Cinema and transdiscursive semiotics. Digital cinema in the multiscreen era: a new environment, a new spectator

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In recent years, a new cinematic environment has been taking shape, where the act of watching a film in a cinema had already been articulated as a minor commercial element within the film industry. But this trend, with the arrival of COVID-19 and the ban on commercial cinemas, was accelerated, generating the new multi-screen cinema: which has dominated the international scene in 2020, the first quarter of 2021, and which has introduced changes that will no longer be reversible. This may lead us to question whether we are still talking about cinema, in the sense it has been given since its invention.
KEYWORDS: Transdiscursive semiotics, cinema, Netflix, multiscreen, COVID-19.

En los últimos años se ha venido configurando un entorno cinematográfico nuevo, donde el acto de ver una película en sala, se había ya articulado como un elemento comercial menor dentro de la industria cinematográfica. Pero esa tendencia, con la llegada de la COVID-19 y la prohibición de acudir a salas comerciales, se vio acelerada generando el nuevo cine de las multipantallas, que ha introducido cambios que no serán ya reversibles. Esto nos puede llevar a plantearnos si estamos aún hablando de cine, en el sentido que se le ha dado desde su invención.
PALABRAS CLAVE: *Semiótica transdiscursiva, cine, Netflix, multipantalla,* COVID-19.

INTRODUCTION

Semiotics, a reference discipline in the Social Sciences in the 1960s and 1970s, has seen how the role it used to play has become relegated and, along with it, the academic weight it carried, since the turn of the century, partly due to external agents (the importance gained by the so-called post-structuralism and its derivatives) and also partly due to internal agents (certain secretiveness in the conceptual aspects that prevented the application of many of its postulates and to a large share of the communicative praxis that was occurring in the early 2000s). This weakening, as it is well known, did not occur equally in all the European and American countries, because it is still enjoying good health in Italy, although with its own nuances, as well as in France, but in Spain and Ibero-America it evidently started losing steam in the early years of the 21st century, which is characterized by deep political and social instability (suffice it to illustrate this with simple examples like the Attack on the World Trade Center in 2001, the 2008 financial crisis, several wars waged by East-West blocks, the change in the Latin-American political cycle and the COVID-19 crisis in 2020-2021), which crystalize in the construction of a new reality: spectacular scientific and technological breakthroughs, along with a new arithmetic among the actors of international politics, with unpredictable social consequences.

All of the above translates into –and is revealed by– the world of signs and symbols of our era in the production of contents (which is markedly digital), transforming communication and filtering, by means of the screen, every human discourse and message. That is why a large share of the new disruptive dynamics in personal and institutional communication, and especially whose medium is the technology applied to the audiovisual, requires updating in the methodological, conceptual and terminological framework. In our opinion, this is a field in which semiotics should have, and indeed has, much to say. It would not be so much a traditional semiotics, but rather a changing and adaptable tool, at the service of interpreting reality.

Therefore, the present paper intends to approach, from the perspective of transdiscursive semiotics, the complex machinery of the new cinema in the multiscreen era, especially in a context where,

due to the COVID-19 pandemic, going to the movies has been banned in practically every country for most of 2020 and so far in 2021. In this context in which life, leisure and any communicative dimension goes almost exclusively through a screen, transdiscursive semiotics becomes a first-rate *decrypting* tool.

The state of the question tries to construct solidly the connections between the cinema and semiotics, and the works that in the last few years have reflected on the different spheres of ontological reformulation of the cinema have been especially useful.

Our methodological proposal, therefore, is not that of a purely procedural, formal and functional semiotics because, just like all discourses, it refers us to other discourses (and interacts with one another), it is this dimension of discursive hybridization that ultimately produces *semiosis*, placing it in the dynamics signification (processes) and meanings (products).

The analysis has allowed verifying how transdiscursive semiotics can and should, inasmuch as it is a tool, be capable of asking all the questions to reflect upon all kinds of implications (political, economic, rational, emotional, cultural, educational, etc.) from the perspective of the visual analysis as production of meaning in our days. In its application in the new cinema or the multiscreen era, it allows us to dissect the most important mechanism of creation of signification imaginaries that confer meaning to the implications that we have mentioned above, through the ever-present screens, generating with them a new type of spectator for a new type of society that is just making its way in these days.

SEMIOTICS AND THE CINEMA.
THEORETICAL PRINCIPLES AND STATE OF THE QUESTION

The link between cinema and semiotics is old –considering the short life of the medium– and it is made up of several top works that have been reformulating its ontology (that of the cinema) at the same time that this art was evolving. After an initial stage that Burch (1987) calls "stage of plenitude of the Primitive Mode of Representation" (p. 33), it was the Soviet theorists who were the first to approach the majority of

the limits and possibilities of the new cinema: this dichotomy between an *artistic* cinema (platonic) typical of "poetic montage", as Eisenstein (1928/2003) would call it, and which, at least partially, will link with the German expressionism of the time between wars (Román, 2004). It is opposed by a certain *realistic* (Aristotelic) vision represented among the Soviets mainly by Jutkevitch and Kozintzev (Leyda, 1965, p. 183).

After these debates, right in the middle of reconstruction of the Western Europe project of post-war Europe, work with solid theoretical foundation is produced from the perspective of semiotics in the cinema by Metz (1971), which understands the cinema as a language (open to multiple linguistic readings). The double articulation of language, theorized by Martinet (1936/1992), consisting in a series of finite phonemes that result, firstly, in a finite but very large number of words that in turn, when combined with one another generate, secondly, an infinite number of messages, is not easily transferable to the visual logic, where the concept of *frame* (still photography) is not comparable to that of phoneme. But this is not a totalizing claim, either, because, though it is true that all the phonemes are clearly delimited in a word, and all the words of a language are delimited within the structure that is language, even considering that the linguistic processes through which a language acquires loans or creates neologisms are also clearly described, all of these linguistic inner workings are qualified and completed by a series of new extralinguistic branches that were beginning to proliferate just at that time: proxemics and kinetics, inserted in the study of non-verbal communication, which complete, from an external point of view, what is strictly verbal, the functioning of linguistic communication and, in addition, they are vital for cinema language (they are, ultimately, the foundation of the actors' work, of narratology, of visual analysis, etc.).

One of the theoretical continuators of Metz's linguistic vision is Bazin (1958) who in turn, as cinema critic and theorist, connects with an avant-garde idea that will be carried out by the French of the *Nouvelle Vague*, grouped around *Cahiers du Cinéma*: Truffaut, Godard, Rivette, Rohmer, which will have Italian ramifications with the Bolognese Pier Paolo Passolini. This theory is qualified by Kracauer in *The Mass Ornament* (1963/2009). In that same year, 1963, *The Aesthetics and Psychology of Cinema*, by Mitry, is published,

a book of paramount importance because it links the cinema not only with a linguistic conception but also with an artistic code and its connections with other branches of creation. But what is really transcendental is that it is one of the first authors to reflect deeply on the receptor's role in the cinema communicative system. Barthes (1992) will also delve into this. He has the cinema and photography pivot around literature, and he does so by reflecting on the role of narration, repositioning the three disciplines around the concept of style, analyzed by semiotics and established by the *auctoritas*:

> Among the authors that have contemporarily dealt with the topic of style, in different stages of his works, is Roland Barthes. Beginning from the texts of his youth –such as "The object World", referring to 17th century Flemish painting– Barthes begins to incorporate in some of his works the contemporary semiotic and psychoanalytical perspectives to the determination of individual and epoch styles (Steimberg, 1998/2013, p. 63).

Actually, the notion of *style* is not exempt from a decoding apparatus that, as Jauss (1967/2013) would put it, links one work with other works by the same author and these in turn with other works of a school or movement sharing traits and features with one another: all of them interpretable by the receptor in the *horizon of expectations*.

An important milestone is the cinematographic analytical proposal by the Italian semioticians Casetti and Di Chio in *How to analyze a film* (1990), as well as the contribution by Bettetini applying it to *simulation* in *La simulazione visiva* (1991), and the new French semiotics (Andrè Gaudreault, *The cinematic story*, 1995). We owe the Bolognese school a large portion of the theoretical postulates that, at least in part, are still valid today. Under the inarguable leadership of Eco (1984, 1997, 2003, 2006, 2007), many researchers have followed in his footsteps, but among others, the works by University of Bologna professors Demaria (2006), Lorusso (2010, 2020) and Violi (2017) are especially remarkable for our proposal. In the scope of their specific application to the cinema, the works by Bolognese Dusi (2015) and Polidoro (2008) are also very relevant.

Lastly, in the last few years, technological changes (above all in what concerns reduction of film production costs) and the changes in cinema consumption, have been incredibly deep and have propitiated a mutation that is much more profound than what the advent of color or sound cinema once entailed, visible in the cinematic scope, both in fiction and journalistic TV documentary (Blanco Pérez, 2020a, 2020c). All of this results in hybridized discourses that have been analyzed in detail in the last few years by Spanish authors of international renown, such as Cerdán (2011), Carrera and Talens (2018), or Torreiro (2011):

> These areas of interference that have been created in the last few years mean the opening up of new paradigms in the form and function of image discourses, as well as new representation models that suggest a great impulse of new practices (Sucari, 2012, p. 16).

However, with the advent of the new digital platforms (Netflix arrives in Spain in 2015, but it reaches its greatest boom in the last fiscal years), in addition to the irruption of other platforms with a similar business model (Movistar+, HBOplus, Disney+, Filmin, Apple TV, etc.), but, especially the onset of COVID-19 and, with it, the ban of going to the cinema theaters for most of the 2020 and 2021 all over the world, have generated quite a few questions about the ontology of current cinema. It will be precisely on this scenario where transdiscursive semiotics, as methodology for the analysis of meanings of this new film world, will have much to say in the study of how the new cinema has been articulating meanings (both in fiction and non-fiction) in the multi-screen era.

METHODOLOGY. THE THEORY OF EMPLACEMENT/DISPLACEMENT: AN ANALYTICAL PROPOSAL FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF TRANSDISCURSIVE SEMIOTICS FOR THE DIGITAL CINEMA IN THE MULTISCREEN ERA

We start from the consideration of semiotics as a discipline with a methodological vocation, which joins theory and praxis, that is: on one hand it seeks to explain, from the communicative perspective, how any

sign system works, and, on the other, it possesses a practical dimension (that is: of applying this theory on the analysis of how these meaning-generating dynamics work).

Transdiscursive semiotics finds a suitable field of application in all kinds of images, although we focus our attention on cinematic images. Since they are in 2D, even when they have a *pretense* of tridimensionality, Zunzunegui will call it *planar semiotics* (as opposed to *space semiotics*, which deals with tridimensional products such as sculptural or architectural ones, etc.). The phenomenon of semiosis, the process by which "something means something to someone", entails the necessary participation of a receptor that will be the decoder of meaning. The American semiotician Morris (1938) will distinguish the sign *vehicle* (sign), the *designatum* (what is designated), the *interpretants* (the interpreter's considerations) and the *interpreter who decodes*. These three elements (plus the receptor who decodes) will make up the framework of a code system called *language*. But semiosis is also the main object of study of social semiotics, a branch of analytical procedural concretion that starts from a very simple basis: given that in all kinds of human societies along history messages have been constructed by means of different communicative branches, analyzing its production of meaning is also analyzing the world in which they were produced (Hodge & Kress, 1995). In other words: "by analyzing products we aim at processes" (Verón, 1987, p. 124).

The theory of emplacement/displacement starts from transdiscursive semiotics (and the post-structural narrative) and it was formulated by Vázquez Medel (2003) at the School of Philology at the University of Seville in the 1990s. Since then, it has been enriched by contributions from different branches because every attempt at approaching the meanings constructed by means of aesthetic/artistic proposals requires interdisciplinary, polyhedral insight.

Linked with critical thinking and with numerous sources, such as Berger's and Luckmann's sociology of knowledge or Gadamer's neohermeneutics, it starts from the constructivist approach in Piaget's cognitive and evolutionary psychology and Morin's theory on complex knowledge, as well as his anthropological view of the world. One of its sources is also the work by Trías and his logic of limit and border

reason. We cannot overlook the post-feminist discourse, more prevalent than ever in the 21st century, which, in our opinion, is presented to us on an open, polycultural, digitalized and *uberized*[2] reality.

Due to all the above, this branch of semiotics is, in our view, a very useful tool to "decrypt" the world around us from a social and humanistic perspective, starting from the current scientific and technological knowledge, because it completes other theories and builds an outlook inserted in a global, transversal theory to attain better understanding of communicative and dynamic reality of signification. Mexican semiotician Vidales (2009) claims that semiotics "emerges as a rigorous apparatus for the production of conceptual systems, of models and of theoretical principles about almost any kind of objects of study, in fact, it also makes its construction possible" (p. 63).

In the turn of the century, impressed by the attacks on the World Trade Center in New York, Baudrillard (2002) wrote that "real events won't even have time to occur. Everything will be preceded by its virtual realization" (p. 58). The referent and its crystallization will volatilize at the same time in which the world that had built them twenty years before volatilized: there was never a more graphic explanation for the notion of *pretense*. But this concept, at least partially, had already been formulated by Benjamin, who understands that reproductivity can deprive a work of art of *aura*, and he adds that the industrial society is going to amplify the mechanism of production and reproduction of mass iconography in a sort of proliferation of pretense: "The *auratic* work of art, in which the 'value for cult' prevails, can only be an authentic work; it does not admit any copies of itself. All reproduction thereof is profanation" (Benjamin, 1930/2008, p. 16).

There is a dynamic of *concealment* of preferentiality in the pretense that connects us with the symbolic-social environment and it will insert us into what Echeverría (2003) calls "the third environment":

> The ICT's generate a new social space (the electronic space, or third environment) in which it is possible for a new kind of society to form and develop, the information society and, to some, the information and knowledge society (p. 163).

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2   A term coined by Ferry (2016).

Therefore, the spectator is thus *emplaced* in a sort of media framework in which the third environment will filter everything. This message filtered through the medium is what causes the receptor's personal coded interpretation, always in agreement with their own apparatus for critical and iconographic analysis.

Without doubt, the spectator is capable of capturing messages that not even the film's author had thought of. This will be one of the semiotic operational triggers that, like a machine for *decrypting* iconography, works in every spectator and which is tainted by his life: it does not assimilate information unequivocally, but rather on the contrary, it completes it and enriches it with multiple readings of the same cinematic work which does nothing but update and fit in an atemporal narration in the historical grammar of the current time. Just like every chapter of *El Quijote* has a rabid currentness, every film, in turn, with the receptor's participation, plays a new updating process. Eco will often say: "ci sono tanti libri come lettori".[3]

The cinematic event as pretense: genres and story
Although the cinema is born as an attempt at imitating reality (as it had already happened with photography a few years previously, which imitated painting), soon Metz (1971) begins to support the idea of the cinema as a story. If we follow the definition of story given by Gaudreault (1995), the description is crystal clear: "1. A story has a beginning and an end. 2. A story is a doubly temporal sequence. 3. Every narration is a discourse. 4. The perception of the story "unrealizes" the thing told. 5. A story is a series of events" (p. 27).

This notion of story, traditionally defined by philological studies, is applied to the audiovisual in addition to a sort of classification by genre, "without doubt, many of the claims about cinema genres are but loans taken from a long tradition of literary genre critics" (Altman, 2000, p. 33).

Spang (2005) uses five levels when he classifies literary genres, but they are not enough for cinema genres. As a rule, this pentapartite

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[3] "There are as many books as readers".

logic needs an update that would perform a transfer from the literary genres to the current audiovisual and that would qualify some of the compartmental divergences resulting from this application. Lastly, we begin to calibrate the weight of the irruption of multiscreen reality in the last five years (Marcos, 2015), making this debate even more suggestive by revealing an unprecedented, fragmented cinematic reality. The advent of the productions from the new platforms has entailed a point of inflexion: Netflix, HBO, Filmin, Amazon Prime, Movistar+, Disney+, Apple TV, etc. were already responsible for the articulation of a new cinematic environment. But the scenario underwent a sudden salutary experience due to the new COVID-19 reality, especially at the moment of the utmost population confinement, in the spring of 2020, when the use of these platforms multiplied exponentially (Prieto, 2020). That is why we should address a number of questions in which we will be able to delve in the present paper, because it is necessary to recalculate the ontology of cinema, adapt it in more ambitious reformulations that surpass by far the old logic of the physical emplacement to reach a much more representative concept. Which will be: "That of the 'referential effect', which is useful as an analytical instrument. And it has to do with the above-mentioned institutionalization of reception modalities for the different story typologies that shape up what we could call West of meaning" (Carrera & Talens, 2018, p. 50).

Plectic *levels in the spectator emplacement*
From the root [-*plat*] from Indo-European languages terms "place" and "plaza" (location) –humans are the world and are *in* the world–. But the root [-*plat*] also derives into another lexeme, one connected this time with the natural biological dimension, because plexus, in its dictionary definition is a "network of interlacing blood vessels or nerves". But that definition *intra* can also be applied in *extra* terms because, in reality, that connection of internal biological networks (nerve, neuron networks, etc.) is but a reflection of a broader biological structure, the neuron network, and even more: the constellations into which our world is inserted. That is, the human being has been able to transcend that ecosystem of natural biology and apply it to a mental ecosystem: our minds are social and they work in a dynamic balance, that is adaptable

and changeable. Hence, organic biology *plectics* would be the capacity to analyze all the species as realities that interact with many other living or inert elements. But the human race has proved well enough that long ago it *transcended* (and therefore overcome) its own plexus (inasmuch as it is a fold). Following the etymological root, humans have transcended their place and time to be able to fold and unfold. That is why they have learned to interact with others, generating dynamic, changing intervals. Transdiscursive semiotics will allow us, therefore, to analyze events (and very specifically cinematic events) not only as an element per se but the other way around, as constituent parts detached from a whole that provides it with full meaning.

The same way that a glimpse at a celluloid roll through a microscope (a 35mm cinema film) allows an "organic" understanding of the traditional processes of shooting in the analog cinema (developing, fixing, printing, exposure, colorimetry, toning, etc.), by opposition, we can understand the inorganic nature of binary codes in folders of digital cinema in the multiscreen era. And in this case, semiotics, and very especially its branch biosemiotics, connects all these branches of signification, which on occasion are opposed to one another, allowing a polyhedral approach from different optics –from the micro to the macro, combined with one another– to this new meaning-producing social and cinematic reality:

> We are in the presence of a very important moment of our field of knowledge, given the fact that for the first time we have the chance to not only rewrite the intellectual history of our field from the perspective of our own sociocultural contexts, but we can also go from being spectators to being the protagonists of these historical retellings (Vidales Gonzáles, 2017, p. 64).

The cinema establishes a connection between the receptor with the work that, due to its intensity and brevity, hardly lasts for one or two hours (or more if it is a series), after which the receptor will distill and apprehend what they have seen, but whose running time –regarding the work exhibited– has already finished per se. Morin (1972) speaks of the cinema as a "system that tends to integrate the spectator in the flow of

the film" (p. 101). Murch (2003) himself would connect this reasoning of the cinematic experience with the sociocultural substrate thereof, in what he defines as:

> A recreation in modern terms of that secular practice of telling stories in the community, except that the flames of the primitive bonfire have been replaced by changing, moving images that are telling the story. Images that dance in the same way every time the film is projected, but they light up different dreams on the minds of each spectator (Murch, 2003, p. 172).

In 2009, when the advent of digital cinema was already unstoppable and the movie theaters the world over were getting rid of their old analog film projectors to install the modern digital DCP, Lipovetsky and Serroy intellectualized –according with all their previous scientific production– about this multiscreen "invasion", which they call "screenocracy society" (Lipovetsky & Serroy, 2009). In this work, five years before the advent of Netflix, they theorized about the dominion of the "screen sphere" in our lives as the prevailing discourse of the techno-sciences and they conclude that, far from meaning the death of cinema (this liturgical act in which a story is told by the warmth of a dark screen and in society), not only it is not dead, but also with its digital life 3.0 it has reemerged. They consider that the mobile devices are a new life for the cinema (no wonder, there are more and more international cinema festivals with films that have been recorded and edited using just smartphones). The act of the "cinematic experience", according to this theory, not only is not going to die with the fall of the movie theaters, but also it will be amplified with a multitude of small digital screens inserted in all kinds of devices, in practice making it compatible with any activity of everyday life.

The pact of *veridiction* will do so too: we put in the film director's hands (the ultimate person responsible for the discourse of the film) the capacity to decide for us the audio visual stimulus. There is also a sound dimension of the cinematic act: if headphones are used, many audio similarities take place regarding isolation and capacity for detail with respect of the cinema in a theater. But the radical difference, however, lies in the screen, since it is not a window of a colossal size where the

plot that we perceive is displayed, in addition, in total darkness and with full dedication. Now, the screen has become small, versatile, it fits in our hands and moves around in our pockets. It coexists with the lighting differences of subway cars, on buses, at the stations or the different parts of a building. Moreover, not even that small screen is exclusive, because the screen is often interrupted as it is playing by a phone call or by constant instant messaging that we are sent from social networks. Therefore, the emplacement first becomes characteristically exclusive to then be one of shared dedication, when it is not underlying or parallel to other activities.

There is a second plectic level that results from the nature of the film inasmuch as it is the audiovisual interweaving that narrates a story: the actants. At the end of the day, the cinema is something similar to trying on other lives, and the receptor inevitably fantasizes with the fact of being who he is not. This detour and estrangement from everyday life is what provides the receptor with finding "his appropriate place at every moment of the story" (Zunzunegui, 1995, p. 151). A much deeper union is established than the merely contemplative one, since after all, the relation that is made is one of the psychological kind, that is why this character may not even be human. It often happens that in some films the décor itself or a town is the main character: this is not a case of choral protagonism as the sentimental link between the spectator and what his mind is capable of projecting evoked by the film itself. It will be what Zumalde (2006) calls "transnotation" (p. 24), which he connects with the different dimensions of cinematic materiality and which, in turn, he relates with the work's management of times:

> Another vital aspect in typology and the structure of the film's analysis is the aspect of time: on one hand the material, physical time in which each sequence begins in order to categorize them and provide them with a systematization for analysis and on the other, the cinematic time (that is, the fictitious time) which will be reconstructed in the deferent sequences of the work (Blanco Pérez, 2020b, p. 29).

These two linked aspects will generate a *style*: the personal proposal of each filmmaker, a sort of author's filter when it comes

to narrating in the cinematic language and which causes it to, in the form of "horizon of expectations", as Jauss (1967) puts it, connect with the author's particular vision of the world, although in this new era the digital context also becomes a defining element because so far all these aspects appeared subordinated to the original emplacement of the large silver cinema screen. Today no filmmaker can afford to build their discourse with their backs turned to the multiscreen reality, a new reality that filters, imprecates or denies a large portion of the previous cinematic dimensions. That is what we are going to devote the following section to.

The world through the screen in the COVID-19 era

Since the irruption of the COVID-19 pandemic, the screen has become our access door to the world and the basis of virtually all the meanings constructed during this time. The multiscreen is somehow the heir of the well-known cinematic effect of "shared screen": a visual artifact that was already present in *The Queen of Spades* (Pushkin, 1916), and which was cultivated profusely in the 1970s by directors such as Brian De Palma, among others. The effect would also be transferred to the small screen (*The Brady Bunch*), and it continued to be used more or less regularly through all these years on the silver screen by current mainstream film directors such as Steven Soderbergh (*Ocean's Eleven*, 2001) or John McTiernan (*The Thomas Crown Affair*, 1999), among others.

But in today's reality, the COVID-19 era multiscreen is the new non-place (time and space) of the generation of imaginaries. The Orwellian myth of the screen as an element of control, even of horizontal control among the neighbors, and how they convey that information on the COVID-19 era networks (Blanco Pérez & Sánchez-Saus Laserna, 2020) is well known in the cinema, but the differentiating element lies in the fact that the screen will be, from now on also, the factor of liberation. The screen, inasmuch as it is a device, is linked with both the audiovisual contents generated by each user (their personal photos and videos), and the creation of contents that the cinema platforms have produced. The reception device is, in both cases, the same. But the impossibility of personal experience during the confinement has exchanged the

enjoyment and the pleasures of life, for the mere consumption of the representation that the multiscreen cinema makes of the enjoyment and pleasures of life in the Netflix era.

Also through the screens, on the social networks and, as a caustic reflection of spontaneous viral communication, memes have proliferated, often linked with the world of cinema, because screenshots are taken from them and then humor is generated with their texts (Salgado Andrade, 2021). For better or for worse, it obviously seems undeniable that multiscreens have imposed, in the COVID-19 era, a new relationship with life and its representation. Bailenson (2021) reflects, from the perspective of cognitive psychology, on the impact that the constant presence of multiscreens is having on individuals, what he calls "the zoom fatigue", resulting from coding the expressions of non-verbal and proxemic communication into the visual language of screens exclusively. Connecting our emotions and expressions exclusively with the screen generates, according to Bailenson's conclusion, an additional stress and fatigue that is expressed in our new relationship with the medium: meetings, classes, even new conceptions of love or family relationships always through the screen.

A new spectator for a new cinema

The connection of experiencing almost all kinds of experiences on the screen has resulted, by extension, in a new kind of user. Though these are changes that had been consolidating for some time already –and that somehow they are accentuated with the implementation of Netflix in 2015–, the COVID-19 scenario has entailed severe consequences that are very difficult to assimilate in the social scope: the prohibition on touching things by virtue of this new reality called "social distancing" which, in practice, socially penalizes adjoining bodies. When this is extrapolated to the cinematic logic, since it is impossible for there to be physical *emplacement*, the above-mentioned *plectic* levels tend to mutate. Let's not forget that the screen is not, according to its meaning, an element of exhibition, but quite the opposite, it is an element of concealment. The *Real Academia Española* (Spanish Language Royal Academy) defines it as: "1. A sheet that is held before or around an artificial source of light so that light does not bother the eyes or to

direct it to wherever one wants. 2. A surface that serves as protection, separation or barrier or shelter". To understand this in the multiscreen logic, we would have to wait until the fourth meaning, when it is defined as: "in some electronic devices, the surface where the images appear" (Real Academia Española, 2020). That is, a screen is, by definition, something that conceals, not something that displays. Visual contact, which comes from "tact" (the same lexeme from which "contagion" derives), also akin to *tocar* [from Latin *tangere*] or touch something. Sometimes to touch as "temptation" which comes from Latin too and it mean "feel or touch" something or oneself. That is, all temptation, etymologically, is the temptation of touching something or oneself.[4]

In the cinema of multiscreens, even with the implications of different orders that it entails, the use value has been replaced by the exchange value, and that puts further away the possibility of touching the world as we used to before in the pre-multiscreen era. In a world where the things that have been used ("touched") become impoverished and the new ("untouched") is praised, touching things humanizes the thing itself. It is through touch that we load the objects with memory: the books, our clothes... a good portion of film experience, of the enjoyment of traditional cinema, is lost with the new *emplacement* of the multiscreen. Joan Manuel Serrat sang about an old neighborhood movie theater, the Roxy: "it was the typical cheap theater…, with wooden benches and smelling of disinfectant". Touching the carpet as one walks on it, the smell of food and even the surviving fabric on the seats' upholstery, provided the physical emplacement with meaning. But, on the contrary, the smartphones that are used to consume multiscreen cinema say very little or nothing about their users (all cell phones are basically the same). Or, if it is so desired, at any rate, it could be agreed that the customization of these

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4   Touching physically in the Christian logic appears linked with the concept of sin, or, contrariwise, linked with the concept of sanctity: the saints touched the lepers' ulcers and sores. The Hebrew transmitted power by means of the hands in the Bible, but so did the Christians, by laying their hands, they even resurrect the dead, returning them to their corporeity.

devices will also come from a virtualized logic (customization of the photo used as desktop wallpaper, of the ringtones and other sounds, etc.).

Alba Rico (2017) claims that "90% of the consumer goods that are being manufactured today will be dumped in the trash in six months" (p. 66). Therefore, the level of programmed obsolescence is compounded by symbolic obsolescence that, mainly through the new advertising displayed by and consumed from the smartphones, compels you to perpetually renovate your device, your TV set, your tablet. In the same way, the consumption of contents, like in an inevitable cause-effect relation, is conditioned by this new type of average consumer, of whose system we are all at least one part.

CONCLUSIONS

Firstly, we consider that the cinematic phenomenon and its multiple evolutions, from the Lumière to the Netflix multiscreen, is located today in the third environment that Echeverría called *Telépolis*: a new reality of the industrial production of cinema characterized by *uberization*. Notwithstanding, these notions are not enough to define what we have agreed to call "the Netflix era". The advent of COVID-19 (and the shutdown of physical movie theaters all over the world along with the ban on social contact) has meant a paradigm change in how we represent ourselves on the multiscreens and around multiscreens, which in turn have become one of the most important axes of our personal sphere: they condition –when they do not create– the representations of how we perceive the world, how we love our loved ones, how we work and, of course, how we consume the cinema.

Secondly, the theoretical foundation of transdiscursive semiotics is revealed like a tool box that is extraordinarily useful to analyze, in a systemic manner, the screen as a new apparatus that produces meaning about human reality per se, and about the type of society that it is generating.

Thirdly, the new multiscreen user consumes more, in a more feverish manner and more often all the contents through the screen. But, at the same time, they also do so with less attention, attributing

less value to the ceremonious atmosphere that the cinematic act entailed when consumed in the theater and, therefore, deprived of this physical *emplacement* that, since the onset of the cinema, provided it with almost all the meaning of the cinematic experience.

Moving forward, it will be very useful to analyze how the post-COVID-19 reality will affect our lives, especially from the perspective of the meaning dynamics through the screens. Some new social customs that have involved multiscreens will be hard to eliminate (telecommuting, telemedicine, international work opportunities, virtualized presence of family members who are geographically distant…), and a hybrid scenario is envisaged as probable. This, in the cinematic scope, may presuppose a model based on physical movie theaters for a small number of a certain type of consumer and the multiscreen for the remaining ones.

This is, after all, a reality that operates in a continual change and search for balance, one for whose analysis the frontiers between the branches of knowledge should be broken. In this meaning paradigm, an adapted interpretative theory should mean better understanding of human nature. Because, in the words of Vázquez Medel (2003), "interpreting the world is also beginning to change it".

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