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ARAŞTIRMA MAKALESİ / RESEARCH ARTICLE

Post-Apocalyptic Images in Cinema: A Structural-Semiotic Narrative Analysis of Len Wiseman's *Total Recall*

Sinemada Post-Apokaliptik İmgeler: Len Wiseman'ın *Total Recall* Filmi Üzerine Yapısal-Göstergebilimsel Bir Anlatı Analizi

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Abstract

Structuralist-semiotic film analysis posits that films can be understood as a system of signs with structural integrity. In this form of analysis, which focuses on concepts such as codes, signs, denotations and connotations, metaphor and metonymy, an approach is taken that will reveal the ideology and myths created in the deeper layers of the films. The narrative conventions and genre codes that are inherent to the cinematic medium provide a foundation for a systematic analysis that considers intertextuality, particularly within the science fiction genre. In this context, the film *Total Recall* (2012), directed by Len Wiseman, can be considered a remake and adaptation. As a post-apocalyptic text in which the world is transformed and renewed by a catastrophe, it offers insights into the future of humanity in the present era. Qualitative descriptive genre analysis was integrated into structuralist-semiotic narrative analysis to examine the film in question. The film was selected as a purposive sample for the study and was analyzed through the headings of the narrative elements of cinema. Consequently, the film addresses several contemporary issues, including the distress caused by modern life, the crisis in the family unit between spouses, the surveillance society and the desire for novelty. These are discussed in the context of the film, which presents a relatively liberal discourse on matters such as the ideal structure of the family and methods of distress management. Additionally, the film attempts to establish a more balanced relationship between exploiter and exploited, moving towards a more democratic and egalitarian model.

Keywords: Science Fiction, Structuralism, Semiotics, Intertextuality, Genre

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Öz

Yapısalcı-göstergebilimsel film çözümlemeleri filmleri yapısal bir bütünlük taşıyan göstergeler sistemi olarak kabul etmektedir. Çeşitli kodlar, göstergeler, yan anlam ve düz anlam, metafor, metonomi gibi kavramların ön plana çıktığı bu çözümleme biçiminde, filmlere onların daha derin katmanında yer alan ideolojisini ve yarattığı mitleri de açığa çıkaracak bir çözümleme perspektifiyle yaklaşılmaktadır. Sinemadaki türlerin getirdiği anlatısal uylaşımlar ve türsel kodlar, özellikle bilimkurgu türünde metinlerarasılığı da gözeterek sistematik bir analiz imkânı sunmaktadır. Bu bağlamda Len Wiseman'ın yönettiği *Total Recall* (2012) filmi, bir yeniden çevrim ve uyarlamadır ve dünyanın felaketle dönüşüm geçirdiği, yenilendiği bir post-apokaliptik metin olarak insanlığın geleceğine yönelik bugüne ilişkin bazı yansıtmalarda bulunmaktadır. Analizde yapısalcı-göstergebilimsel anlatı çözümlemesine nitel betimsel tür analizi entegre edilmiş ve çalışmanın amaçlı örneklem olarak ele aldığı film sinemanın anlatı unsurları başlıkları üzerinden çözümlenmiştir. Sonuç olarak modern hayatın yarattığı iç sıkıntısı, eşler arasında yaşanan aile krizi, gözetim toplumu ve yenilik istenci filmin arka planında tartışılan konulardır ve film ailenin nasıl olması gerektiği, sıkıntıdan kurtulma gibi konularda görece liberal özgürlükçü bir söylem üretmekte, sömüren ve sömürülen ilişkisine daha demokratik ve eşitlikçi bir düzlemde denge getirmeye çalışmaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Bilimkurgu, Yapısalcılık, Göstergebilim, Metinlerarasılık, Tür

Introduction

Efforts to understand and make sense of cinema texts have increased in parallel with the growing influence of this mass media and the seventh art. Considering McLuhan's emphasis on "the medium is the message" (McLuhan & Fiore, 2005), and the semiotic equivalent of this expression "the medium is not neutral" (Chandler, 2007, p. 85), it is possible to think that meaning and discourse are structured in accordance with cinematic instruments. Considering that cinema has an overlapping of entertaining and informative functions, distancing from the problems of daily life and creating a framework for how life should be, thus structuring the actions of the individual and the society are shaped on the same plane.

At the center of Cartesian philosophy is a subject whose existence is beyond doubt. Although Descartes' philosophy of "I think, therefore I am" (Descartes, 1982, p. 5) gave meaning and justification to the existence of this subject in the world, unfortunately the process is not completed here. Living in an age in which "all that is solid is melts into air", as Berman (1988) expresses with reference to Karl Marx, leaves self and identity in a constantly uncanny situation. Considering that modernization and the late capitalist period have further distorted the perception of reality and pushed self and personality to constantly search for new fulcrum points, the problems of existence are not solved, but they emerge as problems that are waiting to be addressed and solved every day.

What is reality? How real are lived experiences? Even if memory has a meaning in ordering experiences, how much can memory itself be trusted? How much can the thinking subject trust the reality that confronts him/her as an image, his/her own self, which appears to be an illusion, and his/her memory, which works largely with images? The problem of reality can be rooted as far back as "the allegory of the cave" described by Socrates in Plato's *Republic*, in which people in chains are being forced to look at the images in front of them and lose the reality (Plato, 2004, pp. 208–209).

When we look at cinematic images where such problems take center stage, we see that this medium has created a unique field of discussion on this issue. Sydney Pollack's *They Shoot Horses, Don't They?* (1969) draws attention to the gaze and surveillance while visualizing economic inequalities and the destructive aspect of competition during the Great Depression through the metaphor of a dance marathon. Films such as Elia Kazan's *A Face in the Crowd* (1957), Sydney Lumet's *Network* (1976), David Cronenberg's *Videodrome* (1983), Peter Weir's *The Truman Show* (1998), and Dan Gilroy's *Nightcrawler* (2014) are examples of movies about ratings and the society of spectacle. Whereas Alex Proyas' *Dark City* (1999) and the Wachowski Brothers' *The Matrix* (1999), which claim to live in a hyperreal world, can be seen as more existential examples that discuss the problems of hyperreality.

Len Wiseman's remake of *Total Recall* (2012) has not been the subject of enough academic analyses. According to Favaro and Akşit (2014, pp. 22–23), who analyze the film around concepts such as technology, memory and self, the film features a 'fetish' technology, but it differs from other science fiction works by not consecrating this technology and positioning it as inaccessible. *Total Recall* approaches the issue of reality as a collision of different realities. As an adaptation of Philip K. Dick's work, it has an important basis for understanding the phantasmic relationship between reality and imagination, which has become increasingly important given Suvin (1988, p. 132) sees Dick's works as "artifacts, refuges from and visions of reality". For modern people, the question of what reality is an important issue because he/she perceives the universe he/she lives in as a simulation in a state of becoming so fast that he/she cannot grasp it with his/her senses, and a factor that reinforces this feeling is boredom. The aim of this paper is to analyze a film with the structural – semiotic method, considering cinematic elements, and to demonstrate the structures of the images given by the film. To create a theoretical framework for the work subjected to content analysis, the genre of science fiction will be defined. The assumptions of the post-apocalyptic genre, which is a sub-genre in science fiction, will be stated and the film will be analyzed from a structural-semiotic perspective.

The Concept of Genre and Characteristics of Science Fiction

The word *genre* "is originally French, and it simply means "kind" or "type." It's related to another word, *genus*" (Bordwell & Thompson, 2008, p. 318). Genre criticism begins with an attempt to categorize a group of films through characteristics such as "certain narrative elements, visual style, and/or emotional effect" (Lewis, 2014, p. 42). Genres make it easier for viewers to find the film they want to watch. According to Bordwell and Thompson (2008, pp. 319–328), it is possible, to a certain extent, to identify genres in terms of specific character types, the subjects and themes, the film techniques, iconography and genre conventions. Genres are closely linked to cultural factors. Genres are shaped by the constant interaction between producer, director and audience. Genres react quickly to trends, exploit them and renew themselves. This is why genres provide important information about social change.

The term 'science fiction' was first used by Hugo Gernsback in *Science Wonder Stories* (Telotte, 2004, p. 70) in which Gernsback (1929, p. 5) announced that he would publish stories based on or logically deduced from scientific laws. Bould (2012, p. 2) emphasizes that science fiction has

undergone a constant transformation. Schlobin (1981, pp. 496–511) lists the definitions of sixty-seven authors on science fiction and fantasy, stating that the ideal is to choose a definition in line with the scope and aims of the study. In this case, the selected definition draws the outline of the approach to science fiction. It is not a coincidence that the original works of science fiction coincide with the Enlightenment and the industrial revolution. According to Roloff and Seeblen (1995, p. 34), one of the characteristics of the science fiction is the production of "closed, autonomous microworlds" and a "fantastic atmosphere". As Jameson (2005, p. 345) emphasizes, science fiction is generally 'understood as the attempt to imagine unimaginable futures'. This feature seems to be an element that links the genre to the oldest mythological works in quest of novelty.

Darko Suvin (1979) divides science fiction into two forms and defines it as a literature of cognitive estrangement. In that case, "to imagine unimaginable futures" should have the potential to create an amorphous gaze against the familiar. According to Oskay (2014, p. 28), science fiction that is willing to change the given situation is the good kind of science fiction; the common kind, or sub-genre of science fiction, "has no faith in reason and humanity, is nostalgic, *nihilistic*, and *anti-erotic*. They aim for humanity's return to mythology, not its exit from it". In this respect, according to Suvin and Oskay, the important point in evaluating science fiction is its possibilities of *liberation*. This requires the work to move away from mythology. In this context, Suvin classifies criticism of science fiction works under three headings. The text *reviewing,* text criticism as *chronicling, and mythical analysis.* Accordingly, the text must have exceeded the level of mythological narration (Oskay, 2014, p. 58). This is related to the liberation possibilities of the text.

The origins of science fiction go back to myths (Mann, 2001, p. 7; Telotte, 2004, p. 64). This mythic quest exhibits a universal characteristic that surrounds humanity. At the end of the process that Eliade (2001, pp. 70–71) sees as a transformation from chaos to cosmos, meaning is produced from meaninglessness. Suvin (1979, p. 5) identifies in these mythic origins a valley paradigm, a search for new and new possibilities. Through stories, then, ideas are tested, and Roberts (2006, p. 9) suggests that the science fictional equivalent of this mythic quest is the staging of 'what if' games. Science fiction allows us to test a particular idea or innovation by utilizing the scientific method. Oskay (2014) characterizes these as fantasies: 'In the period we live in, the fear, anxiety and curiosity felt in the face of the new are met not with tales and stories told by storytellers, as in the old days, but with fantasies, which are industrial products produced by this consciousness industry', such narratives domesticate dreaming and Oskay interprets this situation as a return to the age of mythology (2014, pp. 23; 24). Considering the mythological origins of science fiction, it is necessary to look at the definition and origins of the apocalyptic phenomenon that manifests itself in the analyzed film.

Definition of Apocalypse

According to McGinn (1979, pp. 1–3), the apocalypse means "revelation," the unveiling of a divine secret" and is closely related to prophecy and eschatology. Apocalyptic myths are eschatological myths that describe the end of history/world/cosmos. Collins (1998, p. 5) quotes the apocalypse:

a genre of revelatory literature with a narrative framework, in which a revelation is mediated by an otherworldly being to a human recipient, disclosing a transcendent reality which is both temporal, insofar as it envisages eschatological salvation, and spatial insofar as it involves another, supernatural world.

As Rosen (2008, pp. xi–xiii) emphasizes, these myths argue that history is coming to an ultimate end. Humanity in a sense withdraws from history; so these myths reflect a sense of collective helplessness. One of the best known of these myths is the flood in the story of Gilgamesh. Apocalyptic myths were associated with the emergence of agricultural societies. The cyclical experience of time and renewal in agricultural communities has been linked to eschatology and the cosmic cycle (Eliade, 1981, p. 42). With the emergence of the Semitic religions, instead of cyclical destruction/renewal, a linear understanding of history, in which history comes to an absolute end and the final judgment takes place, begins to dominate. The theme of the final battle between good and evil, the emergence of the savior, the new order established after the battle, and the hope expressed through destruction are apparent (Eliade, 1984, pp. 253–254; 266–267). According to Seed (2011, p. 113), disaster and apocalypse "have been staple themes in science fiction, all with their roots in antiquity". Therefore, such apocalyptic myths always refer to an "after" which means "post".

Cevizci (1999, p. 697) states that the prefix 'post' means 'after' in Latin. In this context, *post-apocalypse* refers to the aftermath of the apocalypse. In post-apocalyptic visions, as summarized in the historical development of the genre in Boz's work (2022, p. 124), the apocalypse has historically occurred, the destruction has spatially transformed the world, and the people who survived the disaster have started to reorganize life. Thus, myth becomes no longer a description of the past and turns to the future, it becomes a prediction about the future, it describes the future, it shows the inevitable fulfillment of destiny. The longed-for Golden Age is not only in the past but also in the future (Eliade, 2001, p. 71). As can be seen, the prominent element is the narrative structure that repeats itself in these myths.

Structural-Semiotic Narrative Analysis in Cinema

The two founders of semiotics, logician and mathematician Charles Sanders Peirce (1839-1914) and Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure (1857-1913) provided a basis for "reading" and understanding cultural phenomena. Saussure's (2011) distinction between signifier and signified as the constitutive elements of language and signs, Peirce's (1998, pp. 5–7) typical triadic division of icon, signifier and symbol and signifier, object and interpretant provided the framework for a more systematic analysis of signs-systems. On this basis, signs are considered as a system. They derive from contrasts and differences. They are based on invariant structures, they are consensual and brand-new chains of signs are derived through syntagmatic and paradigmatic axes (Barthes, 1986; Chandler, 2007). At the final analysis, "Semiosis explains itself by itself" (Eco, 1976, p. 71).

The history of semiotics is the history of structuralism. Structuralism is "the quest for the invariant"(Levi-Strauss, 1978, p. 8), and structuralists want to "derive constants which are found at various times and in various places" (Levi-Strauss, 1963, p. 82). According to structuralists, humans

perceive nature by categorizing it into segments (Leach, 1996, p. 30; 33). Levi-Strauss (1966, p. 135; 161) emphasizes that humans see the universe as a continuum of binary opposition especially nature/culture opposition. His structural approach views myths as abstract constructions. "Myths are identical products from identical minds" (Rosenberg, 1994, p. xxi) and this means that humanity produces *similar* narratives.

These oppositions and signs systems are embedded in all the writings and images of culture, which is what narratology is interested in. Vladimir Propp, in *Morphology of the Folktale*, published in 1928, analyzed hundreds of Russian Fairy Tales and stated that what is important in his work is not who does it and how, but what they do (Propp, 2009, p. 20). Although people and their characteristics change in fairy tales, their actions and functions remain unchanged. Based on Propp's analyses, Greimas developed *The Actantial Mythical Model* (1984), which is functional in analyzing characters in narratives.

According to Christian Metz (1991), cinema is a language and narratives in cinema differs from narratives in literary texts. The raw materials of cinema are images. Metz sees cinema as a linguistic competence and analyzes literal and connotative meanings using sequential or syntagmatic analysis. Therefore, when structural-semiotic analysis is applied to cinematic texts, the narrative elements of cinema must be considered. When looking at cinema history, intertextuality/interfilmicity is detected in constant interaction (Thompson & Bordwell, 2003). Since structural-semiotic studies have largely emerged in literature, the studies in the literature have drawn frameworks that are specific to the situation of cinema, aimed at identifying and considering cinematic elements (Cornea, 2007; Ferrell, 2000; Langford, 2005). The establishment of *mise-en-scene*, sound, speech, effects, acting, camera movements, shot angles, editing, genre characteristics, iconography, idiomatic and non-diegetic elements should be taken into consideration (Bordwell & Thompson, 2008). When semiotic-structuralist narrative analyses are taken into consideration, it is observed that cinematic texts have significant differences. Considering that genres are also a system of repetition/difference (Grant, 2007, p. 1), this study is thought to provide support in bringing semiotic/structuralist narrative analysis closer to cinematic genre analysis.

Sample and Method

In this study, an adaptation of Philip K. Dick's *We Can Remember It for You Wholesale* (1966) (Dick, 2013), which impressively places issues such as reality and illusion at the center of his works in science fiction literature, is chosen as a purposive sampling. The selection of *Total Recall* as a remake as a purposive sample allows to understand the effects of memory on identity and society, the effects of catastrophe on social structure, the impact of family ties and gender patterns on individual decisions and the ethical dimensions of technology in a cinematic dimension. Philip K. Dick lived between 1928-82. According to Umland (1995, p. 1), Dick is the heir to a left-liberal, anti-authoritarian politics and philosophical skepticism. Dick believed that the FBI, CIA and KGB were constantly following him (Arnold, 2016, p. 44), which kept the element of suspicion alive in his works.

In the study, the elements that Barsam (2010) and Bordwell and Thompson (2008) identify as the elements of cinematic narratives were integrated with structuralist-semiotic narrative analysis in a way that would also be the basis for genre analysis, and the film chosen as the sample of the study was analyzed through these categories. Through qualitative, descriptive content analysis, both the style of the cinematic work and the various meanings lying deeper in this style were reached. Yıldırım and Şimşek (2011, p. 224) state that qualitative descriptive analysis consists of four stages. First, a conceptual set is identified and a framework for analysis is created by identifying appropriate themes for analysis. In the second stage, the data are processed according to the thematic framework, in the third stage the findings are defined and described, and in the last stage the findings are interpreted.

Findings

Intertextuality, Narrative and Plot

Total Recall (2012) is both an adaptation and a remake. In Philip K. Dick's story (2013), the protagonist Douglas Quail, and his wife Kirsten live not too distant future. Douglas describes himself as a "miserable little salaried employee" (Dick, 2013, p. 325) who wants to see the planet Mars before he dies. However, he does not have the money for such a tour, so he makes a deal with a company called Rekal, which allows him to go there at least in his dreams. The story takes place largely in Chicago. However, just as he is about to be loaded with memories and dreams in the device, it is revealed that he has somehow been on Mars and a secret agent in the past. Douglas' relationship with his wife is not good at all. According to Kirsten, Douglas is not a very good husband and lives in a dream. According to Douglas, Kirsten speaks always in the same tone, harshly, as if she knows everything and he knows nothing. Kirsten leaves Douglas because of his strange behavior and the cops suddenly appear in the house. Douglas doesn't understand what happened, but he escapes from the police. Douglas realizes that the state is listening to his every thought with a device implanted in his brain, that it is constantly following him, and he becomes paranoid. He makes a deal with the state authorities, but doubts whether what he is experiencing is real or a lie. Throughout the story, in keeping with Dick's writing style, it is unclear what is real and false whether the whole story is Rekal's fiction, or whether almost everyone, including Douglas, in an illusion and a deep desire, imagines all these things as real.

The first adaptation, Paul Verhoeven's *Total Recall* (1990) takes place in 2084, the second adaptation, Len Wiseman's *Total Recall* (2012) takes place after a war at the end of the 21st year. In the future, a dystopian world is depicted in the form of living under paranoid surveillance, people being in a delusion that they are being controlled, and the state gaining the power to control even the desires and thoughts of individuals. Throughout the story, it is unclear what kind of adventure the protagonist has on Mars. Both adaptations are shaped by the fear of being followed/surveilled; in the first case there is a device implanted in the brain, in the second a device implanted in the hand, the device cannot read the protagonist's thoughts, but it informs him of his location. Both protagonists get rid of being watched by removing these devices. However, in the main story, the protagonist cannot get rid of this device that follows even his thoughts.

Both adaptations partially follow the plot of the main story. The first adaptation involves a journey to Mars, and much of the movie is about Douglas' experiences on Mars. Unmentioned in the story, Douglas tries to escape from the people who want to take him over and tries to save colonized Mars. He meets the head of the secret organization. The generator built by the aliens is activated and Mars becomes free again. In Wiseman's adaptation, there is no Mars theme anymore. The story takes place in a world that is completely polarized and devastated in the exploiter/exploited opposition. In other words, in the main story Mars is mentioned but the story takes place on Earth, in the first adaptation the theme of Mars is continued but the story largely takes place on Mars, in the second adaptation the story takes place on Earth but there is no journey to Mars.

The Wiseman's adaptation is constructed in accordance with the classical narrative. Barsam (2010, p.118) states *exposition*, *rising action*, *climax*, *falling action* and *denouement.*

Exposition: Douglas lives an ordinary life, yet through his dreams he feels that this life is not his life. Douglas is presented as a worker/hero in a gloomy world who wants to escape from his ordinary life.

Rising action: Douglas goes to the Rekall company to buy a dream. He is revealed to be a secret agent. The cops raid.

Climax: The movie's sequence of events builds upwards, creating increasing tension. The state and its agents, and Douglas' wife Lori, who is an agent, and Chancelor Cohaagen, appear as the Villain. Douglas constantly conflicts with his enemies in public spaces in the city, starting from his home. Douglas is talented, but he does not yet have the consciousness to confront the villains directly and is in doubt about *who he is*. He is undefeated in combat but is constantly on the run. As a helper, Melina, his former friend and lover in the rebel forces, appears.

Falling action: Douglas and Melina find Mathias and connect to the computer to unlock the secret code in his mind. It is revealed that Douglas is a double agent. Douglas confronts both the rebellious and the conservative, obedient side of his personas and refuses to let his consciousness and memories be erased again. Self-consciousness emerges as the hero's special talent. With the balance restored, he fights Cohaagen and Lori again, destroying all the synthetic soldiers and The Fall.

Denouement: Douglas has come to terms with his own identity and personas and begins his new life as a hero who has saved the Colony, free to live a good life with Melina.

Although the film conforms to the classical narrative structure, it is an open-ended narrative, and the viewer is expected to find and name this answer according to his/her own preferences. The protagonist has reached a state of equilibrium and closure, but the question "what is real?" is not fully answered.

Genre Analysis

The film constructs an autonomous and closed world and is set in the future. It presents a post-apocalyptic dystopian future, and in fact projects a political situation of the present, namely Britain's relationship with its former (Australia) colonies, into the future, creating the image of a polarized

world in which the whole world is destroyed by catastrophe. According to Booker (2010, pp. 18–19), science fiction relies on *high technology* with its themes and visual effects. Since science fiction cinema tries to show what does not yet exist, it has had to make significant use of technology. In this respect, *Total Recall* belongs to the post-apocalyptic dystopian science fiction genre by depicting the aftermath of a chemical disaster and dealing with a problem/disaster with a high probability of occurrence. As Jameson notes (2005, p. 199), imagining the end of the world is more difficult than imagining the end of capitalism, and we still see this tendency in science fiction. The movie is set in the present time that the audience is watching in the past time that has already ended. The future is presented in a pessimistic and depressing setting, but the film does not give up on "humanity and its mind".

Despite the dystopian vision of the future, the possibility of hope and resistance is kept on the agenda. Since dystopian films depict a post-apocalyptic "purification" process, it is necessary for a savior, the Messiah, that is, Douglas, to emerge after an uncertain great war in the past, asking and remembering who he is, and to defeat the evil, the demons that have taken over the entire power structure. Typical of science fiction, motifs such as the opposition between robots and humans, the intense surveillance of everyday life, and the fear that there will be nothing left of Nature in mechanized life find their place. With the wholesale destruction of the synthetic soldiers, the film takes a stand against robots, or rather against their being in the hands of evil and removes them. The film sustains interest in modern society's fear of "amnesia", the erasure/creation of memory; there is no conclusive evidence as to whether what happens in the film is still a dream, Rekall's ad still raises doubts. The film offers liberation from dystopia and the fight for freedom. Through the hero's journey and fight, he plays a pioneering role for a utopian vision of the future.

Signs, Codes, Conventions

Film's messages are constructed through various binary oppositions.

Table 1

Binary Oppositions According to Levi-Strauss' Model

Nature	Culture
Organic	Synthetic
Good	Bad
Past	Future
Exploited/Colony	Exploiter/Federation
Rebel	Agent
Uninhabitable zone	Livable zone
Man	Woman

As seen in Table 1, the film is based on nature versus culture. Culture has destroyed nature. The remnants of chemical warfare are not a big part of the film's mise-en-scene; the *absence* of nature becomes a signifier. Natural life has disappeared and has drifted into synthetic artificiality. The Federation is the signifier of the forces of evil. Villains have made the world uninhabitable except

for a few regions. The forces of good, except for the images of Douglas, lack a complete signifier; this is due to the absence of a referent. However, the Colony is presented as potentially capable of representing good. Ideologically, the film conveys the message that "it is possible to live equally and respectfully without exploitation, but it requires fighting for it".

On a sub-semantic level, the modern Western man has a fear of family and an inner distress due to the compression of his daily life between work and home. Douglas' desire to get rid of his wife Lori and Lori's oppressive attempt to kill him is a disguise of the oppression created by the modern institution of marriage. In contrast to the "bad woman" Lori, Melina, who is willing to do anything for her man, takes place in the hero's life like a phantasmic "mistress". A man's fantasy of "unshareability" between two women is fulfilled. The real reason why Douglas becomes Lori's target is presented as Lori's jealousy for his abilities. The male secret agent proves to women that he is an *object of desire* as a man with special skills; at this moment, the phrase "until death do them part" is used to symbolize the wish to get rid of the unappreciative Lori, who is portrayed in a dark presentation. The most phantasmic element of the film is embedded here. The male protagonist, who recognizes himself in the incomplete *desire of other,* the woman, in the Lacanian sense, constitutes his phantasm on the subjugation of women through gender. The surplus that Lori expresses in this respect can be seen as the traumatic effect of the surplus that cannot be symbolized, and which Lacan claims is 'naturally' present in women.

The woman's humiliation of the man, "clamping" him (squeezing him with her arms in a strangling manner) is an index of the disturbing representation of the woman and the identity of "wife" in film. Lori sometimes "cheats" on her husband by pretending to be the "good wife", masking Melina's face at the end of the movie. The white man is "cunning" and is not fooled by the ostensible codes represented in Lori, the "gray vest" of the housewife, the bullet wound she does not have. It is "salvation" to "divorce" Lori, who is still trying to deceive and kill her man, that is, to let "until death do them part" (Wiseman, 2012, 00:31:16). As Sobchack (2001, p. 37) notes, even in films that visualize destruction, there is often the promise of a new Eden. In this respect, it is possible to say that the promise of *Total Recall* is man's fantasy of deliverance from his ex-wife. In the first movie, there is Lori who is loyal to Douglas, who seems to love him, and in the very first scenes they make love with desire. In the second movie, on the other hand, there is a Lori who is indifferent to her husband, who can be called to duty at any moment with her pager. According to the narrative discourse, the male's desires and needs are not fulfilled. In the movie, it is seen that the man's anxiety stems from the woman's presentation of herself in action and the appropriation of her desire.

The search for a balance in the exploited/exploiter relationship reflects the modern colony/center relationship. A shorter working time, a creative environment without routine, a meaningful, mutually respectful relationship between men and women, a world where robots are not used as lethal machines, a world where nature truly exists in the face of mechanical life, and the limited relationships of people in permanently closed spaces send us to the opposite pole, to the "utopia" where these situations are idealized. If we look at this situation within the framework of Baudrillard's simulacrum theory (1994), it is possible to say that the signifier *abolishes* the signified. The disappearance of the elevator signifier in the film, *The Fall*, presupposes the acceptance that the connection between the

two poles it presents as signified cannot be established and sustained. In this respect, the hegemonic consent between the exploiter and the exploited turns into a style that legitimizes the present and affirms the dominant ideology of today, since it is established without the need for this kind of imposing, oppressive, autocracy. The indicative code shown by the woman with three breasts after the chemical disaster, the monotonous forms of the robots, and symbolically the sense of destruction and horror expressed by the whole atmosphere of the film draws the viewer towards the present; in the future, he watches the signs of destruction, icons and symbols of destruction of today's world. The 'Golden Age' Eliade (2001) speaks of for this genre seems to be finally realized. Therefore, the past in the film exists through its "symptomatic" destruction. The viewer is shown the "smoke" of a world that has already been burned and destroyed.

Visual Effects and Iconography

Telotte (2004, p. 4) states that the constitutive elements of science fiction cinema include various iconographic elements and that audiences are familiar with icons such as rockets, robots, futuristic cities, aliens, fantastic technology, and scientists. The film budget is 125 million dollars, and the movie fulfills visual effect expectations. Virtual faces, robots, futuristic buildings, images and televisions appearing everywhere, big explosion effects reinforce the belief that the world being watched is realistic. The constantly rising action in the film, combined with visual effects, gives the audience a dream experience. The dream that Douglas wants to see in the film echoes the situation of the modern spectator in an ironic way. For the spectator, getting rid of the boredom of everyday life is through identifying with the hero. The promise to Douglas that everything he sees in his dream is 'real' is a promise to the audience that every visual effect he sees is as if it were real.

Many icons and symbols of science fiction are used in the movie. Robots, giant steel buildings surrounding the whole mise-en-scene, cars flying in the air, giant screens on the wall, the elevator called *The Fall* passing through the center of the earth as *a novum*, are the indicators that convince the audience that the film they are watching is science fiction. In accordance with the dystopia and *cyberpunk* genre, the protagonist is constantly inside mechanical objects and buildings, and a dark atmosphere prevails. There is a future in which peace passes through war, modern life turns into a big prison/panopticon, and robots turn into a threatening icon. The symbols and icons in the film imply technophobia. It is as if they are created to frighten the viewer, and even the large space that offers comfort and freedom from this world is only possible with the view from the top of the skyscrapers.

Mise-en-scene, Shooting Scales and Camera Angle/Movements

Mise-en-scene includes the actions of the characters, their positions, what they do, lighting, costumes, sound, etc. As Chandler (2007, p. 85) emphasized mise-en-scene is the spatial syntagms. Until the rising action, the camera is usually at a normal viewing angle, with close-up and medium shots. Wide shots are used to give information about the environment. With the rising action, medium and wide shots, and close-ups are used to draw attention to the character's emotions and expressions. Wide shots are used to show the protagonist's struggle with space. Camera angles are

used throughout the film in accordance with the rhythm of the narrative. When there are dangerous, contradictory situations, camera angles change rapidly, the camera moves up and down. The subjective point of view is not used in the film, but until the equilibrium in the film, the villains are usually presented either from a slightly lower point of view or from a point of view equivalent to the hero. Cohaagen, with his speech in the videos on the walls until the state of equilibrium, is positioned *high* from the point of view of the people below and effects such as formality, management and authority are provided. After the climax, Lori and Cohaagen are defeated by the hero. To emphasize their position, the camera shows them from a high angle.

The film mise-en-scène is constructed in accordance with the Federation/Colony dichotomy by presenting the cities of the Federation as modern and futuristic, while the Colony is presented in a low-lit, gloomy frame, largely reminiscent of *cyberpunk* and *Film Noir*. The *zoom* effect is not used throughout the film. The increasing illumination of the hero's face towards the end of the film, the voice of "Tell us your fantasy. We'll give you the memory" (Wiseman, 2012: 01:46:50) heard in the background, the villain's superior position and visual weight in composition with a decreasing low angle and the hero is shown gradually high angles towards the end of the film. Therefore, the mise-en-scene signifies the hero's transition from darkness to light, from silence to voice, from bottom to top, from sleep to wakefulness, from death to resurrection. Besides, The *Rekall*, shown in a digital, sterile setting in the first film, turns into a "special lounge" in the second film, decorated with Far Eastern motifs, "Buddha" statues reminiscent of Eastern mysticism, colored lamps and all appealing to male fantasy. The protagonist is trapped; when Douglas leaves the home scene, he is confined to the city, to the workplace, and the fact that they cannot go back and forth except for the two poles, and that the world becomes toxic with a great chemical disaster are compatible with the limited and closed nature of the mise-en-scene.

Duration, Editing, Diegesis and Sound

The story time is spread over several days. The plot shows the events that are the basis for the action taken here. The screen time of the film is approximately two hours. Both films have largely invisible editing, which enhances the effect of reality. The film is constructed with a linear narrative and there are no parallel, flashback, flash-forward narrative forms. Since the film narrates the events in a relatively short time interval of a few days, the transition between the plans is provided by cuts, and the follow-up scenes are provided by camera movements. The past gains meaning through destruction, the present is shaped by a pessimistic dystopian outlook, and the future is shaped by hope. When the movie ends, the message is given to the audience that a better world has begun.

There is a general *diegetic* field except for the *non-diegetic* music that gives information about the action. Apart from the subtitles, credits, explosion sounds and music that give information about the film at the beginning, there are no references that do not find a place in the film narrative and no effects are used except for the explosion scenes. The rhythm of the music increases and decreases in accordance with the action, and sometimes the action is guided by classical, sometimes pop-electronic music. The film constantly refers to the 1990 production in an intertextual relationship: Douglas's lying in the dream machine, the woman with three breasts. Lori being the reflection of

the blonde Sharon Stone in the first film, the barrenness of the 'outside and distant' Mars in the first film now finding meaning as the barren world, make the two films constantly comparable and intertextual. Therefore, an interfilmicity dialogue is constantly occurring in the film and an autonomous universal schema is created that is meaningful with the existence of the other film.

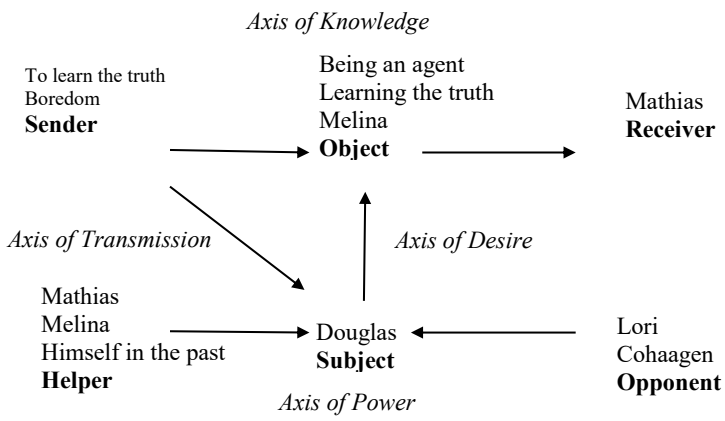
Characters and Star System

The protagonist Colin Farrell has starred in different film genres. However, Farrell presents a relatively naive persona to the muscular and "Terminator" Arnold Schwarzenegger, the protagonist of the first movie. Female actors were sometimes 'bad' and sometimes 'good' in the other films. Kate Beckinsale appears in *Underworld* (Len Wiseman, 2003) as a relatively 'good' woman, but the presentation is not good in an absolute sense. Therefore, there is no quick answer in the film narrative as to whether they are good or bad in the film through persona. Bryan Cranston as Cohaagen, in partial contrast to his acting in *Breaking Bad* (2018-2013), does not appear as a good/evil simultaneously, but as a dominant evil personality.

Greimas' Actantial Model (Greimas, 1984, p. 207; Hebert, 2020, p. 82) provides an important framework for understanding narratives and the hero's journey. When Model is created by centering Douglas, the following figure emerges.

Figure 1

Douglas-centered Greimas' Actantial Model



As seen in figure 1, Douglas is the subject and has changing objects of desire throughout the movie. His desire to become an agent sends him to the Rekall company. When he realizes that he is indeed an agent, he wants to solve the mystery behind this conspiracy and has a desire to be with Melina. In the sender position, there is the protagonist's inner desire to know the truth and to avoid boredom. This emotional and cognitive state leads the protagonist to change his life in the axis of transmission. First, Rekall, then Melina and Mathias, and the protagonist embarks on a struggle to

solve the mystery of the plot. The protagonist is helped by Mathias, Melina and the past Douglas, who sends him a message. When Douglas is surrounded by the police in the movie, he says: "I am nobody". The hero is ready to cross the border. The transition from ignorance to knowledge, from unhappiness to happiness, from inner boredom and weariness to freedom, from closed to open, shows that the director's aim is the journey of the hero, as (Campbell, 2004) states. Lori and the government troops around her and Cohaagen are the main opponents. These people and groups of people prevent the hero with lethal weapons and do not want him to reach his aim, but they fail in this. In the last sequence, the hero reaches all his objects by killing the government soldiers, Cohaagen and his wife Lori, who hides her face. There is no longer any obstacle for him to be with Melina and the film ends happily.

Realism and Ideology

The polarized world created by chemical warfare, a big elevator constructed in the center of the earth and *The Fall* activates genre-specific realism codes and Suvin's *novum*. This situation is a *hyperreality* in the sense defined by Baudrillard (1994) in accordance with the narrative. The fact that the knowledge to destroy the robot cops that will end the occupation is hidden in Douglas supports the idea that complete information is what society needs to change. The Federation has established hegemony through manipulation. In other words, it is not that the image occupies reality, but that the image *conceals* the absence of reality. Dream/reality ambiguity persists throughout the movie. The film constitutes a cognitive estrangement by creating doubt about reality and presents a postmodern *novum* by obscuring time. Eco (1976, p. 289) emphasizes, the semantic system is one of the possible ways of ideologically giving meaning to the world. In this respect, the film glorifies distrust of signs precisely through their being "pseudo" memories. The film makes reality imaginable by inviting the viewer into dreams.

Considering Suvin (1979) and Oskay's (2014) classification of science fiction films, it is possible to say that the film is a film that is willing to change the given situation, partly nostalgic, preserves its belief in reason and humanity, and is close to the liberal left, although it does not propose a complete exit from mythology. The film supports a more democratic, liberal government than the fascist, autocratic one symbolized by Cohaagen. It questions the institution of the family and envisions a freer relationship between men and women that appeals more to the male fantasy. In the signifier dichotomy established between Lori and Melina, Melina is a signifier presented as glorifying the 'free' woman. However, Melina's real signified meaning is her dependence on the man and her effort to fulfill his duty. In this context, in terms of gender ideology, it is possible to say that the film demonizes the disobedient 'woman' and moves the 'husband' to a more angelic point. Although the film does not move away from the classical narrative tradition that provides catharsis, it increases consciousness by raising suspicion against what seems to be familiar in the post-truth age, where the manipulability of everything through artificial intelligence is on the rise. In this respect, the film is an unconscious call to the importance of memory in a way that today's people need more. Boz (2022, pp. 170–171)

describes post-apocalyptic films as films that consider history as deterministic, humanity as a species as evil, shaped according to various macro-ideologies and connected to the notion of the final battle. While *Total Recall* has these tendencies, it also represents utopian desires regarding the future of humanity with its libertarian imagery.

Conclusion

As a post-apocalyptic science fiction film structured in accordance with the classical narrative pattern, *Total Recall* reflects the problems of the present into the future with the modern inner boredom, marriage, the institution of family and fear of women, constant surveillance by the state and the fear of an apocalypse that can be found in Dick's story. The film has a conception of a human being who can overcome these problems, and the narrative structured on the axis of good/evil dichotomy visualizes the struggle and victory of good over evil.

It is possible to observe that post-apocalyptic films see chaos as a tool to transform chaos into cosmos. While blockbusters perpetuate the state of chaos, considering the possible commercial return of the films, they do not neglect to offer hope for the formation of cosmos and order. As can be seen in the analysis of *Total Recall*, it is possible to evaluate this situation as a formula that reasserts a cyclical history developed against the Semitic understanding of linear history. In this study, which relates structural-semiotic analysis to genre analysis in cinema and focuses on the meaning of cinematic images, it is observed that the repetition and intensification that emerges in the essence of myths and structures, from which science fiction also derives, makes a *difference* especially in the understanding of history. This phenomenon, which manifests itself in apocalyptic and post-apocalyptic narratives, deserves more intensive analysis in literature.

At this point, the audience should not forget that the climax of the classical narrative, the place where its triumph is constructed, is based on a phantasm. If Lacan's (1978, p. 20) claim is correct and the unconscious is structured like a language, if films are the closest representations of the dreaming experience, the "end of the film" must have two meanings. Firstly, the phantasmic content of the film fulfils a desire; secondly, since it is the closest moment to "awakening", a compelling truth, the limit of the impossible to symbolize, must have been reached. In this film, as in all apocalyptic narratives, desire is the desire for devastation, and destruction is always based on the compelling impulse of the will to regenerate. This study combines the structural – semiotic method with cinema and genre film analysis. In future studies, it is thought that it will contribute to the literature of the field to search for cinematic images of a "principle of hope" in the manner of Ernest Bloch instead of despair and destruction, Derrida's "deconstruction" instead of *continuities* and *structure*.

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