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Art, Cinema and Society: Sociological Perspectives

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Art, Cinema and Society: Sociological Perspectives

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I. Introduction

> "…narratives are socially organized phenomena which, accordingly, reflect the cultural and structural features of their production... as socially organized phenomena, narratives are implicated in both the production of social meanings and the power relations expressed by and sustaining those meanings." (EWICK and SILBEY, 1995, p.200).

What we classify as a 'narrative' has a significant influence on our lives. For example, it is the narrative that usually fills the gap between daily 'social interaction' and 'social structures.' Not coincidentally, the "stories we listen," or "watch," often reflect and sustain institutional and cultural arrangements — while promoting many of our actions in the world. However, if narratives may 'reveal truths' about the social life, where those 'truths' are reproduced, flattened or silenced, in the second case, they also may help to destabilize instituted powers. Notably, thinking about the 'social meaning' of narratives implies, therefore, recognizing that they are constructed or given within 'social contexts.' In this situation, we can use them as a 'sociological concept' to describe the processes through which social actors construct and communicate their visions of the world.

In our society, films can provide, for instance, the 'images' (or 'narratives') of appropriate expectations about the course of life, and the ways how people move within the social, political, professional, educational, and familiar environment. Thus, given the power of cinema to create meanings and to export (and hide) various 'realities,' how can sociology use it to understand the social life? In other words, how can sociology deal with an artistic language, a 'non-real' world, to understand the 'true reality'? Sociologists have not yet fully systematized the answers to these questions. As we will see, although one of the most important and, at the same time, the most widely consumed art forms in the world, cinema, as they draw our attention Heinze, Moebius and Reicher (2012, p.7): "both theoretical, methodical and empirically [it can hardly be said that] has any tradition as a sociological object". Indeed, the institutionalization of a 'cinematic sociology' as special sociology within general sociology (or sociology of culture), has never happened. Which is to say the least curious - given the increasingly central place that images occupy in social and cultural life as a socializing force and of considerable impact on the mobilization of the 'social imaginary.'

On the basis thereof, I seek to present below the theoretical-methodological challenges that sociology has faced in film analysis – both as an 'artistic' and 'social practice.' From a literature review, I consider the debate about 'art objects' through a brief presentation of the possibilities opened in the field of sociological analysis of art and, from there, I present some theoretical attempts towards a sociology of cinema/film as a subfield within general sociology.

II. Art and Sociocultural Life

"Art is notoriously hard to talk about." It is with this phrase that Clifford Geertz begins the fifth chapter of the classic "Local Knowledge" (1983). And, when made of "pigment, sound, stone," or without any clear reference to the "figurative world," what we named 'art' seems "to exist in a world of its own, beyond the reach of discourse." Of course, it is not difficult to talk about art, but in everyone's eyes, "it seems unnecessary to do so." For many, art "speaks, as we say, by itself: a poem must not mean but be; if you have to ask what jazz is, you will never get to know." (GEERTZ, 1983, p. 94). Thus, we often learn to 'feel' rather than 'think' about those thought-provoking songs, or those impressive paintings, or those films that thrill us whenever we remember them. As Geertz remind, Picasso used to say that wanting to understand art, would be like trying to

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understand 'bird song.' Nevertheless something that has 'meaning to us' can hardly be felt only in its 'pure meaning.' Inevitably, we describe, analyze, compare, judge, and classify everything we see, hear, and feel. Despite this, whenever we talk about art, the 'excess' of what we have seen, or imagined we have seen, always appears once again vast and inaccurate, or something empty and false. In fact, "Sociology and art do not make a good match," said Pierre Bourdieu in "Sociology Issues" (1983). According to him,

> "the universe of art is a universe of belief, belief in the gift, the uniqueness of the uncreated creator, and the outburst of the sociologist who wants to understand, explain, make comprehensible, causes scandal" (BOURDIEU, 1983, p. 162-163).

"Who creates the 'creator'?", this becomes a fundamental question for many sociologists. Regarding this, we should emphasize a core point: depending on whether studies of art objects are allied with disciplines such as aesthetics and criticism, they depart from different premises than those whose fields are part of the social sciences. For many art critics and aesthetic theorists, for example, works of art are often conceived of as 'miraculous revelations' typical of a historical moment. With such thinking, many of these critics and aesthetes imply that the central mystery of the work of art must be 'left unsolved,' either because it would lead to its 'emptying of meaning,' or because it would be impossible, or even useless, to want to 'access' it. Also, in many cases, the artwork tends to be "considered as spontaneous expressions of individual genius" (ZOLBERG, 1990, p. 6). However, this perspective is totally at odds with the project of 'social analysis of art,' for which the artwork would have little 'mystery.' Social Scientists will, therefore, seek to analyze the social construction of 'aesthetic ideas' and the 'social values' embedded in them.

a) The Artwork as Social Process

Not apart from society, art production, as well as other modes of social activity, incorporates the texture of a standard of living. It means that there is no ex nihilo creation. From a sociological perspective, art objects move in a specific social context. Under these circumstances, art inexorably express his condition, implicitly or explicitly, either to affirm it or to deny it. In this sense, we can take artwork as a 'social phenomenon,' that is, an 'artistic fact' - such as a 'social fact.' As far as their constitution or cultural complexion, but also in their 'transpersonal' dimension. This way of 'reading' art then makes possible their sociological analysis.

Thereby, sociology of 'art objects' must comprehensively understand artistic phenomena, starting from their connections with other aspects of social reality. From this point of view, does not exist 'art' if we separate it from a 'horizon of expectations' (Erwartungshorizont). Recognized as 'social phenomenon,' the artwork becomes the product of individuals with demarcated intentions that allows them to establish bridges between what we consider 'reality' and their 'symbolic systems.' However, this kind of sociological approach often faces resistance in various intellectual circles. Given sociology's refusal - at least its traditional version - to address 'art itself,' it could not come to recognize the specificity of the 'artistic object.' Some authors describe this as an opposition between 'studying the art object sociologically' and 'the art object as a social process' (ZOLBERG, 1990; HENNION and GRENIER, 2000).

We can then divide sociological studies of art into 1) those who seek an understanding of the 'historical-social conditions' that explain the creation of artwork (aimed at revealing its social determination), 2) those who, without wishing to make statements about aesthetic experience, proceeds through a thorough reconstitution of the 'collective action' necessary to produce and consume art, and 3) those who propose a synthetic approach in which both external issues (social, economic and political factors), as well as internal issues (aesthetic aspects) of art are analyzed as an 'integrated system.' Thus, the sociology of art objects would be a genuine interconnection between the field of 'general sociology,' 'sociological aesthetics,' and 'social history of art' - as truly twinned disciplines (FURIÓ, 2000).

For example, German sociologist and musician Alphons Silbermann (1971) argued that the aim of 'sociology of art' should be the analysis of a 'continuous social process.' This process would reveal the interdependent relationship established between artist, artwork, and society, which would force us to consider an interaction between various elements. Based on this idea, the sociology of art would find a series of study possibilities: the relationship and interdependence of the artist and the audience; the social origin of some categories of artists and their social context; the social effect of the artwork; the public that receives and reacts to the works, etc.

Silbermann claimed a universally intelligible, convincing, and valid approach to the art objects, to reveal how things became what they are, and clarify their present and past transformations. By not separating 'art' from its 'social reality,' the observation of 'artistic facts' gave to the sociology of art the character of an autonomous discipline. However, the artwork itself remained a marginal position in their analysis, which pays more attention to the social environment that allowed its genesis. Thus 'external conditions' appear as their main analytical focus. Zolberg (1990, p.54) points out that,

> "because of sociologists' concern with the social, the artworks themselves become lost in the search for understanding society, ending up as virtual byproducts."

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Here we have a second important point. If the idea of the 'enlightened' artist, acting on his own, and disintegrated from social relations is, from a sociological point of view, clearly questionable, on the other hand, the sociological analysis of art cannot forget individual treatment, or personal, 'artistic creativity.' Although bound to a context, the one who produces a 'work of art' is someone who has an imagination (creativity) and personality, and who embodies a 'worldview' that turns out to be personal (his/her impressions) - not always objective.

Although 'artistic experience' is nourished by the constitutive elements of the 'social landscape,' in a substantial part of cases, it signifies an ever new and unique appropriation. In part, this explains those cases where the same 'social causes' do not have the same 'aesthetic' and 'political' effects, as individuals react differently to them. In other words, this means that in 'artistic terms,' not everything can be entirely explained in 'sociological terms' (GONÇALVES, 2010). That is to say, if the 'social approach' of the arts seeks especially a sociological understanding of the 'artistic phenomenon', and in so doing not only attempts to analyze the work itself but focuses its attention more on the 'socio-artistic action' - the set of relations that art maintains with society, and with the individuals that compose it. On the other side, the 'sociological analysis' cannot lose sight of what is the artwork per se. In its validity and autonomy, in its 'symbolic corporeality.' In short, we should not refuse to examine art too in its own "image, vision and imagination" (FRANCASTEL, 1987), in its always "singular reality" (ADORNO, 2003).

This perspective also implies admitting that it is not only the configuration of a society that produces a particular artwork or artistic expression but also that the artistic work itself can contribute to creating other possible social configurations, more or less vigorous and with a greater or lesser impact on societies. That is, a 'work of art' can generate new tastes, ideas, attitudes, and cultural movements.

b) 'New Realities' Through Art

If 'sociological analysis' of artistic practices can be useful in understanding 'social reality,' there are some authors, however, who will question the very 'causal logic' that takes society as the fundamental productive basis of epiphenomenal characteristics. These authors will analyze how art itself fundamentally structures the constitution of society. Sometimes, by rethinking the relationship between the study of art and the study of sociology, as pointed out by John Clammer in "Vision and Society" (2014). Few attempts have been made to investigate the possibility, not of a new sociology of art, but sociology from art:

> "given the ubiquity, persistence and apparent universality of artistic production, does that fact tell us something about the nature of society, rather than the nature of society (in so far as we actually understand it) telling us something about the nature of art?" (CLAMMER, 2014, p.3).

By asking this question, Clammer seeks to bring the arts back to a central position about 'social causality,' and this has a profound theoretical-methodological impact. For this proposal not only suggests a new way of looking at society but, above all, places the 'imagination' back at the center of the production of what we mean by 'social reality.' Thus, some contemporary theorists will assume that cultural practices represent an 'independent variable' — a complex of emotions, desires, eroticism, responses to nature, and other human beings that are embodied in 'material' and 'performative' forms (ROTHENBERG, 2011). That is, in the development of human societies, the arts would play a generative role, not just a derivative one (DUTTON, 2010).

Authors such as Clammer (2014), de La Fuente (2007), DeNora (2003), Gablik (2002) and Dutton (2010), understand that the arts are not only a peripheral leisure activity but mechanisms that generate many other forms of social and cultural behavior, being present in areas as diverse as fashion, ritual, religion, sport, social protest, and 'images' of the ideal society. According to Tia DeNora (2003), art (and music in particular) would be an 'active' and 'encouraging' force in society. Art would then have structuring qualities in many contexts of everyday life. 'Music' and 'society', for example, would be co-produced entities. In this sense, art becomes a meaningful heuristic source in the understanding of society, due to its ability to generate perceptions, images, landscapes, and objects. In other words, it represents "the major way in which cultures communicate with each other and through which ideas, beliefs, possibilities, and ideals travel" (CLAMMER, 2014, p.8-9). Finally, it means that social agents not only produce art; artwork are themselves also agents in our world (DE LA FUENTE, 2010). The sociology of art should then involve the study of social relations from the objects that mediate social agency in an 'artistic' manner. However, when these authors claim that art has an 'active character', it does not mean that it is an 'uncaused cause' (CLAMMER, 2014), but rather a dialectical relationship with social and historical factors - together, co-producing aesthetic pleasure and imaginaries, identities, and subjectivities - both individually and collectively.

III. Framing Society: The Social Meaning of Films

> "When the image is new, the world is new." - (Bachelard, 2003, p.63).

As we have seen, while social scientists belie the notion of the 'artist' as a 'lone genius', the artist, and in particular the art per se, "is not merely the end

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product of a series of causal determinations" (TANNER, 2010, p.242), and for this reason, she still has vital power to create, shape, reinforce or weaken the 'emotional structures' of society. Not by chance 'social imagination', in practice, arises from the invention of utopias, futurisms, fictions and various other 'creative activities' that are not taken very seriously by 'mainstream sociology.' The real reason for this 'disregard' for artistic objects is linked to the fact that the 'poetic' is a mode of expression, a form of truth and knowledge, that clashes with technical-scientific rationality. According to Heidegger (2002), in an increasingly 'poor-in-thought' world, the 'poetic' (as meditating thought) presents itself as the central means of preparing the emergence of a new 'way of being' and a future beyond the self-destructive civilization of consumption and technology (as calculating thought).

Both 'types of thinking' are necessary to human existence. But each represents a particular way of 'interpreting' the world. According to Adorno (2003, p.37-38), for example, "in aesthetic appearance, the work of art takes a stand before reality, which denies it, by becoming a sui generis reality. Art protests against reality through its objectification". With this, the German sociologist admits that 'art' is not to be confused with reality (of the world), but it assumes a particular reality, or its reality - materialized in work, in 'aesthetic language.' Perhaps one of the reasons that prevented sociology from systematically devoting itself to cinema, in addition to the 'anti-aesthetic attitude' mentioned by Eßbach (2001), was, according to Markus Schroer (2012), that it does not see cinema as a 'Useful source' of research, but rather as a 'competitor', as they both address the same subject: society.

Taking the argument further, Schroer (2012) will state that in the few sociological works on cinema, much attention has never been paid to the structural similarities between the development of sociology and cinema. However, in their efforts to explore society, 'sociology' and 'cinema' cannot be equated. Despite their similarities, they differ fundamentally on the following point:

> "films thematize, visualize and condense social issues and problems, but do not provide a comprehensive theory about the functioning and structure of society and do not want it at all" (SCHROER, 2012, p.21).

With a generative capacity, films can represent some 'social trends' and provide a 'valid picture' of contemporary social relations and customs. Thus, we can assume that not only the 'analysis of films' represents an 'analysis of society,' but the films themselves operate a 'social analysis'. This view suggests, therefore, that cinema is also capable of 'creating thoughts' and 'imaginaries.' In a kind of 'philosophical experimentation,' as Alain Badiou also points out (2010, p.339):

> "Cinema speaks of courage, speaks of justice, speaks of passion, speaks of betrayal. The great genres of cinema, the most codified genres, such as melodrama, the Western, are precisely ethical genres, that is, genres that address humanity to propose moral mythologies".

In these terms, cinema, similar to sociology, is regularly expanding the 'visible zone,' making the invisible visible, making the unimaginable imaginable. While the film takes on this task with the help of the 'camera,' sociology creates a whole range of 'theories' and 'empirical methods' - interviews, participant observations, etc. - to address social reality and thereby transcend the boundaries of what was considered reasonable until then. Thus, much of what we know about the society we live in, we know from the films and the 'second life' they offer us on screen.

a) Cinema and 'moral standards'

Despite this not easy relationship, some sociologists have seriously devoted themselves to the study of cinema as a 'social practice' of enormous sociological and aesthetic value in our society, in order to understand how this 'factory of illusions' or 'means of enculturation', as suggest Manfred Mai and Rainer Winter (2006), informs us about who we are and who we want to be, how we feel, what we have been dreaming of, or what we should dream of. One of the first approaches to a 'sociological study of cinema' came from the pioneer work "Sociology of film" (1946) by German sociologist Jacob Peter Mayer. In this book, Mayer attempted to lay the foundations of what he conceived as the 'sociological assumptions' of an analysis of the film as a 'social phenomenon'. However, his interest in cinema arose specifically after another study entitled "Max Weber and German Politics" (1944), from which Mayer would suspect films' ability to shape 'political opinions.' His longing was especially to understand the 'emotional' and 'moral' impacts of films on his audience.

Thus, the 'sociology of film' proposed by Mayer goes in the direction of the sociology of film as a 'study of reception.' In such a way, he sought to answer: 1) which 'ethical values' films teach and how these values pattern relate to the 'real norms' according to which people live and 2) what is the relationship of both 'norms of films' and 'real norms' in the construction of 'absolute value' standards. Mayer concludes that it is impossible to provide entertainment divorced from 'moral norms.' Even if it is purely entertainment, the power of visualization creates 'values.' That is why 'films' and 'moral standards' would be inseparable:

> "The example of pre-Nazi Germany made me inclined to believe that even so-called non-political films can become an instrument for shaping political opinions. Consequently, I am less interested in the intricate psychological mechanisms which seem to underlie film reactions than in those structural features which may help

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> us to explain the sociological implications of films" (MAYER, 1946, p.267).

The 'cinema experience' would then turn out to be a 'ritualistic experience' in which the 'myth' (of the fictional world) would not merely be a 'story told on-screen,' but also a 'lived reality.' According to Mayer, that would explain the contemporary yearning for films: "since the traditional structures of life are uprooted and about to disappear altogether, the modern moviegoer seeks mystical participation in screen events" (MAYER, 1946, p.19). It is through the films that the public would find the 'totality' of an 'apparent life' in which traditional institutions seem no longer able to offer. However, and here seems to be the essential point of author's contribution, although the film is presented indiscriminately to all members of the audience, the subjects operate the viewing mechanism (Vorstellung) and perception (Wahrnehmung) individually.

What is "watched" is the same for each individual, although what is 'visualized' (through 'imagination') is unique to each one. How then to explain their different impacts on them? According to Mayer, 'memory' would play a central role in this process. Indeed, only a 'study of memory' and 'things remembered' in a film could give stimulating indications of the 'effects of cinema' and the 'role' it plays in the lives of the public. Although we have here the appeal of the 'fantasy of the past,' it is nonetheless a fantasy that has a deep 'real feeling.' That is why the relationship between 'real' and 'fantasy' in cinema cannot be simplistically analyzed. For, according to Mayer, to the extent that we all have 'ideas' we live generally in a 'fantasy world' where the "ideal" is a goal for which we engage in everyday life. In this way, the "ideals" and the "fantasies" - often presented in the movies - are closely related to life, and therefore are a necessary stimulus to action, providing a broader horizon of experience, conceptions of life and behavior. An example of would be the spontaneous reactions to certain movies: how to have nightmares and fear of sleeping alone. Or, nowadays, the many cases of actors assaulted on the street for being confused with the characters they play (MENEZES, 2017). What this seems to show us is that despite its 'fictional' character in content, we often experience the fiction as 'real' in form.

Thus, in addition to having a significant influence on personal and collective 'emotions' and 'behavior', cinema can also be a determining factor in creating one's individual 'outlook' on life - his plans for the future, his ideas about what kind of life is best, and his conception of the ways in which people from different backgrounds of his conduct behave. In many cases, films even portray a type of society with which the viewer is unfamiliar, and about which he often lacks many other sources of information. Like this,

> "Whatever views he may have on these alien modes of existence will be based on what he has seen in the cinema. It may happen, moreover, that he is led to compare the life depicted on the screen with his own life, to the disadvantage of the latter, and the result may be dissatisfaction, unrest, aspirations, ambition, and so on" (MAYER, 1946, p.169).

In this sense, the thesis of cinema as a mere 'reflection of society,' and of its 'mentality,' seems to maintain a simplistic and mechanical relationship between 'reality' and 'fiction.' However, the film representation, when making use of reality (itself already processed and organized), imposes its visualization on a theme in a concentrated and precise manner. In doing this, films return to reality, providing 'interpretative patterns' that can serve to process and classify this same theme. Thus, not only derive from a lived world, but films also play a generative role, influencing our ideas about what it was like in the past and what it is today. The most sociologically relevant question here, it seems to me, this one that seeks to know: Who can see what? What can be shown? What hasn't the viewer seen yet? How far can he go? What is seen and shown and what remains hidden and contained is how 'power' flows through images and their 'dreams.'

However, if Mayer acknowledged that "what is really important to the sociologist is the discovery and isolation of the implicit attitudes of a film, the general assumptions on which the conduct of the characters is based and the treatment of plot situations" (MAYER, 1946, p. 170), there is very little space in the 'sociology of film' which he proposed for the film itself as 'art'. It offers us nothing about the study of 'character conduct,' and the 'film language' is not considered at any point in the book. Thus, Mayer does not present an 'interpretative basis of the film' as a finished work of art, but is limited to the study of the impact of particular films on their audiences - and their 'moral standards.' Within the jargon I expounded above, we might say that Mayer then takes an 'externalist approach' in his 'sociology of film,' in which the work of art in its aesthetic configuration is, to some extent, set aside.

b) Institutional analysis

Another influential sociological approach to the study of cinema came in 1970 with the publication of the book "Towards a Sociology of the Cinema" by English sociologist Ian Charles Jarvie. In this study, the author proposed an essay on the structure and operation of cinema as a 'entertainment industry.' Thus, he sought to answer questions such as 1) who makes movies, how and why?; 2) who watches films and why?; and 3) How do we learn and evaluate a film? In this sense, he anchored his proposal on three main bases: industry, audience and values in the content of film experience. In seeking to think of cinema as "one social institution among many others" (JARVIE, 2013, p. Xiv), the concern related to the exclusively aesthetic criterion became then secondary. Consequently, this allowed sociology to

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involve in its studies not only the so-called 'good film' but, above all, those films considered 'trash' because,

> "The cinema is – sociologically, at least – a mass art; and it would be silly to pretend that mass taste is very high, or that the average product reaches above mass taste to any high standard of excellence. Thus, my defense in discussing trash is complete: chiefly, I am doing sociology. Yet I wish to defend my study aesthetically too: although I confess to highbrow biases, I am critical of the view that the average good entertainment movie ('trash', in the broadest sense) is of no aesthetic interest; it is one of the most pleasurable entertainments I know and, loathe though I am to say this, occasionally it even satisfies highbrow criteria: it can be informative, well done, sophisticated. It is snobbish, then, to ignore mass cinema either as a sociological or as an aesthetic phenomenon" (2013, p.xv).

Jarvie's proposal has helped point out the shortcomings of some authors more concerned with 'elevation' than with 'understanding' of the cinematic phenomenon as a 'social phenomenon.' Thus, by considering, in the apprehension of the cinema, its involving "virtues," but also its admitted "failures," he believed to assume the position of a 'participating observer.' Whatever the use of critical language, analysts should not judge a film image for 'moral reasons.' In this way, Jarvie sought to restore its status as a 'social art' by analyzing how 'social character' can affect cinematic art and how its 'artistic effects' can affect society.

By assuming cinema is as an art, and the function of art is to enrich our experience through entertainment, like it or not, there are a variety of ways of entertaining - although not all of them can be considered art. However, the assumption that cinema needs an 'intellectual justification' would insult the medium and reflect a lack of confidence in its value and importance. Jarvie also wants to denounce the view that the attitudes, values, and interests of their creators are conditioned by the social context in which they live and work. This experience leads us to 'label' certain types of films, and since all labels can be understood as 'statements,' in the latter circumstance they can also be evaluated in terms of 'true' or 'false.' The greatest absurdity this reading can lead us to is to judge the merits of films in 'moral terms,' or from a judgment of whether or not they lack a greater 'sense of reality.'

For example, this discussion can be contemporized and seems useful to understand contemporary African film productions, in their 'new forms and aesthetics,' as Manthia Diawara (2010) points out. The emergence in recent years of a popular and mainstream language in mainland cinematography, especially in the wake of low-cost Nollywood productions, as popular video production in Nigeria is known, challenges the idea that African cinema should be "committed," "serious" and with substantial "critical" and social content. However, what productions such as those of Nollywood denounce are a profound and inevitable transnationalization of cinema, as well as African cultural and social diversity. Although considered of 'less aesthetic value' by many critics, such productions carry importance that must be underlined, because, despite their lack of 'seriousness' and 'political engagement', according to Noah Tsika (2015, p.10-11):"Nollywood films tend to unravel a multidimensional and heterogeneous landscape of Africa, far from the Hollywood model that portrays a mixture of relentless sameness". Besides, these most popular types of movies also serve to raise, according to Nwachukwu Frank Ukadike (2014, p.xv), "a series of questions about production values, artistic and aesthetic trends, formidable challenges for viewer issues and broader perspectives for reading films."

Admittedly, the purpose of Jarvie's approach is to map an 'institution' that materializes in the 'film industry' and nourishes the needs of a particular 'audience.' His attempt to find out how this 'social valuation' of cinema takes place is, therefore, by the 'institutional analysis' that follows "progress chronologically through the manufacture of a film from conception and production, to sales, to distribution, to viewing and experience, to evaluation" (JARVIE, 2013, p.14, our translation). Only from this mapping, it is possible to identify the relative position of films concerning other social regularities in a given society. Thus, in Jarvie's view, cinema would be both a 'social occasion' and an 'aesthetic occasion,' and these two aspects would be interconnected.

c) Structural Conditions

From a different perspective, German sociologist Dieter Prokop, in "Soziologie des Films" (1982), will make a direct critique of the 'functionalist' postulates in film studies, specifically his sense that the 'film industry' is a "neutral medium" in shaping public preferences; and the thesis that the public stands as 'unitary' in front of a mass directed by a 'collective unconscious.' About this last idea, Prokop sought to belie what, for many theorists, would represent the essence of cinema: an appeal to the 'collective soul' of a society. This idea was associated with the 'mirror metaphor' propagated especially by another German theorist, Siegfried Kracauer (1966), for whom films from a nation would reflect its 'mindset' more directly than other artistic media. First, because the film production unit would incorporate a kind of 'mix of interests' and 'heterogeneous tendencies,' excluding arbitrary material handling and suppressing individual peculiarities. And secondly, because the films would be directed and interested in an 'anonymous crowd', fulfilling their 'unconscious desires,'. Therefore,

> "What films reflect are not so much explicit credos as psychological dispositions those deep layers of collective mentality which extend more or less below the dimension

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> of consciousness [...] In recording the visible world whether current reality or an imaginary universe films therefore provide clues to hidden mental processes" (KRACAUER, 1966, p.6-7).

With that, Kracauer made a very tempting invitation: since the films 'reflect reality', we should look into this 'mirror.' For Prokop, however, sociologists who follow such an invitation would be unaware of its implications. Especially assuming the 'collective unconscious' as an absolute conditioner of film productions, they would reproduce nothing more, nothing less than the 'self-image' that the film industry provides about itself according to its discourses and principles. It would have been the case for many readings that attempted to explain the success of US films, considered in some of these analyzes to be a product of the co-elaboration of them by the public. In this way, the success of the films was simplistically explained by somehow manifesting the 'character' of the American public. It was from this social unconscious that its success and acceptance by society would come. For, according to the supporters of this kind of thinking, "the film would be a collective work for the totality of the people" (PROKOP, 1986, p. 44).

Thus, both the American 'functionalists' and the Kracauerian 'German school' were characterized by excluding 'structural factors' from their analysis of film productions. And, as far as the representatives of the latter current are concerned, along with the conception that the film would be a 'mirror of the collective unconscious,' there was also a critique of the 'ideology of the masses', which brought new critical-cultural implications to the debate. As also signaled by Jarvie, there is often a tendency to want to condemn mass culture as 'reality falsifier'. Thus, for some authors of this current, the 'unmasking' of the ideologies behind the films would become a task of the analyst - an attitude that approached, in some respects, the 'orthodox Marxist' current.

The objective of the Kracauerian school was to applaud films that were 'free of ideology', as he believed to have been 'Italian neorealism,' without realizing that this cinematic movement also had certain socio-economic and ideological assumptions. According to Prokop, for example, Italian neorealism, recognized for its critique and social documentation, had the following assumptions 1) It was a group of filmmakers formed during the period of fascism, oriented towards criticism and social denunciation, in a political context which, despite their regrets, guaranteed relative freedom of expression for these artists; 2) the polyphonic structure of the film industry, dominated by small producers, not an oligopolistic industry. It was this context, therefore, that had allowed the 'emergence' of the so-called 'neorealism' and it would be his change, in turn, that would also make this cinematic trend end.

In that sense, what explained the emergence and decline of neorealism was not the 'collective soul' of society, but the political, economic, and social development of the Italian film industry itself. Thus, Prokop guided the analytical axis of his study into three fundamental aspects: production, consumption, and analysis of the final product (the film). About 'production', he analyzes what he called the 'structural conditions' of film production - the film industry itself. In the 'consumption' aspect, he considers complementary elements to the process of film production, focusing on the historical development of the sale of 'film merchandise.' In relation to 'product analysis', he seeks to perform a process of 'film interpretation.' Therefore, his 'analytical scheme' was intended to move from the most general to the most particular level of analysis.

Dieter Prokop's sociology of the film is an influential contribution to the development of an analysis of the structural conditions of cinema, as it attempts to account for the socio-historical structures that promote the rise and decline of certain film tendencies without falling into idealism and functionalist thinking. However, as regards the interpretation of the "cinematic object," we should some limitations on its proposal. Since, while sometimes privileging 'film analysis,' its 'methods' of analysis are underdeveloped and still quite incipient, it is not clear exactly what their 'interpretative bases' are about 'what' we should analyze, 'why' and 'how' in films.

d) Interpretative Analysis

Unlike the authors cited above, French sociologist Pierre Sorlin will propose, in his book "Sociologie du Cinéma" (1985), a "method of interpretation" of films that attempts to account for the symbolic possibilities that this form of art, and entertainment, provides us - and that can also serve us as a source of understanding of social history. Thus, in Sorlin's methodology, it is assumed that films are never the substitute or reflection of the society that gave rise to them, but in themselves, the thing both meaningful and meaningful - respecting, thus, the autonomy of the artistic object (the film) in its own 'materiality.' It means that, for Sorlin, a film would not be a "record" of social reality, nor would it be a "mirror" of a "collective soul" - a vague term used by Kracauer and other authors. Instead, films would operate an 'imaginary retranslation' of a particular social formation, or of a specific historical period.

Sorlin believed that films could be 'revealing' of the social world, but he did not want to incur in his analysis in a 'social determinism.' That is why, for him, the film, as 'social staging' rather than 'reflex,' would be the result of 1) a selection (what is shown and what is hidden) and 2) a redistribution (how the story is structured). If the 'context', in some interpretations, would always come from the analysis of the 'social conditions' of the constitution of works of art, actors,

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production, structures, etc., in his scheme, the social meaning it is understood as inherent in the 'work's discourse', being sought and reconstructed from the work itself, as he clarifies in this passage:

> "We have to take the film itself, dedicate ourselves to discovering in the combinations of images, words and sounds the most clues to be able to follow some: precisely those that allow us to return to the historical moment by clarifying the exterior (social exchanges) by the interior (the micro-universe of the film)" (SORLIN, 1985, p.38)

Accordingly, Sorlin argues that films would not be able to "open" a window to the world. Rather, they would filter, reinterpret, and redistribute some of their aspects into the inner universe of their stories. And this would happen for a simple reason: if what is called the "outside world" were determinant, the study of films would become useless, because knowing this "world" would be enough to comprehend what films perform. However, just as in a structural arrangement, not everyone occupies the same place, or is bound by the same factors, films would surpass their "outside world", their "social context" and the "reality itself" in which they arise, insofar as it transcribes, modifies, denies, or confesses it. Thus, instead of mere "copies," films would represent, in short, a set of propositions about a given social formation. It would then be up to the analyst to identify how these propositions are "put on the scene" through codifications proper to film language.

However, obstacles begin to arise when asking 'from what angle' to focus and analyze a film. According to Sorlin, the analyst will inevitably have to deal with some reading difficulties. First, because there is a weight of affectivity. Although the 'readings' of the films are rarely absolutely false, we tend to be most sensitive to what we already know and, therefore, are fixated on 'small points' when it comes to a domain that is familiar to us. That is because, "in most cases, the reception given to a film, at least in its first view, is governed by fundamentally affective reactions" (SORLIN, 1985, p.32). In this sense, all those later interventions to what was seen look to want to find, in some way, 'justifications' for the emotion initially felt.

A second difficulty would be associated with false evidence of the images. It is well known that images, in comparison with the written text, seem to have among us a kind of fetishized 'authority.' As they say, image 'speaks for itself', it 'shows', and that is enough. However, this profound reverence for what is 'visible,' and even more so for what 'moves,' only "convinces us because it conforms to a prior knowledge that somehow comes to authenticate" (SORLIN, 1985, p.33). Thus, the 'informative value' often attributed to images depends less on their 'content' than on a 'particular attitude' toward iconographic material. In other words, the temptation to want to see 'the truth' in images would overshadow the fact that they are not 'neutral images.' We have then faced with two extreme ways 1) the one that seeks in the film what is purely 'documentary'; and 2) the one that considers them as a 'set of signs,' in which the insertion of each element imposes new meanings.

It is now clear that instead of being the film something to be confused with the 'real', what is at stake in Sorlin's proposal is the understanding of the 'constructive character' of his images, as this will allow us to understand the 'value foundations' that govern the constitution of their narratives, the choices, and positions of their characters, their place in the cinematic space and the unfolding of the plot. In this movement, cinema no longer appears to be a 'unified set' and opens the possibility of thinking society in what it reveals, but only in a partial way. Thus, we should analyze a film, first leaving aside what we know about it, its 'other discourses,' to always evaluate it in its particularities. Acting in this way, it would be possible to arrive at a 'thick interpretation' of the films, not to 'fit' them into a 'prior knowledge', but to understand, by their peculiar and unique characteristics, how the codifications (of the social world) are reconstituted in the construction of their senses.

Regarding the narrative aspect, Sorlin identifies an elementary texture that permeates, with some variants and unfoldings, the vast majority of films. Firstly, its system would involve 'struggles' and 'challenges,' inscribed in a temporality oriented between a 'beginning' and an 'end'. In the fight, there would be an obstacle to be overcome, in the 'challenge' an absence to be supplied. And between the 'obstacle' or 'absence' and its 'resolution', there would be a lapse, a 'beginning' and an 'end.' Besides, the narrative film necessarily has 'identifiable characters', which can be individuals, but also entire groups and communities. However, the specificity of the film lies in the use of different means of expression to tell its stories. For example, sounds intervene as signs; music indicates repetition, an accompaniment of a situation; Silence can help to underline a crucial moment, and it may also happen that the film builds its aesthetic conventions. It is these elements, therefore, that, in an orchestrated manner, channel and guides their message to the viewer.

Based on this, the film, as we imagine it, only exists in the 'act of reading,' in the process of enjoyment, in the confrontation with our 'hypotheses.' There would be no predetermined 'meaning,' but multiple possible lines of meaning. That is why reading a single movie may be different for each individual in each specific context. This idea leads us to an important conclusion: that we do not see the world (and the movie) 'as it is' but as we 'are.' In Sorlin's words (1985, p.58), "we perceive beings and objects through our habits, our hopes, our mentality, that is, through the ways our environment structures the essential (what is essential for us), about the accessory". We can then say that what is (and the

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way it is) 'visible' to everyone at one time is nothing random. What is 'seen' or 'hidden' in the background would respond to a need, or rejection, of social formation. In this interpretation, we see only what we are 'capable' or 'can' (we are 'authorized' to) see. And cinema, in turn, would function as a 'repertoire' and 'producer' of these 'authorized' or 'forbidden' images. In other words, showing, on the one hand, fragments of the 'real' (of the 'perceived' and 'reconstituted' life of those who produce the films), that the public 'accepts' and 'recognizes', and, on the other hand, helping to extend the 'domain of the visible' or to impose 'new images' on the iconographic panorama of a society (SORLIN, 1985, p.60).

Finally, there could not be a 'film study' other than an investigation of its 'construction'. That is, an analysis of the arrangement of the various visual and sound materials that shape the plot and from which we can interrogate cinema as an 'ideological expression.' Its definition of ideology here encompasses a set of explanations, beliefs and values accepted and employed by a given 'social formation.' However, in the same 'social formation', 'ideological expressions' develop that may be concordant, parallel, or contradictory. Thus, Sorlin believed that ideology functioned as a 'guiding force,' but at the same time would be filtered and reinterpreted by different social groups. It is these 'negotiations' and 'filters' that are interesting to analyze in the 'structuring' of films, in order to identify the 'lines of force' that cross the different 'social formations' at a given time - in the struggle to define what it can be 'visible' or perceptually 'real' in our eyes.

IV. Conclusion

Throughout this paper, it has been possible, albeit briefly, to explore a range of ways in which analysis of arts and cinema can provide insights into social processes. Besides, it has also become clear how sociological orientation helps us indicate to what extent films can exercise some 'hegemony' in society by providing existing, central and 'meaning patterns,' 'moral values,' and reinforcing ideologies, exclude opposites or marginalize them. Thus, when we talk about 'sociology of film,' we want to reinforce the idea that it is not an 'aesthetic appropriation' but, in fact, an analysis of the 'social dimension' of this captivating artwork.

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