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ARGUMENT FOR A MISTIQUE OF CINEMA
PHD THESIS SUMMARY

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List of published works on the research topic:

1. Iordache, Florin – Alexandru (2022), „Nichifor Crainic's Dreams, Rhenish Mysticism and Herzog's Cinema”, *Anuarul Institutului de Istorie „George Barițiu” din Cluj-Napoca. Series Historica*, LXI, Supliment, 1, *Identitate și diversitate în Europa. Istorie, societate, relații internaționale. Lucrările conferinței internaționale, Oradea, 22–27 martie*, pp. 661–679, available at:
<http://historica-cluj.ro/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/Florin%E2%80%91Alexandru-Iordache.pdf>
2. Iordache, Florin – Alexandru (2023), „The influence of Tarkovsky on the mystical gaze in Fatima (Pontecorvo, 2020)”, *Journal of Italian Cinema & Media Studies*, 11: *Issue Intersections between Italian and Slavic Cinemas*, June, pp. 471 – 485, available at:
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In addition to the research topic, within the same doctoral program:

3. Iordache, Florin – Alexandru (2021), „Film Vs. Digital: New Paradigms in Emulating Film Features through Digital Cameras”, *Entrepreneurship and Research Conference: Digital Transformation, ediția a III-a, 28-30 martie, Universitatea Babeș-Bolyai, Cluj-Napoca: Editura Presa Universitară Clujeană*, pp. 382-388, available at:
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Introduction. Argument

My interest in this doctoral thesis has developed over the course of several years, during which I have followed a path that I could call initiatory, migrating from the field of exact sciences to the field of the arts, more precisely the field of cinema. This endeavor has had its own specificity, the process being accompanied almost permanently by my inclination towards the phenomenon of Orthodox mysticism, reactivated in contemporary times by the so-called Romanian mystics who passed through the communist prisons. What guided me on this path were, on the one hand, important works of world cinema, which I began to study even before I became a student at the Faculty of Theater and Film, and on the other hand, the memorial works of former political prisoners. Through them, I came into better contact with the phenomenon of Orthodox mysticism, towards which, being educated in the spirit of the Christian Orthodox religion, I had a certain inclination. I even met a few of them personally. My inclination towards the research of Orthodox mysticism was doubled by the experience of watching certain films and, later, by the in-depth study of the cinematic works and the directors who created them. Gradually, I had a double initiation: into mysticism and into film. My new concerns were fueled by an unquenchable thirst for knowledge, which could not be satisfied by the rigors and limitations of the exact sciences, nor by a field in full development, such as IT, in which I was active at the time. If the field of exact sciences was approached as methodically and rationally as possible, I let myself be guided more by intuition towards the new spheres of knowledge, at least at the beginning of the journey. The limitations and rigors of the exact sciences only served to increase my imagination, passion for creation and inclination towards creativity, along with my inclination towards the sense of intuition, which has developed more and more.

In the end, I came to the works of the monk Nil Dorobanțu, who pays special attention to mysticism and theophany phenomena, focusing on the most controversial cases in Romania, which caused a stir in their time: the Maglavit and Vladimirești phenomena. The work of Nil Dorobanțu is imbued with a unique mysticism, but it shares many elements with the mysticism specific to the memorial works of those who passed through the communist prisons. However, beyond the visions themselves, which can be related to certain specific visual sequences in films, both from the work of Nil Dorobanțu, as well as from the memorial works of other mystics of the communist prisons,

certain ideas, aesthetic visions, together with a certain Christian mystical-philosophical discourse emerge that can be easily related to the mystical visions emerging from the filmic discourse of certain directors described by some commentators as being mystics. In this way, the idea of an analogy between the phenomenon of mysticism, reactivated in Romania by mystics of the communist prisons and also by theologians or monastic figures, such as Dumitru Stăniloae, Nil Dorobanțu, Nichifor Crainic (who have focused on this phenomenon in Romania by studying it, but at the same time having the experience of communist prisons) and the phenomenon of mystical cinema, through its few flagship exponents (Capra, Tarkovski, Herzog, Malick, but also others). What would be the legitimacy of such an endeavor? Important anchors can be found both in Nichifor Crainic's course on the theology of culture, held between 1939 and 1940, from which the work *Nostalgia of Paradise* (Crainic 2010: 34) was later born, as well as in his lectures on mysticism. The deepening of the study of mysticism led aestheticians and philosophers to make analogies between mysticism and art. There are also numerous testimonies from artists in support of the idea that works of art have a transcendent nuance, these being cited in the work. As Crainic also observes, such statements are very similar to the accounts of mystics when they speak about the supernatural force that triggers mystical ecstasy.

Motivation

In his doctoral thesis, cinematographer Gabriel Kosuth addresses a key question, left unanswered, when analyzing the vision of the Virgin Mary and Child from the Bergman film – *The Seventh Seal* (1957). In connection with the vision that the artist Jof excitedly tells his wife, the author of the study *Cinematic Oniricism – Stylistics of Representations of Dreams in Sound Film* wonders if not perhaps the visions of mystics are not all artistic creations. (Kosuth 2008: 82). This is a legitimate question, especially coming from a professional who works in the film industry. In the context of this study, it becomes fundamental. A second question, intrinsically linked to the first, is whether the director himself is the one who suggests this idea to the public.

This research endeavor aims, among others, to respond to such questions, putting directors together with their artistic creations in relation to mystics and their visions. If, outside of Romania, the relationship between mysticism and cinema has been too little explored, with most authors limiting themselves to the realization of comparative studies between religion and cinema, even less have been such themes addressed in the domestic space. This is due, in the first place, to the sporadic presence

of disciplines that deal with the study of mysticism in the Romanian academic landscape, and, in the second place, to the nefarious influence of the communist regime, which brutally cut short the few attempts to reintroduce mysticism into the study programs of faculties specializing in the field of theology, philosophy, or literature.

As for the exploration of the relationship between mysticism and cinema, it is still in its early stages. The few authors and researchers, foreign or Romanian, who have approached such a topic, or have tried to follow a similar research direction, have chosen as a research subject the works of directors who belonged to a familiar cultural space, with which they had certain affinities. In addition to this fact, in most cases, they have limited themselves to the filmography of a single director. For example, Richard James Leonard, an Australian Jesuit priest, studied the mysticism in the films of Australian director Peter Weir. Romanian director Radu Gabrea studied the relationship between Herzog's cinema and Rhenish mysticism, specific to Germany, a European country to which he emigrated during the Nicolae Ceaușescu regime. Elena Dulgheru, a Romanian film critic born in Russia, studied the filmography of directors who formed in the Euro-Asian cultural space (Tarkovsky), Caucasian (Paradjanov), and Balkan (Kusturica), making a comparative analysis and putting in relation the films of the three filmmakers with the Eastern mysticism specific to Byzantium. However, very few of them have dared to rise above the limitations of cultural order, approaching comparatively directors and filmographies belonging to different cultural spaces, with which they were not too comfortable or familiar. Very few are those who have dared to relate, for example, the filmographies of directors from the Western world such as Capra, Malick, or Peter Weir with the filmographies of directors from Eastern Europe, such as Tarkovsky, Abuladze, Paradjanov, Kieslowski.

Few are those who have dared to explore the connections between the philosophies of Western directors, considered by some commentators to be mystics, and phenomena of Eastern mysticism, although there are serious studies that attest to the connections and mutual influences between Western mysticism and Eastern mysticism. Indeed, this is precisely the novelty of the research in the present work. Although the authors mentioned above have had praiseworthy initiatives, more than courageous, revealing the dawn of a path on which research can be continued, I allow myself to mention the fact that they have neglected two important aspects in their approaches.

First of all, some of them have been too little aware of the universality of the cinematic language and of the fact that directors, especially those with authorial tendencies, can influence each other based on affinities, or can be influenced by established masters whom they have studied during their apprenticeship, beyond cultural or national barriers.

The present work intends to consider, as far as possible, this aspect as well, following the hypothesis of possible influences that have occurred through different channels (approaches based on affinities, motivations, common artistic sensitivities and aesthetic views, or trends due to the study of works that have imposed themselves over time in the history of world cinema). Secondly, I believe that the limitations of authors concerned with similar themes have been due to the fact that the hypothesis of an all-encompassing spirituality has not been taken very seriously, which, like a shadow, could cover both the spiritual affinities that appear between the different forms of manifestation of mystical cinema, as well as the affinities between mysticism and cinema.

Methodology

Much of the confusion associated with mystical cinema is due to the term itself which is intended to describe it. Therefore, in the first chapter of this work, I first tried to define the term "mysticism", and then I made an incursion into the authors and theorists in the literature of specialization who have associated this term with cinema. I also presented, as well, some of the results and conclusions that these authors have arrived at.

At first sight, it seems difficult to define the concept of mystical cinema. My entire research project, not just the first chapter, is dedicated to finding an answer to the question "What is mystical cinema?". The conclusions of the study respond better to such a question.

In contrast to other authors who have dealt with this theme tangentially or centrally, I have proceeded differently. In my opinion, the notion of mystical cinema can be better clarified by approaching filmmakers, together with their works, in relation to the mystics of the 20th century, which is the century of cinema. Even though, historically speaking, cinema appeared at the end of the 19th century, the 20th century represents the period in which cinema formed and reached maturity. When I say the mystics of the 20th century, I am not referring only to people considered to be mystics, but also to some mystic theorists who prove through their philosophical discourse that they had a mystical perspective on life and a mystical experience proven by their interests, concerns, and experiences in their personal lives.

These are the fundamental criteria that underlie the selection of sources in the documentation of mysticism. A mystical cinema cannot abstract from mysticism and from the understanding, however minimal, of such a theme.

Another important criterion in the selection of reference points in the case of the universal field of mysticism is the accessibility and familiarity of the subject. Therefore, I decided to choose mystics and theorists of mysticism from Romania, considering the ease with which I could obtain the sources and bibliographic materials, and on the other hand, it was important that I met personally, both Romanian mystics, but also people from Romania who had contact in certain contexts with such personalities and could provide a living testimony about them. Some of these testimonies were even filmed and included as bibliographic support in this work. The scope of Romanian mystics being itself quite vast, in order to trace the main directions in terms of the research of the intersections between mysticism and cinema, I decided to prioritize the works of three major personalities, which I consider to be the most representative both for the study of mysticism and for the relevance of this study. The three major personalities are, in order: Nichifor Crainic, Nil Dorobanțu and Dumitru Stăniloae.

The case of Nichifor Crainic, in addition to the serious reasons indicated in the introduction, is also representative by the fact that between 1942 and 1944 he was the president of the cooperative "*Romanian Film*" (Ică 2018: 17). The other two wrote arguing theologically on the mystical phenomena of Maglavit and Vladimirești. Their writings (Dorobanțu and Stăniloae) become representative as bibliographic sources especially in the penultimate chapter of the work (*chapter III*), where an analysis of a film that reproduces a mystical phenomenon similar to those that took place in Romania was carried out.

Another innovative aspect of the work is the relationship between cinema and mystical phenomena that are historically documented and reproduced in films, in the hope that this will better outline the notion of mystical cinema. Until *chapter III*, the research is dedicated to a few authors of mystical films, also tracing possible influences between them and other filmmakers, not necessarily mystical or religious. In *chapter III*, where a recent film about a mystical phenomenon is analyzed in detail, the focus is on what notable influences and trends have been perpetuated from other authors, in the director's attempt to create an enriched mystical perspective in his film.

In addition to the three reference authors, other authors who have focused on Orthodox and Eastern mysticism (Vasile Andru) and, in some cases, a few mystics from communist prisons with visionary experiences have also been taken into account. Since the present work aimed to create bridges between Eastern mysticism and exponents of a mystical cinema from the American continent (Frank Capra and Terrence Malick), it was felt the need for a theological validation coming from the part of a theologian concerned with Eastern mysticism, who has carried out his activity in the Western space, primarily in the United States of America. Therefore, in some cases, as a reference support, I have also taken into consideration the work *Byzantine Theology*, written by John Meyendorff. On the other hand, considering the vast and complex material of universal cinema, the question arises of how I chose to navigate the plethora of authors and films that can be the subject of such research. I emphasize that I was not explicitly interested in religious cinema, although in *chapter I* I dedicated a small section to it in order to outline a brief history, precisely because in some cases, over time, the two types of cinema, mystical and religious, have intertwined. If religious cinema must be seen in a broad sense, encompassing all films about Jesus, saints, prophets, meditations, and religious themes, often being a spontaneous creation of the author's artistic imagination, without any explicit control exercised by the Church or by various religious institutions, mystical cinema must be seen in an even broader sense, being the fruit of a collaborative artistic imagination.

When Henri Bremond wrote his work, *A Literary History of Religious Feeling* (1913), referring, of course, to religious literature written by Catholic authors between the 17th and 19th centuries, he indicated two methods: the historical-descriptive method, which presents authors and their works chronologically, and the selective-synthetic method, which looks at the works from within, in an attempt to clarify the essence of the author's personality and vision, as well as the spiritual affinity between him and the historical echo provoked in the era by the appearance of their works (Crainic 2010: 170). If, in this case, I would have applied the first method, I would have obtained nothing more than a chronological list of authors together with a minimal collection of data about their works, which would not have helped very much in the proposed approach. Instead, I decided to opt for a selective-synthetic method within the study. Such a method allowed me to go deeper into the analysis, while also choosing a limited number of samples from the vast area of directors and cinematic works that have a connection with mysticism and religion. Given the fact

that the material was very extensive, I took into consideration the most representative personalities and films in the field of cinema, which through their genius and greatness have each contributed in their own way to the formation of a mystical cinema, enriching it with original aspects. Another important principle that was taken into account in the selection of directors was the auteur criterion: Carl Theodor Dreyer, Frank Capra, Leni Riefenstahl, Orson Welles, Werner Herzog, Ingmar Bergman, Andrei Tarkovsky, Terrence Malick, Peter Weir have in common not only the mysticism characteristic of their films, but also a unique, recognizable style of filmmaking. In addition to the chosen criteria, it was taken into account both the affinities and influences that may appear between directors, as well as the possibility of spiritual influences between directors and exponents of Christian mysticism that I have mentioned.

To better characterize the chosen method, I would call it the selective-synthetic-intuitive method, since it also has an important intuitive component. In addition to my personal intuition, which I used in the first instance in selecting the directors and films, I paid particular attention to the directors' intuitive sense, where I could find relevant indications. For example, one of the reasons Frank Capra was selected is that I found numerous references to the term "mystic" in his autobiography. In the first instance, Leni Riefenstahl was not even on the extended list of directors considered for this research, but the value judgments and insistent associations between Riefenstahl's filming style and the attribute of "mystic" noted by Frank Capra in his writing weighed enough to start a research direction in this regard.

First of all, this research work is a search, from beginning to end, for the concept of mystical cinema. And, before considering what theorists, film critics, and authors specializing in film studies say about mystical cinema, I was interested in finding out the directors' opinion on this term. I was also interested in this in terms of the perspective of a possible concept of mystical cinema intuited by them. Therefore, in addition to the references used by various authors and specialists, I have used the levers provided by the filmmakers studied, in order to clarify the concept and features of mystical cinema.

From the extended list, given the inherent limitations of a doctoral thesis, I focused on a few extended case studies, namely Frank Capra, Leni Riefenstahl, Sergei Eisenstein, and, separately, a comparative case study of a recent film by Marco Pontecorvo about a mystical phenomenon. Adjacent to them, Tarkovski, Herzog, Peter Weir, and Terrence Malick were also

treated. The reasons behind such a choice are well-founded: Andrei Tarkovsky and Werner Herzog have been covered and masterfully treated by some Romanian authors - I believe that Elena Dulgheru has almost exhausted the subject of Tarkovsky, and Radu Gabrea has very well framed Werner Herzog's cinema in the phenomenon of Rhenish mysticism, while exponents of American mystical cinema such as Capra and Malick have been completely ignored by Romanian authors, but not by foreign ones, who have dedicated numerous specialized works to them, although very few of them have explored the connection with mysticism.

The mysticism of Peter Weir's films has been comprehensively treated by several foreign authors, so it has only been marginally represented (by virtue of associations intended to build the concept of mystical cinema) the object of this research work. However, directors classified by some authors as mystics, such as Werner Herzog, Peter Weir, and especially Andrei Tarkovsky, represent reference pillars for the comparative study of the extended case studies Frank Capra and Marco Pontecorvo. Andrei Tarkovsky is the preeminent exponent of mystical cinema, being himself described by some authors as a mystic, religious artist, free-thinking mystic (Dulgheru 2014: 88), therefore the comparative study (between film authors) revolves around this great director.

Therefore, themes, motifs, and common symbols were sought, as well as similarities between trends, opinions, philosophies, ideas, and mystical perspectives regarding film, cinema, and the artist's mission. In the first place, the directors' autobiographical works were explored, which are of great importance for the awareness of similarities and the correlation of visions. In addition to their documentary value, they are like a mirror in which we can read the artist's soul, but they also include true theoretical writings about film, cinema, and art, materialized as a result of the practical experience of a filmmaker. In a somewhat similar way, the rapprochements between mystics and theorists of mysticism (Crainic, Dorobanțu), on the one hand, and filmmakers, on the other hand, were made: not only their theoretical writings, but also their memoirs were taken into account: just as in the case of directors one can speak of a film theory validated by practical experience, so too the autobiographical attempts of mystics can be relevant in the sense that they can reveal to us various mystical theories validated by the personal experiences of the authors. Such a first attempt (the search and justification of an approximation between vectors of mysticism and exponents of mystical cinema based on similarities) was exemplified in the first subchapter of *chapter II*, where I made an analogy between Herzog's cinema and the mystical philosophical

discourse of Crainic, through which the writer describes, justifies, and interprets personal mystical experiences and visions. The fruit of the rapprochement between mystical theorists and mystical directors (intuitively considered to be mystical – this is actually the hypothesis) was the development of a method by which it was attempted to demonstrate that the cinema practiced by them is mystical. By applying such a method to extended case studies (Capra, Riefenstahl, Pontecorvo), the concept of mystical cinema was finally clarified better. In my search for the mystical cinema in the works of the directors Frank Capra and Leni Riefenstahl (who are analyzed comparatively in the study on the mysticism of Frank Capra's films), I was guided by the principles set forth by Nichifor Crainic in *Nostalgia of Paradise*. The reasons are easy to understand: first, their works are imbued with the pulse of the same tumultuous era; then, each in their own way (Crainic and Capra) was concerned with the relationship between religion and art, on the one hand, and the relationship between religion and civilization; each was involved in one way or another in the propaganda missions of the nations they belonged to, assuming the role of cultural emissary on the international stage in a turbulent period; all three were animated in their activities by artistic ideals specific to that era, leaving behind both a rich artistic creation and extremely relevant autobiographical writings; *chapter II* credits the idea that director Frank Capra anticipated through a cinematic realization the treatise on aesthetics and philosophy of culture elaborated by Nichifor Crainic almost two years after the release of the film *Lost Horizon* (1937). First, I looked for evidence of the theandric mode (Crainic 1994: 8) in the films and autobiographies of the directors. Then, I looked for evidence related to the prophetic nature of art (present in the film in some form or another), the thaumaturgical character of the work, the purifying intentions with which the author has endowed his creation, forms of natural and supernatural revelation, the androgynous symbol, the role of the artist (similar to that of the priest), the inclination towards the sacred, the feeling of nostalgia for the lost paradise, images of paradise depicted in the film, as well as the techniques of expression of the mystical, mythical, and sublime. In the identification and inventory of cinematic means of expression – another objective of the thesis – I used criteria and methods developed by James Richard Leonard and Elena Dulgheru, applied to the filmographies of Peter Weir and Andrei Tarkovsky, respectively, as well as criteria and methods derived from the analysis of mystical visions. Starting from the theophanic visions described and analyzed by Nil Dorobanțu (Dorobanțu 2016a; Dorobanțu 2016d), common motifs, symbols, and themes were found: for example, the star

of Christ from Peter's vision (Dorobanțu 2016d: 44-45), which appears represented in a drawing in the film *Pelerinaj la Maglavit* (1935) by Jean Mihail, with the four corners (rain, wind, coal, fire), symbolizing the four elements (water, air, earth, fire), represents an argument for the poetics of the four elements (the alchemical system), taken into account for the analysis of Pontecorvo's film, but not only (it is also used by Elena Dulgheru in the analysis of Andrei Tarkovsky's filmography, as well as by other authors as a model for explaining a work of art). Starting from the question posed by Gabriel Kosuth (the visions of mystics – artistic creations?), a possible answer was attempted based on the way in which directors use various elements and natural phenomena (rain, snow, wind, birds, doves, and others) in the rendering of epiphanies. Classical hermeneutics of psychoanalysis (approaches of theorists such as Freud, Jung, Lacan) were used much less, out of respect for the mystery of the creative spirit of artists and realizing that no scientific endeavor can encompass the immaterial fire that fueled the artistic aspirations and the thirst for creation of the authors. Keeping in mind the final sequence of the film *The Enigma of Kaspar Hauser* (1974), I did not take to dissecting the artists, looking for motivations exclusively in their personal lives, isolating them from the rest, but on the contrary, I analyzed without harming their works and artistic heritage, seeking, as far as possible, the meaning in the whole of the works and trying to bring them closer together. Given the problematic and complexity of the study – the fact that several mystics and artists were taken into account – since it had to be viewed from several angles, I refused from the start a method that would condemn to fixity or to irrevocable evaluations. On the other hand, neither was the total detachment of the works from their authors taken into account, considering that they cannot be independent of the creators' universe. So, it was opted more for a philosophical study of ideas and mystical visions, than for classical semiotics. However, the inventory of cinematic means of expression, as well as of various stylistic devices, was followed. Far from being a multiple monograph or an essay on religion and film, as this was not intended, the present research addresses the filmography and biography of the directors to the extent that they support the thesis of the existence of a mystical cinema in their works. In the case of the authorial paradigms studied, which incorporate in them the imprints of a mystical cinema, two films from each, relevant to the study, were subjected to a more detailed analysis: thus, in *Chapter II*, for Frank Capra, the films that best illustrate the concept of mystical cinema were selected: *It's a Wonderful Life* (1946) and *Lost Horizon* (1937); for Leni Riefenstahl, viewed from the perspective of an analogy with Frank Capra,

without however dedicating a separate chapter to her, emblematic films such as *Das blaue Licht* (Blue Light) (1932) and *Tiefland* (1954) were subjected to attention; A large part of the directors' filmography was neglected, although the extended case studies contain numerous references to other films by the directors, with the aim of illustrating certain trends, approaches, the use of certain motifs, symbols, themes and specific procedures. Although important for monographic approaches, they become less relevant in the case of the problematic of mystical cinema.

Structure

In addition to the aforementioned, *Chapter I* provides a summary of the approach to mystical themes by relevant directors from the silent film era, such as Georges Méliès, Victor Sjöström, Mauritz Stiller, Benjamin Christensen, and Carl Theodor Dreyer. It then continues with important directors from the sound film era who took up the thread of mystical concerns: Frank Capra, Ingmar Bergman, and Andrei Tarkovsky. In addition to the few works of these directors, other landmark films in the history of mystical cinema were also mentioned, such as *The Song of Bernadette* (King, 1943), *The Fugitive* (Ford, 1947), or *Macario* (Gavaldon, 1960). Thus, an attempt was made to create a brief history of mystical and religious cinema. Also the relationship between mysticism, mystics, and cinema was explored, as well as the concept of mystical gaze in cinema found in the relevant literature. Here, several inedited analogies between visions belonging to prison mystics (but not only) and visionary phenomena depicted in films were exemplified in detail, in an attempt to find the path to mystical cinema more easily.

Chapter II further explores the relationship between mysticism, mystics, and cinema. First, in an introductory subchapter, are explored the similarities between the mystical theory of the soul, as it emerges from a memoir by the writer and theologian Nichifor Crainic (1889 - 1972), German mysticism represented by Meister Eckhart, and the filmic discourse of a contemporary filmmaker – Werner Herzog. The chapter then delves deeper into the Christian mysticism in Frank Capra's films, using the already mentioned films as extended case studies, but it attempts to do so through a comparative approach, taking also into account the approaches and works of other directors. The mystical visions of cinema held by Frank Capra and Andrei Tarkovsky are correlated, and attempts are made to draw analogies between manifestations of Western and Eastern mysticism, as portrayed in their films or as they emerge from their autobiographical writings. In addition, similarities between the ideas expressed by Frank Capra in his films and writings and the ideas of Romanian

writers and mystics, exponents of Eastern mysticism (Nichifor Crainic, Vasile Andru, Vasile Voiculescu, Ioan Ianolide), were explored. The film *Lost Horizon* (1937) was analyzed according to the principles outlined by Nichifor Crainic in *Nostalgia for Paradise* (1940). In a separate subchapter, a comparative analysis is made between Frank Capra and Leni Riefenstahl, with an emphasis on the mysticism and political romanticism that permeate their works. In this sense, a series of cinematic coincidences present in the films of the two artists are explored. Regarding the filmography of Leni Riefenstahl, the influence of German expressionism and romanticism is investigated through the works of German directors Friedrich Murnau and Arnold Fanck. The films *The Blue Light* (Riefenstahl, 1932) and *Lost Horizon* (Capra, 1937) are discussed comparatively. In addition, the influence of the early Swedish film school on the films *Tiefland* (Riefenstahl, 1954) (influenced by *The Wind* – Victor Sjöström) and *Lost Horizon* (Capra, 1937) (possibly influenced by *The Blizzard* – Mauritz Stiller) is also investigated. Additionally, the influence of the paintings of Caspar David Friedrich, El Greco, and Francisco Goya on the films directed by Riefenstahl – films analyzed in more detail in the doctoral thesis – was investigated. With this opportunity, the next great director connected with mysticism, namely Sergei Eisenstein, was addressed. The link between Riefenstahl and Eisenstein is constituted by the common passion for the works of the painters Francisco Goya and especially El Greco, whose paintings influenced and inspired the Soviet director in his cinematic art, dedicating him more aesthetic comments in his study *Nonindifferent Nature* (1940). The study is relevant to the doctoral thesis because in it the Soviet director develops a whole theory of imagination based on the *Spiritual Exercises* of Ignatius of Loyola. Therefore, of the directors highlighted for this thesis, only Eisenstein (paradoxically!) developed a theoretical writing about the art of film (and the creative processes involved) based on analogies with visions of mystics. On this occasion, similarities and analogies were sought between Eisenstein's ideas and those of Nichifor Crainic with regard to the process of artistic creation, religious inspiration, artistic inspiration, as they emerge from *Nostalgia for Paradise* and *Nonindifferent Nature*.

Chapter III explores in detail the cinematic treatment of the Fatima mystical phenomenon in a recent film directed by Marco Pontecorvo, as well as in the other films that preceded it. It continues the approach begun in the previous chapters, completing the overall picture of a comparative analysis of films that present historically documented mystical phenomena: alongside

The Song of Bernadette (King, 1943) from *Chapter I* and *Lourdes et ses miracles* (Rouquier, 1955) – a documentary film analyzed in the following chapter, a series of films are reviewed, such as *The Miracle of Our Lady of Fatima* (Brahm 1952), *Apparitions at Fatima* (Costelle, 1991) and *The 13th Day* (Ian and Dominic Higgins, 2009), culminating with *Fatima* (Pontecorvo, 2020). Additionally, the chapter explores the possible influence of renowned directors considered by some commentators to be mystics (Herzog, Malick, Weir, Tarkovski) on Pontecorvo and his film *Fatima*. It also highlights the influence of the visual poetics that pays tribute to early Soviet cinema (Dovzhenko, Eisenstein, Pudovkin) on the film directed by Pontecorvo, emphasizing the notion of emotional landscape, discussed by Eisenstein in *Nonindifferent Nature*.

Chapter IV represents an attempt to illustrate mystical themes through a few documentary films, showing that mystical cinema is not limited to fiction films. The first film to be analyzed is *Lourdes et ses miracles* (Rouquier, 1955), which explores the religious emulation created around the supposed miracles that occur during pilgrimages to Lourdes, where in 1858 a mystical phenomenon similar to that of Fatima took place. The analysis focuses on the directorial approach and on the cinematography of the film – from the perspective of cinematic composition. The next subchapter contains an interesting parallel between two fictional documentaries, emblematic of the destinies and subsequent evolution of the two authors, great directors relevant to the doctoral thesis: Orson Welles and Sergei Eisenstein. The comparative study of *¡Que Viva Mexico!* (Eisenstein) and *It's All True: 4 Men on a Raft* (Welles), two masterpieces unfinished during the lifetime of the two authors, composed of a mixture of mysticism, fiction, and documentary, takes into account the analysis of the image from a compositional point of view, the directorial approach, the strange correspondences between the two art works, the elements that belong to mysticism, possible influences and connections with other films analyzed in the framework of the thesis, but also the strong impact on the subsequent artistic careers of the directors. Through a new parallel, extended by the addition of the film *Tabu* (1931), which revolves around the trio Eisenstein – Welles – Murnau, the theme of paradise and the lost paradise is explored, given that these films were made in the historical vicinity of *Nostalgia for Paradise* (1940). The last subchapter is limited to a few recent documentaries that successfully incorporate elements of mysticism, this serving more the narrative purpose than a mystical perspective itself.

Summary conclusions

At the end of the research undertaken, it emerges, on the one hand, that between some directors addressed and various mystics taken as reference, there are certain similarities in the sense of similar ideas and philosophical discourses, common concerns, related perspectives on life, on artistic creation and on the artist's responsibility in the world. These have been proven both by reviewing and analyzing the film works and by researching autobiographical writings or written works belonging to both sides. The most obvious case in this regard is the analogy between Frank Capra and Nichifor Crainic (*Chapter II*), although in an introductory subsection was demonstrated the connection between Nichifor Crainic and Werner Herzog, having German mysticism as a common point. Another example from the same chapter is an analogy between Nichifor Crainic and Serghei Eisenstein, having Spanish mysticism as a point of common interest and the kinship between religious and artistic inspiration.

What the study has succeeded in demonstrating, first and foremost, is that among some of the world's established filmmakers, there have been (and continue to exist) inclinations and concerns in mysticism, which are worthy of serious consideration by scholars, and this inevitably spills over into their films. As, for instance, Henri Bremond demonstrated in his study from 1925 the link between mysticism and poetry, there is an undeniable influence of mysticism on the cinema, through the influences exerted on filmmakers in various ways. The study supports Gabrea's hypothesis that mysticism is a trans-temporal and transcultural phenomenon. This is because analogies have been made between directors and mystics from different cultures, and in some cases, from different time periods.

On the other hand, the study has detected some stylistic similarities between the procedures and expressive means used by directors in their films and the visions of the mystics, trying to answer the question of Gabriel Kosuth.

If there is an influence between mysticism and poetry, and if there is also a connection between poetry and cinema, then the similarities between mysticism and cinema are worth exploring in more detail. This is what the study tried to achieve, through several paths and methods. In *Chapter II*, for example, it was highlighted how lines from the mystic Oprișan's poem *Psihaion* seem to describe images from the vision of the climber Karl in Arnold Fanck's film or images from Leni Riefenstahl's debut film. Also, the visions described by Crainic find a visual counterpart in

the films of Werner Herzog. Elements and stylistic motifs from the theophanic visions of Nil Dorobanțu and other mystics are used by several directors in their films to herald epiphanies (Frank Capra, Ingmar Bergman, Andrei Tarkovsky, Jan Holoubek, Marco Pontecorvo).

In addition to all of this, countless other common elements, such as themes, motifs, symbols, concepts, messages, and philosophical or religious ideas, are found in abundance in both the writings of mystics and in the works or memoirs of mystical directors. Another relevant case in this sense is Vasile Voiculescu, who was also an author of fantastic prose. Given the fact that one of the reference works for the doctoral thesis was *Nostalgia of Paradise*, where the author was deeply concerned with the problem of the aesthetic relationship between religion and culture, in the appreciation and analysis of directorial works, the ideas and principles outlined by the Romanian writer, theologian, and mystic Nichifor Crainic were sought to be credited. Crainic, through his lectures on mysticism, had a profound influence on the generation of prison mystics, who were intellectually formed beginning with the interwar period and continuing with the period of detention in the communist prisons.

A good part of the works analyzed or mentioned in the study by renowned directors of world cinema support the idea that the mystical film, a particular form of artistic creation, has its primary impulse in the nostalgia for paradise. Being linked to the feeling of this nostalgia, his perspective extends beyond the world and beyond death, being permeated by a sense of the supernatural, more or less present. Mystical masterpieces are born from the directors' aspiration to regain the lost paradise through art. The most obvious cases in this regard are: Frank Capra (*Lost Horizon, It's a Wonderful Life*), Andrei Tarkovski (*Mirror, Nostalgia, Ivan's Childhood*), Friedrich Murnau (*Tabu*), Orson Welles (*4 Men on a Raft*), Eisenstein (*Que viva Mexico!, Bezhin Meadow*), Leni Riefenstahl (*The Blue Light, Tiefland*) Terrence Malick (*Days of Heaven, The New World*).

In mystical cinema, there is a marked tendency towards stylization, achieved through various means. First and foremost, it is about the stylization of the image, often obtained through careful and elaborate composition, through the appropriate use of lenses that produce distortions, through the variation of frame rate (filming speeds), through the appropriate use of filters that stylize realistic portraits and landscapes, through black and white filming, through the choice of appropriate shooting angles and colors, through appropriate lighting, through editing, through shots oriented towards the sky and elements of nature, facilitating or activating sensitive contemplation,

a bridge for imaginative contemplation. Directors often turn to famous paintings for inspiration in creating the composition, to build and recreate a certain type of atmosphere (mystical, mysterious) in the film (Herzog, Tarkovsky, Eisenstein, Riefenstahl, Pontecorvo). Among the most common painters who have influenced mystical cinema are names like El Greco and Caspar David Friedrich. In this sense, the mystical elongations of the bodies painted by El Greco are relevant, which inspired and influenced Sergei Eisenstein in his cinematic art. At the same time, the influence of Byzantine art (mainly icons), the Renaissance and Gothic (from which German Expressionism later derived) on mystical cinema should not be neglected. The Roman art of the Western Church owes a great deal to the Byzantine art of the Eastern Church, both institutions being concerned with the revelation of a sacred universe that people sometimes overlook. But even in archaic arts, such as Egyptian art or Mexican art, we find the same intense need for stylization justified by the intention to transcend nature, by the primacy of art over nature. If in a mystical film the director goes more for stylization, then he slightly moves away from the naturalist formula, which gives priority to the acting and the credibility of the actors' behavior. In such an approach, the actor and what is related to him does not become more important than the other elements such as the sets, the light, the shadows, the camera movements or the angles from which it is shot. The gestures, voices, and behavior of the actors are integrated into a unified whole, and in order to do this, they are transformed, refined, distorted, even exaggerated (so as not to seem at all natural), that is, stylized. This happens for profound reasons, namely precisely to suggest a higher order, a sacred universe. In the films *¡Que Viva México!* and *Ivan the Terrible*, the directors use stylization to create a sense of historical grandeur and epic scale. The actors' bodies are often posed in unnatural or exaggerated positions, and their gestures and movements are stylized to create a sense of beauty and power. Their hieratic bodies, which integrate into the artificial rhythm of the epic, express more than they do individually. It seems that there is a collective soul above them, a sacred order that possesses them. The same thing happens with Dreyer, in the case of the film *Ordet*, where the character of Johannes seems to be possessed by a higher power that dictates his behavior, gestures, and words. This is also the case with the film *A Hidden Life*, directed by Terrence Malick, where, in spite of all the pleas of his family and loved ones, in spite of the torture and the insistence with which the Nazis try to get Frank to change his attitude towards the regime, the main character chooses the path of martyrdom from a holy madness: in the light of an asceticism amplified by the way it was

filmed, the character is as if animated and encouraged in his decisions by a force greater than himself.

In addition to these things, in a mystical film we also talk about the stylization of nature, as a landscape. Nature is stylized in a romantic and mystical sense, taking into account precepts that support the idea that the external nature is influenced by the emotional state of the characters. Phenomena and elements of nature are used in a way, we could say, derived from the visions of mystics, that is, in a deeply mystical sense, with the purpose of suggesting subtle meanings and hidden realities: invisible worlds. To all this are added the suggestive possibilities of editing and the soundtrack, often having ancestral resonances.

The idea of emotional landscapes and a nature that is not indifferent to the inner lives of the characters was most likely taken from the Romantics, although it finds strong support in the discourse and philosophy of Christian mystics, being perpetuated from the distant past (Nichita Stihatul) to recent times (Nil Dorobanțu, the mystics of the communist prisons). Paradoxically, among the directors selected for this study, Eisenstein was the one who theorized the most on the subject, although this took place in the last period of his life and career, when he developed his study *Non-Indifferent Nature*. It was shown in *Chapter II* how, for the second part of this work, Eisenstein, endowed with extraordinary intuition, was inspired by the use of nature in early Soviet films, where he observed that, although it was used without a precise purpose, giving the impression of a totally indifferent nature, it still served to create an emotional state through a kind of inner plastic music. Many of the silent Soviet films of Eisenstein, Dovzhenko, or Pudovkin begin with a prelude that depicts a poetic landscape, in an attempt to set the stage for the landscape inserts that are introduced later in the film. This poetics of the elements of nature, of the emotional landscapes, which rhyme through their visual plasticity, specific to early Soviet films, has been taken up by directors such as Werner Herzog, Andrei Tarkovsky, Terrence Malick, and Marco Pontecorvo, to build in their films a perspective that is both mystical and poetic. Of all the films analyzed in this study, only the film *Fatima* (Pontecorvo, 2020) explicitly brings together this type of visual poetics with the theme of mystical ecstasy, as a culmination of the four attempts to screen the events of Fatima in 1917, the year in which the Bolshevik Revolution took place in Russia. The miracle of the sun depicted by Pontecorvo in *Fatima* is dated *October 13*, which is therefore in the vicinity of the historical event known as the October Revolution. In the study, I have demonstrated

that it is not by chance that there are certain connections (in terms of visual poetics, composition, editing, ecstasy, miraculousness, conflict, the play of beliefs and doubts, the mysticism of humor and rain, the use of pathos, stylization techniques, trends and directorial perspectives) between films of early Soviet cinema, in particular *Old and New – The General Line* (Eisenstein, 1929), *Earth* (Dovjenco, 1930), *A Simple Case* (Pudovkin, 1932) and the film *Fatima* (Pontecorvo 2020).

The key to deciphering such a connection was provided by Eisenstein himself in his study *Nonindifferent Nature*: in the period preceding his experience in Mexico, Eisenstein wanted to visit Lourdes, being concerned with the problem of the psychology of mystical ecstasy in order to study how, through the creation of authentic works of art (including films), pathos and ecstasy can be triggered in spectators. Therefore, there is an influence of mysticism not only on mystical directors, such as Sjöström, Capra, Dreyer, Tarkovsky, Weir, Herzog, Malick, but also on Soviet directors. We will never know what would have happened if Eisenstein had been able to visit Lourdes. However, we know what happened to the poet Franz Werfel, whose visit to Lourdes resulted in a conversion and a novel after which the film *The Song of Bernadette* (King, 1943) was made. In Eisenstein's case, however, it can be said that the experience in Mexico was the one that filled the void caused by the longing for mysticism, his adolescent passion that had died out shortly before the outbreak of the Revolution. To the same extent, the experience sparked his passion for the fairy tales and legends of his childhood, which justifies Eisenstein's interest in the mystical stories of Ivan Turgenev upon his return to Russia, from which the director later drew inspiration for the making of the destroyed film *The Bezhin Meadow* (1937). From mysticism is derived the inspiration that gives meaning to creative ecstasy, whether it has religious motivation or not. Even though Turgenev's work of the same name was adapted to integrate the story of the Soviet martyr Pavlik Morozov, and any reference to the supernatural was removed from it, we can still deduce from the history, but especially from the title of this film, Eisenstein's inclinations towards mysticism. There is an undeniable connection between the epilogue of the film *Que viva Mexico!*, in which Mexican indigenous children celebrate the *Day of the Dead* wearing sugar skull masks as a defiance of death, and the metaphysically tinged discussions of children in Turgenev's story about the supernatural signs of death. The Russian writer's 1851 story *Bezhin Meadow* about the hunter who got lost and ended up in an unknown place, witnessing the discussions of peasant children, has many elements in common with the plethora of mystical novellas and novels from the early

20th and interwar periods mentioned in the work study and which decisively influenced directors such as Mauritz Stiller, Victor Sjöström, Alexander Dovzhenko, or Frank Capra in their choice of subjects for their films.

The study therefore confirms the hypothesis of the initial approach, which began with the elaboration of the article on the film *Fatima* (2020), where the main premise was that there is an influence (intuited at first, later demonstrated) between the poetics and means of expression of early Soviet cinema and Pontecorvo's film, these being colported to the Italian director's work by renowned directors such as Andrei Tarkovsky, Werner Herzog or Terrence Malick. Subsequently, during the research, other common elements were also discovered that are found in the creative baggage of the great creators of mystical films: the motif of the bird, of flight, the motif of the angel, the androgyne symbol, Plato's myth, the theme of the lost and found paradise, the possible paradise, the garden as a symbol of paradise, elements of artistic prophetism, pictorial references. The mystical film oscillates between realism and fantasy. Along with the tendency to stylize, there is a strong need for authenticity. The first quality of a work of art is given by its authenticity. Directors want the story they intend to tell through the film to seem as credible as possible. Most of the time, they achieve this by minimizing special effects and limiting the artificial effect, or by filming in a realistic or naturalistic style. For authenticity, unknown actors are preferred to the general public, filming in natural locations instead of studio filming, and when filming in a studio or using special effects, the goal is for everything to look as natural as possible, without giving the impression of artificiality. In this case, stylization is discreet, it is not an end in itself, but only a means by which the director manages to mediate between spectators and mystical worlds. In detriment to accentuated stylization, the director will choose to film with a minimum of abstraction issues that, even if they belong to invisible worlds, are more concrete and tangible, this being an approach closer to Italian neorealism. If, for example, there is a need for a more realistic rendering of the miraculous, this is done with the help of the real, masking it or implanting it in concrete things and gestures, in order to prevent it from floating somewhere between heaven and earth. In this way, poetic visions of reality are obtained, although it cannot be said that poetic realism is the same as poetic mysticism. For example, Frank Capra's decision to film *Lost Horizon* in a crude, almost documentary style, was a consequence of the impact of early Swedish cinema's echo on world cinema and on renowned directors from all over the world. The study also shows how early

Soviet cinema influenced director Marco Pontecorvo in the rendering of the miraculous in the film *Fatima*. The idea of such a mystical film is to show the miracles and subtleties of the miraculous, as they happen or can happen in reality, rather than as they are imagined. This is the case with the documentary film *Lourdes et ses miracles*, where director Georges Rouquier distinguished himself through the discretion and honesty with which he filmed and rendered the facts and events surrounding the religious pilgrimage. Beyond the chance to actually film the miracles, it was more important how they were presented, in their complexity and ambiguity, which certainly raises, in front of the viewer's gaze, the issue of meaning and mystery.

Mystical film is based on myth and mystery, especially religious mystery. In addition to myth, the primitive reaction of the human spirit in the face of nature, religious mystery is necessary for art and implicitly for film to facilitate the overcoming of the limits imposed by the hardships of the modern world, facilitating access to the heavenly spheres, which, in a mysterious way, it intuitively. For such a film, the director can choose his material from anywhere, from any time and even from the life of a people foreign to his own. Sources of inspiration can be: the historical past, mythology, folklore, local legends, stories, short stories or mystical novels, the Bible, religious writings, the works and lives of great mystics or mystical writers. In the case of the latter, the extraordinary facts that sometimes accompany mystical ecstasy do not definitively characterize mystical film, just as they are not necessarily necessary in the case of the mystical phenomenon. In many cases, the artistic creation process associated with a mystical film is a sketch of the mystical phenomenon.

The mystical film is an eminently moral work: masterpieces are born from the desire to portray moral ideals, this being the idea that has tormented great mystical directors such as Tarkovsky or Capra.

Mystical cinema encompasses all mystical films, whether they are fiction films, documentaries, or even hybrids of fiction and documentary, such as the works *Que viva Mexico!* by Sergei Eisenstein and *4 Men on a Raft* by Orson Welles. It can be said that there is a common thread in mystical cinema, which was opened by the early Swedish film school and later taken up by Frank Capra and other mystical or romantic directors: Friedrich Murnau, Carl Dreyer, Leni Riefenstahl, Ingmar Bergman, Orson Welles, Andrei Tarkovsky, Werner Herzog, Peter Weir, or Terrence Malick. Each of these directors tried, in their own unique way, consciously or unconsciously, to approach the practice of such cinema, contributing significantly through their

works to its development. Not only through their clear interest in the subjects of mystical stories, but also through their authorial imprint, they reconnected modern art with the mystery. However, few of them were those who consciously and resolutely integrated into the path of the *theandric mode* in the process of artistic creation, as it is defined by Nichifor Crainic in *Nostalgia of Paradise*. Evidence, or rather, the fruits of a possible theandric mode are found in all the genius artists mentioned or analyzed in this study, but I believe that only Frank Capra, Andrei Tarkovsky and Terrence Malick (whose prolific activity as a great creator and artistic visionary still constitutes an unfinished chapter) are the ones who have consciously embarked on such a path. Consequently, the stories told through their works, which are varied both in technique and style, not only reflect profound aspects of humanity, but also manage to build dynamic forms of life that ultimately reflect eternal realities.

The image of mystery, the quintessence of mystical cinema, does not break through from the emptiness and falsity of religious blockbusters, where often authentic religious values are betrayed and exploited, nor from the range of dazzling seductive tricks that cinematography and technological progress put at the disposal of directors. It rather emerges from an attitude of a sensitive and affective nature, through which the director manages to reproduce with the camera, through the corresponding means of cinematic expression, what his inner eye sees and feels. It can be more elevated insofar as this inner eye of the artist is doubled or coincides, in particular cases, with the inner eye of the mystic or visionary. Therefore, by researching both the inner eye of mystical directors, who, having at their disposal the entire arsenal of the language of cinema, have managed to create formidable works that have overcome the ephemerality of the era in which they were made, as well as the visions and works of some mystics contemporary with the phenomenon of the seventh art, I believe that I have managed not only to outline clear aspects of mystical cinema, but also to approach their mysterious source.

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