

Cinema, Media and Society: Futuristic perceptions - three iconic scientific fictions and their main characters

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Abstract

This article examines three works of Science Fiction, each one relevant for the time period in which they were created and also of their timeless character: Metropolis (1927), of Fritz Lang, Matrix (1999), of Lily e Lana Wachowski, and Arrival (2016), of Denis Villeneuve. The goal is to analyze their main characters, through the ideas of Chatman and The Hero's Journey of Campbell (1988), and establish a parallelism between the characters in the three films. For this purpose, the narratology method is utilized.



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Introduction

This article intends to analyze three sci-fi films, more specifically their respective main characters, and reveal common aspects to all of them. The choice was justified by the cinematographic relevance of the works in question, separated by a long temporality, all were significant to its time and beyond. Therefore, these are works that have modified the making of science fiction in cinema, timeless classics. The canonical representative is *Metropolis* (Fritz Lang, 1927), the recent classic is *Matrix* (Wachowski Sisters, 1999), which completes 20 years of release in this 2019, and the contemporary *Arrival* (Denis Villeneuve, 2016), considered by many critics the best recent sci-fi film, and "unquestionably, the best 2016 film" (Berardinelli, 2016). The study proposes to analyze a narratological aspect of these works, their protagonists, their characteristics and interactions with the stories, and also with the other films. Despite the distant temporality, the protagonists of the three films have similarities between them, both in narrative function and in particularities, which is also elucidated throughout the present work. In order to do so, the methodology narratology and literature review are used, along with the concepts of being and doing of the character (Chatman, 2016) and the Hero's Journey (Campbell, 1988).

Science Fiction and character analysis

According to Levin (2014), science fiction is essentially "an inquiry into the role and future of man in the world. How man uses the technology and the responsibility that he takes against it, both in relation to the natural world and to the social world." Science fiction, although projecting the future, distant or not (as in the case of the mundane subgenre), is often anchored in the present. As Freedman (2000) states, the futuristic world shown is not only disparate, but it is an emphasis on the differences from this one to the present, to the momentous temporal space. Nunes (2013) reiterates that science fiction "is about the criticism of the present time. But by doing it through the other, it allows one to see itself from outside in a renovator and revealing way." Therefore, it is possible through the analysis of the historical period in which the stories were written (or filmed), to make a correlation between the future shown and the reality of the time. Some characteristics are timeless, others, a direct reflection of social aspects and peculiarities of the era in which they were conceived. The genre of science fiction is prolific in the history of cinema, present since its beginnings. A film by Georges Méliés (1861-1938), the historical director of the seventh art, *The Voyage to the Moon* (1902), was one of the pioneers of the genre on the big screen. Daughter of speculative fiction, science fiction in cinema shares features with literature, such as its division between *hard sci-fi*, a term first coined by Jules Verne, and *soft sci-fi*, that came from writer H.G. Wells, creator of the *War of the Worlds*. The difference between both, according to Levin (2014), is basically the focus: in the first, it would be the technology and the material future, high scientific realism, in the second, the social structure and more human aspects, where the "why" would be more important than the "how". "While Verne concentrated on speculating on the materiality of the world in the near future, Wells occupied with what we could call very vaguely of the social and psychological structure of the man in a far more distant future." (Levin, 2014) Any kind of science fiction can fit into one of these two approaches, widely used, hard sci-fi or soft sci-fi, but there are also numerous possible subgenres, such as dystopia, social science fiction, robotic fiction, mundane, cyberpunk ... (Sterling, 2019). For this article, the subgenres' in which the present films are will be explained.

As previously mentioned, the choice of the three films was motivated by their iconicity and relevance to the cinema, overtime periods distant from each other. The characters analyzed in the three cases are protagonists, and in addition to having their own characteristics, they have parallelism when placed side by side. To analyze the peculiarities of each, as well as their function in the narrative, will be seen the aspects defined by the critic Chatman (Cardoso, 2016), the being and doing of the character:

a) "The being and doing of the character: the character is characterized by its identifiable traits (physical and physiological) and behavioral (its conduct in action). As in the literary field as well as in filmic, the character is defined by this set of facets, being both dynamic or flat. [...] its name contains several outlooks [...] In the filmic text, it is defined by the number and duration of the shots, as well as the amount of dialogue. B) Information about the character: the spectator gets information about the character through the dialogues, the action, the dramatic space, the voice-over of a storyteller, the physical aspect (sex, age, ethnicity, etc), specific characterization (make-up, clothing), the voice timbre and performance (which includes movements and gestures). C) Character-actor relationship: [the filmic character] establishes always a dialogue, most of the times a complex one, with the real actor. In reality, a very remarkable character, with an almost mythic outline, like Ulysses, or the Superman, can ineradicably define the career of an actor, who, in a way, may have it associated with, almost eternally. [...] But the opposite also happens: the actor is remembered, but not so much the character that he/she performs. D) Character-author relationship: in the literary universe, the character is the result of a creation of the author that instills on its values, ideologies or principles (personal or epochal), but there are also characters that do not reflect in an immediate way, or at all, the characteristics of its creators. Similar premise governs cinema. Often the so-called 'author's Cinema' explicitly identifies copyright concepts with the characters of the film [...] A character can still maintain certain characteristics that typify it, even if it is interpreted by different actors [...]." (Cardoso, 2016)"

For this analysis, the last aspect, character-author relationship, does not show relevance in the three films studied. The ideological perspective appears clearly in the context of the works itself, in its script, but does not necessarily reflect the characteristics of its creators, embedded in their characters. For example, in two cases, more explicit in one than in another, Christian references are perceptible both in the script and in the main characters. However, this fact does not lead to a clear association between the person (s) of the director (s), his ideas, and personal characteristics. *Metropolis* (1927), for example, by Fritz Lang, discusses the man-machine relationship and the present Christian motives do not reflect his own origin, Jewish (Kurtz, 2000). *Matrix* (1999) includes in its content a mixture of religions and ancient traditions, mainly Gnostic Christianity and Buddhism (Wagner, Flannery-Dailey, 2001), which does not help to define the real opinions on the religion of the transgender sisters Wachowski. *Arrival* (2016), of the three, is the one with the most subliminal and subjective reference to Christianity. In addition, none of these films have as the main characteristic being the so-called "author's Cinema", therefore, this character-author relationship is not, at all, pertinent to the comprehension of the works. However, the aspects of being and doing of the character, information about it and actor-character relationship are subject to analysis and are addressed in this study, as well as key details in the narrative function.

Metropolis: Freder Frederson

Metropolis (1927), by Fritz Lang, is a landmark in the history of science fiction in cinema, silent film heir of German Expressionism, impressive visual work and with very advanced visual effects for the time it was held. Expressionism had as a strong theme the social criticism and intended to "express in a particularly intense way the fears, anxieties, and dissatisfactions of the urban man". (Barros, 2011). All the fears and dreads of European society before a world that began to overpopulate and wave with possibilities of inhumane use of technology seem to find its place in this simultaneously gloomy and technologically fascinating environment that is built by Fritz Lang. (Barros, 2011). Metropolis is a dystopia, a narrative with pessimistic characteristics, where technology has not solved the great issues of mankind, freedom is scarce (or, at least, questionable), and the portrayed universe is oppressive and totalitarian.

In this context, it is possible to observe that the work portrayed fears of its own time, such as the advancement of mechanization, the alienation of the masses, the dehumanizing use of technology and robotics. These themes that, although they dialogue directly with the period in which the film was produced, (period of intense urbanization and industrial revolution), also have a character of timelessness. Metropolis is the name of the city where the plot occurs, an industrial city, divided into two: on the one hand, the Gardens of the Eternal, a stronghold of the rich, comfortable place and full of fun, and on the other, the place where the workers labor in conditions analogous to slavery. In this context, Maria, an activist, warned the workers that one day a man, a hero, would appear and would improve their lives. She, in an intrusive way, heads to the Gardens of the Eternal with some children of the workers. Soon she is expelled, however, during her stay in the gardens, Freder Fredersen, son of the city tycoon, manages to spot her and is interested in her. This meeting leads him to go down undercover to the place where the workers who sustain Metropolis are located. Shocked, he decides to confront his father and demand a change in the living conditions of his underlings. In the meantime, Rotwang, the scientist linked to Freder's father, Joh Fredersen, has a personal dilemma revealed, he decided to create a robot to replace the woman he loved. Joh Federsen decides to capture Maria and Rotwang kidnaps her. Using the technology he created, he makes a robotic version of Maria, very convincing, that has opposite characteristics to the main character and aims to confuse the workers. After a series of events and the robotic farce is exposed to everyone, the real Maria escapes and, along with Freder, tries to untangle from Rotwang. Freder and the scientist fight, until the man falls and dies. As prophesied, Freder reveals the bridge between his father and the workers, and the balance is restored. The history of Metropolis is loaded with allegories and metaphors, starting with the heading appearing on the screen: "The mediator between the head and hands must be the heart!". In the end, the mediator is the protagonist Freder Frederson, the "head" of the city is Joh Frederson, his father, and the "hands" are represented by the foreman Grot, a worker (Suppia, 2002). Some of the allegories are openly linked to Christianity. Present both in the scenery of the city of Metropolis, as the Tower, clearly inspired by the design of the Tower of Babel, made by the Flemish painter Pieter Brueghel, and the statues of death and the Seven deadly sins; the references are also observed in the characters. Freder and Mary are the most evident: Mary, the True One, is portrayed as a "saint": of humble gestures and caste clothes, always with an "aura" of light around her, surrounded by children. His own name is a direct reference to Mary, mother of Jesus. The robotic Maria, an impostor, is revealed as a worldly figure and who uses her sensuality to confuse men, the duality caste/prostitute is used to reinforce the sanctity of the real Mary. In addition, Maria relates, in her speeches, the biblical

history of the Tower of Babel with the New Tower of Babel of Metropolis (Santana, 2000). Therefore, the set allegory is merged with the clear Christian reference in the plot script. What about Freder? The main character fulfills a key role in the story, and is another concrete example of the Christian influence on the work. Let us analyze this character more deeply, as proposed in this study.

A) The being-doing of the character: Freder is a member of the elite, son of Metropolis tycoon, who lives in an ideal world, the Gardens of the Eternal. He's around his 20s, at most thirty years, is a man of simple gestures and naïve look. He has a lot of space in the narrative, like every protagonist, is a dynamic character, by possessing his own history and clear motivations, has active conduct and through its actions, the plot will develop.

B) information about the character: The character begins his story as a naïve man, alienated in his privileged life in that society, and ends up as someone who has awakened to a diverse reality, starts to have a more complete view of what surrounds him, and modifies himself as a more active being. Gustav Fröhlich's interpretation accompanies these transformations: the main character, in the beginning, has simpler and restrained gestures, a certain delicacy; throughout its transformation as a more active being, he now has wider gestures and even brusque ones. The characterization shows him as a rich man, good clothes, good posture and etiquette, and eyes marked with black color. Expressive, the eyes emphasize a visual characteristic of German expressionism.

C) Actor-character relationship: Gustav Fröhlich had already acted in four other films when he played Freder, but this was his first major recognition role. He was discovered by the wife of Fritz Lang, Thea Von Harbou, who considered him perfect for the character (Goeke, 2006). Even after extensive filmography, the actor would be more remembered later by this interpretation of Freder Frederson.

On his role in the narrative, Freder Frederson's trajectory obeys the Hero's Journey, as Campbell defines:

There are two kinds of heroic prowess, one is the physical action, where the character saves someone's life, gives himself or sacrifices himself for another person. The other kind is the spiritual hero, who learns or finds a way to experience a supranormal level of human spiritual life and then comes back and communicates to others. It's always a round-and-round cycle in the hero's trajectory. You can perceive this in a simple initiation ritual when the child must abandon his childhood and become an adult. He or she must die, that is, let his/her child personality die and come back as a responsible adult. It is a common experience that we must all pass: we live in childhood for 14 years and we must leave this posture of psychological dependence to assume an attitude of responsibility and autonomy and this requires a death and a resurrection. This is the main theme of the hero's journey; abandon a condition, find the source of life and reach a different condition, richer or more mature. (Campbell, 1988)

The main character has the type of prowess related to physical action, helping to establish a certain balance in Metropolis, for interceding for the workers and turning against his father. To do so, he must abandon his previous status, of constant pleasures in the Gardens of the Eternal, and his ingenuity and alienation, as well as paternal approval (at least temporarily). By knowing the other side of Metropolis, the shadowed strongholds of the workers, he assumes an autonomous and active attitude, rebels and arrives, to the end, to a more enlightened condition and with an enlarged view of life in Metropolis. Therefore, the protagonist goes through a process of awakening to a new reality, in his case, a social reality.

Como já citado anteriormente, Freder tem o papel de mediador, aquele que faz a ponte entre os dois mundos, o dos ricos e o dos operários, é o “coração”, o que une a cabeça e as mãos. Para além de ser mediador, Freder retrata o Messias, o salvador da humanidade, de acordo com o cristianismo. As previously mentioned, Freder has the role of a mediator, the one who makes the bridge between the two worlds, the rich and the workers, is the "heart", which unites the head and hands. In addition to being a mediator, Freder portrays the Messiah, the Savior of mankind, according to Christianity. His apparition was prophesied by Mary, and from the beginning of the plot, he is defined as the one who will liberate the workers from their degrading living conditions by uniting rulers and workers in a common goal. As in other Christian references of the film, Freder is also an allegory, a "Liberating Messiah" (Cavalli, 2006).

Matrix: Mr. Tomas Anderson, or Neo

Matrix, (1999), of the sisters Lily and Lana Wachowski, is considered a modern classic. A science fiction of original script that united subgenres like the action film, martial arts film, the philosophical film, all within a futuristic plot. *Matrix* is iconic not only for its theme and reception, positive between public and critic but also for its technical innovations. One example is the footage with 120 simultaneous cameras combined with slow motion, used in a scene with the protagonist, where he strays from bullets. The visual effect of this scene to this day is emblematic of the film (Eldestein, 2019). The *Matrix* connection with the period in which it was produced is also undeniable, the film alludes to technological modifications of the time. The main ones were the advancement of the Internet, which left gradually to be dial-up and became faster and spread, and the possibility of a richer virtual experience. As Vale details (2012), "*Matrix* was greeted as the mainstream Hollywood film that best converged with the concept of virtuality in a society that was getting more and more connected over the Internet." Despite reflecting directly on technological issues from the end of the decade of 90 and the beginning of 2000, the film has a man-machine duality, present in times of advances of artificial intelligences, an existentialist reflection and a questioning about the nature of the real that are timeless and still relevant, 20 years after its launch. In the plot, avowedly dystopic, *Matrix* is the name assigned to a virtual reality created by machines to deceive and subjugate humans, preventing them from knowing the true reality. According to Machado (2000), "The man has turned into a type of pile or battery for feeding dominating machines that, in return, provide man with a virtual" freedom ", a real-life fantasy." In this context, Thomas Anderson, a hacker bored with his work, begins to wonder about the world in which he lives, parting from small details. There begins his questioning, his encounter with characters and with Morpheus, opens his eyes to a very different reality from that in which he is accustomed. An iconic scene is the one where Morpheus makes him choose between the red or blue pill, the blue would keep him living in the simulacrum of the *Matrix*, the other would make him see the world as it is indeed. Morpheus acts as a tutor and warns him that, once within the real reality, there was no way back, and that the truth might prove harsh. Thomas Anderson chooses the red pill and we accompany his rescue with the Nebuchadnezzar spaceship, where he meets with other hackers who attempt to destroy the *Matrix* system by infiltrating it. By now, Anderson is already Neo. There was a narrative among the humans that a chosen one would appear to liberate mankind from the tyranny of the machines and, to know if it is really Neo, he must enter the system, the *Matrix*, several times and try to break it inside, which involves discovering puzzles and fight Smith agents, among other characters. Throughout his endeavor, he has the help of other hackers, as well as a woman close to him, Trinity. Subsequently and after some events, it is confirmed that Neo is

indeed the Chosen One, and close to the climax of the film, he finds himself in danger of death, not only in the Matrix but real. Trinity reveals that the prophecy suggests that she would fall in love with the Chosen One, a kiss from her makes him return "to life" and Neo manages to defeat his enemies, in part, and save the ship's crew. The hope for the liberation of mankind remains. Matrix, complexly, draws from diverse philosophical sources, ancient traditions such as Greek mythology, and dialogues with different religions, especially Buddhism and Gnostic Christianity (Wagner, Flannery-Dailey, 2001). According to William Irwin (2001), Matrix also counts in its interlines the story of Socrates, not just a brilliant philosopher, but a man who died for his libertarian ideals. In its essence, Matrix is based on the Myth of the Cave, of Plato, which is exposed in his book *The Republic*. The allegory is as follows:

The prisoners in the cave are chained by the neck, hands, and legs. They have lived like this since birth and therefore have no concept of another kind of life. Shadows appear on the wall in front when their jailers pass animal figures in front of a campfire, like in a puppet show. Captives see shadows on a wall; not shadows of true animals, but of sculpted figures. The light that casts these shadows comes from the campfire; that is, it is not the best kind of light, which would be that of the sun. But these prisoners don't know they're prisoners and they don't even suspect there's another reality beyond the one they live in. One day, however, one of them is freed from the chains and taken to the outside world and, under the sunlight, sees things as they really are. Instead of selfishly staying out there, the prisoner returns to tell others, who repay his gesture of kindness with mockery and endurance, believing he went mad. (Irwin, 2001).

Irwin reiterates that the myth has an analogy with the story of Socrates, Plato's teacher, who was also taken as a madman for his comprehensive worldviews. Plato even wrote about Socrates as if he were a character in his writings. The character of Neo in much resembles that one of the myth because he literally comes out of a captive state, which he previously believed in being the real, for the discovery of reality in fact. Therefore, the interpretation that Neo's story also veiledly represents the story of Socrates is plausible. In addition to the allegory that is the central base of history, Matrix also has religious, Buddhist and Christian references. As this study proposes to establish a parallel between the three films, *Metropolis*, *Matrix*, and *the Arrival*, the emphasis will be in the Christian aspects. Christianity is very present in the film, and one of its most evident manifestations are the nomenclatures given to characters and objects.

Apoc (Apocalypse), Neo's given name of Mr. Anderson (from the Greek *andras* for man, thus producing "Son of Man"), the ship named the *Nebuchadnezzar* (the Babylonian king who, in the Book of Daniel, has puzzling symbolic dreams that must be interpreted), and the last remaining human city, Zion, synonymous in Judaism and Christianity with (the heavenly) Jerusalem. (Wagner, Flannery-Dailey, 2001).

In addition to these names, one of the main characters, Trinity, is also a Christian reference: The Holy Trinity, "Father, Son and Holy Spirit." Neo also has a crucial role, and the Christian allegory is clear, therefore, let's analyze the protagonist in the film:

a) The being-doing of the character: Neo, or Thomas Anderson, is a hacker around his thirties, bored with work and suspicious of the reality around him. Initially, he is a man of contained gestures and has a reflective character. He is the main character of *Matrix*, a dynamic one, with a story and clear motivations, but well explored by the narrative. B) Character

information: begins his story as Thomas Anderson, a simple hacker, who suspects of some aspects of the world in which he lives. Subsequently, he discovers the truth, that what he knew until then was a simulacrum, the Matrix, and not the reality in fact. From there he needs to find out if he is the Chosen One who will save mankind from literally living a lie and releasing it into the real world. Eventually, he discovers that he is, in fact, the chosen one, and no longer calls himself Mr. Anderson and yes Neo, an anagram for "a", as in "The One", "The Chosen". His role is not of a mediator, because from the beginning he is placed alongside mankind, but the character has a perceptible transience, because he has to blend into the Matrix, infiltrate the system and pass unnoticed by it, so has to be able to beat it "inside", as his hacker function allows. Keanu Reeves, the interpreter, is able to clearly show Mr. Anderson's transition to Neo, in the beginning, contained gestures and reflexive and more introverted behavior, like Neo, confident gestural, brusque behavior and practice of martial arts complete the transformation of the hacker into a powerful being. The garment also accompanies the changes: as Mr. Anderson, ordinary robes, executive, like classic white blouse and trousers with belt, already as Neo, impressive visual: imposing black monochrome, iconic overcoat, belts, and weapons. C) Actor-character relationship: Keanu Reeves has had as his most acclaimed role when working in the theater, one of the most classic and difficult characters to interpret: Hamlet. He was already a respected actor in the cinema when he took on the role of Neo, but this one then stepped him to a new level. Highly praised for his performance, both dramatically – Neo's personality was well-captured by the actor – and physical – he dismissed stunts and martial arts masters ovated him for his ability and likelihood on screen. After the success of the Matrix, he would be linked to Neo's name for a long time, also for the performances in the sequences of the trilogy, even assuming other occasional roles in the cinema. In 2017, he would begin to be better known by the character John Wick, from the homonymous successful franchise.

The character Neo, in the narrative, also follows the Journey of the Hero: he abandons a condition, finds the source of life and comes to a different condition, richer or more mature (Campbell, 1988). His construction is complex, he represents both the hero of physical prowess, who saves and sacrifices himself for someone, in this case, mankind, as the spiritual hero, who has access to another level of human spirituality and comes back to tell the countrymen what he saw. In this case, the approach is not exactly spiritual but involves a great discovery of the human condition, which is subsequently revealed by him. The "awakened" humans already knew what the Matrix was, but the way Neo, the Chosen One, deals with it, is unprecedented, it is something that he himself learns in the course and informs the others about his progress and discoveries.

Neo, in addition to his remarkable deeds, is a clear allusion to the "greatest story ever told", the Christian Bible, by being characterized not only as a hero but also as the Messiah. In the Matrix, the figure of Christ is a fundamental part of the story, Neo's messianic growth, both in self-consciousness and in power, and his eventual salvation for mankind is the essence of the script. (Stucky, 2016). This allegory is identifiable not only by its characterization, but as its trajectory: Neo grows, and here this growth occurs mainly metaphorically, transforms, dies and resurrects, to continue offering hope to mankind. And to grow, Neo needs to "see how far the rabbit hole goes," that is, he needs to awaken to a new reality, the reality indeed, and rethink all of its previous existential notions. It is from there that he can change the existing structural conjunctures and turn into Neo, the One, The Chosen, namely the Messiah.

Arrival: Dra. Louise Banks

Arrival (2016), by Denis Villeneuve, is an acclaimed contemporary sci-fi film. Of the three analyzed films, this is the only one based on a literary work: *The story of your life*, a tale of Ted Chiang, winner of the Hugo and Nebula Awards, the greatest of its kind. It is an example of social science fiction: although it also fits into the subgenre of alien invasion, the focus of the tale and the film are the human repercussions of such an event, as how the connections between countries, cultures, happen, and as the very perception of what is human, in an extraterrestrial contact, can modify (or not) ethical, existential, and social notions. In addition to the usual narrative among the other, the extraterrestrial, and its contrast to the human reality, "the aliens at Arrival can also bring different interpretations, on the part of the audience, about their sociocultural phenomenon" (Kusumastuti, 2019). That is, unlike most alien invasion films, the perspective is not in the invasion itself, and not so much in action, in the explosive sense of the term. Therefore, Arrival can be considered an example of *soft* science fiction. It is also an innovative film: although it is produced by a large studio and with a good amount of resources, its approach is unusual:

Arrival is not a standard science-fiction blockbuster in either narrative or form. At the film's beginning, it appears to be about alien spacecraft landing at random points across the globe. [...] *Arrival's* storyline is cerebral rather than action-based. It is about transcending barriers and being immersed in a new culture to understand a foreign race. (Eyre, McIntyre, 2018).

Another feature of Arrival is the realism with which it addresses the story of its protagonist, and how it manages to inject it even in its elements of science fiction. In the first case, the film portrays aspects of Dra. Louise Banks daily life, the main character, both the key moments and the banal, through a sensory approach most commonly related to the *slice of life* films. These moments are interrelated with their research regarding how to communicate with the aliens, a slow process and which has contributions by experts all over the world, which obviously awakens controversies and afflictions. A credible approach to a possible threat to all mankind. On the second case, the realism contained in the fictional part, a contundent example is the representation of the aliens. It is noteworthy the approach of countless films, especially Hollywoodians, about the look and actions of extraterrestrial beings. They are often represented as quasi-humanoids, and when they are not, they obey in parts the anthropomorphic logic: the presence of eyes, arms, or even a mouth. It's a far too anthropocentric view of what an alien would be. This concept is demystified by Edgard Morin (1995), who thinks what would be an extraterrestrial being:

A third hypothesis cannot be ruled out; perhaps there is in the universe very complex organizations, endowed with properties, autonomy, intelligence and even though, but that would not be founded in a core-protein organization and that would be (currently? Forever?) Inaccessible to our perception and understanding. (Morin, Kern, 1995).

Reinforcing the realistic premise, the film depicts these aliens as creatures differing of everything already existing, the only possible similarity being related to marine animals. They're called *Heptapods*, by their seven tentacles. Still, the absence of human characteristics, such as eyes and mouth, makes them closer to a plausible idea of alien. Moreover, if in the visual aspect it is still possible to draw a parallel, in the behavioral and communicational aspect, they are inaccessible to human perception (at least for much of the film).

Therefore, because it has a realistic approach, the film has no obvious metaphors and allegories, although it causes many reflections. There is a veiling reference to the tower of Babel, the Christian history, according to Felinto (2017), but we will resume the question later. The work also dialogues with postmodernity, both in its structure, a non-linear narrative, as in the theme: communication with the extraterrestrial in a globalized context.

Arrival also portrays main issues in contemporaneity, such as the need for communication and a common understanding, in conflicting times and of broad intercultural connection. The very choice of the female protagonist is also a nod to the recent questions about representativeness in cinema (Moreira, 2017). The original tale includes Louise as a linguist character, but, unlike the film, the narrative is not told through her point of view. Of these contemporary themes, the alleged existence of extraterrestrial life and possible contact between mankind and the aliens has always been a subject addressed by science fiction and will continue to be until, and if, one-day stop being speculative and become a science. Hence lies the timeliness of the work. The plot is based on a key event: from an hour to the next, Ufos appear in 12 different cities along with the globe. It is not known why, with what intentions, and what kind of aliens would be present. In this context, Dr. Louise Banks, linguist, is called to establish a communication between extraterrestrials and humans, her function is to be a bridge between the two worlds, a mediator. For this, she relies on a broad investigative team, with specialists from around the world in several different areas, who could assist her in her endeavor, and a focal team, which includes Dr. Ian Donnelly, her love interest. The film includes scenes from the life of Louise Banks herself and shows her relationship with her daughter, Hannah, and everyday situations. These scenes are shown interfaced with the research and their results. At a given moment, Dr. Louise and her team are face-to-face with the aliens, called *heptapods*. They initiate communication, very rudimentary, and beings also try to communicate with humans, seemingly in a non-violent way. However, its signs and communicative modes are inaccessible: circular forms of limited duration appear, and the meaning of them must be researched, a role that the linguist performs well. To access the language of the heptapods, Dr. Louise should use as much empathy and acute perception, that is, to think as one of them. At a given moment, she deciphers the functioning of the "language" of the heptapods and manages to establish effective communication with them. A message that could be misinterpreted is sent and causes discord all over the world. The thought is that the aliens could be offering a real threat, and an imminent war is announced. Dr. Louise, deep down, does not believe that the aliens want to attack and effectively shows that the whole situation was nothing but an error of interpretation, by correcting the translation, mankind becomes able to understand that the goals of the heptapods were not destructive. By fully understanding the language of the beings, Dr. Louise discovers that they face time differently than humans, past, present and future are not linear and, by understanding them, she starts to access a whole new way of facing reality, including the one that concerns her own life. The aliens would be here to gift humanity with its way of interpreting communication between beings and reality itself, in exchange, humans should be able to assist them in a future event, and save the Earth from a tragic event. For this, this new tool of heptapods would be essential. If we consider the defining event of the outcomings, the appearance of the extraterrestrial, the imminent need for communication between humans and these beings, we perceive another underlying human duty: the union between nations, at least for a moment, for the understanding of the external. But even this harmony is threatened: just as in the history of the Tower of Babel, the mutual misunderstanding, including, now, not only among humans but among the aliens, almost leads to a problem of catastrophic dimensions. It's only the other, and Louise, who can avoid a frightening future. Extraterrestrials arrive on a planet

divided by languages and ideologies. It is precisely its alien language, strange, exotic, entirely another, that will allow this humanity on the brink of a global war to overcome the babelic gap and achieve peace. The horizon of the biblical imaginary is not distant, since the greatest gift bestowed by God to men is language, and even the Master of creation uses the word to shape the universe ("and God said..."). And it is in the Babelic episode, later, that the gift of mutual understanding will be disintegrated by the multiplication of languages. But our languages are temporally limited, linear, unwinding sequentially in time. The language of Alien heptapods is simultaneity, instantaneity that radically transforms Louise's subjectivity. (Felinto, 2017). Dr. Louise Banks, the main character of the film, can be analyzed by several biases. Let's begin, therefore:

A) The being and doing of the character: Louise Banks is a respected linguist, mother, between thirty and 40 years, is called to solve a communication problem between mysterious aliens and humans. She is a character of quiet gestures, of contained expressions. Protagonist, is a dynamic character, with a story and clear motivations, well explored by the narrative.

B) Information about the character: Louise begins her story revealing her maternal condition, her work as a linguist and the challenge she has ahead of her: deciphering the language of the aliens appearing on Earth. As she understands their language, she knows a more comprehensive and completely different worldview, with a peculiar temporality. From then on, her subjectivity over life itself changes. She can also prevent a global war by doing her job effectively. The main character is a mediator par excellence, is a translator, the one that is the key to the communication between the heptapods and the humans. For that, she needs to understand both sides and make a bridge between them. On the wardrobe, sober clothes, fit for work in the office, and several scenes with space clothing make evident the role of linguist of the character, as well as reinforce the intense dedication to the work she presents. The interpretation of Amy Adams accompanies the evolution of the character: contained gestures closed expression at the beginning of her trajectory, more open gestures and expressions of enchantment and reflection closest to the end of the narrative. During her initial phase, more subtle, there were even those who characterized Louise Banks as "purposely pale" and with "illegible" facial expressions (Richard, 2018).

C) Actor-character relationship: Amy Adams already had a consolidated career when she played Dr. Louise Banks. Before the first meeting, her most recent award until then was a Golden Globe of 2015, Best Actress-Drama, for *Big Eyes* (Tim Burton, 2014). Her performance in *Arrival* was very well received by critics, and she was nominated for several awards, such as the Golden Globe Award for Best Actress-Drama, SAG Awards for Best Leading Actress and BAFTA for Best actress. She won the National Board Review for her acting as Louise Banks.

The protagonist also fulfills in the narrative the Hero's Journey: She abandons a condition, finds the source of life and comes to a different condition, richer or more mature (Campbell, 1988). She is the type of heroine of physical prowess, (in this case, not so physical, but intellectual), but her actions lead to the rescue of mankind, as in the hero's tradition. Her role as a translator and mediator between the aliens and humans allows her not only to avoid alone a global war but also to know a new subjectivity and rethink her whole life. According to Feleti (2017), the heroine not only participates in an "ideal empathy movement" when understanding the heptapods, as she also becomes an "alien" by understanding the comprehensive reality offered by them (the understanding of time with a notion almost simultaneously, past, present, and future). From there she rebuilds her identity and goes through existential questions. That is, at the heart of this meeting between heptapods and Louise, is the awakening of the character to a reality different to that usual, with different

temporal contours and that completely changes her philosophy of life, and even concepts such as free will are questioned. Attention to the fact that the character, when deciphering the alien language, can correctly understand a message sent by them to humans. Before misinterpreted, the message could suggest a threat, which generated an international alarm and the possibility of an imminent war. By making the correct translation, she not only changes the total meaning, as appeases the spirits and avoids, alone, a war disaster, as well as a tragic future for mankind (since now, it is known that she has free access to the future). Although the film has a realistic approach and does not have many allegories, as in the case of *Metropolis* and *Matrix*, it is possible to make a correlation between the heroic acts of Louise, her position of the redeemer of mankind, with a Messianic achievement.

Conclusion

Science fiction, as a speculative genre, has a multitude of themes that it can address. Not by chance, within the hard and soft types are several subgenres. In addition to showing the future, and a social and technological organization very different from the period that was the starting point, science fiction can also reflect specific issues of the time, fears and expectations. The films analyzed in this article do not escape to the rule. In this premise, *Metropolis* (1927) denounces the context in which it was created: the Industrial Revolution increased urbanization. Behind the advances, there is the fear of a dehumanizing technology, which is not in the function of mankind, but rather than in the detriment of it. (Frols, 2006). *Matrix* (1999) reflects a concern with the innovation of the internet, which was established at the time, and a certain mistrust with the virtuality (Vale, 2012). *Arrival* (2016), carried out in a context of broad globalization, but also of polarization, extremisms, and post-truths, translates a contemporary fear of a great conflict of world proportions (Barber, 2019). In addition to the themes that dialogue directly with the period in which they were written, the films have a universal approach to frequent points in science fiction in general: technological advancement, artificial intelligence, alternative reality, contact with extraterrestrial beings, futuristic perceptions about the human and the social. Not only, but also for this, they are timeless. And if all three films reveal latent fears for the future, nothing better in a narrative than a hero to save it, or at least make it more harmonic. Thus, we have Freder Frederson in *Metropolis*, and his mission to unite "the head" and "the hands" of society; Neo in the *Matrix*, and his role of freeing mankind from the tyranny of machines and a life that comes down to a simulacrum of the real; and Dr. Louise Banks in *Arrival*, who should discover how to communicate with aliens, how to understand their language and decipher whether their intentions are benign or threatening. The main characters fulfill their goals and can establish a milder future. In addition to the successful acts and the fact that all the protagonists follow the Hero's Journey in their respective narratives, some similarities between them are palpable. The three have to awaken to a new reality, only so they can envisage a different perception from what they had previously. This new consciousness has an impact on them and, consequently, they can save mankind. In the case of Freder, his awakening is to the social reality, he comes out of the alienation of class in which he lived. Neo awakens to an existential and structural reality, he discovers that his life was a virtual farce, the Matrix. Finally, Louise becomes aware of a new temporal and philosophical reality, which leads her to rethink not only her existence but to decipher the charade of the future. Other parallelisms are confirmed only between two of the protagonists. One of them is the role of mediator that appears in the three stories. Freder is the one who makes the bridge between the workers and the wealthy, is "the heart", who unites. He is undeniably a mediator. Neo is a character of a more transitory character, his role as mediator is debatable, in the sense that he only acts as such for a limited

time, to infiltrate the Matrix. He has always been alongside humans and intends to destroy the machines to save them, if necessary. On the other hand, Dr. Louise Banks and her profession as linguist turn her into the mediator par excellence. She's the translator of the alien language for humans. Finally, of the Christian references contained in the three works, more explicit (as in *Metropolis* and *Matrix*) or implicit (as in *Arrival*), none reverberates more in the analysis of the protagonists than the allegory to the Messiah. However, this metaphor can only be verified in its entirety in the characters Freder and Neo. Both were previously announced in a prophecy, such as saviors, and run an upward trajectory after a period of ripening, and ultimately, fulfill their functions as they had advocated early on. Neo's case is even more faithful to the correspondence of Christ's narrative, by dying and resurrecting to finally liberate mankind. For Dr. Louise Banks, there is only one very subtle allusion, because she saved, alone, the humanity of a global disaster... An act of messianic proportions, but at no time in the film is referred to as such, therefore, it is something that depends on the interpretation of the spectator. In conclusion, these three protagonists, in their own way, represent a hope facing an uncertain future, no matter what it's nature. They reflect the strength of mankind in modifying itself and reinterpreting the reality that surrounds it. Acts that are, at the same time, the principle and proposal of science fiction as a genre. As in *Matrix* (1999), science fiction itself is a domain "without rules, controls, boundaries or limits. A world where anything is possible.

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