

Desired Objects of Denys Arcand

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Resumo:

Esse artigo apresenta uma taxonomia para analisar objetos em filmes e aplica essa metodologia ao trabalho do diretor canadense Denys Arcand. Essa categoria de estudo busca identificar e analisar como os objetos cotidianos mais representativos são usados nos filmes. Este artigo avalia os três filmes seguintes: *Le déclin de l'empire américain* (*O declínio do Império Americano*, 1986), *Les invasions barbares* (*As invasões bárbaras*, 2003) e *L'âge des ténèbres* (*A era da inocência*, 2007). Esta pesquisa foi desenvolvida na Concordia University (Montreal, Canadá) e teve apoio do Foreign Affairs and International Trade do Canadá (DFAIT).

Palavras Chave:

Análise fílmica, design, objetos, Denys Arcand.

Abstract:

This essay presents a taxonomy for analyzing objects in films and applies it to the work of Canadian filmmaker Denys Arcand. This kind of analysis aims to identify and analyze how the most representative daily objects are used in films. The following three films were analyzed for the purposes of this paper: *Le déclin de l'empire américain* (*The Decline of the American Empire*, 1986), *Les invasions barbares* (*The Barbarian Invasions*, 2003) and *L'âge des ténèbres* (*Days of Darkness*, 2007). This research was developed at Concordia University, Montreal, Canada and supported by the Foreign Affairs and International Trade, Canada (DFAIT).

Keywords:

Film analysis, design, objects, Denys Arcand.

To analyze objects which are significant in Denys Arcand's body of work, it was necessary to delimit a corpus, selecting films and objects which met the criteria of our predetermined categories. The first step in our methodology was determining an appropriate taxonomy (1) for analyzing objects in films. We then employed this taxonomy as a model to help us to identify and analyze the most representative objects used in Arcand's films. Our process involves both quantitative and qualitative analysis; we consider the number of times each object appears in a film (quantitative analysis) as well as the context of their appearance, i.e. the type of shot used and how that creates either a larger or smaller relevance and/or expressiveness (qualitative analysis). In addition to the criteria of *relevance* and *expressiveness*, we also analyze the *functionality* of an object by exploring details and specifying the role various objects play in films. The following *Table 1* explains the taxonomy used in our analysis:

TAXONOMY FOR ANALYZING OBJECTS IN FILM	
CRITERION OF RELEVANCE	
This criterion is based on the number of times objects appear in a film. Excessiveness, as well as exclusiveness, may be indicators of relevance.	
Example	If the theme of a film is death, and a bottle of milk appears prominently several times, it is probably an object specifically chosen to <i>co-act</i> with death.
CRITERION OF EXPRESSIVENESS	
This criterion aims to identify how an object can cause impact; how it calls forth the spectator's attention. This can occur in different ways, thus we subdivided expressiveness into the following subcategories:	
Distanciation	This is a strategy which deviates from the standard use of frame, montage, and edition. The objective here is to call the spectator's attention to an object. It is based on Brecht's concept of <i>distanciation effect</i> .
Example	If objects appear in unusual shots it seems to be <i>nonsense</i> , yet there is an underlying intent.
Particularization	This strategy is related to a detail that shows something out of the ordinary.
Example	When an extreme close-up is so close and slow that it causes a deformation in the image of the object.
Surprise	An unexpected event related to an object that astonishes us, causing admiration and/or fright.
Example	When a character interacts with an object that doesn't match his/her profile: a priest with a gun, a child smoking a cigarette etc.
Ecstasy	Eisenstein defined the notion of ecstasy as the highest degree of intellectual and emotional activity the spectator can experience.
Example	The color of an object, its shape, a small detail, and its disposition in the atmosphere; these elements can capture the spectator's sense and sensibility, in turn mobilizing their desire.
CRITERION OF FUNCIONALITY	
This criterion is based on the concept that a relevant and expressive object will execute one or more function(s) within a film.	
Scenographic function	This function is linked to the creation and adaptation of a scenario in relation to an environment. The setting can present the character before he has appeared.
Example	Objects in a scene may indicate a character's social position, tastes, habits, lifestyle, and personality.
Semantic function	This function works on a level of denotation and connotation with the metaphorical, metonymical and synecdochial capacity of the scenic assembly.
Example	Milk is known as a symbol of purity. If a bottle of milk is broken, we can infer that purity has been corrupted.
Synesthetic function	This function seeks to reach our perceptions, working our visual, verbal, chromatic, olfactory and musical repertoires, among others, to cause emotion and commotion.
Example	Which sensation would a bottle of milk evoke if placed in the context of a cold European climate and an operatic soundtrack? How is this same bottle interpreted when placed in the setting of a sunny day with an <i>allegro</i> of sweet flute as a soundtrack?
Referential function	This function refers to other arts, languages, and contexts that are separate from a film but are referenced in this film.
Example	All the films that make reference specifically to Hitchcock's shower scene in <i>Psycho</i> .
Dialogical function	This function intends to re-contextualize a given reference.
Example	The Brazilian film <i>Central Station</i> (Walter Salles, 1998) shows the character Dora, who judges and decides the destiny of letters: garbage, drawer or post. Within the religious environment of the film, garbage, drawer and post clearly correspond to hell, purgatory and heaven.
Ideological function	This function contemplates objects which are able to express ideological concepts in film.
Example	Explicit <i>propaganda</i> films, such as the Soviet film <i>October</i> (Sergei Eisenstein, 1927) and the German film <i>Triumph of the Will</i> (Leni Riefenstahl, 1934).
Authorial function	This function refers to the relevance of the interference of the author's own personal data in films and also to his/her appearance on screen.
Example	Hitchcock's appearances in his films.
Aesthetic function	This function refers to the design of objects, as well as to the aesthetic movement in which they are inserted.
Example	The design used in Wim Wenders' films from the 1970s and 1980s is a reflex of German modernism and functionalism.
Advertising function	This function refers to product placement, which occurs via the inclusion of a brand's logo in a shot, or a favorable mention or appearance of a product in a shot.
Example	The James Bond film, <i>The Man with the Golden Gun</i> (Guy Hamilton, 1974), featured extensive use of AMC cars.

Table 1 – Taxonomy for analyzing objects in film

This methodological construction should not be understood as a naive proposal of statistics or *measurement* of criteria and functions. The challenge here is the development of a specific terminology and typology to examine visually represented objects. Thus, such criteria could still be enlarged and adapted.

For the purposes of this paper, we selected films from Arcand's diverse filmography, with a focus on his production of color feature films. We further selected his loose trilogy (2) to analyze, as it is representative of his career. The chosen films were: 1) *Le déclin de l'empire américain* (*The Decline of the American Empire*), 1986, 101 min; 2) *Les invasions barbares* (*The Barbarian Invasions* - Canadian English title; *Invasion of the Barbarians* - International English title), 2003, 112 min. and 3) *L'âge des ténèbres* (*Days of Darkness* - Canadian English title; *The Age of Ignorance* - International English title), 2007, 108 min. (Quebec's version) and 103 min. (international version).

The Decline of the American Empire describes the relations between eight intellectual friends (four men and four women) from the Department of History at the *Université de Montréal*. The ensuing conversations range from politics to academic affairs, but primarily concern their sexual exploits. The plot of the film centers on the group planning a dinner together at a secluded house. While the four men prepare the food and reflect on their promiscuity, the four women discuss their sexuality while exercising at a gym. When the group finally gets together for the dinner, the conflicts arise. This film, because of all its social nuances, can be considered an allegory of Quebec. *The Decline of the American Empire* was followed by a sequel, *The Barbarian Invasions*, in 2003.

The Barbarian Invasions picks up seventeen years later where *The Decline of the American Empire* left off. The 2003 film is built around the character of Rémy, his battle with terminal cancer and his estranged son's efforts to make him more comfortable. His son gathers various friends from Rémy's past who come to visit and comfort him. During Rémy's last days, they travel to the same secluded house featured in the first film, and discuss philosophy, politics, and past sexual and intellectual exploits. This sequel was followed by *Days of Darkness* in 2007.

Days of Darkness is the third film in this loose trilogy. In the film, the character of Jean-Marc Leblanc lives an ordinary North American life. He has a big house, a safe civil service job, a wife who works as a businesswoman, and two daughters. His wife and kids ignore him and he feels perpetually ineffectual in his bureaucratic job. Punctuating his boring life are fantasy scenes in which gorgeous women swoon at the sight of him and even those fantasy creatures develop minds of their own. In this regard, *Days of Darkness* is reminiscent of the film, *Brazil* (Terry Gilliam, 1985), in which a young man tries to find a woman who appears in his dreams while working in a mind-numbing job and living a life in a small apartment, set in a dystopian world. Those three Arcand films utilize objects in a relevant and expressive way and the following analysis intend to demonstrate it.

Using the already described method we located sixteen objects: eyeglasses, book, painting, picture, kitchen tool, television, jewel, mirror, piano, medicine, lamp, recorder, cassette, duck decoration, video game, and telephone. Among this group of "desired objects," we chose the following three for further analysis: eyeglasses, mirror and medicine. We based our decision on the fact that all three objects are representative due to the number of times they appear in films (result of the quantitative analysis) as well as because of the way that they appear in films; in both unusual and usual shots which provide them with larger relevance and expressiveness (result of the qualitative analysis). In addition to the criteria of relevance and expressiveness, we also considered the functionality of the selected objects.

Eyeglasses

Perceptions involve all of our five senses: i.e. tasting, touching, smelling, hearing and seeing, at the centre of which is the function of our physical brain and nervous system. What distinguishes perception from sense is the action of the self or the will. Figuratively, seeing means having intellectual apprehension, to perceive, to know, to understand and to discern. Therefore eyeglasses, as devices to compensate for defective vision, to protect the eyes, to help seeing, can also act as epistemic artefacts – tools for thinking – with conditions for acquiring knowledge.

In Arcand's films, male and female characters wear glasses in a purposeful way. In *The Decline of the American Empire*, the character Rémy (Rémy Girard), an under 40-year-old university professor, wears round glasses with a metallic frame, yet he only wears them at work. His decision to only wear glasses at the university, but never outside of work, emphasizes the intellectual nature of his academic life. Moreover, the type of round frame worn by Rémy is frequently associated with intellectual personalities, such as Sigmund Freud, but is also related to progressive personalities, such as John Lennon. In this sense, Rémy's pair of glasses accomplishes what we call a referential function.

Aesthetically, eyeglasses seem to make people appear more mature, educated, and intelligent; they can inspire respect, i.e. they reach a semantic function. This cliché fits Rémy's and his friends' profile in the milieu of academic life. Diane (Louise Portal), Rémy's colleague in the Department of History at the Université de Montréal, is a young woman who is always seen wearing large dark-framed glasses. Similarly, their university professor friend, Pierre (Pierre Curzi), always wears enormous eyeglasses with a light brown frame. The design of the eyeglasses worn by these characters reflects both their intellectual nature as well as the aesthetics of the 1980's: large lenses, completely round or square glasses with rounded corners, and frames in various tones of brown. Thus, an aesthetic function is also achieved.

At the end of *The Decline of the American Empire*, Louise (Dorothée Berryman), Rémy's wife, discovers her husband's infidelity after a dinner with their group of friends. His infidelity includes his affairs with their friends Dominique (Dominique Michel) and Diane. The next morning Louise, who doesn't wear glasses, wakes up wearing a pair of sun glasses with opaque black lenses, which are putted up from crying. This scene works on the semantic level: she hides her eyes (the window to the soul) and her displeasure behind the darkness of the lenses.

In *The Barbarian Invasions*, we have the same characters seventeen years later. Now they are over 50 years old, trying to rescue their relationships and affectivities during the last days of Rémy's life. Their children are now adults who reflect the kind of education and familiar conditions we witnessed in the central characters in *The Decline of the American Empire*. Indeed, Sébastien (Stéphane Rousseau), Rémy's eldest son, is a successful businessman in London. He wears small, oval dark-frame eyeglasses to work each day. There is a scene in which Sébastien meets Nathalie (Marie-Josée Croze), Diane's daughter, in a coffee shop. While he waits for her, he works on his laptop. As soon as she arrives, he takes off his glasses to see her better, but upon taking off his glasses we are able to see the connection between them; his enchantment is visible. As the two characters talk, Sébastien's eyeglasses are placed in the center of the table, as a mediator of their encounter. While his glasses/mask remains on the table, Sébastien's face is naked, open and fragile before Nathalie. Thus, his eyeglasses establish a semantic function.

On the other hand, Rémy continues to wear the same kind of round glasses as he wore nearly two decades ago in *The Decline of the American Empire*. We even have the sense that it is exactly the same pair of glasses worn in the other film, although it is not. This type of re-contextualizing of a reference to the preceding film works as a dialogical function. Only now Rémy wears his glasses constantly, probably because of age. In fact, this lack of change in his personal style denotes how the character has not changed much during the last two

decades, and so this object achieves an ideological function: Rémy did not want to change or grow as an individual and his eyeglasses reflect that.

The presence of eyeglasses in Arcand's films is not limited to the main characters; even the supporting characters wear them. In *The Barbarian Invasions*, for instance, we see a relatively young male patient of Indian culture, wearing a huge old-fashioned pair of glasses. His appearance, as an expression of a particular culture, accomplishes the aesthetic function. He is presented as an outsider, a stranger who has other habits and other visual characteristics (semantic function). The presence of his family at the hospital, with their culturally different costume, food, and manners, reinforces this sensation and works as a synesthetic function.

The character Pierre is seen wearing very different eyewear in *The Barbarian Invasions*. His glasses have changed a lot: they are fine, discrete, and light as opposed to the large, heavy, dark frames featured before. Pierre's character has changed and so has fashion in the seventeen-year time frame between films, getting married to a young woman and having two young daughters; he is more natural and his glasses reflect that.

Further, the style of eyeglasses mirrors the contemporary *Zeitgeist* of the times (aesthetic function). However, the main character of *Days of Darkness*, Jean-Marc (Marc Labrèche), wears traditional old-fashioned round glasses, which have a certain camp character. His eyeglasses are like him, it means, in a semantic level they are neither attractive nor interesting. Arcand explores the possibilities of roles that eyewear can play in a film; how they can impact a character's persona or even the mood of a scene. He demonstrates this wealth of representations, for instance, when he changes the glasses that Jean-Marc wears in his fantasies. It is important to notice that Jean-Marc's eyeglasses are different only when he feels he has another personality, when he is a successful man (writer, actor, politician, etc.) in his fantasies. For example, in the first dream in the beginning of the film, he imagines he is a writer who has recently won an award for his book *Un homme sans interesse* (*A Man Without Interest*). In fact, the book's title is an intertextual reference to Robert Musil's novel *L'homme sans qualité* (*A Man Without Quality*), which implicates a referential function. Here the spectator also has a "cynic" situation: Jean-Marc imagines himself as an interesting man who triumphs at writing about an ordinary person. Also, when he dreams he is a well-known politician who is dynamic and charming, he uses the same modern glasses. In these fantasies, he is shown wearing contemporary rectangular glasses with a black frame: the image of youthfulness and contemporaneity (aesthetic function). The new eyeglasses fit this fantasized successful image.

However, when Jean-Marc fantasizes that he is a terminal cancer patient who dies, even in his imagined funeral, he wears his real-life round glasses. At the end of *Days of Darkness* there is one of the most interesting dreams: Jean-Marc is being interviewed at his secluded house by the St. Lawrence River. He imagines he is there to write a reflection book. He talks about our epoch, which he believes can be characterized by the word "disintegration". At that moment, his fantasies begin to disintegrate: the sexy reporter, his lesbian co-worker, his gorgeous chef, and also the imagined superstar, Véronica, disappear. Véronica, who is dressed as a queen, fades away on an old sailboat called *La Dauphine* - The Dolphin (3). This dream is his passport back to reality, and because of it he wears his real eyeglasses (semantic function). The audience can infer that the fact that Jean-Marc keeps wearing his "boring" glasses instead of being inspired to get new, hipper glasses, says he does not really want the life of his fantasies, he does not want to be a celebrity.

Finally, we have an extremely expressive scene in which eyeglasses play the main role. The character Pierre, the same university professor of *The Decline of the American Empire* and *The Barbarian Invasions*, is back in *Days of Darkness*. Here we see an interesting connection to the two preceding films: in fact, Pierre is the only character from the previous films who reappears in *Days of Darkness*. He is older and wears a pair of ordinary glasses with black frame mended with band-aid. These are different glasses, not the same fine-framed ones from *The Barbarian Invasions*. Pierre is now divorced, his young wife accused him of physical violence, and because of that he can see his daughters just once a month under court supervision. When we see Pierre in

Days of Darkness, he is on sick leave and has become homeless. The band-aid on his eyeglasses, which provokes surprise, is a subtle detail with an important role: it shows the deplorable condition of this character, shows the changes he has suffered since the first film. Here we see the concretization of the referential function. Above all, the utilization of sticking plaster is a very subtle way to represent, to communicate Pierre's new situation.

Eyeglasses can play a role as masks, as shields which are able to protect or to hide the eyes and also the soul (semantic function). At the end of Arcand's trilogy, the characters' masks fall away, revealing their fragility. Arcand elaborates his characters personas thoroughly, and objects such as eyeglasses are present to corroborate his intentions. Objects "are talking to us about significant and touching things" (BOTTON, 2006: 78).

Mirror

The definition of a mirror – also related to eyesight – is a reflecting surface, originally of polished metal but now usually of glass with a silvery, metallic, or amalgam backing. This surface forms an image of an element when light rays originating from that element fall upon the surface. In a metaphorical way, the mirror can be used as an instrument of truth or of distortion. For example, in Lewis Carroll's 1871 work, *Through the Looking Glass*, the character Alice ponders what the world is like on the other side of a mirror (the reflected scene displayed on its surface), and to her surprise, she is able to pass through to experience an alternate world. In reality, mirrors are devices that allow people to see themselves the way others see them.

In *The Decline of the American Empire*, there is a medium-size square mirror in the kitchen of the secluded house used by the main characters. This particular mirror works as a painting, reflecting the external bucolic landscape, with its thick blue frame which emphasizes this sense of work of art. Arcand chooses angles and close-ups to reinforce the characterization of a painting, a picture hanging on the wall. Even when we have someone in front of this mirror, the image reflected is the scenery, not the person: a way of neglecting the characters' identity in a semantic way and this specific mirror is specially positioned in an area surrounded by glasses, which allows the landscape to enter inside the house through the windows and also through the mirror.

An opposite situation concerning the presence of a mirror is shown when the character Pierre meets his young lover, Danielle, for the first time at a massage parlor. Danielle is a young, bright undergraduate student at the *Université de Montréal*. She is studying history while working at the massage parlor as a Japanese geisha. In the room where Pierre receives the massage from Danielle, there is a prolonged rectangular mirror along the wall, strategically positioned to allow the client to see himself and the back of the massager. In front of a mirror we may use a selective seeing, which involves the perceiver only taking in what he or she can actually cope with or finds agreeable. Selective seeing is understandable to us, because the picture of the world we seek to build is one that is consistent with our own set of criteria and assumptions, tried and tested possibly for many a year. The problem with selective seeing is that it makes us to a varying degree, defensive and insofar it does so, restricts our own participation with the world in all its color, diversity, complexity and surprises.

At the private room, Danielle starts the work wearing a kimono and ends naked. The horizontal mirror has a thin black frame which does not call our attention to it, but lets the mirror act as the focal point to build a brothel-like atmosphere (scenographic function), which includes voyeurism and fetishism (semantic function). John Glassco (1909-1981), the Canadian poet and writer from Montreal, broaches this subject when he, in his novella *The Black Helmet* (1974), describes the hero's erotic stratagem, in which he visits a brothel and has sex with two prostitutes in front of a large mirror. The narrator concludes:

I've begun to re-live that silly pantomime before the mirror, just when I thought I had put all that behind me for good. But with a difference: this dead self interests me in a new way now. That double role, devised simply as an expedient of sexual fulfillment, now strikes me as having had a certain originality,

even a certain value, as if it signaled a striking out of my own vein, something specially fitted to my stupid limitations. I thought of it, then, as giving the illusion of a sexual duality. And was that, after all, wholly an illusion? Perhaps the sense of a double vision of oneself is the reality which underlies and explains all feeling, if not all consciousness. Even while actively doing or desiring, do we not project our own response, our passive wishes, into the object of the act or the desire? There's even more to it than this: there's the inevitable synthesis of the two visions in that of a third self — the spectator, the seer, and his vision is the most complete of all, the most artistic, the keenest. So the real beauty of any act involving two persons lies not so much in the double part one plays in it as in the vision of the whole action, seen as if in a mirror, that keeps flashing on and off in the little theatre of the mind. In the act of love above all: as well as being both actor and actress, the lover is an audience. For me, then, the mirror on the brothel wall was merely an artifice, an economy by which three simultaneous visions were united and trained on the single picture of myself. And the two women? Only dummies, props (GLASSCO, 1974: 20-21).

The mirror on a brothel wall reveals the split consciousness which must accommodate the alterity of the self into the fetishistic disguise of intentions. There is a sort of self-objectification in this context. The reflected conscience becomes a text which must be read in a mirror, which doubles and reflects the person. The reflected image is another self, a double, but more fragile and vulnerable, such as Narcissus contemplating his face in the fountain's depth. Pierre finds a different picture of himself *printed* in the parlor/brothel's mirror (semantic function).

In *The Decline of the American Empire*, a film dedicated to the adventures and misadventures of emotional/sexual life, the static image of the unfaithful husband is reflected not in a mirror but in a glass window, which surprises the spectator. Specifically, Arcand shoots Louise, the betrayed wife, when she hears the news about her husband's infidelity: the group of friends is united in the living-room; Dominique reveals Rémy's affairs with her and Diane; Louise stands up and stares at her quiet husband. The shot captures her desolated face: she is alone in the scene but the background is the darkness of the night coming into the room through the window and into her soul through the news delivered by her friend (semantic function). The exterior darkness in opposition to the illuminated room creates this reflection. Reflected on the glass, we can see Rémy seated in an armchair in front of her. They are face-to-face and the spectator can experience this angle because the glass works as a mirror. The sensations created in the scene accomplish a synesthetic function.

In *Days of Darkness*, the protagonist Jean-Marc frequently visits his elderly mother at her hospital room. The contact with the mother is always an opportunity for Jean-Marc to think, to reflect about himself. In fact, his mother is a mirror in which he sees his own image projected. In some situations, Arcand shoots Jean-Marc interacting mentally with his mother's image reflected in the window. Purity is the glass moral virtue (semantic function). The mother's face and the window's glass work as mirrors of Jean-Marc's disquiet (semantic function). This mood is heightened when the protagonist is seen reading from the Portuguese poet, Fernando Pessoa, *Le livre de l'intranquillité* (*The Book of Disquietude*, in English or *Livro do Desassossego*, the original title in Portuguese) in his mother's hospital room. This is a significant reference (referential function): the close-up lets us clearly know which book he is reading.

In the three films that create Arcand's loose trilogy, we have mirrors working as mirrors, mirrors working as something else, like a painting, and also the opposite case, when we can see something like a glass window working as a mirror. Mirrors are additionally used to show the inner person, and to reflect everything except the person.

Medicine

The constant presence of different medicines, pills, capsules, tablets, and remedy packaging in Arcand's films is an integral role in the expressiveness (ecstasy) experienced by the audience. The use of these objects is an intriguing way to describe contemporary society, in which people need artifices to deal with reality.

In *The Decline of the American Empire*, the character Mario (Gabriel Arcand), Diane's young and rustic lover, goes to see her at the secluded house. While he is waiting, he asks Claude (Yves Jacques), the homosexual friend of Diane's group, for a cup of water so he can take a pill. The spectator is not able to identify precisely the kind of medicine he is taking; we can only see the packaging quickly, but Mario says that it is a "strong home remedy." The commentary is provocative and the atmosphere is slightly erotic because of Claude's interest, although the scene itself is quite nonsensical, which characterizes distancing.

A further example from *The Decline of the American Empire* also occurs at the secluded house. After the uneasiness caused by Dominique's revelation about Rémy's infidelity, his distressed wife, Louise, takes medicine. The spectator cannot see which remedy it is, but we can infer she is trying to deal with the anxiety and stress caused by the news about her husband's inappropriate behavior. Rémy also wants medicine to help him escape this embarrassing situation (semantic function). He asks Pierre if he has *Valium*. Pierre has a medicine cabinet in the bathroom and offers Rémy *Mogadon* and *Serapax*, both are benzodiazepines like *Valium*. Rémy takes two tablets of *Serapax* to sleep and to avoid talking to Louise. In the sequence, Danielle opens the same medicine cabinet to take her contraceptive. The close-up enables the spectator to identify that she is taking a contraceptive; although she wants to have a baby with her lover Pierre, he does not want a child with her. Thus, again, the use of medicine/pills offers insight into the characters' internal struggles.

In *The Barbarian Invasions*, medicines play a special role because, in this case, the main "medicine" is heroin: a polemical alternative treatment to combat the strong pain caused by terminal cancer. The remedy is a drug. The drug is the destruction and the redemption of both characters involved: Rémy, the terminal patient and Nathalie, the drug addict (semantic function). Nathalie is the character who provides Rémy heroin. Nathalie treats his pain and, in this process, begins to get her own life back. At the end of the film, the solution to Rémy's suffering is extreme: heroin overdose. Simultaneously, the solution to Nathalie's suffering is a program against heroin addiction. Arcand then emphasizes a medicine called *Methadone*, which is used to treat heroin dependence, and accomplishes a referential function. *Methadone* is a synthetic opioid (a chemical substance that has a morphine-like action in the body), used medically as an analgesic, antitussive and anti-addictive. It was developed in Nazi Germany in 1937.

While preparing Rémy's overdose, Nathalie starts taking *Methadone*. The first scene related to her *Methadone* use occurs at a pharmacy. An extreme close-up (particularization) frames the medicine bottle and shows its name. Nathalie talks to the pharmacist about the treatment, takes a whole bottle of *Methadone* and carries others on. After Rémy's death in the secluded house, another close-up lets us see the *Methadone* bottles in the fridge of the house, and then Nathalie is seen desperately taking this remedy. Rémy dies, Nathalie escapes. The filmmaker's beliefs are revealed, characterizing an ideological function.

In the hospital where Rémy is being treated, a completely different situation involves a special "medicine" for the soul: the Communion Host. A visiting nun gives the patients the sacramental bread to purify their souls, to cure their wounds (ideological function). However, Rémy is a lapsed Catholic who found a replacement for religion in politics. His redemption is his affliction. Arcand presents this story itself as a kind of bitter-coated sugar pill (semantic function). The film starts with the bitter. It opens crisply, moving us step-by-step through the sweet center of affection as his soul becomes redeemed as his body deteriorates.

In the first minutes of *Days of Darkness*, three specific medicines give the spectator important information about the personality of the character Sylvie (Sylvie Léonard), the protagonist's agitated wife. There is a medicine cabinet in the couple's bathroom housing an array of remedies, which reaches a scenographic function. Arcand carefully shows us three medicines, the packaging is visible so that we can acutely read the character's name: Sylvie Cormier-Leblanc. The close-up allows us also to read the name of each doctor and each remedy (particularization). On the labels, we can find the pharmacological name of the substances but also what each medicine is for. This seemingly small detail allows the spectator to garner precise and intimate information about Sylvie (semantic function). For instance, the first medicine, *Apo-Fluoxetine*, is an anti-depressive; the second one, *Ratio-Paroxetine*, is used to treat panic disorder and the third one, *Apo-Lorazepam*, is used as a remedy for anxiety. She is hysterical. So, while we notice Sylvie's peculiarities, it is through the presentation of her medications that we gain a much deeper understanding of her inner turmoil.

Medicines, as eyeglasses, are devices used in treating, in correcting, in accurating the body. They try to normalize the body and its functions, aiming to achieve an ideal identity. Eyeglasses are embodied mirrors capable of playing a role as epistemic tools dedicated to the truth or distortion. It depends on the treatment the individual claims. As this is so, Arcand uses material elements to enrich the narratives of his films in a meaningful and purposeful way. Ecstasy!

Post scriptum

Objects in films promote values; in other words, values have been promoted by the design of objects and the way they are shown in cinema. So, what do we want these objects to reveal? What we do want objects to say about us? Material culture involves what man creates and uses in his ordinary life; what is intentionally extracted from the environment, his *Umwelt*, what he needs. Yet, what does man need? Materiality and immateriality. Thus, objects work as mediators of human relationships or as mediators between man and the world. We regard the expressive potential of objects; we regard the poeticity of objects. Film is also poetry, as Cavell assumes: "Film has a natural equivalent for the medium of Shakespeare's dramatic poetry. I think of it as the poetry of film itself, what it is that happens to figures and objects and places as they are variously molded and displaced by a motion-picture camera and then projected and screened" (ROTHMAN, 2005: xxvi).

One of the probable roles of design and cinema - material and immaterial simultaneously - is to turn from the external world (*Umwelt*) to the internal world (*Selbstwelt*). That is the turning point, the convergence of the alterity of both worlds, which is a way of sharing the world as a whole (*Mitwelt*). For Martin Heidegger (1889-1976), man is apart from things. He lives amid things, being (*dasein*) separated, but he could be submerged into things (see EHRAT, 2005: 350-60). This situation defines our being in the world through three different ways: 1) the objective world of things – *Umwelt*; 2) the social world subjectively shared with other people – *Mitwelt* and 3) the subjective world of the individual's interior experiences – *Selbstwelt*. In this panorama, we can locate design and cinema in the middle, as mediation between *Umwelt* and *Selbstwelt*, indeed, as *Mitwelt*. Design and cinema seem to turn *Umwelt* into *Mitwelt*, denoting *Selbstwelt*. They put man in contact with things and people of the world.

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Notas:

(1) The first step toward the development of a methodology for film analysis by focusing on objects was started in 2004 at Kassel University, Germany, in association with Dr. Simone Malaguti. See Gambarato & Malaguti, 2006 and 2008.

(2) The films, *The Decline of the American Empire*, *The Barbarian Invasions* and *Days of Darkness* are considered a trilogy by critics, although Denys Arcand has never confirmed that. The *Days of Darkness* DVD offers as a special feature, a "Q&A with Denys Arcand". This is where we noted his comments about this subject. Therefore, we prefer the expression *loose trilogy*.

(3) Dauphin is the title of the princes of the *Viennois* or *Dauphiné*, and that title passed to the elder sons of the kings of France, since the attachment of this province to the kingdom. *Monseigneur le Dauphin*. The Dolphins of France. *Dauphine* is the designation of the dolphin's wife: *Madame la Dauphine*.

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