

TIME AND SPACE IN POST-MODERN MOVIES

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Resumo

Os artefatos culturais pós-modernos podem assumir muitas formas diferentes devido a sua concepção eclética e anárquica. O objetivo do presente ensaio é analisar e ilustrar sua compressão do tempo e do espaço.

O estudo está concentrado em filmes porque, por um lado, o cinema é uma forma de arte que, bem como a fotografia, surgiu no contexto do primeiro impulso forte da cultura moderna. Por outro lado, porque talvez, dentre as formas de manifestação artística, o cinema seja a que possui a mais poderosa e eficaz capacidade de lidar de maneira instrutiva com assuntos interligados como tempo e espaço. O uso de imagens em série, bem como a possibilidade e autonomia para fazer cortes e inserções no tempo e no espaço em qualquer direção, conferem ao cinema uma liberdade muito grande em relação aos obstáculos normais. Ainda que este seja, no final das contas, um espetáculo projetado no restrito campo de uma tela plana.

Os filmes analisados são *Blade runner*: o caçador de andróides (1982), de Ridley Scott, e *Asas do desejo* (1987), de Wim Wenders. *Blade runner* é um filme popular de ficção científica, considerado pela crítica especializada como um excelente exemplo do gênero. Como *cult-movie*, ainda pode ser assistido nas salas de projeção contínua existentes nas grandes metrópoles. Apesar de ser classificado como filme “comercial”, é uma expressão de arte popular que trata de assuntos importantes.

Asas do desejo, por sua vez, é um exemplo de filme “intelectualizado”, muito bem recebido pelos críticos e mais difícil de ser compreendido numa primeira leitura. É um tipo de filme que demanda certo esforço para ser entendido e apreciado. De maneira diferente em termos de perspectiva e estilo, trata de assuntos semelhantes aos apresentados em *Blade runner* - a condição humana, os relacionamentos interpessoais, a sociedade, o amor, a morte, a solidão, anseios e esperanças.

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Os dois filmes nos mostram muitas das características do Pós-Modernismo, além de dedicarem particular atenção à conceituação e significado do tempo e do espaço.

Postmodern cultural artifacts can take many different forms due to its eclectic conception and anarchic subjects. The purpose of this essay is to analyze and illustrate the compression of time and space in some postmodern movies. This work is concentrated on movies, partially because they are a form of art which (as well as photography) arose in the context of the first strong impulse of the modern culture. On the other hand because among all other artistic forms, it perhaps has the most powerful capacity of dealing in an instructive manner with intermingled subjects such as space and time. The serial use of images, as well as freedom for performing clippings in space and time in any direction, sets cinema free from many normal hindrances although it is, in the long run, a show projected in the restricted space of a screen with no depth.

The films to be analyzed here are Ridley Scott's *Blade runner* and Wim Wender's *Wings of desire Himmel über Berlin*. *Blade runner* is a popular science-fiction movie, considered by many critics as an excellent example of the kind. As a "cult-movie" it can yet be seen in those all-night exhibition movie theaters in large metropolitan cities and it is, although also labeled as "commercial" film, a popular art expression which deals with important subjects.

Wings of desire, on the other hand, is an example of "intellectual" film, very welcome by the critics (one of them described it as a "bittersweet masterpiece") and a little more difficult to be understood at the first sight. This is the sort of film that takes some work to be grasped and appreciated. In a different manner, through very distinct perspective and style, however, it deals with similar subjects as those presented in *Blade runner*. Both of them show us many of the postmodernism characteristics, besides of paying a particular attention to the conceptualization and signification of time and space.

I've found theoretical support to this study in David Harvey's and Giuliano Bruno's works about movies and postmodernity, listed in the bibliography.

The plot in *Blade runner* is related to a small group of genetically constructed human beings, called "replicants" who come back to challenge their creators. The setting of the movie is in Los Angeles, year 2019 and the story is about the investigation carried out by Deckard, a "specialist" designed to find them out and eliminate or "terminate" them (as it is said in the movie) because they have become harmful to the social order.

These replicants were created with the specific purpose of working on highly specialized tasks in particularly difficult environments in the border of spatial exploration. They are provided with strenght, intelligence and powers

which are at the limit, or even beyond those of an ordinary human being. They also have feelings and it seems to provide them with the condition for, when performing their tasks, elaborate judgments which correspond to those required by human thought. Their creators, however, are afraid that some time they may become a threat to the established order and to avoid this possibility the replicants were given just four years of lifetime. When they escape from the control during these four years they need to be "terminated" and the task of terminating them is as dangerous as difficult due to their superior capacities.

It must be noticed that the replicants are not mere imitations, but totally authentic reproductions, indistinguishable in almost all aspects from the human beings. They are simulacra rather than robots. They were designed as an ultimate form of short-term, high productive capacity and high flexibility manpower (the capitalist ideal manpower).

Nevertheless, as it usually happens to workers who have their working life shortened, the replicants are not happy by having to accept the restrictions to their short lifetime. They look for their creator to try to increase their lifetime by pervading the core of their generator system so that, either persuading or forcing their creator, they have their genetic structure reset. Their designer, Tyrell (head of a vast corporate empire with his name) tells Roy, the replicants head, that the replicants have a more than satisfactory reward for their short life - after all, they live more intensely than common people. "Take your time", says Tyrell, "a flame burning with double intensity lasts half its time".

In short, the replicants exist in the schizophrenic rush of time which Jameson, Deleuze, Guattari (apud HARVEY, 1989) and others see as something so characteristic in the postmodern life. The replicants move in the space with a special sort of fluidity that provides them with an immense range of experience. Their *personae* is, in many aspects, similar to the global instantaneous communications.

Disgusted as they are about their "slavish work" (as Roy, their head, says) and trying to increase their lifetime, four replicants arrive in Los Angeles, fighting and killing. In this city, the "*Blade runner*" (specialist in replicants detection and termination methods) Deckard is summoned to "take care" of them. Although tired of all this killing and violence, Deckard is forced to leave his retirement rest, for the authorities give him only two alternatives: accept the task or be downgraded as "inferior person".

So, either Deckard or the replicants have a similar relationship with the dominant social power. This similarity defines an occult linkage of empathy and understanding between hunter and preys. During the film, Deckard's life is saved twice by a replicant while he saves the life of a fifth one, a recently created and

even more sophisticated replicant called Rachel, who eventually Deckard falls in love with.

Los Angeles, where the story takes place is hardly an utopia. The capacity the replicants have for working in the outer space meets its counterpart in Los Angeles, where the scenery reveals a worn out landscape of disindustrialization and post-industrial decay. Empty warehouses and abandoned industrial facilities are getting wrecked by acid rain. Everything is surrounded by fog, garbage is piled up everywhere and building structures are in such a disintegrating state that the view of the contemporary New York boilers and ruined bridges can be considered a soft one. Punks and trash pickers fight among the garbage, stealing whatever they can. J. F. Sebastian, one of the genetics designers who eventually enables the replicants to enter the Tyrell corporation (and who gets prematurely aged due to a disease called "accelerated decrepitude") lives alone in one of these empty spaces, surrounded by a bizarre set of toys and speaking dolls which pay him company.

Above all these scenes of chaos and inner decay and at the street level there is a world of high technology where we see fast transporting vehicles and advertisements ("a new opportunity for buying a golden land again"), familiar images of the corporate power (Pan Am, surprisingly still operating in 2019, Coca Cola, Budweiser, etc.), and the huge pyramid-like Tyrell building, which dominates part of the city. The Tyrell Corporation is specialized in Genetics Engineering. "The more human than human trade", says Tyrell, "is our business".

In opposition to these overwhelming images of corporate power, at the street level there is a frenetic small-range production. The streets are crowded with all kinds of people - Asians seem to predominate, and Coca Cola is announced by a Japanese smiling face. There is a new language, the "Citizenese", a mix of Japanese, German, Spanish, English, etc. The "third world" and its informal working practices has arrived in Los Angeles and is everywhere. The scales of a genetically produced snake are manufactured in a small workshop, and human eyes produced in another one (both of them managed by Oriental people). This indicates intricate working relationships among highly disconnected companies and the Tyrell Corporation itself.

At the street level the city is absolutely nonsensical. The architectural projects are a postmodern mess - The Tyrell Corporation building is something resembling an Egyptian pyramid. Greek and Roman columns are mingled in the street, also showing references to the Mayan, Chinese, Oriental, Victorian and contemporary (the shopping malls architecture). The simulacra are legion. Genetically produced owls fly, and snakes slide down the shoulders of Zhora (a replicant) while she makes her performance at a "cabaret" which seems to be a

perfect imitation of those from the 1920'.

The chaos of signs, messages and significations altogether suggest, at the street level, a state of fragmentation and uncertainty which enhances many of the aspects of the postmodern aesthetics. In *Blade runner*, says Bruno (1987), aesthetics is "the result of recycling, of fusion of levels, of discontinuous significants, of the borders expansion boom and of erosion".

However, there is also a deep sense of some concealed organizational power - The Tyrell Corporation, the authorities who summon Deckard without giving him any choice, the fast operation of the law and order representatives whenever it is necessary to maintain the control on the street. Chaos is tolerated precisely because it does not seem to be a real threat for the general control.

Everywhere there are images of creative destruction. They are markedly present, in effect, in the replicants themselves, created with wonderful powers just to be prematurely destroyed and surely "terminated" in the case they really get involved with their own feelings and try to have their way on developing their own capacities. Images of decay which pervade all the setting reinforce exactly this sort of circumstance. The social life shocking and fragmentation sense is enhanced in a remarkable sequence when Deckard pursues one of the replicants, Zhora, through the crowded, nonsensical and labyrinthic spaces of the city. When he eventually finds her out in an arcade full of exposed merchandises, he shoots on her back and she falls down breaking layers and layers of glass doors and windows, dying while making pieces of glass fly into all directions on the course of her final jump through a huge window.

The success of the replicants chase lies on a question-making method, which is based on the fact that replicants do not have a real life background. After all, they were genetically created as adult beings and have no experience in human socialization (a fact that turns them into potentially dangerous people in case they escape from control). The key-question which exposes the identity of Leon, one of the replicants is: "Talk to me about your feelings related to your mother". He replies: "Let me speak about my mother" - and shoots the person who makes the question. Rachel, the more sophisticated replicant, tries to convince Deckard about her identity as a real person by producing a picture of a mother and a small daughter, saying that she is the little girl.

The question here, points out Bruno (1987), is that "pictures are now taken as evidences of a real history, and it does not matter what is the real truth of this history. Image is, in short, evidence of reality, and images can be created and manipulated."

Deckard finds out a lot of pictures in Leon's hands, presumably designed to provide documentary evidence for his own history. And Rachel, looking at

Deckard's family pictures (it is interesting to notice that Deckard's only historical sense is provided by his pictures), tries to make herself suitable to the images. She changes her hairstyle according to the pictures, plays piano as if she were in a portrait and acts as if she knew the meaning of a "home".

It is this wish for an identity, a home and a history that makes Rachel saved from being terminated. Certainly Deckard feels moved by all her efforts to be a real person. But she can only enter again in the symbolic territory of a truly human society by accepting the irresistible oedipian symbol: the father. This is the only way she can take to be able to respond to the question "Talk to me about your mother". When she subjects herself to Deckard (by trusting him, condescending with him and also by physically surrendering to him) she learns the meaning of human love and the essence of common sociability. When killing the replicant Leon and thus saving Deckard's life, Rachel shows the ultimate evidence of her capacity of acting as Deckard's woman. By denying her condition, she escapes from the replicants schizoid world of time, space and intensity to enter the Freudian symbolic world.

David Harvey does not believe (and neither do I) that Bruno (1987) is right when opposing Roy's fate to Rachel's fate, having as basis the wish of the latter to submit herself to the symbolic order and Roy's refusal in doing so. Roy is programmed to die soon and no postponement or salvation are possible. His desire of overcoming all the waste of his own condition just cannot come true. His extreme rage, as well as other replicants rage, finds no limit. When getting to Tyrell, Roy kisses him first and then pulls his eyes out, killing his creator. Bruno's (1987) probably correct interpretation of this scene lies on a reversion of the Oedipus myth as a clear indication that the replicants do not live according to the Freudian symbolic order. It does not mean, however, that replicants do not have human feelings. We have seen in the movie something about the feelings of Roy in his touching and affectionate response to the replicant Pris, killed by Deckard among J.F. Sebastian's toys. The subsequent pursuit of Roy by Deckard, that soon turns into the pursuit of the hunter by the prey gets to its climax when Roy, in the last moment, saves Deckard from falling from the top of a high building. At this very moment Roy gets to his programmed end.

However, before dying, Roy tells Deckard about his participation in incredible events and things he had seen. He exposes his rage towards his slavish condition which makes all his intense experiences "go away by the time as tears in the rain". Deckard knows the power of these longings. In his reflections, he understands that replicants are like most of us. They just want to know "where they come from, where they are going to, and how much time is left".

After the four replicants are dead, Deckard runs away with Rachel (who

was not programmed to last only four years) towards a natural scenery where there are forests, mountains and sun shining. The replicant has become such a perfect simulacrum that she and the human can go for their future, although figuring out "how much time is left".

Blade runner is a science-fiction parable where postmodern subjects are situated in a flexible accumulation and time-space compression context and can be explored with all imaginative power provided by cinema. The conflict occurs among people who live in different ranges of time and, as result, see, live and feel the world through very different ways. The replicants do not have a real history, but maybe they can make one, since history, for everybody, was reduced to picture evidence. Although socialization is still important for personal history, it also can, as Rachel did, be copied. The depressing aspect of the movie is precisely that, in the end, differences between humans and replicants are so little that they can fall in love (once they are in the same temporal range). The power of simulacrum is everywhere. The strongest social linkage between Deckard and the rebel replicants - all of them are controlled by a dominant corporate system - never indicates that a coalition might be formed among the oppressed to fight the controlling power. Though Tyrell has his eyes pulled out, it is an act of personal rage, not of class rebellion.

The end of the film shows a pure evasion scene (tolerated, it must be noticed, by the authorities) which leaves the problems unsolved. Either the replicants problems or the outrageous living conditions of the frantic human crowd that dwells the dangerous streets of a decaying and wrecked postmodern world are set aside.

In *Wings of desire* we also find two groups of actors who live in different temporal ranges. The angels live in the eternal and everlasting time, and the human beings live in their own social time - and, of course, each group faces the world from very different points of view. The film deals with the same sense of fragmentation which pervades *Blade runner*, though questions referring to relationships between time and space, history and place are expressed directly and not otherwise. The problem of the image (particularly, the photography) *versus* the narrative of a story in the real time is essential to the structure of the film.

The film begins with a narrative similar to a fairytale about how the time was when children were children. It was a time, they say, when children thought that everything was full of life and life was only one, when they had no opinions about anything (including, we may infer, about having opinions), and when they were not even disturbed by pictures. However, children make important questions like: "Why am I who I am and not you?", "Why am I here and not there?", and

“When did the time begin and where does the space end?” These questions are repeated in several key-moments of the film and form its subject.

Children, at several moments, look up or around as if they were partially aware of the angels presence, while adults, busy and self-referenced, seem to be unaware. The questions made by the children are, in fact, fundamental identity questions, and the film explores two parallel ways on defining answers.

The setting is Berlin. In a certain sense, it is a shame that Berlin is not in the English title, for the film is a strong and sensitive evocation of the meaning of this place. But we soon realize that Berlin is a city among many others in an interactive global space. Peter Falk, an international media star, is instantaneously identifiable (many people know him as Detective Columbo, from a television series and in the movie there are several references to his role). Falk is flying and his thoughts are “Tokyo, Kyoto, Paris, London, Trieste, ... Berlin!” while he looks for the spot where he must land. In several key-spots of the movie there are airplanes taking-off or landing. People think in German, French and English, sometimes using other languages (language has not degenerated to the *Blade runner*'s “citizenese”, as of yet). References to the media international space are everywhere. Berlin is, for sure, just one more place among many others, and it belongs to an internationalist cosmopolitan world. But Berlin is still the place to be explored. One instant before hearing Falk's thoughts, we hear a little girl thinking of how to draw the space of her house. Relationship between space and place is soon directly presented.

In the first part of the movie Berlin is seen through the monochromatic eyes of a couple of angels who, by being out of the human existence time, they exist only in the spirit, in the eternal and endless time. They can also move instantaneous and effortlessly in space. For them, time and space just exist, an endless present in an endless space which reduces the whole world to a monochromatic condition. Everything seems to flow at the same time, more or less as contemporary social life flows in the homogeneous stream of the international currency. The angels, however, cannot interfere in human problems or decisions. Living in a world of “always” and “forever”, they cannot grasp the meaning of the human “here” and “now”.

Through the angels perspective the picture of Berlin is an extraordinary landscape of fragmented spaces and temporary incidents with no cohesive logic. The opening images take us from the top to inner backyards and to the restricted space of the laborers home from the XIX century. We then pass through inner spaces similar to labyrinths, hearing the angels and people's private thoughts. Isolated spaces, isolated thoughts, isolated individuals - this is all we can see. A young man in a room thinks about committing suicide due to unrequited love, while

his father and mother have quite different thoughts about their son.

In the subway, on a bus, in cars, in an ambulance that rushes with a pregnant woman, on the street, on a bicycle, everything looks fragmentary and transitory and every incident is recorded in the same monotone and monochrome. Living out of the human time and space, all the angels can do is offer some spiritual comfort, trying to cure the fragmented and many times shaken feelings of the human beings whose thoughts they watch. Sometimes they succeed and sometimes not (the young man commits suicide and the high school girl, taken to prostitution, comes to grief). “As angels” complains one of them, “we can never participate, just pretend.”

This fantastic evocation of a urban scenery with people alienated in fragmented spaces, trapped to a temporality of incidents with no patterns brings about a strong aesthetic effect. Images are crude, cold, but provided with the beauty of an old fashioned snapshot, though put into movement by the lens of the camera.

The identity of this place called Berlin is made by these bizarre but beautiful images. The differential organization of time and space is, therefore, seen as the structure where individual identities are developed. The image of separate spaces is particularly strong, since they are juxtaposed and arranged in the mode of a “collage”, a montage. The wall of Berlin is one of these divisions and many times in the film as an omnipresent division. “It is impossible to get lost in Berlin” - says somebody - “because you can always find the wall”. But there are more subtle divisions. According to the reflections of a man driving a car and passing through a street where scenes of destruction resembling the war times, “Germany has fragmented to such an extent that everybody is a mini-state and each street has its fences surrounded by a nobody's land and that can be crossed only by having the right password.” Even approaching another individual requires the payment of a tax. This extreme condition of alienated and isolated individualism is considered good (if compared with the prior experience of nazist collective life). People even look for this condition. “Get some nice clothes and you will have won half the battle”, says Falk, thinking about the rule he will have to perform and in a very funny scene, he tries on several hats, looking for one which will enable him to keep unknown and mingle with the crowd. The hats he tries on make him look like virtual characters masks. One of the hats makes him resemble Humphrey Bogart, another is for the horse races, that one is to go to the opera and that one is to attend a wedding. The act of wearing masks and disguises is connected with spatial fragmentation and alienated individualism. How can some sense of identity be developed and maintained in such a world?

Referring to identity, there are two spaces which have a peculiar meaning.

The library - a reservoir of historical knowledge and collective memory - is an attractive space for many people (even the angels seem to rest there). An old man enters the library. He is going to perform an extremely important though ambiguous role. He sees himself as the story teller, the muse, the potential guardian of the collective memory and history, the representative of the "ordinary man". However, he is disturbed by the thought that the circle of people who used to gather around him to listen has broken off and scattered away and he does not know where they are, and whether they have become readers who do not communicate one with the other. The old man complains that even language and the meaning of words and sentences seem to have disappeared or become incoherent. From now on he is forced to live "immediately", he uses the library to try to rescue a proper sense of the history of the specific place called Berlin. He wants to achieve this not from the kings' and leader's point of view, but as an anthem of peace. The books and photographs, however recall images of death and destruction occurred during the II World War, as if this was the moment, in fact, of the beginning of a new time and when the spaces of the city were shaken.

The old man, surrounded by earth globes in the library, spins one of them, thinking that the whole world is turning into dust. He goes out from the library and walks towards Potsdamer Platz, the heart of old Berlin, with its Josti Café, where he used to have a coffee, smoke a cigar and watch people passing by. Walking along the Wall of Berlin, everything he finds is an empty piece of land, full of weeds. Stunned, he falls on an abandoned armchair, insisting that his quest is not vain and irrelevant. Although he feels as an ignored and mocked poet in the border of nobody's land, he cannot give up because, as he says, "if humankind loses its story teller, the memories of childhood will get lost, too". Though history may sometimes look dreadful - and he remembers one occasion when there were flags in the Potsdamer Platz, the crowd were frenetic and the police were brutal - it must be told. Besides, he feels personally protected, safe, as he says, "from the narrative present and future problems". His efforts for reconstructing and transmitting this narrative of salvation and protection is a subtle "underplot" which importance will only be evident in the very end of the film.

However, there is a second place where a fragile sense of identity still prevails. The circus, a show performed in the restricted space of a tent, offers a place for especial interaction when some human relationship may occur. It is in this space that Marion, the trapeze girl feels some sense of herself, a possibility of achieving an identity and belong to something. However, the news that the circus is financially broken and will be forced to be closed-off, shows immediately how temporary and contingent is this identity. Here the short-term contract must prevail, too. Marion, although very sorry about the news, insists upon having a

history of her own and that she is going to create one, tough not in the circus. She even figures her out going into an automatic picture-taking cabin and leaving it with a new identity (one more time, the power of the photographic image), getting a job as waitress or whatever. Her own history - as we are reminded while an angel observes her in her trailer - can be reduced anyway (as Deckard's history) to family pictures pinned up on a wall and so, why not making a new history by means of photographs?

These fantasies are, however, full of an aura of desire of being an entire person, instead of a fragmented and alienated one. Marion longs to be complete, but she admits that it can only occur by the means of a relationship with another person. After the circus disappears, she stands up, alone, in an empty place, feeling as a rootless person, with no history, with no country. However, this very emptiness seems to contain the possibility of a radical change. "I can become the world", she says, while watching an airplane crossing the sky.

One of the angels, Daniel, already tired of his impotence for tuning with "here" and "now", feels attracted by Marion's energy and beauty, particularly in her performance on the trapeze. He gets trapped by her inner desires of *becoming* instead of just *being*. For the first time he catches a glimpse of a full-colored world and starts entertaining more and more the idea of joining the human time and leaving the spiritual end eternal time. His decision is anticipated by two important events. Marion dreams of him as a glittering "the other", and he sees himself reflected in her dream. Still invisible, he follows her to a nightclub and, while she dances, alone, he touches her thoughts. She reacts feeling a sweet sensation as if, she says, "a hand was softly closing inside her body."

The second event is centered on Peter Falk - an angel who came to earth some time ago. While having a coffee on a street shop, Falk feels the presence of the invisible Daniel. "I cannot see you, but I know you are here", he tells to a stunned Daniel, starting then to talk in a high-spirited manner of how pleasant it is living in the human flow of time, feel the material events and perceive, in a tangible manner, the universe of the human feelings.

Daniel's decision of joining earthly life is taken in the nobody's land, between two strips of the Wall of Berlin, patrolled by soldiers. Fortunately, his angel friend takes him to the West Side. There, Daniel wakes up to a world of rich and gorgeous colors. He has to walk through the city in real physical manner, and, when doing so, he experiences the joy that comes from the creation of a spatial story by merely crossing the city, which no longer seems fragmented, but presenting a coherent structure instead. This human sense of space and movement contrasts with the space of the angels, priorly described as a hyperspace of fast flashes, being each image similar to a cubist painting, which suggests a very

different mode of spatial perception.

When getting in the human time, Daniel goes from one plan to another, but now he needs money to survive. By asking to a by-passer, he gets enough money for a cup of coffee, he sells an old armor (which we learn later, is the initial gift to angels who come to earth) and gets out from the store wearing colorful clothes and a watch he pays close attention at. Daniel goes to the studio where Falk is making a movie and gets shocked because the watchman does not let him come in. Cursing the watchman, he is forced to call Falk through the fences. Falk, who immediately guesses who he is, asks him: "How long?" and Daniel replies: "Minutes, hours, days, weeks ... *Time!*" Falk relies in a soft mood: "Well, let me give you some dollars!" The entrance of Daniel in the human world is now firmly set on the coordinates of social space, social time and social power of money.

The meeting of Marion and Daniel is clearly intended to be the climax of the film. They spin around each other in the same nightclub where she had been before, watched by the old Daniel's angel-companion (who looks tired), and they go together to a bar near them. There, they get to know each other in an almost ritualistic way. She, ready and determined to make her own history, to overcome the *being by becoming*; he decided to learn the flow of human experience through time and space. In a long monologue, she emphasizes the importance of their common project. She wants to get rid of coincidence and contingency. The short-term contracts are over. Marion tries to define a sort of union which has a universal meaning, beyond this particular time and place. "There may not be destiny", she says, "but surely there is a decision." And everybody in the city and even in the world can take part of this decision. She imagines a crowded square where she and Daniel, so replenished of this place, are able to take this decision for everyone. It is a decision of setting a linkage between a man and a woman around the project of come to be, a linkage in which a woman can say: "My man", and this way, opening all the universe to a new kind of interpretation and perception. This decision means entering the labyrinth of happiness by turning desire into love, so that Marion can eventually get truly alone with herself - for getting truly alone presupposes an integrality that only comes from a non-contingent relationship with another person.

It seems that now Marion has the answers to those embarrassing questions: "Why am I who I am and not you?", "Why am I here and not there?", and "Where did time begin and where does space end?" The result of this union - thinks Daniel while helping Marion on her performance in the trapeze, after their first night together - is not a child, but an immortal image which can be shared by everybody for the rest of their lives.

It is hard to keep the ending from slipping to banality (preceded by the kitsch

sequence of the dream, when the angel appears before Marion in a glittering silver robe). Should we come to the conclusion that, after all, only romantic love makes the world go round? An indulgent reading might be that we should not allow our worn-out in the kitsch and pastiche experience prevent us from getting free from the romantic desire and the assumption of great projects. However, the final sequences are really amazing. The film goes back to the permanent time monochrome. The old man, set aside during the colorful takes of the film, walks towards the Wall of Berlin, saying: "Who is going to look for me, the story teller? They need me more than ever". The camera suddenly passes him by and focuses the clouds, as if flying. "We are on our way", says Marion. There is more to come - the final credits assure us of that.

Harvey (1989) sees the second part of the film as "an attempt to bring back to life something of the modernist spirit of human communication, of union and of come to be from the ashes of a postmodern, monochromatic and feelings deprived landscape." Wim Wenders clearly puts into action all his artistic and creative power in a project of redemption. He proposes, in fact a romantic myth which may redeem us from the "shapeless universe of contingency." The fact that many angels, according to Falk, preferred coming to earth suggests that it is always better being in the human flow of time, and that coming-to-be can potentially break-off the stillness of being. Space and time are structured in radically different manners in the two parts of the film, and the presence of the color, of the creativity, and, last but not least, of the money as a form of social connection provide it with the necessary environment where it is possible to find some meaning in a common purpose.

However, there are serious problems to solve. Daniel has no history and Marion is apart from her roots and her history was reduced to a handful of photographs and some other memorabilia. Is it possible to put into practice the project of come-to-be historically? The insistent old man's voice seems to question the viability of this. The open romanticism of the end, he seems to say, must be complemented by the real sense of history. In fact, Marion's image of a "Platz" full of people taking part of her decision recalls the spectrum of the moment when Potsdamer Platz became dreadful with the flags. Formally speaking, in the film there is a tension between the power of the spatial images and the power of the narrative. The old man (described as Homer, the history teller, in the credits) is in many aspects set aside in the film, explicitly complaining about that. According to him, come-to-be must be more than creating one more set of images without depth, it must be situated and grasped historically. However, this subsumes that history can be grasped without the use of images. The old man leafs through a photograph book, hanging around Potsdamer Platz, trying to

reconstitute, by memory its sense of place, and remembers when it became ugly, without taking to the anthem of peace searched by him.

This dialogue between narrative and image generates a dramatic tension in the film. Powerful images can either enlighten or darken narratives. In the film they overcome the verbal messages which the old man tries to expose. It is almost as if the film were restricted to its own intertextuality of images. On this tension lies the question of how dealing with the aesthetic aspects of space and time in a fragmented and monochromatic postmodern world. "Maybe", says Marion "time itself is the problem", leaving us to imagine, as in *Blade runner* final takes, "how much time is left". Whatever that means for the participants, the monochromatic landscape of eternal time and endless space will surely not be enough.

It is very suggestive and interesting that these two films, so different in many aspects, describe so similar conditions. In Harvey's (1989) opinion "it is not to be taken for granted that this similarity is accidental or contingent. It supports the idea that recent experience of time/space compression, under pressure to achieve more flexible manners of accumulation, has generated a crisis in the representation of cultural forms and this is a topic of intense aesthetic preoccupation in the whole (as in *Wings of desire*) or partially (in the case of all, from *Blade runner* to Cindy Sherman's photographs and novels by Italo Calvino and Thomas Pynchon). These cultural practices are important. If there is a crisis in the representation of space and time, new modes of feeling and thinking must be created. Part of the route to leave the postmodern condition must go through this process."

In spite of the open optimism in the end of Wenders' movie, the sad side of both films lies on the incapacity for going beyond romanticism (individualized and strongly presented) as solution for the two conditions of life so brightly portrayed by the directors. It seems that they are unable to get rid from the images created by themselves. Marion and Daniel look for an image to replace images, as if it were an adequate conception to change the world. From this perspective, turning to the romanticism is dangerous in both cases just because it announces the continuation of a condition where aesthetics prevails on ethics. The quality of the romanticism is different, too. The tired machismo of Deckard and the submission of Rachel are different from the meeting of minds and souls in the case of Daniel and Marion (who want to learn one with another). In *Blade runner* there is at least a preoccupation about the nature of the symbolic order under which we might be, and Wenders avoids this issue. Wenders also avoids completely the question of relationship and class-awareness by reducing the social problem to the immediate relationship between individuals and collectivity

(the State). Although in *Blade runner* there are several objective allusions to class relationship, the characters evidently do not see a purpose on getting related to them, even when they are, as Deckard, vaguely aware of its existence.

Although these two films are bright portraits of the postmodern condition, particularly of the conflicting and confused experience of time and space, none of them has the power of beating the established perspective or transcending the hostile conditions of the moment. This must partially be attributed to the inherent contradictions of the cinematographic art. After all, cinema is the supreme maker and manipulator of images for commercial purposes. The simple act of using it implies always the reduction of complex histories of daily life to a sequence of images projected on a screen without depth. The idea of a revolutionary cinema has always drowned when facing this difficulty. Nevertheless, the problems are deeper than that. The postmodern artistic forms and cultural artifacts, due to their own nature, have to face self-consciously the problem of creation of images and, as result, must necessarily turn into themselves. As consequence, it is difficult not to be the object portrayed in the form of art itself.

However, within these limits, the mimetic qualities of these films are extraordinarily revealing. Either *Wings of desire* or *Blade runner* show us, as in a mirror, many of the essential characteristics of the postmodern condition.

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