. As apparent from the title, the following sections of the first chapter (1.2. *Walter Benjamin and the aura of the artwork in films*, 1.3. *André Bazin and the “transparency” of the cinematic image*, 1.4. *Siegfried Kracauer and the “material aesthetics of the cinema”*) focus on the theories of Walter Benjamin, André Bazin and Siegfried Kracauer. The structure of this section aims to provide more than a description of the concepts of cinematic image of these authors. First of all, it highlights the fact that with mechanical reproduction, and particularly with the cinematic image, the perceptual sensitivity is re-dimensioned, instituting new relations between the cultural and the natural. In this way the experience of the original is replaced with the original experience of the reproductions, which generate specific reception techniques. As copying and multiplication are not an option, but something intrinsic to film, this is not a trait that destroys its individuality and aura. It follows

that the representation becomes valid and accepted only if it falls within the parameters of recognition, i.e. a more realistic representation that recreates existing objects, a representation with a referential function. Both André Bazin and Siegfried Kracauer - though from the different positions that the sections of the chapter analyze - claim that the cinematic image has the almost ontological task of portraying reality, of reproducing the real world in its physical and occurrence sequentiality, since it has the highest degree of objectivity in terms of its referential object. The conclusion is that the realism proposed by the two theorists should be seen as a matter of degree, and that, as Gregory Currie claims, the realism of the sequence plan combined with field depth, as proposed by Bazin (best exemplified in Italian neorealism films) is more realistic than the style based on the valuation of montage functions. In other words, cinematic realism can only be assessed in relation to other modes of representation and not in relation to reality, as it is a discourse with its own rules and conventions, a code that is by no means more natural and more true than others.

Chapter 2. *Structuralist semiology as the realization of the project of film image semiology* aims to highlight the role that semiology played when it was set up as pilot theory in the theoretical study of the cinematic image. The chapter begins with Section 2.1. *Constructions of the concept of structuralism*, which provides an overview of the senses of the term “structuralism” and of the implications structuralism method has in the field of philosophy. In line with François Dosse, we define structuralism as a unifying project aiming to develop a general science, Semiology, that brings together all humanistic sciences around the study of the language and of the signs. The result is that the underlying part of French structuralism is a semiologic project and that its essential concept, that of structure, results from its correlation with the sign systems, with their nature, on the one hand and with the forms of culture on the other hand. Therefore, structuralism springs from a set of ideas and methods resulted from the application of semiology to the cultural practices. Section 2.2. *Coordinates and theories of the Sign*, aims to present the general features that define the sign in the philosophical tradition, and the way in which it was set as a paradigm in the current philosophy. The result of this section is the identification of the following situation: from Stoicism onwards, the system of signs was ternary in the Western world, made up of a signifier, a signified and a "context", but in the sixteenth century the signs became binary because, with the *Logic of Port Royal*, the sign was defined as a relationship between a signifier and a signified. Starting from the eighteenth century,

the question focused on the way in which a sign relates to what it signifies; the classical era answered this question by analyzing representations, and the modern thinking by analyzing sense and significance. The next two sections of this chapter (2.2.1. *Saussure's dyadic model of the sign* and 2.2.2 . *Peirce's triadic model of the sign*) aim to present the two major theories of the sign, while analyzing the differences between them: that of the Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure and that of philosopher and logician Charles Sanders Pierce. The purpose of presenting these theories of the sign is to set the context for the semiological method of understanding the cinematic image in Section 2.3.1. *The first semiology - Cinema: Language system or Language?*

The postulate that forms the basis of this approach was that the intervention of linguistics and semiology could guarantee the elimination of the stylistic and aesthetic or technical discourses on the cinema, and provided a scientific analysis. Symptomatic in this direction was Roland Barthes's approach, one of the first who chose to use the image (of advertising and photography) as a field of study for the semiology of the visual image in order to observe the signs contained in an image, as well as its mechanisms for the production of sense. This section argues that the theoretical stakes of the debates of this period was to know the way in which the cinema functions as a means of significance by comparison to other languages and systems of expression, and in these circumstances the theorists started from the assumption that one should oppose all attempts to include the cinematic language in the verbal language. When Jean Mitry insists that the film "is first and foremost an image" he emphasises the analogical level of film language. Indeed, the basic signifying material in cinema is the image; however, the sound is also recorded, it presents itself as a "double " of reality. In linguistic terms, the link between the signifier and the signified of the visual and acoustic image is strongly justified by the similarity. On the contrary, there is no connection between the acoustic signifier and its signified when it comes to language sounds and their sense in a given language, except for onomatopoeia. Thus, Mitry's theoretical perspectives allow one to avoid a double problem. They speak about the level of existence of cinematic language, insisting on the fact that cinema is a representation of reality, not a mere copy of it. This section develops an analysis of Christian Metz 's approach, who, using Saussure's linguistics, tried to measure the distances and the overlapping areas in the case of cinematic language and articulate language. This brings us to a first finding: Metz postulates the cinema as a language, but studied it from a grammatical point of view, as a language. Inspired by Saussure's threefold foundation ("language as the sum of the language and of the

spoken word"), Metz specifies the status of cinematic language opposing it to the features characterizing a language. Our argument is that a systematic confrontation between the verbal and filmic language as the one undertaken by Metz through his cinematic semiology, only manages to point out rather the differences than the similarities with respect to one another. At this point, we reach the same conclusion as Metz, namely that there can be no language in the absence of a "double articulation" phenomenon (the double linguistic articulation, which also helps establish the arbitrariness of language and which also structures the signification relationship, indicates that the acoustic chain that can be segmented into two types of units (these units are the words - *signifying units* - and the phonemes - *distinctive units*, and graphemes of a language): the former, namely the *signifying units*, have their own signified, the latter do not have their own signified, but serve to distinguish between the signifying units, and they are *distinctive units*).

Section 2.3.2. *The concept of code in cinematography* creates, in line with Christian Metz, the following situation: although a segmentation of the double articulation type cannot be determined when it comes to cinematic language, it still involves a multilevel coding, each of which being a kind of articulation that helps make the film comprehensible. Thus, we distinguish between: perceptive analogy, "iconic denomination codes" (those that allow recognition of objects and sounds), and truly cinematic "signifying figures" (or "special codes" that form the cinematic language in its strictest acceptance). This section concludes that film code can only be polymorphic, as it is the meeting place of visual analogy codes concerning all figurative images, of photographic codes concerning the mechanical image (the plan construction code, the image clarity code, and so on), while including codes related to sound, colour, montage and - last but not least - in the case of narrative films, filmic codes and all narrative specific codes (for Metz these codes represent the "great phrase" i.e. the film expression material follows a logic of the cause-effect type to illustrate an action).

If, as demonstrated in the previous sections, in the 60s theorists like Roland Barthes and Christian Metz made possible a semiology of the image, and the latter a film semiology based on Saussure's linguistic model, Section 2.3.3. *The second semiology or the emergence of a semio-psychoanalysis: the cinema spectator and the problem of identification* focuses on a second cinematic semiology set in the 70s on the basis of psychoanalysis, which lays emphasis on the

spectator and on the ideological role of the cinema - understood, in line with Althusser - as an alienating element of society. What lies behind the cinematic image analysis approach through psychoanalysis is the idea that psychoanalytic theory, especially Lacan's, is based on linguistics, as for Lacan the unconscious is structured as a language (in fact a spoken language system rather than a language). This section shows that Jean-Louis Baudry's theoretical research on what he called "the basic unit" of cinema, transformed by the camera, led to the distinction – for the first time in the cinema - between a double analogy between the situation shown in Lacan's "mirror stage" and that of the cinema spectator and secondly, to a double identification, with reference to the Freudian model of the distinction between primary identification and the secondary identification in ego formation. In this double identification in the cinema, the primary identification, i.e. the identification with the subject of the vision, with the represented paradigm, would be the basis and condition of the secondary identification, i.e. the identification with the character, with what is represented. The conclusion drawn from this section is that according to the explanatory semiologic-psychoanalytic model, the cinema is one of what Althusser calls the Ideological State Apparatus, which construct and place us as subjects from the very beginning. Consequently, subjectivity becomes a social construct of the representation systems (among them the cinema, which is ideologic not only through the issues it addresses, but also through its formal structure).

Chapter 3. *Beyond the structuralist semiology of Gilles Deleuze's cinematic image philosophy* functions a counter-theory to the semiological model of linguistics inspiration applied to the cinema. Deleuze 's argument is that if we can speak of semiotic systems only in linguistic terms, we must accept that these terms cannot cover the sense of the non-linguistic elements. The thesis underpinning this chapter, expressed in section 3.1. *Gilles Deleuze: Philosophy in images or cinema- thinking*, is that for Deleuze art detaches from the mimetic representation, has its own value, without any reference to the original, and cinema offers the best example in this sense. From this perspective, the image is not an imitation of an "ideal" reality, but a simulacrum created by humans in order to provide an overview of what one feels around; the image exists as pure phenomenology. In this context, Deleuze aims to "overturn Platonism" abolishing precisely the image's reference to the original, which makes sense only in classical logic of representation. Cinematic image, understood as a simulacrum- image is no longer representation, it is no longer understood as a division between copy-original, but has the

potential to create its own movements and temporal modes, that place it within the practice of thinking; it thus occurs in the knowledge and thinking activities. In the following sections 3.2. *The movement-image regime* and 3.3 . *The time-image regime*, our approach emphasizes that the starting point of Deleuze's research on cinematic image is the interpretation given to Henri Bergson, an interpretation built on three theses about the relationship between movement and immobile sections, cinema snapshots. Our work focuses on describing these theses starting from Deleuze 's statement that there is no contradiction between these immobile sections, photograms, and their mechanical alteration in motion; the cinema does make use of immobile sections, that is to say the twenty-four frames/ images per second, but what it offers is not a photogram, but an average image, to which movement is not added: on the contrary, the movement belongs to the average image as a given fact. Movement is established between these immobile sections and compare the parts against the duration of a total that changes; it thus expresses the change of the total when compared against its parts, while in fact it is itself a mobile section of duration. Then we identify a second source on which Deleuze fundamentals his philosophy of the image: three faneroscopic categories for any phenomenon (faneron) established by the American logician Peirce (*Firstness* - pure possibility – *Secondness* - real existence, actuality and *Thirdness* – the law of thinking , mediation). Based on these three fundamental categories Deleuze develops his own classification of cinematic images. Our thesis argues that the images that Deleuze identifies as belonging to the motion-image (the affection-image, the action-image, the perception- image) are deeply related to the peircean concept of "faneron" whose extension is extremely wide: from feeling and perception to memory and object.

In this chapter we also analyze the features that Deleuze assigns to the two types of images which he distinguishes in the history of cinema: "the movement-image" (classic cinema) and "the time-image" (modern cinema). We believe that this separation of cinema in two poles is essential in two ways: first, because it is linked to the configurations underlying the composition of the cinematic image (movement and time), and secondly because it is linked to the real history of the world, and that is because Deleuze argues that modern cinema has its origins after World War II. In conclusion we can say that Deleuze marks/anticipates the separation from the "linguistic imperialism" that dominated film studies and, last but not least, that it represents "the last avatar", what David Bordwell and Noël Carroll call the "Grand Theories" that influenced the reflection on cinematic image.

Chapter 4. *Postmodern poetics and policies: between philosophical discourse and film discourse*, makes the convergence between postmodern theory and postmodern cinematic practice. The first section of this chapter 4.1. *Postmodernism- Preliminary considerations* provides the context in which we can speak of a philosophical postmodernism in relation to the postmodern condition that Jean-François Lyotard identifies with "a distrust in metanarrative", those guiding and universal principles and traditions legitimating modern knowledge, and then in relation to Gianni Vattimo, who has explicitly sought a conceptualization of postmodernism, which he understood as an instance in the philosophical construction which rejects absolute values. For Vattimo, to be postmodern means to fully accept Nietzsche and Heidegger's nihilism, a reaction leading to what the Italian philosopher called "weak thinking". It is, first and foremost, the exclusion of any transcendence, and the denial of any ontological model of origin and depth; the removal of all "strong" constraints of normativity in all areas of thought, from scientific positivism, to the normativity of moral laws and canons of science. Against this background, postmodern theory emphasizes fragmentation as a key feature of artistic texts and practices, of subjectivity, experience and society in the postmodern era.

The following two sections of this chapter (4.1.1. *Jean Baudrillard and the "paradigm" of the simulacrum* and 4.1.2. *Fredric Jameson and postmodernism as a cultural dominant*) describes and analyzes two of the most influential systematizations of postmodernism, those of Jean Baudrillard and Fredric Jameson, which we argue to be the best account of the issue of socio-economic and cultural founding of postmodernism. One of the features of Baudrillard's theory would be the substitution of the concept of representation with that of simulation. The principle of representation which is based on an equivalence between the sign and the real is replaced by the principle of simulation, which denies the sign as a value, turning it into a simulacrum – the signs are no longer required to have any contact with the world which they are supposed to represent. Baudrillard develops a criticism of the sign as it was conceived in the tradition of structuralist semiology. We could identify an example of Baudrillard's theory on simulacra in the Hollywood science fiction type cinema in the series *Transformers* (directed by Michael Bay). The film, as a Hollywood way of thinking in terms of blockbuster cinema, profit, does not focus on sense, but on fascination; precisely because the world that this show depicts is more alive, stronger and more real than the reality before or after the show, it creates the effect of a "reality that is more real than reality", of a hyperreal, leading to the abolition of the feeling of

reality. The desire to see the film is not something imposed by the project itself, due to its value, but it is an outcome of the system, of the ideological apparatus that imposes itself to the viewer through its cost – it is a "culture industry" that has been emphasized from Adorno onwards. The conclusion that emerges from such film projects is that the distinction between the artistic image and the commodity image is abolished in terms of commodification (commodified, the film can only seduce through the eclecticism of its production).

Just as Baudrillard and Lyotard link the cultural / aesthetic sphere of postmodernism to the socio-economic sphere of postmodernism, understanding the social as a species of the cultural, Fredric Jameson also understands postmodernism less as a cultural dominant of a new social order, and more as a reflex, or rather a symptom of a change in late capitalism. We recognize in this section the constitutive features that Jameson attributes to postmodernism (especially the nostalgic evasion, the weakening of historicity, the recycling of the retro styles, the pastiche) and which he exemplifies by reference to the movie *Body Heat* (1986 , directed by Lawrence Kasdan). Against this background, the parody specific modernism, is, according to Jameson, replaced in postmodernism by pastiche. Used in the construction of the postmodern film, the pastiche is confined to a nostalgic attitude aimed at recycling past styles and not at authentic historicity. Our finding is that this does not mean that logic of the referent is irrelevant in postmodern films, but, on the contrary, postmodern films suggest that everything has always been "cultural", that is to say mediated by representations.

Section 4.2. *Concepts of a postmodern aesthetic in films or the novelty of the past* assumes that the postmodern film aesthetic is created and senseful only in relation to the modern, to the past. Therefore, postmodernism springs from modernism rather than follows modernism. This section outlines what Susan Hayward called "postmodern aesthetic concepts of the film " (imitation – which can be parody or pastiche, prefabrication, intertextuality and collage). Our thesis argues that their presence in postmodern films questions the "old" or the "already known", turning the known into the unknown. The result is that their use in the construction of the postmodern film is not the recovery of a forgotten reality, but the building of an imaginary that draws attention to the conventions of representation. At the same time, in line with Linda Hutcheon, we accept that postmodern parody is not indifferent to the past, to the context of the

representations it quotes; but it is not only nostalgic (as Jameson interprets it), but critical as well, being thus "double coded": it legitimizes and undermines what it parodies.

The last section of the chapter, 4.3. *Hollywood dream factory, "a cinematic society"* illustrates the convergence of postmodern theory and practice by appealing to films directed by Quentin Tarrantino and David Lynch. The reason why we resort to these film directors is that their movies constantly draw attention on their own process of fictionalisation. Undermining the modernist confidence in the image as an authentic expression, films like *Reservoir Dogs*, *Pulp Fiction*, *Inglorious Bastards*, *Lost Highway*, *Mulholland Drive*, display their own artificiality. We prove that these films fail to question the concepts that we have in terms of notions such as: reality, fiction, illusion, showing that in the postmodern world everything is marked by fragmentation, discontinuity. They also express that even what we consider to be immutable may be only a construct of the human subjectivity. In fact, we believe that what links the postmodern cinema and postmodern theorists is the attitude that questions all reality constructions and the welding of sense. The result of the analyses in this chapter is that for the postmodern world the relation established by Saussure between the signifier and the signified is the essential problem of a culture in which the "power of the image" prevails. The stage in which the image finds itself is as if its existence were independent from a reference, a separation that makes it impossible to access significance. While modernism seeks originality, eliminating as much as possible a conscious link with the past, postmodern films reinterpret the link with the past and state that the sense cannot be dictated by the author, as it is individual, and so there are as many senses as the individuals who come into contact with the film in question. As Jean -François Lyotard states, the lamentation of the loss of sense in postmodernism comes down to the fact that the narrative elements of knowledge have become a heterogeneous set of combinations, and the epistemic coherence has been diluted. As this chapter shows, this means that many of the postmodern theories and practices consistently draw attention on their own construction process – they reflect their own movement - which our thesis correlates with postmodern cinema.

The last part of the paper, *Peroration: "Medium Specificity"* is intended to be a review of what has been analyzed in the previous chapters from the perspective of the studies on films, consolidated in the late 80s through the efforts of David Bordwell and Noël Carroll. Our research indicates that for these authors, the study of the film developed and legitimized itself as a

hermeneutic discipline whose interpretations are in fact examples, through movies, of the various doctrines, of what they call the “Grand Theories” on the Whole (semiotics, structuralism, post-structuralism, Lacanian psychoanalysis, Marxist-althusserian interpretation, all developed in the academic French environment). We believe that these theories were reached one way or another, based on the idea of searching for cinema specificity (*medium specificity*). This labour that is endured to identify a last feature, without which it could not exist, is a typical modernist approach. This section concludes, in line with Noël Carroll, that the thesis of medium specificity in films (*the medium specificity thesis*) – i.e. the idea that each art has its own medium, which distinguishes it from other arts, is rather problematic because there are no clear criteria to identify the essential material among all the footage.

Despite all these results, we would like to mention that **our main contribution** is based on the following **two observations**. The first is that the cinematic image is composed of different types of signs reunited and coordinated in a frame – that is to say linguistic signs (verbal language), iconic signs (the visual objects that appear in the cinematic image allow visual recognition based on perceptive analogy), plastic signs (colours, shapes, internal composition, etc.), index signs (as cinema is a speech about the world, it makes reference to an extra-cinematic reality) - signs that trigger a process of interpretation that involves a progressive perception of the sense through active participation in clarifying content that eludes full and total disclosure. Then, a second finding, which actually coincides with the thesis of our thesis, is that we cannot speak of an essence specific to the cinema, especially in the contemporary society, in the world of digital capture, of the processes of hybridization and convergence between media, where we can consider film to be rather an intermedium. The only essence, *in extremis*, the zero degree, the "ectoplasm" of the cinematic image, is reduced to technology and to idea (without which it would not be possible); in other words, to the concept behind each film and to the place in which it encounters matter to merge into sense.

In this line, we would like to state one more time that the aim of our research has not been to choose or to propose any of the theories presented and analyzed as a model, but to describe and analyze the assumptions on which they are built, the points in which they differ, and, last but not least, their implications and effects in the conceptualization of the cinematic image as a sense-producing medium. Therefore, we can only agree with Althusser's definition of

theory in general, according to which "every theory is in essence a problematic, that is to say the theoretical and systematic matrix of any problem related to the subject of the theory."⁴

Finally, we hope that the results we obtained – some still in an incipient form, others representative and applicable - will be of interest, and that the thesis as a whole may be regarded as a platform of the cinematic image research through a double methodological route: philosophical and interdisciplinary.

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