UNIVERSIDADE FEDERAL DO RIO GRANDE DO SUL

BRUNO AMARAL DARIVA

MARGINAL REALITIES: POLITICS AND AESTHETICS OF MAGICAL REALISM IN CINEMA

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Dissertação de Mestrado submetida ao Programa de Pós-Graduação em Letras da Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Sul como requisito parcial para a obtenção do título de Mestre em Letras, com ênfase em Literaturas de Língua Inglesa.

Orientadora: Profa. Dra. Elaine Barros Indrusiak

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BANCA EXAMINADORA:

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Prof. Dr. Elaine Barros Indrusiak – Orientadora (UFRGS)

____

Prof. Dr. Rita Lenira de Freitas Bittencourt (UFRGS)

____

Prof. Dr. Cristine Fickelscherer de Mattos (UPMack)

____

Prof. Dr. Juliano Rodrigues (IFRS)

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RESUMO

Esta dissertação discute os elementos políticos e estéticos do realismo mágico – fenômeno originado nas artes visuais e popularizado na literatura – no contexto do cinema. O discurso crítico conflitante associado ao desenvolvimento do realismo mágico em diferentes mídias e contextos contribuiu para obscurecer sua compreensão na teoria e minar uma definição mais precisa do conceito. A partir de uma revisão bibliográfica que descreve as origens do termo e destaca algumas de suas características políticas e estéticas (por exemplo, a presença de visões de mundo contrastantes e a combinação de realismo e elementos fantásticos), esta pesquisa usa a literatura como um protótipo para comparação. A despeito da instabilidade do conceito na literatura, a evolução do debate nessa área dá suporte a uma abordagem comparada que investiga como o cinema explora os recursos do realismo mágico e como as particularidades do audiovisual reproduzem e modificam as estruturas dessa categoria interdisciplinar. Essa investigação acerca do realismo mágico no cinema se dá de maneira analítica em vez de classificatória e assume duas formas distintas: primeiro, a incorporação de diferentes exemplos para permitir uma compreensão mais ampla das características do realismo mágico em narrativas audiovisuais e, posteriormente, uma análise detida do longa-metragem *Beasts of the Southern Wild* (2012), delimitando a discussão e ilustrando as possibilidades do realismo mágico na contemporaneidade.

Palavras-chave: Realismo mágico. Literatura latino-americana. Literaturas de língua inglesa. Realismo no cinema. Interdisciplinaridade. Cinema contemporâneo.

ABSTRACT

This thesis discusses the political and aesthetic elements of magical realism – a phenomenon originated in visual arts and popularized in literature – within the context of film narratives. The conflicted critical discourse linked to the development of magical realism through different media and locations contributed to muddying its theoretical understanding and undermining a precise definition of the concept. Following a bibliographical review that accounts for the origins of the term and underlines some of its political and aesthetic features (e.g., the presence of contrasting worldviews and the combination of realism and fantastical elements), this research uses literature as a prototype for comparison. Despite the instability of the concept in literature, the increasing debate in this field enables a comparative approach to investigate how cinema explores the resources of magical realism and how the particularities of the film medium account for both mirroring and modifying the structures of this interdisciplinary category. This investigation of magical realism in cinema is analytical instead of classificatory and assumes two different forms: first, the incorporation of different film examples to allow for a broader understanding of magical realist features in film narratives and, second, a close reading of the feature film *Beasts of the Southern Wild* (2012), which narrows the discussion and illustrates the possibilities of magical realism in the contemporary world.

Keywords: Magical realism. Latin American literature. English-language literatures. Realism in cinema. Interdisciplinarity. Contemporary cinema.

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INTRODUCTION

Since the early twentieth century, authors and literary critics have been adopting the term 'magical realism' to refer to heterogeneous works of fiction. Originated from an attempt by German art historian Franz Roh (1995, originally published in 1925) to describe a new artistic movement, magical realism grew to become something different. Not only did it escape Roh's ideas, but it also left Germany to emerge as a literary trend in Latin America in the 1960s. From Roh's ambivalent definition (GUENTHER, 1995, p. 57) and its subsequent manifestation in literature, magical realism has become a vague concept: the different attempts to define the emerging Latin American phenomenon were made without much debate or communication, ultimately resulting in conceptual emptiness (CHIAMPI, 2015, p. 22).

Such vagueness is likewise corroborated by the variety of existent terminologies. Since the late twentieth century, "the terms 'magic realism', 'magical realism' and 'marvellous realism' have become both highly fashionable and highly derided" (BOWERS, 2004, p. 01). The widespread popularity of these terminologies reflects their power to convey specific ideas. In that perspective, they similarly offer "alternative approaches to reality to that of Western philosophy" (BOWERS, 2004, p. 01) and incorporate contradictory elements – magic and reality – into a narrative form. Following Wendy B. Faris's ideas, the hybridity of magical realism and its related terms accounts for their persistence: with origins between painting and literature, the terms satisfy the description of "European and third world literatures" and suit the "mixture of genres, perspectives, and cultures in postcolonial writing" (FARIS, 2004, p. 39). Accordingly, Maggie Ann Bowers (2004, p. 01) underlines their oxymoronic nature: by describing the "forced relationship of irreconcilable terms," these terminologies inherently include multiple and contradictory worlds.

Since the 1920s, each term has been indiscriminately applied to different and specific contexts (BOWERS, 2004, p. 02). Besides the varied usages, these terminologies have likewise undergone diverse translations. From *Magischer Realismus*, coined by Franz Roh in 1925, the term has been translated into Dutch, English, Spanish and Portuguese – not rarely having more than one variation of terminology. In addition to the aforementioned English terms, one can find, for instance, four different Portuguese terminologies that often suggest the same ideas: 'realismo mágico,' 'realismo maravilhoso,' 'realismo fantástico' and 'real maravilhoso' (see CHIAMPI, 2015).

The lack of an appropriate categorization aggravates the ambiguity of magical realism. Besides having opaque definitions and terminologies, magical realism has been interchangeably

referred to as a genre and a mode (e.g., DURIX, 1998; FARIS, 2004; BOWERS, 2004). The categorization of magical realism as a mode has been more widely adopted to avoid the well-defined and historically identifiable aspects of genres (HEGERFELDT, 2005, p. 46). Támas Bényei (1997, p. 150) argues that "[m]ode' seems to be appropriate" because its vagueness allows for broader analyses and interpretations. Anne Hegerfeldt (2005, p. 47) expands the discussion by asserting that 'mode' refers to a manner of narration: it "is a manner of representing a fictional world that cuts across genre boundaries and may be found in diverse forms of literature, as well as in other arts."

Despite its conceptual, terminological and categorical complexities, magical realism has not vanished from world literatures. Since its boom in Latin America during the 1960s, the literary phenomenon has been overtly present in English-speaking countries. Examples include the writings of British/Indian author Salman Rushdie, the fiction of British writers Angela Carter and Jeanette Winterson, and the works of Nigerian writer Ben Okri. According to Fredric Jameson (1986, p. 302), the "strange seductiveness" of magical realism seems to subsume both writers and critics: the dissemination of different terminologies follows an amalgam of heterogeneous works of fiction produced in different contexts. By opposing Western traditional narrative modes, magical realism has become a form of expression – a voice from the margins carrying destabilizing and decolonizing ideas under a seemingly conflicting style.

The popularity of magical realism – "perhaps the most important contemporary trend in international fiction" (FARIS, 2004, p. 01) – is likewise reflected by its applicability to other media. Prompted by Fredric Jameson's essay "On Magic Realism in Film" (1986), the term has been connected to audiovisual narratives through features of both artistic and literary versions of this mode[1]. Following both historical and visual approaches, Jameson presents a unique conception of magical realism focused on historicity, color and violence. Although compelling in its originality, Jameson's article dissociates from the current perception of magical realism in film, which mainly involves a combination of supernatural and reality.

The assumption that a film is magical realist derives either from painting or literature: while the former relationship is occasionally approached by academics (e.g., GEE, 2013), the latter connection is more frequently underlined both by critics and researchers (e.g., BOWERS, 2004; FARIS, 2004). In addition to direct adaptations of magical realist texts – especially Latin American novels – cinema has presented us with original stories carrying significant similarities with magical realism as it was molded by literature. However, these similarities are hardly

[1] Considering the broad and interdisciplinary scope of this research, I endorse the widespread classification of magical realism as a mode (see HEGERFELDT, 2005, p. 46).

acutely examined: magical realism is commonly used by critics as a trivial label – its application to films superficially suggests any slight dissociation from traditional reality. The indiscriminate labeling of magical realism to audiovisual works has resulted in inconclusive and heterogeneous film categories. Unsurprisingly, magical realism in cinema has become more imprecise than its literary counterpart.

Both literary and audiovisual versions of magical realism are governed by the combination of realism and fantastical elements and the presence of multiple worldviews – contrasting perspectives usually connected to different social and cultural backgrounds. While film studies lack solid theorizations regarding magical realism (LABUDOVIC, 2003; SKRODZKA, 2012), the historical and aesthetic proximity between literature and cinema within the development of the mode favors an interdisciplinary investigation. Whereas Roh's artistic theories might aid a deeper contextual understanding of magical realism, the relationship between its literary and audiovisual versions is conspicuously constituted by formal and political correlations and deserves closer attention.

Considering literature as a base for analysis (BOWERS, 2004, p. 105), this thesis investigates the functioning of magical realist devices in cinema. Focusing on magical realism as a multicultural and interdisciplinary phenomenon, this research compares the particularities of both media to present an analysis of the formal and political aspects of the audiovisual version of the mode. Following the formal and political structures resulting from the employment of magical realism by film narratives, this investigation subsequently focuses on the feature film *Beasts of the Southern Wild* (2012) to present a detailed study of the mode in contemporary cinema.

Chapter one provides a review of the theories following the development of magical realism and its terminological varieties through different media and locations. The first section chronologically details the early theorizations on the mode. Starting with Franz Roh's artistic concepts and moving to discussions by Latin American authors (e.g., Arturo Uslar Pietri, Alejo Carpentier, Angel Flores and Luis Leal), I seek to establish significant contrasting points between German and Latin American versions of magical realism. The discussion expands to underline the differences and similarities among Latin American theories – a decisive factor for the current vagueness and complexity of the mode.

The second and third sections respectively deal with the postcolonial discourse and aesthetics of magical realism. Considered an artistic expression of submerged traditions, the mode formally and substantially challenges Western notions of representation by encoding within it an idea of resistance to central and established generic systems (FARIS, 2004;

SLEMON, 1995, p. 10). In that sense, section one analyzes how magical realism became remarkably important as a postcolonial/subversive expression and how it developed to likewise represent “innovation and the re-emergence of submerged narrative traditions in metropolitan centers” (FARIS, 2004, p. 02). Section two dwells on the formal elements of the mode and investigates how its textual structure conveys intellectual, emotional and political effects. In addition to broadening the political and formal understanding of magical realism, the theories here analyzed – which include texts from Chiampi (2015), Faris (2004) and Hegerfeldt (2005) – provide reliable tools for related interdisciplinary studies.

Chapter two details the applicability of magical realism to film narratives. I analyze examples from critics and researchers (e.g., LABUDOVIC, 2003; BOWERS, 2004) to assess shared techniques and motifs. Considering literature as an analytical device (BOWERS, 2004, p. 103), the first section compares audiovisual narratives to well-established novels within the mode (e.g., Gabriel García Márquez’s *One Hundred Years of Solitude* and Salman Rushdie’s *Midnight’s Children*) to identify and comprehend potential connections between the literary and audiovisual versions of magical realism. Given the scarce and opaque theoretical production on magical realism in film narratives, this interdisciplinary approach does not work towards a definition, but rather towards emphasizing important similarities and distinctions between the politics and aesthetics of magical realism in both media.

The second section focuses on the specificity of magical realism within the film medium. While some of the political and aesthetic characteristics of magical realism in literature correspondingly reverberate through audiovisual narratives, the history and audiovisual quality of cinema imply a relationship with reality (and, as a result, with realism) that is different from that which we perceive in literary works. This section consequently analyzes some manifestations of realism in cinema – from classic to more transgressive approaches – to subsequently investigate how the aesthetics of film realism relates with the aesthetic and political structure of magical realism.

Chapter three presents a case study of the film *Beasts of the Southern Wild* (2012) as a means to closely incorporate the discussions made throughout the thesis within the scope of a single audiovisual work. Produced by Court 13, a collective based in New Orleans, and directed by Benh Zeitlin, *Beasts of the Southern Wild* aesthetically and politically associates with magical realism. The film employs dream, magic and reality to approach two conflicting worlds in Southern Louisiana and reimagine postcolonial relations within the context of an unequal society facing environmental crises. This chapter likewise is divided into two sections: while the first discusses how magical realism relates to the environmental discourse and political

controversies of the film, the second investigates the narrative aspects of the film against the backdrop of magical realist conventions discussed in the previous chapters. Considered by critic Phil Hoad (2012) as “America’s new magical realism,” *Beasts of the Southern Wild* adequately illustrates the possibilities of magical realism in cinema by combining literary motifs and techniques with audiovisual narrative and its particularities.

1. BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REVIEW

1.1 Origins and theoretical foundations

At the beginning of the twentieth century, German artistic production was changing paradigms. Expressionism was no longer the central reference in visual arts: the new German painting refused the Expressionist "exaggerated preference for fantastic, extraterrestrial, remote objects" (ROH, 1995, p. 16). This new style revealed the reality Expressionism belied under fantastic dreamscapes. Focusing on the mundane and the commonplace, 'Post-Expressionist' painting attempted to explore the strangeness of real objects.

This new trend lacked either established definitions or a consolidated nomenclature. As growing and thriving as it was, the emerging German style had no artistic manifestos or representative groups to keep it together as a coherent movement. Conversely, the integrity of this new art depended largely on the disavowal of Expressionist abstractness, something that "did not hold up in the ensuing art historical discourse" (GUENTHER, 1995, p. 33). The absence of specificity made room for two pivotal definitions: Franz Roh's *Nacht Expressionismus/Magischer Realismus* (Post Expressionism/Magic Realism[2]) and Gustav Hartlaub's *Neue Sachlichkeit* (New Objectivity). While Hartlaub's term prevailed, Roh's concept eventually became influential to other arts.

Instead of concisely defining *Magischer Realismus* (GUENTHER, 1995), Roh's 1925 theorization extensively analyzes the aesthetic elements of Post-Expressionism/Magic Realism. By distinguishing the phases of art through objects of artistic interest, Roh stresses the re-emergence of the real world as the cornerstone of Magic Realist art. He considers that Magic Realism woke up from an Expressionist dream to observe the world through new objects – the "horrors of our own time" and the "purity of shepherdess in the fields" at this point substitute God, hell and related transcendental subject matters (ROH, 1995, p. 17). Accordingly, Magic Realism celebrates the love for terrestrial things and delights in their limited and fragmented nature (*ibid.*).

The aesthetic principle of Magic Realism embodies the employment of techniques inherited from Expressionism to reveal the hidden and palpitating mysteries of real objects, which "threaten the secure tranquility of simple and ingenuous things" (ROH, 1995, p. 18). Magic Realism reconstructs reality through spiritual phenomena with a "fastidious depiction of

[2] Roh's pictorial concept has been translated to Magic Realism, with capital letters (see ROH, 1995). With the subsequent development of his ideas in literary studies, the term 'magical realism' has been adopted (GUENTHER, 1995, p. 63). Some authors, however, use the variation 'magic realism' (see HEGERFELDT, 2005).

familiar objects," a new rendering of the mundane that engenders renewed perspectives of the world (GUENTHER, 1995, p. 36). Following Roh's ideas, the re-emergence of reality as an important subject matter is part of a natural cycle: "[h]umanity seems destined to oscillate forever between devotion to the world of dreams and adherence to the world of reality" (ROH, 1995, p. 17).

The new art was objective, firm in compositional structure and representational (GUENTHER, 1995): as opposed to Expressionist rejection of representative meaning, Magic Realism reintegrated reality and the objective reference to nature "into the heart of visibility," rendering painting "once again the mirror of palpable exteriority" (ROH, 1995, p. 18). The objectivity of Magic Realism requires "accentuation, isolation, and microscopic depiction" (GUENTHER, 1995, p. 58) to disclose the pulsating magic behind real objects. The desired employment of objectivity likewise demands impressions of colors and forms, which evokes the sensory potential of Expressionism and Impressionism through "prolific and detailed *tactile feeling*" (ROH, 1995, p. 19).

In addition to being objective, Post-Expressionism/Magic Realism represented a reconquest of the "possibility of feeling existence" (ROH, 1995, p. 20). According to Roh, the new art makes the objects and our reality "stand out from the void" (*ibid.*), which results in radiation of magic and spirituality combined with coldness and sobriety. Magic Realism appropriates the energic and fantastic legacy of Expressionism and Impressionism for mimetic and integrative purposes. While the latter profoundly valued textures, colors and shapes, the former aligns those elements to objects to propose a "calm admiration of the magic of being" and "a discovery that things already have their own faces" (ROH, 1995, p. 20).

Post-Expressionism/Magic Realism consequently emerges from a flux of compositional and abstract strokes to give rise to permanent and definite objects: "[t]his miracle of an apparent persistence and duration in the midst of a demoniacal flux; this enigma of total quietude in the midst of general becoming, of universal dissolution: this is what Post-Expressionism admires and highlights" (ROH, 1995, p. 22). The new art enchants by juxtaposing the "forms of the spirit and the very solidity of objects" (*ibid.*) – the seeming contrast of abstract flux and concrete perpetuation.

As opposed to the cursory idea of copying nature and its objects, the representational essence of Magic Realism conveys the notion of creation: the intended realist depiction implies meticulous construction of existing objects in their "particular primordial shape" (ROH, 1995, p. 23). This characteristic is largely important to differentiate Post-Expressionism/Magic Realism from the representational art of the nineteenth century, which "rarely attempted

anything other than extrinsic imitation, and hence it had to remain seated in front of nature or works of art or plaster casts, limiting itself in the end to copying the object before its eyes" (ROH, 1995, p. 24). The idea of creation is exemplified in the artistic process of Georg Schrimpf[3]: the painter creates the exterior world from indoors and rarely uses a model (*ibid.*). This artificial creation of the exterior world generates "new views of reality, which is at most built in pieces, never imitated as a whole" (ROH, 1995, p. 25).

In comparison to previous artistic movements, Post-Expressionism/Magic Realism likewise introduced a new representation of space in landscape painting. Impressionist landscapes focused on surfaces and represented space "from the perspective of air" through a "shimmering colored vapor" that filled the whole picture (ROH, 1995, p. 25). The flattering Impressionist space was replaced by Expressionist desire for spatiality. Expressionism explored the force of depth through depressions and elevations. Conversely, Post-Expressionist/Magic Realist art focuses on ambiguity by juxtaposing and reconciling the spatial sensations of far and near. As a consequence, Magic Realist landscapes "move vigorously forward, at the same time that they recede into the far distance" (ROH, 1995, p. 26).

Furthermore, the relations of scale in Magic Realist painting correlate with the conflicting ideas of miniature and monument. Neither of these ideas is restricted to actual framing dimensions: while miniature attempts to "locate *infinity* in small things" (ROH, 1995, p. 27), monument piles up "shapes in large groups" to seek what is powerful and statuesque (*ibid.*). The new art juxtaposes these two scale possibilities, which remain at continuous tension and preclude any organic division. The ultimate effect is "the appearance of something slow and laborious at first sight" (ROH, 1995, p. 28), which eventually offers to the viewer "secret delights and intimate charms [...], the image of something totally finished [...] and minutely formed" (*ibid.*).

Just as Post-Expressionism/Magic Realism combined a variety of contradictory aesthetic elements, it presented both conservative and progressive strains. The Neoclassicist wing (e.g., Christian Schad, George Schrimpf, Rudolf Wacker) focused on clarity, occasional sentimentality, nonpolitical matters and invoked a "clear, timeless Classicism" (GUENTHER, 1995, p. 46). Conversely, the Verist vein (e.g., George Grosz, Otto Dix, George Scholz) presented socially conscious artworks to voice the instability and "desperate disquietude" of

[3] The artistic processes within Magic Realism vary according to different painters. Roh (1995, p. 25) brings the example of Alexander Kanoldt, "who builds his landscapes out of Italian cities because he feels certain of their spiritual content, working whenever possible in nature, outside." Post-Expressionism is open to many spiritual possibilities as long as it does not degenerate into simple external imitation (*ibid.*).

Post-World War I German society (*ibid.*). The political division of Magic Realism became even more evident as Nazism came to power: the Nazis' "cultural cleansing" embraced conservative artworks and denounced left-wing artists as Bolshevists. Both Hartlaub and Roh were targets of Adolf Hitler's cultural politics – the former was "fired from his job as museum director in Mannheim", the latter was "taken to the Dachau concentration camp in 1933" (GUENTHER, 1995, p. 55).

In addition to the coexistence of Roh's and Hartlaub's definitions, the new art assumed a variety of terminologies in different European countries. In Russia, for instance, this new trend was named Constructivism, while in France, the term *Réalisme Nouveau* (New Realism) emerged as a different possibility (GUENTHER, 1995, p. 45). The "fluidity of boundaries, ambiguity of definitions and the sometimes untraceable transformation of concepts" (GUENTHER, 1995 p. 34) followed the dissemination of Post-Expressionist/Magic Realist artistic ideas and contributed to making the present-day magical realism a categorical and terminological puzzle.

Since 1929, the German literary community has adopted some of the ideas conveyed by Roh's Magic Realism. This "appropriation has been facilitated by the pliant meanings of both 'magic' and 'realism' and the ambivalence with which Roh first presented Magic Realism" (GUENTHER, 1995, p. 57). As illustrated by Irene Guenther (1995, p. 58), German writer Ernst Jünger translated Roh's notion of magic into "literary 'stereoscopy', the profound sense of the minuscule uncovered through precise examination." Guenther (*ibid.*) underscores that Jünger contributed to introducing Roh's term into German literature through his dream-diary and daily journal *Das abenteuerliche Herz*, which explicitly employed the concept in its 1929 publication. From 1948 on, Magic Realism has appeared as a literary concept in various journals and has become a common term in German literary criticism (GUENTHER, 1995, p. 59).

The actual development of Magic Realism as a literary concept began after the 1927 Spanish translation of Roh's theories by *Revista de Occidente*, which introduced the term to Latin American authors and critics. The Latin American literary community employed the liberty provided by the ambivalence of the term and the lack of clear parallels between visual arts and literature (GUENTHER, 1995, p. 62) to develop theorizations on the application of Roh's concept to literary texts. Latin American authors "have been prime movers in developing the critical concept of magical realism and are still primary voices in its discussion" (ZAMORA and FARIS, 1995 p. 02).

Arturo Uslar Pietri (1948, p. 162) primarily connected the concept of magical realism to Venezuelan short stories from 1928 onwards by identifying a powerful and promising

tendency in Venezuelan writing. He notices that such stories considered men a mystery among realistic information: [u]na adivinación poética o una negación poética de la realidad. Lo que a falta de otra palabra podría llamarse un realismo mágico" (USLAR PIETRI, 1948, p. 162). Uslar Pietri's brief account dubiously characterizes reality as both magical and prosaic: while the former awaits to be poetically revealed, the latter should be poetically denied (CHIAMPI, 2015, p. 23). His ambiguous definition partially resonates with Roh's idea of creation in that he considers magical realism to be a poetical attitude. Both ideas reject the superficial notion of copying reality and focus on the artist's unique perception of the mundane. Maria-Elena Angulo (1995, p. 06) emphasizes that the similar ideas are not a coincidence: "one can assume that [Uslar Pietri] was familiar with the term. His definition of the new prose, where man is a mystery among realistic data […] follows the pattern of Roh's idea."

Simultaneously to Uslar Pietri's investigation, Alejo Carpentier (1995, originally published in a newspaper in 1948 and later expanded in 1967) proposed a manifesto for Latin American fiction (CHIAMPI, 2015, p. 32). Carpentier's detailed attention to Latin America stems from his disappointment with Surrealism (CHIAMPI, 2015; GEE, 2013). Once a staunch supporter of the movement, Carpentier eventually came to the conclusion that his participation led him in the opposite direction (LÉANTE and CARPENTIER, 1970): he left France and came back to his homeland, where he introduced the term *lo real maravilloso* (marvelous real) to describe the uniqueness of Latin American cultural and natural heritage and detach himself from the manufactured marvelous of the French/European movement. Carpentier's ideas flout manufactured codes and traditional formulas to highlight the "improbable juxtapositions and marvelous mixtures" inherent in "Latin America's varied history, geography, demography, and politics" (ZAMORA and FARIS, 1995, p. 75).

The manifesto – part of which also served as the prologue to his 1949 book *The Kingdom of this World* (1989) – relates the wonders of Latin American culture to past and present: "Latin Americans drag a legacy of thirty centuries behind them, but in spite of a record of absurd deeds and many sins, we must recognize that *our style* is reaffirmed throughout *our history*" (CARPENTIER, 1995, p. 83). By listing historical icons and events – e.g., Melgarejo's beer-drinking horse, the emergence of Ruben Darío as a poet within an illiterate society, "the frescoes rescued from the Bonampak jungle, the lasting enigma of Tihuanaco" (*ibid.*) – Carpentier praises Latin America's achievements and disassociates "Latin American literature from European trends" (LABUDOVIC, 2003, p. 10), ultimately equaling the uniqueness of Latin America marvelous reality to cultural identity.

Out of his personal experience with the history of Latin America, Carpentier contrasts the marvelous real with the artificially fabricated writing of Europe: "[…] I was moved to set this recently experienced marvelous reality beside the tiresome pretension of creating the marvelous that has characterized certain European literatures over the past thirty years" (CARPENTIER, 1995, p. 84). He extends his criticism to European painting by underscoring the technicist style of Surrealism, which produces a "monotonous junkyard of sugar-coated watches, seamstresses' mannequins, or vague phallic monuments" (CARPENTIER, 1995, p. 84). As opposed to European "poverty of imagination" and code-based art, Carpentier presents the intrinsic marvelous of Latin America – detached from "tricks of prestidigitation" and embedded with natural magic (*ibid.*).

This enchantment of Latin American marvelous reality originates "from an unexpected alteration of reality (the miracle), from a privileged revelation of reality, an unaccustomed insight that is singularly favored by the unexpected richness of reality or an amplification of the scale and categories of reality […]" (CARPENTIER, 1995, p. 85-86). Carpentier's explanation denotes a relationship between reality and observer imbued with both modifying and mimetic operations by describing the ideas of alteration/amplification and revelation/insight (CHIAMPI, 2015, p. 33). It follows that his concept simultaneously considers magic a product of human perception and a component of reality (CHIAMPI, 2015, p. 33-34).

The combination of intrinsic magic and external perception accounts for a project to read reality (CHIAMPI, 2015, p. 35) and presupposes faith: "[t]hose who do not believe in saints cannot cure themselves with the miracle of saints, nor can those who are not Don Quixotes enter, body, soul, and possessions, into the world of Amadis of Gaul or Tirant le Blanc." (CARPENTIER, 1995, p. 86). Carpentier disconnects the marvelous from imaginary endeavors – which constituted the ideas of Surrealism – to attach it to empirical domains that are only apparent to faithful observers (CHIAMPI, 2015, p. 36). The correlation faith/reality comprises the marvelous real and builds upon the mythology, upbringing, ontology and "fecund racial mixing [*mestizage*]" of Latin America. (CARPENTIER, 1995, p. 88).

Carpentier himself differentiates the marvelous real from Roh's Magic Realism by connecting the latter to unrealistic images and "prefabricated objects" (CARPENTIER, 1995, p. 103). His contempt for artificiality finds in Magic Realist paintings a fertile source for criticism: "[…] houses without character, little roofs, white walls and in the middle of those streets without atmosphere […] some enigmatic figures pass by each other without speaking, engrossed in their diverse, unrelated tasks" (CARPENTIER, 1995, p. 103). Conversely,

Carpentier advocates for naturality: the marvelous should be grasped by the artist "in its raw state, latent and omnipresent" (CARPENTIER, 1995, p. 104).

Felicity Gee (2013, p. 156) problematizes Carpentier's manifesto by identifying traces of Surrealism in his rationale: "[t]he Surrealist movement is never far from his mind, and the stark contrast between the two continents causes him to be critical of their methods." Carpentier's practices and learnings from Surrealism renewed his awareness of Latin American history and enabled him to theorize on the marvelous real in the continent (GEE, 2013, p. 156). Gee underscores significant similarities between André Breton's Surrealist manifestos and Carpentier's theorization on the marvelous real: while the latter postulates a state of heightened perception (*estado límite*), the former presupposes a state of heightened attention (*état d'attente*) (GEE, 2013, p. 156). The results of both experiences emerge strikingly similar in that "Carpentier merely re-enacts Breton's ramblings against a different backdrop, shifting his perspective on the strange ritualistic behaviour of the modern city to one focused on the rituals and superstitions" of Latin America (GEE, 2013, p. 156).

Carpentier's desire to detach his manifesto from the ideas of Surrealism and Magic Realism indirectly connects his theorization to both artistic expressions and highlights their correspondence. Roh's conceptualization coexisted with Breton's and shares with Surrealism irrational approaches to reality and experimental representations of the exterior world (GEE, 2013). Accordingly, both Roh's Magic Realism and Breton's Surrealism find in Italian painter Giorgio de Chirico a source for inspiration: de Chirico's "pictorial vision of modern man's alienation and disorientation" highly influenced the avant-garde art of the 1920s and rendered the Italian artist a precursor of both styles (GUENTHER, 1995, p. 38). Furthermore, the occasional similarities between Magic Realism and Surrealism are said to be responsible for the unpopularity of Roh's ideas in France, where Surrealism overshadowed both Magic Realism and its variant *Réalisme Nouveau* (GUENTHER, 1995, p. 56).

The attention to Latin America and the focus on the term 'magical realism' overlap in the work of Angel Flores (1995, originally published in 1955). Flores's rationale begins by highlighting an ineptitude for categorization in Latin American prose fiction from the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and ascribing it "to the unstable economic and social milieu of the writers of Spain and Latin America" (FLORES, 1995, p. 110). The oscillating conditions of life reportedly hindered the appropriate devotion of time and effort required for literary achievements and frequently resulted in heterogeneous and careless works of fiction (FLORES, 1995, p. 110-111). Flores's argument encompasses the Latin American tradition of ambiguously mixing Romanticism and Realism (e.g., Esteban Echeverría, Jorge Isaac, Ricardo

Güiraldes) to contrast it with the brilliance of magical realism as a subsequent and upgraded category/trend (FLORES, 1995, p. 111).

As opposed to Carpentier's ontological and geographical approach, Flores associates magical realism with Europe's artistic reaction to photographic realism during the First World War period. He brings examples from literature and painting (e.g., Franz Kafka, Marcel Proust and Giorgio de Chirico) to illustrate a rediscovery of style and expression from authors from the nineteenth century (e.g., Nikolai Gogol and E. T. A. Hoffman). Franz Kafka's writing style is representative of the "difficult art of mingling […] drab reality with the phantasmal world" of nightmares and represents to Flores a major influence on the "cold and cerebral storytelling" conveyed by what he considers the inaugural literary work of magical realism in Latin America – Jorge Luis Borges's *A Universal History of Infamy* (FLORES, 1995, p. 112-113).

Despite recognizing in Borges's writing a wide range of influences – including H. G. Wells, Arthur Machen and Marcel Schwob – Flores points to Kafka's impact on the Argentinian author as the "most profound and revealing" (FLORES, 1995, p. 113). Borges himself had already expressed great admiration for Kafka's "timely and timeless" fiction while commenting and translating his works to the Latin American literary community in the 1930s (ROGER, 2014, p. 140). Borges's Kafkaesque inspiration matured with the 1941 publication of the short stories "The Library of Babel" and "The Lottery in Babylon": while the first presents a Kafkaesque narrator hoping for something that will never come, the second "echoes Kafka's tales of individuals who voluntarily […] enter into arbitrary, rigidly dictated systems that they can neither comprehend nor escape" (ROGER, 2014, p. 146-47).

Borges became a pathfinder and source of inspiration for Latin American writers of the same period, who developed significant works in the same magical realist direction: María Luisa Bombal's *House of Mist*, Silvina Ocampo's *Forgotten Journey* and Adolfo Bioy Casares's *The Invention of Morel* (FLORES, 1995, p. 114). The variety of Latin American authors connected to magical realism increased through the 1940s by sharing "the same preoccupation with style and also the same transformation of the common and the everyday into the awesome and the unreal" (*ibid.*). Flores's definition confines magical realism to timeless fluidity and supernatural naturalization by identifying formal resemblances between Latin American authors' writings and Kafka's *The Metamorphosis* and *The Trial*. Both the fluency of time and the approach to supernatural dispense "lyrical effusions" and "needlessly baroque descriptions": "[t]he practitioners of magical realism cling to reality as if to prevent 'literature' from getting in their way, as if to prevent their myth from flying off, as in fairy tales, to supernatural realms" (FLORES, 1995, p. 115-116).

The combination of realism and fantasy present in Borges's works has made its appearance in Latin America in separate ways (FLORES, 1995, p. 112). Flores historically points to the realism of the Colonial Period and the 1880s and to the magic in the chronicles and letters of Columbus as historical roots of magical realism. Flores's effort to describe a Latin American tradition of magic literature superficially connects the characteristics of Modernism – whose exoticism relates to Symbolism and Parnassianism – and the magic from the chronicles – whose enchantment relates to the perception of the Europeans (CHIAMPI, 2015, p. 24). This established relationship engenders the confusion between magical realism and fantastic literature, which would be ubiquitously present in Latin American literary criticism (CHIAMPI, 2015, p. 24). Flores himself corroborated the confusion by interchanging the term 'magical realism' for 'fantastic literature' in 1959 (FLORES, 1959, p. 386-388).

Flores's characterization of magical realism likewise includes the idea of effect in that the precision and leanness of magical realist writing ultimately leads to ambiguity. Flores emulates Joseph Roth by referring to this effect as "a confusion within clarity" (FLORES, 1995, p. 116). Roth (2010, p. 24, originally published in 1935) utilizes this expression to describe a type of confusion that is not caused by exhaustion of senses: "[t]his clarity was not the same as the false clarity of a wanderer in the desert who takes a *fata Morgana* as reality and heads towards it. No, it was such that reality itself became a *fata Morgana*! It did not dissolve into the air when we reached it. It was physical; it was tangible." Flores's reference to Roth's "confusion within clarity" possibly underscores the seemingly contradictory continuity between reality and supernatural within magical realist fiction and anticipates Anne Hegerfeldt's (2005) idea of hesitation.

The development of Latin American magical realism evidenced significant disproportions between critical discourse and literary creation (CHIAMPI, 2015). As opposed to the increasing literary quality/quantity of magical realist works and the continuous utilization of the term through the 1950s and 1960s, the conceptual development of the term occurred casually and sporadically. Irlemar Chiampi (2015, p. 25) ascribes the sluggish development of critical theory to a lack of communication: "[i]n the discussion of magical realism, as well as with other issues regarding Latin American literature and culture, the lack of communication or mere silence are responsible for the discontinuity among critical investigations"[4] (*ibid.*). Flores's essay does exactly what Chiampi criticizes by attempting to further develop the

[4] All translations, unless otherwise noted, are mine. Original: "Na discussão do realismo mágico, como em outras importantes questões de literatura e cultura latino-americanas, a incomunicação ou mero silêncio são responsáveis pela solução de continuidade que sofrem as propostas críticas."

concept of magical realism without acknowledging either Uslar Pietri's first mentioning of the term or Alejo Carpentier's derivative expression *lo real maravilloso*.

Twelve years after Flores's theorization, Luis Leal (1995, originally published in 1967) proposed a revision of the concept of magical realism by confronting Flores's focus on Kafkaesque style and arbitrary categorizations. Throughout his text, Leal alludes to Roh's pictorial definition, Uslar Pietri's brief investigation and Carpentier's ontological account to elucidate Flores's confusion and differentiate magical realism from both fantastic and psychological literature: magical realism does not "distort reality or create imagined worlds, as writers of fantastic literature or science fiction do; nor does it emphasize psychological analysis of characters, since it doesn't try to find reasons for their actions or their inability to express themselves" (LEAL, 1995, p. 121). Leal refers to magical realism as an attitude towards reality that does not involve creating imaginary worlds as a form of escapism: "[i]n magical realism the writer confronts reality and tries to untangle it, to discover what is mysterious in things, in life, in human acts" (*ibid*.).

Leal's conceptualization breaks with Flores's resort to Kafkaesque supernatural by denying the existence of a magical attitude towards reality in Kafka's works: "if, as Professor Flores notices, in Kafka's story the characters accept the transformation of a man into a cockroach, their attitude toward reality is not magic; they find the situation intolerable and they don't accept it" (LEAL, 1995, p. 121). The rejection of Kafka's influence consequently expands to Borges's writing style, which characterizes itself for "the creation of infinite hierarchies" (LEAL, 1995, p. 122). Leal rejects Kafka's and Borges's literary fashion to underscore that magical realism dispenses the creation of imaginary beings/worlds but searches for "the mysterious relationship between man and his circumstances" (*ibid*.).

Leal ultimately combines Roh's approach to reality and Carpentier's marvelous real by asserting that "[t]he existence of the marvelous real is what started magical realist literature, which some critics claim is *the* truly American literature" (LEAL, 1995, p. 122). The clumsy combination of heterogeneous ideas into 'magical realism' engenders a cursory explanation of the term: Leal's account restricts itself to point to a common interest in theme as a central characteristic of magical realism (see LEAL, 1995, p. 122) and overlooks formal and aesthetic oppositions between the theoretical foundations basing his conceptualization (CHIAMPI, 2015, p. 27). While Carpentier's marvelous real almost presupposes passivity from the observer (e.g., "we have only to reach out our hands to grasp it," CARPENTIER, 1995, p. 107), Roh's attitude towards reality encompasses the idea of active creation; yet, both ideas constitute the foundations of Leal's definition.

Irlemar Chiampi (2015, p. 27) further criticizes Leal's argumentation by emphasizing the confusion he falls into while commenting on Flores's analysis of Kafkaesque influence on magical realist writers. As already mentioned, Leal rejects Kafka's treatment of the supernatural as influential to magical realism because his characters do not magically approach reality. His reasoning contradicts Roh's theorization – whose idea of creation was related to the artist and not to characters – and possibly Carpentier's, whose theory emerged from the artist's own observations of Latin America reality. Despite ambiguously and simultaneously connecting magical realism to Carpentier's ontological concept and Roh's phenomenological approach, Leal managed to detach magical realism from neighboring genres and opened up a range of possibilities for future theorizations (CHIAMPI, 2015, p. 27).

Roh's original concept of Magic Realism did not effectively conquer the imaginary of visual arts, but his ideas – broad and charming enough to be employed by other arts – survived and played a range of roles in the minds of those attempting to describe and understand magical realism as a literary phenomenon. Many of the apparent contradictions of pictorial Magic Realism (e.g., intrinsic magic versus external perception, the spatial sensations of far and near, the relations of opposite scales) have corresponding relations in the presumed opposition of magic and reality in literary magical realism. His ideas likewise permeate – directly or indirectly – the theoretical conceptions of many of the Latin American authors discussed above. That is true of Uslar Pietri, Carpentier and Leal: while the former directly connects his definition to Roh, the other two present approaches that respectively (and implicitly) dwell on and attack Roh's phenomenological conceptualization. The ambivalence of Roh's concept (GUENTHER, 1995, p. 57), the lack of reference to his ideas and the lack of explicit communication among Latin American authors escalated to undermine a stable definition of magical realism.

The critical attempt to categorize Latin American literature from the twentieth century consequently imbued the discussion of magical realism with theoretical complexities and contradictions. Latin American criticism divided the idea of magical realism into two critical streams: first, the consideration of reality as naturally mysterious; second, the attribution of the mystery of reality to its depiction. Both ontological and phenomenological approaches to reality carried significant weight in the discussion of magical realism and represented a point of departure for subsequent political problematizations. While the former corroborates the correlations between magical realism and geographical and cultural locations, the latter provides reasons for considering magical realism a worldwide trend unlimited to physical/cultural boundaries.

1.2 Postcolonialism and subversion

The significant development of magical realism in Latin American fiction and literary criticism engendered strong connections between the mode and Latin American identity. Through the second half of the twentieth century – and even until today – magical realism has been generally thought to reside in Latin American grounds (FARIS, 1995, p. 164). Following the flourishing of magical realism in other locations, some authors have questioned the Latin American exclusivity and pointed to the existence of geographical distinctions within the mode. Wendy B. Faris (1995, p. 165) suggests the existence of a tropical lush – where magic is pervasive – and a northern variety – where magic is less present and "its range is more circumscribed." Jean Weisgerber (1987, apud FARIS, 2004) likewise distinguishes magical realism between a scholarly stream and a folkloric one. These differences encompass a variety of political discourses connected to different cultural and geographical contexts.

The highlighting of geographical distinctions within the mode reflects the apparent incompatibility between magical realism and central generic systems. Because magical realism opposes European realism, it seems "most visibly operative in cultures situated at the fringes of mainstream literary traditions" (SLEMON, 1995, p. 408). However, that does not imply the absence of magical realist texts from the so-called central locations nor the reduction of magical realism to marginal literature (*ibid.*). Alternatively, it points to perceiving that magical realism "carries a residuum of resistance toward the imperial center and to its totalizing systems of generic classification" (SLEMON, 1995, p. 408). This resistance has been mainly perceived in the twentieth-century relationship between colony and colonizer, in that a "marginal" nation – long invaded by the writing traditions of its colonizer – employs a different discursive system to undermine the empire's dominance and free itself from cultural strings.

The discursive system of magical realism embodies the representational codes of both realism and fantasy and suggests a struggle between the two (SLEMON, 1995, p. 409). Considering that "the ground rules of these two worlds are incompatible, neither one can fully come into being, and each remains suspended, locked in a continuous dialectic with the 'other', a situation which creates disjunction within each of the separate discursive systems" (SLEMON, 1995, p. 409). This opposition prevails in magical realist texts and requires one to read dialectically by avoiding the collapse of either one of the representational systems into the other (SLEMON, 1995. p. 420). This enduring suspension between two discursive codes reflects the coexistence of two or more cultural systems and "the tension between the ever-

present and ever-opposed colonized and colonialist discourses" in a postcolonial society. (SLEMON, 1995, p. 409-411; BOWERS, 2004, p. 93-94).

Faris (2004, p. 133) suggests that this particular aesthetics serves the purpose of undermining Western realism by denying the reader "the right to represent the world." Irlemar Chiampi (2015, p. 155) corroborates that idea by emphasizing that "the ideology of marvelous realism seeks the overturn of the rational-positivist conception of reality"[5,6]. Through the employment of a realist mode of narration to introduce and depict seemingly fantastical motifs, magical realism destabilizes the limits of realistic fiction to accommodate non-European/colonial forms of knowledge and belief systems. The formal constitution of magical realism consequently conveys the undermining of Western/Imperialist narrative authority while at the same time making room for new voices and sometimes unclear forms of representation to emerge (FARIS, 2004, p. 133).

The themes of magical realist texts likewise might evince the representation of postcolonial relations. Stephen Slemon (1995, p. 411) emphasizes that these relations are thematized in three different ways: through the metonymic relationship between the location where the story takes place and the postcolonial cultural structure; through the metaphorical equivalence between the temporal scheme of the novel and the "long process of colonization and its aftermath"; and through the highlighting of gaps produced by the encounter of at least two different cultural systems – that of the colonizer and that of the colonized (SLEMON, 1995, p. 411). Slemon consequently establishes thematic relations between the micro – the fictional story – and the macro – the postcolonial history. He brings as examples the Canadian novels *The Invention of the World* (1977) and *What the Crow Said* (1978), which properly constitute a portrayal of the English-Canadian culture and the colonization process as a whole.

Jack Hodgins's *The Invention of the World* condenses the colonization process into the story of the Vancouver Island community The Revelations Colony of Truth. The tyrannical leader Donal Keneally emulates the figure of the colonizer by bringing the population of the Irish village of Carrigdhoun to Canada, where he founded The Revelations Colony of Truth and socially and economically exploited the community. Slemon (1995, p. 412) notices that "Keneally delivers the villagers from the first phase of colonialism only to initiate a second phase in which he employs the authority of Celtic legend and Prospero magic to establish a system of absolute patriarchal domination over them." His subsequent death represents the

[5] Original: "a ideologia do realismo maravilhoso persegue a reviravolta da concepção racional-positivista da constituição do real [...]."
[6] Chiampi (2015) refers to magical realism as 'marvelous realism' (realismo maravilhoso).

ensuing presence of postcolonialism in that his ghost seemingly appears at the house of the protagonist Maggie, which is located in the same place as the former colony, to remind us of his legacy and possibly suggest the historical consequences of his colonizing exploitation (SLEMON, 1995, p. 412).

The memory of colonization further materializes in Keneally's widow Lily Hayworth. While she fears Kenneally to the point that she faints at a possible sight of his ghost, Lily is also nostalgic of the privileges she had while at his side: "[o]ld Lily sometimes forgot she wasn't mistress any longer of this place. She barked orders and cut criticism at people as if Keneally was still alive and she the House of Revelation's mistress" (HODGINS, 1977, p. 45). The text emphasizes Lily's difficulty in accepting her condition and mirrors postcolonial relations by connecting her to the past and Maggie to the present/future. In that perspective, Lily could not believe that time had passed and that Maggie was "the soul of the house she was living in" (HODGINS, 1977, p. 45). Maggie ultimately becomes the "symbolical heiress of the process of colonization" (SLEMON, 1995, p. 412) and partially achieves her liberation by bringing the House of Revelation "back to the simple, material and trivial dimension of the world" (DUŢĂ, 2011, p. 212).

Accordingly, Robert Kroetsch's *What the Crow Said* introduces the confusing and complex world of Big Indian. The town witnesses the disruption of the relations between cause and effect and the existence of strange/magical events: seasons equal to one year, children are raised by coyotes and a card game lasts a hundred and fifty-one days. The interpretation of these events makes it difficult "to decide which causes actually operate meaningfully in Kroetsch's border cosmos, and which are asserted by the inhabitants of Big Indian in an effort to impose a perceived, explicable order" to the world (WALL, 1991, p. 91). This macro duality combines with micro binary oppositions within the text: earth (horizontal dimension) and sky (vertical world), ordinary and extraordinary passage of time, masculine and feminine dimensions (SLEMON, 1995, p. 414). Kroetsch's binary organization consequently reflects "the dialectic operative in postcolonial cultures between […] constraining codes of imperial order and […] liberating codes of postcolonial 'original relations'" (SLEMON, 1995, p. 412).

Kroetsch's text draws much of its magical realism from Gabriel García Márquez's *One Hundred Years of Solitude* (BOWERS, 2004, p. 47). This is evident in his depiction of Big Indian resembling García Márquez's Macondo and in his employment of a third-person narrator within a magical realist story. Kroetsch himself acknowledges García Márquez's influence by praising the Colombian author's managing of third-person narration and unattachment to the conventions of realism (KROETSCH, 1980). As suggested by Jeanne Delbaere-Garant (1992,

p. 92), that correlation is emphasized by the writing structure of the account of Vera Lang's impregnation by bees: "[p]eople, years later, blamed everything on the bees; it was the bees, they said, seducing Vera Lang, that started everything' (KROETSCH, 1978, p. 01). Kroetsch's text emulates García Márquez's reliance on "a past and seemingly unconnected event for the causality of the whole of the story to follow" (BOWERS, 2004, p. 47).

García Márquez's magical realist writing similarly conveys opposition to European realism and marginal resistance to central locations. The relationship between Latin America and Europe is primarily postcolonial in relation to the imperial power of Spain and Portugal. However, Bowers (2004, p. 32) further argues that Latin America developed a relationship with the entire Europe "that placed it on the margins of European perception, knowledge and culture." García Márquez's magical realism – and magical realism in Latin America in general – has served the purpose to shape Latin America's identity and shift it away from a position of marginal cultural production that was dependent on European generic systems and writing conventions. That is notably true of the period comprising the 1950s and 1960s, which became known as the Latin American boom and gave worldwide recognition to many Latin American authors. *One Hundred Years of Solitude* emerged from that context and became a political and aesthetic source of inspiration for subsequent magical realist writings and studies.

The novel thematizes the North American/European exploitation of Colombian/Latin American resources and employs magical realism to recapitulate Colombian history and signalize "instances of protest against exploitation at the hands of colonists" (AHMAD and AFSAR, 2014, p. 02). This is accomplished with the depiction of Macondo as a mysterious village seemingly unconnected to the rest of the world: its uncertain geographical location and José Arcadio Buendía's failed attempts to find routes from it to other places aid to characterize Macondo in opposition to the "civilized center" (AHMAD and AFSAR, 2014, p. 04). The subsequent "modernization" of Macondo follows the European and North American incursions to the continent and consequently represents the moral, social and economic decline of the village.

The consequences of imperial exploitation are imbued within the narrative events and the personal traumas of the characters. García Márquez's text explicitly references the colonial trauma through personal accounts dating back to the sixteenth century: "[Úrsula Iguarán's great-great-grandmother] did not dare fall asleep lest she dream of the English and their ferocious attack dogs as they came through the windows of her bedroom to submit her to shameful tortures with their red-hot irons" (GARCÍA MÁRQUEZ, 2014, p. 26). The novel likewise evokes the effects of Imperialism by narrating the arrival of the transnational banana

company: “Macondo had been a prosperous place and well on its way until it was disordered and corrupted and suppressed by the banana company” (GARCÍA MÁRQUEZ, 2014, p. 300). The harmful effects the company caused on the citizens of Macondo are repeatedly emphasized throughout the novel and culminate in the tragic assassination of thousands of workers and their families.

García Márquez’s combination of magical realism and historical events serves the purpose of recreating Colombian history. He resonates with Anne Hegerfeldt’s notion of magical realist “historiographic metafiction” (2005, p. 63; see also HUTCHEON, 1988) by challenging the traditional/Western views of history and presenting his particular perception of historical events (AHMAD and AFSAR, 2014). This is evident within the text in Aureliano’s harsh opinion on the banana company, which was “contrary to the general interpretation” and “radically opposed to the false one that historians had created and consecrated in the schoolbooks” (GARCÍA MÁRQUEZ, 2014, p. 302). His retelling of Colombian history focuses on the perspective of the oppressed and presents a condensed version of history (AHMAD and AFSAR, 2014, p. 06). This points to Slemon’s (1995) argumentation and evinces the conveying of a metaphorical relationship between the novel and the “lengthy process of colonization” and its aftermath effects (AHMAD and AFSAR, 2014, p. 06).

Similarly to García Márquez’s work in Latin America, Salman Rushdie’s Indian/British novel *Midnight’s Children* (1981) likewise represents a worldwide example of a magical realist writing employing the thematization of postcolonial relations. Rushdie’s novel attaches the birth of its narrator Saleem to the exact moment India gained independence from Britain. The text parallels Slemon’s (1995) levels of connections by directly placing the story in the aftermath of colonization. The novel connects Saleem to India’s postcolonial history through magical powers: in addition to a thousand other extraordinary children born at around midnight of India’s independence day, Saleem is particularly gifted with powers that allow him to enter the minds of his midnight “siblings” and hear the thoughts of India’s population. The cultural and religious diversity of postcolonial India consequently underlies the one thousand and one different children connected to India’s moment of freedom.

The metaphorical mirroring of India’s history in Saleem occurs through the direct connection between historical circumstances and personal affairs. Just as his birth represents India’s independence, important occurrences in his life likewise affect the destiny of his country: his imprisonment corresponds to the end of midnight’s children’s powers and to the weakening of democracy during Indira Gandhi’s authoritarian government; his ultimate fragmentation into six hundred and thirty million pieces represents the conflicts resulting from

Britain's domination and the lack of unity among the population of India (JOVANOVIĆ and BRATANOVIĆ, 2018). Saleem's story ultimately emphasizes the gaps arising from British colonialism. The readjustment of social classes and the imposing of British political/economic systems destabilized Indian society to the point that independence – and magical powers – could not preclude subsequent social and political crises.

Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* can also be read as an attempt to rewrite history and present diverse perspectives in opposition to Western historical accounts. It exposes the "fictionality of the [Indian] nation" as constituted by the British empire and undermines the idea "of the nation having a stable identity and a single history" (KORTENAAR, 1995, p. 41). Saleem explicitly engages in that function and directly invites the reader to challenge the common belief that all Muslims were favorable to the Partition of India (KORTENAAR, 1995, p. 43): "[i]f you don't believe me, check. Find out about Mian Abdullah and his Convocations. Discover how we've swept his story under the carpet" (RUSHDIE, 1981, p. 65). This reconstruction of history is likewise achieved through the employment of 'literal metaphors': the literal whitening of the skin of the Indian population reflects the ongoing English influence on the educational system of the country.

The harsh effects of colonialism on the countries' cultural identities entail the conclusion that postcolonial magical realist writings – especially, but not limited to the ones abovementioned[7] – engage with history (FARIS, 2004; LANG, 2020). Faris (2004, p. 138) emphasizes that this process reveals an attempt to critically address historical issues and denounce/recover historical wounds. The use of magic or supernatural simultaneously confronts the formal elements of realism and the political and historical discourses associated with the hegemonic realist perspective. It ultimately highlights historical atrocities and underscores the unspoken and often remarkable perspectives of those marginally involved in the process of colonization (FARIS, 2004, p. 140).

The decolonizing agenda of magical realist writing accordingly developed with the contemporary and internationalized cultural relations of the late twentieth century. Faris (2004, p. 134) notices that the cosmopolitan climate of contemporary culture expanded the decolonizing imperative of magical realism "beyond the borders of postcolonial societies to influence the cultural productions of the entire world." The contemporary world brought the perception that the borders between margins and center are not conspicuously definite and that the postcolonial discourse can be replicated within the context of the so-called first-world

[7] See also Günter Grass (1964) and Jeanette Winterson (1987).

countries. That comes from the fact that much of the inequality and oppression inherent in the relationship between colony and colonizer is actually reenacted within the contrasting relationship between a scientific/central and a non-scientific/peripheral worldview in developed societies.

The contemporary status of magical realism consequently rendered it a globalized and "common narrative mode for fictions written from the perspective of the politically or culturally disempowered" (BOWERS, 2004, p. 31; see also HART and OUYANG, 2005). As a result of this, magical realism has been increasingly more present within the cultural production of "central" countries – those which usually assumed the role of colonizers during Imperialism. That is noticeable in the writings of British authors Angela Carter (2006 [1984]) and Jeanette Winterson (1987). Both writers employ the original political strength of magical realist writing to present different forms of critique and diverse approaches to reality within their cultural context. While Carter (2006) combines magical realism and feminism "to subvert the authority of the British ruling classes" (BOWERS, 2004, p. 64), Winterson (1987) employs magical realist devices to recall and rewrite the cultural and social implications of Napoleon Bonaparte's dominance in the early nineteenth century.

Carter's novel *Nights at the Circus* (2006) epitomizes the representation of the disempowered by focusing on unusual characters and setting the story in "places that are out of the ordinary" (MICHAEL, 1994, p. 492) – including a circus, a brothel and a museum for monstrous women. The juxtaposition of the eventual magic associated with two-winged protagonist Fevvers and the extraordinary events taking place in these locations with a more ordinary and scientific reality serves the purpose of communicating a "subversive, feminist level of signification" (HENITIUK, 2003, p. 412). The interview-structure opening the novel reverberates this tension by contrasting the worldviews of Jack Walser – scientific, patriarchal – and Fevvers – magical, feminine (HENITIUK, 2003, p. 412). Walser ultimately echoes the Western/realist perspective by attempting to comprehend the eccentricities of the "fabulous bird-woman" (CARTER, 2006, p. 24) and conciliate them with the ordinariness of his/our world.

Valerie Henitiuk (2003, p. 418) notices that Carter attempts to construct a personal female landscape via the textual strategies of magical realism, ultimately crafting "magical spaces, both physical/actual and metaphorical/imaginary, within otherwise realistic fictional parameters." Fevvers represents a contrasting point to the mythologizing and traditional roles of women, which respectively comprise societies and cultural traditions that either connect women to "the mysterious forces of nature" or to the patriarchal hegemony of men

(HENITIUK, 2003, p. 418). Carter subverts these myths by creating a female corporal space “that refuses to be contained within either real or magical parameters” (*ibid.*). The depiction of Fevver’s two pair of wings within a magical realist structure precludes the reader from categorizing her as an “unrealistic freak” and encourages them “to participate in the deconstruction, rather than validation, of established worldviews that constrict or malign women” (HENITIUK, 2003, p. 418). The textual inclination to evade categorizations likewise finds equivalency in Fevver’s personality. She is self-confident and assertive and strongly rejects others’ attempts to traditionally define her (HENITIUK, 2003, p. 419).

The depiction of two conflicting worldviews is also accomplished by Winterson in *The Passion* (1987). The novel connects the scientific and non-scientific perspectives respectively to Henri, a personal waiter to Napoleon Bonaparte, and Villanelle, a Venetian girl with webbed feet and extraordinary abilities. The interaction between both character-narrators conveys the conflicting perspectives and the significations of reality and magic to the point that neither of them monopolizes the narrative. The dialectical connection between these character-narrators representing the conqueror/colonizer Bonaparte and the victim/colonized Venice consequently reflects the incompatible romantic relationship between Henri and Villanelle and the respective narrative focus on rational and irrational attributes. This tension between two characters and two worldviews correlates with Henri’s difficulty in comprehending Villanelle, which is exemplified in his attempt to rationalize and understand the physical loss of her heart and the maze-like structure of her hometown Venice.

The characterization of Villanelle likewise represents a subversion of the traditional feminine imagery and a rejection of categorization. That is primarily evident in her physical attributes and in her ability to walk on water. Villanelle’s webbed and magical feet symbolically undermine the masculine hereditary trade of her town in that she is the first “girl whose feet [are] webbed in the entire history of the boatmen” (WINTERSON, 1987, p. 51). Similarly to Fevvers, Villanelle refuses to be limited by either reality/magic or gender/sexuality. While her webbed feet challenge the binary division between men and women in Venice, her non-restrict sexuality and passion for crossdressing entail a fluid identity that destabilizes gender stereotypes and the rigid boundaries between masculine and feminine. She rejects being circumscribed within traditional/patriarchal limits and challenges ordinary/masculine assumptions to be the first woman to literally walk where no other Venetian woman had walked before. Villanelle’s “indefinite” identity and refusal to categorization reflect the textual suspension between two discursive systems. Winterson’s employment of magical realism consequently corroborates Villanelle’s oxymoronic and subversive nature.

From the contemporary presence of magical realism within British fiction, one confirms the assumption that the strict postcolonial agenda of the mode adapted to broader political concerns relating to gender and the marginalization of cultures (BOWERS, 2004, p. 54). Besides England, these concerns have also been present in American culture. The United States assumed a status of dominance through the twentieth and twenty-first centuries and its imperialist politics consequently destabilized social relations and cultures within its territory and over the world. Bowers identifies the development of magical realism in the United States as "anti-neo-American-colonial magical realist writing" (BOWERS, 2004, p. 46). The American version of the mode often comprises authors in conditions of oppression – e.g., Native Americans, Mexican Americans and African Americans – who adopt magical realist techniques to "write against dominant American culture" and incorporate different cultures into "the dominant Western cultural form" (BOWERS, 2004, p. 46).

The cross-cultural characteristic of American authors – which, similarly to many magical realist writers, evidences the coexistence of colonizing and colonized cultural forces – accounts for the connection between magical realism and "under- or misrepresented" groups in American society (BOWERS, 2004, p. 54). Both Bowers (2004) and Faris (2004) emphasize the importance of the African American author Toni Morrison in developing characteristics of the mode in the United States. While acknowledging Morrison's indifference to the term 'magical realism'[8], Bowers (2004, p. 55) contends that Morrison's work "draw[s] from her cross-cultural context as an African American" and incorporates "oral culture and mythology adapted from West African culture." She further argues that Morrison employs magical realism to create "a cultural memory with which to rebuild a sense of an African American community at a time of crisis, when the majority of the African American population seem to her to be held in a position of economic and spiritual poverty" (BOWERS, 2004, p. 55).

Morrison's *Beloved* (1987) is widely appointed as a work that approaches the post-slavery experience of African Americans in the United States. The novel blurs the distinction between spiritual and material worlds by giving life to the protagonist's dead child. The ghost of Sethe's child Beloved embodies the presence of slavery primarily because it echoes Sethe's attitude of killing her daughter to protect her from enslavement (FARIS, 2004). Faris (2004, p. 137) underscores that the reconstruction of the past inherent in the bridging of worlds in magical

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[8] Morrison claimed in an interview that she had the impression magical realism was used as a "way of *not* talking about politics." She added that her "own use of enchantment simply comes because that's the way the world was for [her] and for the black people [she] knew." She ultimately revealed to consider magical realism an "evasive label" and to have become "indifferent" to the term (DAVIS and MORRISON, 1988, p. 143-144).

realism approximates a society's symbolic death and the reconstruction of its cultural body. The "rebirth" of Beloved consequently turns literal the rebirth of voices silenced by the brutally oppressive process of slavery in the United States (RAZMI and JAMALI, 2012, p. 117; FARIS, 2004, p. 122, 138). In that perspective, Morrison's narrative suggests "the partial magical healing of socially damaged relationships [by the process of slavery] through communication with beings from beyond the grave" (FARIS, 2004, p. 84).

The enchantment inherent in Beloved and her natural appearances throughout the novel find support in the practices of West African culture (BOWERS, 2004, p. 58) and likewise work to challenge Western historical assumptions. Faris (2004, p. 138) notices that Beloved's presence is entrenched in a realistic setting and conveys the memories "of past events and the emotions they generate." Beloved's return serves as a narrative device to embody the atrocities of history and entails a healing process to remind and assuage the wounds inherent in American slavery (FARIS, 2004, p. 85). That reminder engenders the conclusion that these wounds might never completely heal and must not be forgotten. In that sense, despite Beloved's departure, "[t]he word "Beloved" remains as a ghostly breath, evoking not just that individual being but also other beloveds lost to slavery and its aftermath, hovering in the air, coming from an indefinite place […]" (FARIS, 2004, p. 122).

The political discourse of magical realism follows the path of its traits across different media and thus constitutes an important characteristic of the mode both in literature and film. That is particularly true of film adaptations of magical realist novels, which retain the original discourse of their source. Examples include the highlighting of female voices in Alfonso Arau's *Like Water for Chocolate* (1992) and Bille August's *The House of the Spirits* (1993), both adaptations of novels respectively by Laura Esquivel (1989) and Isabel Allende (1982). The marginalized discourse and rebellious strength of the mode are also evident in films carrying the uniqueness of magical realism unrelated to literary sources. Labudovic (2003), for instance, considers Spike Jonze's *Being John Malkovich* (1999) as a representative of aesthetic and political features of the mode and analyzes the film as a critique of American corporative and consumerist society. Bowers (2004, p. 109) further argues that many films carrying magical realist elements extend the use of magic "beyond the film's capacity to divert and entertain" to initiate "questions concerning philosophical issues."

The investigation of postcolonial discourse within magical realism entails that postcolonialism conveys a lens to read the mode and does not constitute an absolute and limiting label. Alternatively, it helps us comprehend that the transformation of discourses throughout the history of magical realism – e.g., from magical realist works in Canada and Latin America

to British and American stories – reveals a variety of works carrying different voices and displaying diversified geographical and cultural backgrounds. Postcolonialism consequently provides "a framework for reading texts across postcolonial cultures," as well as across different media, and might establish a base for analysis that does not work reductively, "on the basis of shared conditions of marginality in relation to metropolitan cultures, but productively, on the basis of their sustained dialogic engagement with the cognitive legacies of colonialist language and history" (SLEMON, 1995, p. 421). The productive employment of this lens enables one to read and compare works from diverse economic and political contexts and identify similar or different motivations underlying a common textual style.

The perceived discursive variations resulting from the reading of the mode within postcolonial and globalized contexts lead to the conclusion that their differences combine to convey common subversive and transgressive qualities. These qualities of magical realism pervade the text – e.g., the contradictory alternation between the real and the magical and the eventual creation of the 'magical real' (BOWERS, 2004, p. 63-64) – and embody its cultural discourse of "resistance to monological political and cultural structures" (ZAMORA and FARIS, 1995, p. 06). The subversiveness of magical realism proves to be versatile (albeit not flawless, as we shall see in chapter three) by adapting to different cultural contexts to question ontological, political, geographical or generic boundaries (ZAMORA and FARIS, 1995). Bowers (2004, p. 64) notices that "[t]he root of this transgressive and subversive aspect lies in the fact that, once the category of truth has been brought into question and the category of the real broken down or overturned, the boundaries of other categories become vulnerable." This adaptable transgressive discourse of magical realism emerges from its particular aesthetic construction and corroborates the existence of cultural and geographical diversities within the mode.

1.3 Form and aesthetics

The investigation of structure and aesthetics within magical realism primarily demands the differentiation between the textual composition and effects of magical realism and fantastic literature. It is true that both modes/genres share similar discourses – e.g., "the questioning of rationality, the implicit criticism of traditional novelistic readings, the verbal claim for the reader's credibility" – and themes – e.g., "supernatural appearances, demons, metamorphoses,

disruptions of causality and of time and space" (CHIAMPI, 2015, p. 52-53)[9]. However, magical realism and the fantastic employ their motifs and discourses through different narratorial devices and convey dissimilar emotional and intellectual effects.

Tzvetan Todorov (2014) situates the fantastic between the uncanny and the marvelous and postulates two pivotal conditions for its existence. His first condition entails the presence of the real world and connects the depiction of an unrealistic event to the creation of hesitation. This hesitation occurs when the reader becomes unsure about how to explain supernatural occurrences, thus vacillating between rational (uncanny) and irrational (marvelous) perspectives. Todorov's second condition implies a project to read the text and emphasizes the role of the reader in excluding poetical and allegorical interpretations. While poetry's lack of representativity blurs our sense of reality and constitutes an obstacle to the fantastic by rejecting the pure representation of the world, allegory's focus on the figurative and objection of literal meaning likewise precludes the reader from grasping the fantastic by moving the hesitation away from literal explanations (TODOROV, 2014).

Chiampi (2015, p. 53) further argues that the definition of the fantastic presupposes the correlation between psychological and intellectual effects. She emphasizes that the fantastic produces fear and emotional variants through the postulation of intellectual concerns. Fear consequently arises as a discursive effect from the contradiction inherent to the textual structure and does not rest in the mere existence of supernatural events (CHIAMPI, 2015, p. 53). While the reader's conventional world depends on natural laws and social and historical conventions, the fantastic text conveys a threat to the natural stability of this world by displaying supernatural beings/events within a disrupting atmosphere. The psychological effect of the fantastic evinces the emotional response to events lacking in referential signification and the conflicting convergence between two reading hypotheses (CHIAMPI, 2015).

Amaryll Chanady (1985) likewise emphasizes the presence of two levels of reality as a characteristic trait of the fantastic. However, she minimizes the focus on emotion and hesitation as constitutive effects of fantastic narratives to dwell on the concept of antinomy. According to her, the antinomy of the fantastic presupposes the conflicting existence of two codes – the natural and the supernatural – and the progressive deconstruction of both codes to the point that neither of them can satisfactorily explain the story events. The fantastic consequently arises from the textual unresolved antinomy between logical and irrational worldviews. This

[9] Original: "a problematização da racionalidade, a crítica implícita à leitura romanesca tradicional, o jogo verbal para obter a credibilidade do leitor" and "aparições, demônios, metamorfoses, desarranjos da causalidade, do espaço e do tempo"

combination of codes ultimately produces illogical and disconcerting effects by undermining a world ruled by reason and conventional norms. Chiampi (2015, p. 56) corroborates that idea by arguing that the fantastic creates "fake hypotheses," underlines the "arbitrariness of reason" and "shakes cultural conventions without offering to the reader anything but uncertainty."[10]

While the textual structure of magical realism emulates that of the fantastic by similarly portraying two conflicting worldviews, it supposedly resolves the antinomy with the integration of the supernatural within the norms of perception of the fictitious world (CHANADY, 1985)[11]. Chanady (1985, p. 24) argues that the supernatural of magical realism does not constitute an irrational worldview for the narrator of the text and does not disconcert the characters or the reader. As opposed to the fantastic, in which supernatural events are puzzling and ask for contradictory explanations, magical realism presents seemingly illogical events as matter-of-fact and ultimately suggests the irrelevance of looking for reasonable/irrational answers. According to Chanady (1985, p. 25), magical realism "abolishes the antinomy between the natural and the supernatural on the level of textual representation." This coherent textual resolution between two conflicting codes ultimately influences the reader, who recognizes the antinomy on the semantic level, but "suspends his [or her] judgment of what rational and what is irrational in the fictitious world" (CHANADY, 1985, p. 26).

The formal opposition in magical realism correspondingly follows the presentation of ordinary reality as marvelous (HEGERFELDT, 2005; CHIAMPI, 2015). This "rhetoric of inversion" (BÉNYEI, 1997, p. 152) ultimately introduces ordinary events and objects as magical or extraordinary while presenting typically marvelous occurrences as commonplace. García Márquez often explores this textual phenomenon in *One Hundred Years of Solitude* through the inventions brought by the gypsies to Macondo: whereas flying carpets provoke no curiosity to the citizens of Macondo, magnets are considered "magical irons" and ice is contemplated as "the great invention of [their] time" (GARCÍA MÁRQUEZ, 2014, p. 24). Accordingly, this 'supernaturalization' of reality evokes Roh's (1995) primary theories on magical realism and the search for discovering the magic of ordinary things (SPINDLER, 1993, p. 78-79). This inversion of marvelous and reality complements the naturalization of magic and likewise contributes to the defamiliarization of the assumptions of the Western world (HEGERFELDT, 2005, p. 200).

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[10] Original: "O fantástico contenta-se em fabricar hipóteses falsas [...], em desenhar a arbitrariedade da razão, em sacudir as convenções culturais, mas sem oferecer ao leitor, nada além da incerteza."

[11] Támas Bényey (1997, p. 152) argues that the antinomy of magical realism is not completely resolved: it is both "reproduced in the process of reading" and often present "on the level of focalization."

Chiampi (2015, p. 59) also notices that magical realism replaces blood-chilling and fearful emotions for the discursive effect of enchantment. This enchantment stems from the coherent placement of the two oppositional codes and corroborates Chanady's idea of resolved antinomy. The enchanted textual proximity between natural and supernatural renders the causal relations in magical realism different from those of realism and the fantastic. While realism and the fantastic respectively display explicit and ambiguous causalities, magical realism diffuses its causal relations by making them somewhat ubiquitous and conceptually incomprehensible (CHIAMPI, 2015, p. 61). Following Chiampi's argument (*ibid.*), the opaque causal relations of magical realism and the resolved antinomy on the textual level consequently encourage the suspension of doubt by part of the reader to "preclude the contradictions between natural and supernatural elements."[12]

The harmony constructed between oppositional codes and the subsequent effect of enchantment do not necessarily imply the absence of hesitation by the reader or the audience. While hesitation in fantastic literature is engendered by intentional contradictions on the textual level, hesitation in magical realism mainly occurs on the level of the reader (HEGERFELDT, 2005, p. 55; see also BÉNYEI, 1997, p. 152). Since the reader typically acknowledges the existence of two conflicting codes (see CHANADY, 1985, p. 26), hesitation arises from "uncertainty over which set of conventions to apply" (HEGERFELT, 2005, p. 55). The reader consequently recognizes the "discrepancy between tone and content" and hesitates "about how to reconcile the apparently incompatible elements, for the usual means of recontextualization, such as writing the event off as a hallucination, attributing it to an unreliable narrator, etc., are not supported by the text" (HEGERFELDT, 2005, p. 55).

Hesitation might also originate from the characters' uncertainty regarding "the reality status of particular objects or events" (HEGERFELDT, 2005, p. 55). The characters in magical realist narratives might emulate the reader's "investment in the codes of realism" (FARIS, 2004, p. 20) and promote hesitation by questioning the nature of fantastic events from a realist point of view. That is particularly true of Henri in Winterson's *The Passion* (1987) and Jack Walser in Carter's *Nights at the Circus* (2006). In Winterson's story, when Villanelle asks Henri to recover her lost heart, he primarily understands her claim as figurative and immediately disregards the possibility that she lacks a physical heart. Similarly, in Carter's novel, Walser conducts the introductory interview with disbelief of Fevver's magical stories and witnesses her wings with similar incredulity. The characters' perspectives consequently establish a self-

[12] Original: "evitar a contradição entre os elementos da natureza e da sobrenatureza"

conscious counterpoint (HEGERFELDT, 2005) to the matter-of-factness of the narrative and the presumed resolved antinomy of the text.

Tamar Yacobi's (1981; 2015) mechanisms of integration aid us to interpret the textual inconsistencies of magical realism and bridge the gap between Hegerfeldt's idea of hesitation and Chanady's and Chiampi's respective notions of resolved antinomy and harmonic oppositions. Yacobi (1981, p. 113) developed five reconciling principles to account for the resolution of "textual tensions" mainly "on the level of fictive reality": the genetic, the generic, the functional, the existential, and the perspectival. Along with Meir Sternberg (2015), she further developed her theory by adding a figurative measure (p. 426) and renaming the integrating devices of her reading operation for 'mechanisms' – of which the generic mechanism matters for us the most.

The generic mechanism presupposes the recontextualization of textual incongruities by means of resorting to generic/stylistic frameworks[13]. Thus, when faced with a "problematic discourse," the reader/viewer "grasps it as a token of a certain discourse type that regularly accommodates (neutralizes, settles, exploits, even celebrates) the problem" (STERNBERG and YACOBI, 2015, p. 405). Magical realism simultaneously (and self-consciously) promotes hesitation and neutralizes the contradictory relationship between oppositional codes (HEGERFELDT, 2005). The discursive problems arising from this complex textual structure – especially for the reader/viewer entrenched in the Western codes for representing reality – consequently undermine the usual means of recontextualization and call for the application of the generic mechanism: the apparent incompatibility of natural and supernatural, the dissimilar tone and content, and the opaque causal relations constitute characteristics of magical realism as an identifiable category and can be recontextualized in light of this cognitive integration. Reading the incongruities of magical realism through Sternberg and Yacobi's generic mechanism allows us to focus on the characteristics of the mode and investigate how its narrative techniques contribute to producing the previously mentioned effects and critical discourses.

The nature of magical events in magical realist fiction ranges from the marvelous to the uncanny and defies easy categorizations (HEGERFELDT, 2005; FARIS, 2004, p. 115). Hegerfeldt (2005, p. 51) further argues that the magic in magical realism does not regularly

[13] Regardless of labeling magical realism as a mode or as a genre, the application of the generic mechanism assumes that magical realism is identifiable through aesthetic and political elements. This cognitive process is analogous to the assimilation of characteristics within specific genres and recognizes magical realism as a detectable (even if not generic) category.

match the supernatural and often depends on "exaggeration and excess," so that "it would be more precise to say that magic realism blends elements of the marvellous, the supernatural, hyperbole and fabulation, improbable coincidences and the extraordinary with elements of literary realism." Faris (2004, p. 115) correspondingly notices that magical realism frequently situates its magic in the mid-point of that spectrum to favor the blending of different worlds: "near the middle it is virtually impossible to decide to which end of the spectrum an event belongs." The constitution of this magical spectrum and our interpretation of magical occurrences accordingly depend on our reference of reality – in this case, dictated by the conventions of Western realism.

Magical realism aesthetically incorporates elements of realism to formally and politically question the assumptions of realist fiction as "a transparent representation of reality" (HEGERFELDT, 2005, p. 72). The mode consequently does not reject realism, but rather, as Hegerfeldt (*ibid.*) suggests, engages in a process of appropriation and subsequent transgression of its essence: the deviations from the norm "[draw] attention to the conventions on which that norm is based." These conventions match the aesthetics of realism, which typically presupposes truth and verisimilitude to the extratextual world (see LODGE, 2015, and CANDIDO, 2004). Antonio Candido (2004, p. 136-137) further argues that the realist perspective entails the "multiplication" and "progressive specification" of details and a record of the effect of time on the detailed fictional world[14]. While realism employs these factors to generate verisimilitude to the extratextual world and convey the concreteness of real objects, magical realism shifts the focus of realist aesthetics to the immaterial and the non-realistic, ultimately undermining literal meanings and the idea of true representation.

The matter-of-fact depiction of magical elements primarily exploits this aesthetics by providing realism to supernatural or impossible events. While the magical realist narrative frequently points to elements of the extratextual world – e.g., *The Passion*, *Midnight's Children* and *One Hundred Years of Solitude* refer to history and often evoke real geographical places – it refers in the same manner to extraordinary and non-realistic occurrences. The narrative voice/function of magical realist texts introduces these elements in the narrative without providing extraordinary comments or depictions, ultimately approaching them with verisimilitude and incorporating them into reality. This naturalization of magic instructs the reader/viewer to do likewise and disrupts causal relations by denying the possibility of explanations: "[i]n magical realism, the mere act of explaining the supernatural would eliminate

[14] Original: "a visão realista pressupõe (1) a multiplicação do pormenor, (2) a sua especificação progressiva e (3) o registro de suas alterações no tempo."

its position of equivalence with respect to our conventional view of reality" (CHANADY, 1985, p. 30).

This seemingly inappropriate use of the realist fashion engenders textual tensions and incongruities: "[w]hile the narrator's attitude indicates that a certain event is to be accepted as an empirically real and often not even particularly astonishing occurrence, the conventions of the realist mode point in the opposite direction, designating the event as impossible" (HEGERFELDT, 2005, p. 54). Chanady (1985) argues that this matter-of-factness of magical realism accounts for the resolved antinomy on the level of the text by removing mystery and surprise from magical events. Hegerfeldt (2005) alternatively adds that the persistence of these textual tensions ultimately contributes to the effect of hesitation. This simultaneous harmonic and conflicting relationship between natural and supernatural distinctively characterizes magical realism and evinces the aesthetic foundations of the mode's critical discourse against established Western conventions.

The use of narrative details to describe magical events corroborates this realistic depiction of an extraordinary dimension and reinforces "the appearance of reality" and the "credibility" of the "fictional object" (CANDIDO, 2004. p. 136). Magical realism uses details to "weave a textual fabric that joins different worlds" (FARIS, 2004, p. 91), consequently adding realism to events that contradict the conventional rules of the Western world. Villanelle's description of her webbed feet in Winterson's *The Passion* exemplifies this technique: "[t]he midwife tried to make an incision in the translucent triangle between my first two toes but her knife sprang from the skin leaving no mark. […] She bent the point of the knife, but that was all" (WINTERSON, 1987, p. 52). García Márquez's account of Remedios's ascension to heaven likewise displays realism and details: "she watched Remedios the Beauty waving good-bye in the midst of the flapping sheets that rose up with her, abandoning with her the environment of beetles and dahlias and passing through the air with her as four o'clock in the afternoon came to an end" (GARCÍA MÁRQUEZ, 2014. p. 210).

The matter-of-fact style of magical realism often presupposes the postulation of a childlike perspective. Hegerfeldt (2005, p. 146) argues that "[c]hildren have an intrinsic belief in magic and the supernatural" and often "do not distinguish between reality and fantasy." The assumption that magical realist narrators/focalizers are childlike consequently encompasses the idea that they accept magical events "as children seem to accept such events in stories" (FARIS, 2004, p. 94). Hegerfeldt (2005, p. 148) emphasizes that magical realism employs the psychological features commonly attributed to children as a literary technique: "the tone adopted by magic realist fiction is not that of a real child, but a literary construction based on

social and psychological assumptions.” This narrative device ultimately smooths the oppositional codes of realism and fantasy by corroborating matter-of-factness.

Many literary works materialize the childlike perspective to convey the story through the point of view of children. The narrator of *Midnight’s Children*, although not a child, tells his story by assuming the perspective of his child/teenager version and resorting to his past understanding of the world: “Saleem’s whole persona is a childlike one, because children believe themselves to be the centre of the universe, and they stop as they grow up; but he never stops” (HAFFENDEN, 1985, p. 243). Saleem often recognizes the eccentricity and possibly childish atmosphere of his account by inviting Padma and the reader to have faith and believe what he is saying (see RUSHDIE, 1981, p. 51, 267). Similarly, Günter Grass’s *The Tin Drum* (1964) uses a child narrator to naturally merge the worlds of reality and fantasy: Oskar’s discovery of his powers does not make him surprised or disconcerted, but canalizes the effect of awe on ordinary things (FARIS, 2004, p. 94-95), ultimately mirroring the strategy of inversion often used by García Márquez in *One Hundred Years of Solitude*.

Most focalizers of magical realist fiction are likewise “ex-centric”: “implausible or fantastic events are reflected through characters whose world-view quite naturally affords room for the extraordinary, the fabulous or the marvellous” (HEGERFELDT, 2005, p. 115). Magical realism often uses marginalized focalizers to present a magical worldview through the voice and perspective of those who are placed outside the ordinary and scientific dominant center (e.g., the citizens of Macondo and two-winged Fevvers in *Nights at the Circus*). This narrative focus on the culturally/economically disempowered favors the postcolonial and subversive discourses of magical realism by disrupting conventional social relations and worldviews based on the Western world. As claimed by Hegerfeldt (2005, p. 118), “[i]n presenting the marginalized perspective not as a substitute, but as a complement, magic realist fiction does not simply reverse the positions of centre and margin, but counteracts and levels the hierarchy between the two.”

The textual alignment with marginalized characters entails the representation of two adjacent worlds (FARIS, 2004, p. 21). One can notice this in García Márquez’s depiction of the contrasting culture of Macondo and the rest of the world in *One Hundred Years of Solitude*; in the division between India and Britain in Rushdie’s *Midnights Children*; and in the respective worlds of Henri and Villanelle in Winterson’s *The Passion*. These divisions typically follow the dichotomy between center and margins and correspondingly connect the magic and the supernatural to the marginal world. Thus, while marvelous occurrences often take place in Macondo and the children of colonized India are endowed with magical powers, Villanelle’s

hometown Venice similarly defies conventional understanding. Magical realism ultimately represents the confrontation of these worlds on the textual level to critically approach and redefine Western aesthetic and cultural assumptions.

This separation endows certain characters of magical realist fiction with the power to bridge different realms and the task to remain heterogeneous and suspended between contradictory worlds (FARIS, 2004). Similarly to Melquíades in *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, who bridges the exterior world to Macondo and ultimately remains living in the village as a ghost, Saleem in *Midnight's Children* connects "the worlds of physical objects and imaginations" by using his brain as a "radio transmitter" (FARIS, 2004, p. 105). This bridging function of characters is also used to join the worlds of the living and the dead – as is the case with Clara in Isabel Allende's novel and Bille August's film *The House of the Spirits*. The introduction of gifted characters consequently seems to serve as a narrative function that facilitates the merging of fantasy and reality. More than that, it often represents the characters' dual nature – such as Villanelle's webbed feet symbolizing her suspension between the worlds of masculine and feminine and Fevver's wings indicating her simultaneous marvelous and real nature.

The narrative space of magical realist worlds likewise entails "a sense of indeterminacy" (FARIS, 2004, p. 97). García Márquez explores this indeterminacy through the geography of Macondo, whose mysterious localization prompts José Arcadio Buendía to further investigate and make calculations to find a possible route to civilization (see GARCÍA MÁRQUEZ, 2014, p. 18). Winterson's *The Passion* correspondingly explores this feature by having Villanelle describe the peculiar city of Venice: "[t]he city I come from is a changeable city. It is not always the same size. Streets appear and disappear overnight, new waterways force themselves over dry land" (WINTERSON, 1987, p. 97). Similarly, Patrick's miraculous eye undermines real distances and turns the geography of France and London overtly indeterminate (see WINTERSON, 1987, p. 21, 23). The fictional space of magical realism ultimately subverts the accurate and truthful spatial depictions of realism and provides a lens to see the world with uncertainty.

Rawdon Wilson (1995, p. 210) further argues that magical realism highlights the "problem of fictional space […] by suggesting a model of how different geometries, inscribing boundaries that fold and refold like quicksilver, can superimpose themselves upon one another." According to him, the fictional space, defined as "an experience of place" constituted by "descriptive phrases that place characters and things," emerges in magical realism as belonging to two different indications of local: the "extratextual world" and the magical realm (WILSON,

1995, p. 216). The hybridity of the spatial relations in magical realism allows reality to shine through a "fenestral translucency" while building and accounting for an extraordinary dimension (WILSON, 1995, p. 220). We are able to perceive this hybrid configuration both in *The Passion* and in *Midnight's Children*: whereas both texts respectively stick to the real cities of Venice and Bombay, they simultaneously inhabit these cities with instances of magic and inexplicable events.

The ambiguous aspect of magical realism finds support in the various processes of literalization employed by magical realist works (HEGERFELDT, 2005). Hegerfeldt (2005, p. 56) notices that magical realism disrupts the "Western distinction between the literal and the figurative by rendering figures of speech oddly real on the level of the text." Faris (2004, p. 110) refers to this process as a verbal game between the text and the reader "whereby the metaphorical is imagined to be literal, connecting words and the world." Magical realism consequently undermines the literal and concrete dimension of realism by presenting the figurative language as real and endowed with referentiality. This process is primarily noticeable through the use of metaphors, which, in magical realism, "can be as important and true as empirical descriptions of reality" (HEGERFELDT, 2005, p. 56).

Winterson's *The Passion* employs the literalization of metaphors (HEGERFELDT, 2005) to distinctively approach the worlds of Henri and Villanelle. The lost heart of the Venetian protagonist is rendered literally by the text and ultimately highlights the characters' different worldviews: "'[i]n that house, you will find my heart. You must break in, Henri, and get it back for me.' Was she mad? We had been talking figuratively. Her heart was in her body like mine. I tried to explain this to her […]" (WINTERSON, 1987, p. 116). Similarly, Rushdie's *Midnights Children* highlights the literalization by having Saleem constantly ask the reader to avoid metaphorical interpretations: "[p]lease believe that I am falling apart. I am not speaking metaphorically; […] I mean quite simply that I have begun to crack all over like an old jug. . . In short, I am literally disintegrating" (RUSHDIE, 1981, p. 37). Both passages illustrate how magical realism self-consciously acknowledges the process of literalization and "allow[s] literalized elements partly to retain their figurative or abstract character" (HEGERFELDT, 2005, p. 236)[15].

The literalization in magical realism likewise extends beyond the figurative language to encompass the transformation of abstract ideas into concrete objects (HEGERFELDT, 2005, p. 56). Hegerfeldt (2005, p. 248) notices that magical realism surpasses "the semantic constraints

[15] For readers/viewers who are not familiar with the characteristics of magical realism, the figurative instance might be recontextualized through Sternberg and Yacobi's "figurative mechanism" (2015, p. 426).

governing the usage of abstract nouns" to present "semantically odd" constructions in which thoughts and emotions are physically present. Laura Esquivel's novel and Alfonso Arau's film *Like Water for Chocolate* (1989; 1992) employ this mechanism through the literal incorporation of Tita's emotions into her cooking. Tita's frustration over losing Pedro to her sister consequently materializes in the wedding cake she cooked and pass over to the guests of the ceremony: "the weeping was just the first symptom of a strange intoxication – an acute attack of pain and frustration – that seized the guests and scattered them across the patio and the grounds and in the bathrooms, all of them wailing over lost love" (ESQUIVEL, 1989, p. 22). This scene is also captured visually by Arau's film, which shows the guests' painful and sad reactions after eating Tita's cake.

The transformation of the figurative and the abstract into the literal engenders a "levelling of traditional dichotomies – dichotomies which […] are also of a hierarchical nature, for figurative language has long been regarded as inferior to referential language, and language and concepts in general have been considered less real than empirical reality" (HEGERFELDT, 2005, p. 236). The transgression of boundaries between the literal and the figurative/abstract consequently promotes hesitation on the textual level – because the reader remains suspended between both linguistic dimensions – and corroborates a subversive discourse on the political level (HEGERFELDT, 2005). By drawing "attention to the categories and conventions within which the world is perceived and represented," this characteristic of magical realism – in consonance with its general aesthetics and textual structure – highlights and questions the manner through which "categories and conventions shape social reality" (HEGERFELDT, 2005, p. 237). These processes of literalization balance the literal the non-literal and "[take] us beyond representation conceived primarily as mimesis to re-presentation" (FARIS, 2004, p. 115).

As opposed to the characteristics of the fantastic mode/genre as formulated by Todorov (2014), the textual structure and literalization techniques of magical realism encourage the retention of an "allegorical quality" (HEGERFELDT, 2005, p. 58). Due to the fact that the process of literalization in magical realism does not occur completely, the text constantly moves the reader "back and forth between literalization and 'figurization'" (HEGERFELDT, 2005, p. 58) and ultimately supports both levels of interpretation. In that sense, what for Todorov would disqualify the fantastic – e.g., the allegorical interpretation of Saleem as a metaphor for his nation – constitutes a possible and complementary interpretation within magical realist narratives. The possible literal and allegorical readings of events in magical realist fiction simultaneously find support in the text, but neither of them can be "entirely sustained": "[m]any

magic realist texts play quite openly on their ambivalence, insistently foregrounding the figurative aspect without in any way resolving the tension in favour of one interpretation" (HEGERFELDT, 2005, p. 59).

The analysis of the aesthetic qualities of magical realism provides a base for comparison to other works and brings to light the textual and political functions of formal elements. Many of the characteristics of magical realism abovementioned simultaneously contribute to matter-of-factness and hesitation. This contradictory relationship evokes the critical discourse of the mode against realism, in which it incorporates the essence of the latter to subsequently subvert it. This subversion on the textual level entails a transgression on the cultural and political contexts – as analyzed in the previous section – to highlight and give voice to postcolonial and marginal discourses.

The formal and political characteristics of magical realism likewise transcend literature and constitute important traits in audiovisual works. There are two aspects of magical realism of which we can be certain: it has never been restricted to a single medium and it has never received a conclusive definition. The indefinite borders of the mode on both levels welcome the use of magical realist aspects in different media and artworks and the focus on interdisciplinary theoretical investigations of the mode. Instead of circumscribing the characteristics of magical realism to literature, the use of literary works as theoretical objects purely presupposes a prototype for comparison and interdisciplinary analysis (see HEGERFELDT, 2005, p. 06). While the phenomenon of magical realism in the film medium is not yet solidified in critical theory (see SKRODZKA, 2012, p. 126; also GEE, 2013, p. 19), literature stands out as the cornerstone of magical realist fiction and theoretical discourse. Accordingly, cinema incorporates the essence of magical realism in literature and dwells on many of the characteristics above analyzed to present the mode through a different lens.

2. MAGICAL REALISM AND CINEMA

2.1 From literature to film

The popularity and consolidation of magical realism in literature – at least in terms of creative discourse – provided enough grounds for critics, authors and viewers to categorize films and other kinds of narrative art as magical realist and consequently evoke the interdisciplinary legacy of the mode. While this increasing categorization adds theoretical concerns to the concept, it seems unreasonable to reject (or restrict) the expansion of the mode beyond its literary manifestations, precisely because the critical and historical discourse on magical realism and the increasing presence of magical realist features in film narratives undermine the establishment of such boundaries. Whether one can label a film as magical realist or not should not constitute the most relevant question. Conversely, the significance of analyzing magical realism in cinema lies in the possibility of understanding this ever-growing phenomenon: which characteristics and political discourses of what we currently (and vaguely) understand as magical realism are being presented in film narratives, and which aesthetic and political particularities are being added to modify/consolidate the mode?

Fredric Jameson (1986) was one of the first authors to connect the concept of magical realism to film. His approach starts by outlining the idea of magical realism according to the works of Latin American authors to subsequently deviate from the Latin American category and propose a somewhat new perspective on the mode. While recognizing the conceptual complexities of magical realism and the configurations of "grounds for abandoning the concept altogether," he likewise acknowledges that magical realism "retains a strange seductiveness" (JAMESON, 1986, p. 302). He surrenders himself to the seductiveness of the term to explore magical realism through anthropological lenses and analyze how elements of history, violence and color strike, "in contrast to the more traditional Latin American conception," […] "as constitutive of a certain magic realism" (JAMESON, 1986, p. 302). He focuses on "social and political realities" to ultimately provide a personal interpretation of the aesthetic qualities of magical realism in film (GEE, 2013, p. 205).

Through the analysis of two Latin American films – *Cóndores no entierran todos los días* (1984); *La Casa de Agua* (1984) – and a Polish film – *Fever* (1981) – Jameson initially identifies shared characteristics that point to the way these films approach the historical past to take a stand "against totalitarian and capitalist systems" and disrupt "the historical narrative" and "hegemonic social structures" (GEE, 2013, p. 207). He understands that these works imbue their narratives with a "perforated history" while presupposing prior knowledge of historical

events and consequently avoiding exposition[16] (JAMESON, 1986, p. 303-304). As opposed to what he describes as 'nostalgia films,' which present "a pseudopast for consumption" and "[draw] from a more immediate social past," "magic realist" films set their stories in "remote historical periods" and use "parallels and analogies with the present" to produce social and political criticism (JAMESON, 1986, p. 310). Jameson ultimately believes that magical realism renders history with gaps and structural disjunctions and depends on content that exposes "the overlap or the coexistence of precapitalist with nascent capitalist or technological features" (JAMESON, 1986, p. 311).

He further argues that violence contributes to interrupting the narrative and making "some discontinuous or surcharged reading of the respective historical moment unavoidable" (JAMESON, 1986, p. 311). The three films he analyzes occasionally bring to the surface apparently disconnected "violent interludes that illustrate a deep-rooted desire for social change, or perform the anguish and suffering of social oppression" (GEE, 2013, p. 225). These uses of violence consequently "[transform] the real through the disruption of the narrative" by assuming the form of objects: "[h]opes, utopian visions and repressed memories are figuratively conceived as […] a bomb, flames, diseased bodies, a make-shift psychiatric hospital, a fountain of water, a funeral procession, and particles of dust" (GEE, 2013, p. 226). The aesthetic incorporation of violence thus defamiliarizes historical narratives and serves to re-telling the past through the insertion of interior and subjective realities (GEE, 2013, p. 223).

As reported by Jameson, this disruption of the official reality likewise finds in the use of color a powerful narrative device. His interpretation of magical realism presupposes that "'authentic' historical events do not have the monochrome contrasts that gives documentary photography its 'realism', but neither are they presented in the 'full-color achievements of Hollywood'" (GEE, 2013, p. 227). Conversely, he characterizes the presence of color in magical realist films as a mechanism to "[separate] objects from one another" and create "distinct zones of vibration within the eye" (JAMESON, 1986, p. 311), which ultimately conveys strangeness and manipulate the image to preclude "the illusory effect of reality characteristic of classical narrative cinema" (GEE, 2013, p. 228). The intensity carried by particular uses of color triggers psychological responses – described as "libidinal apparatus" (JAMESON, 1986, p. 314) – and produces "a magical affect if the object or the [*mise-en-scène*] is derealised sufficiently to cause a visual shock" (GEE, 2013, p. 240). The magic resulting

[16] The presentation of indispensable precedents to the comprehension of the narrative (see Sternberg, 1978, p. 13).

from color consequently instigates “a punctual experience of rare intensity comparable only to Baudelaire's ‘green so delicious it hurts’” (JAMESON, 1986, p. 314).

Jameson ultimately provides a re-reading of magical realism as consolidated by literature and shifts the approach from the supernatural quality of magical realist narratives to focus on the narrative and aesthetic representation of history. As Felicity Gee (2013, p. 203) suggests, it would “prove futile to attempt to fit [Jameson’s work] into a body of pre-existing critical discourse on literary magic realism in which magic corresponds to […] the folk histories of Latin American and other postcolonial or marginal literature,” which left some readers and critics frustrated (GEE, 2013, p. 2013; see also ALDEA, 2011, p. 109). While Jameson’s investigation reveals itself to be “very much dependent on the accidents of personal viewing” (JAMESON, 1986, p. 310), his analysis reinforces the engagement of magical realism with history – as put forward in the last chapter – and provides instruments to consider visual functions within magical realism – something that had mainly been absent from critical theory since Roh’s (1995) theorization. Still, the development of magical realism within audiovisual media did not – as Jameson sometimes seems to suggest – occur independently of its literary form: it indeed incorporated many of the elements present in the writings of magical realist writers worldwide.

As described by Cody Lang (2020), the use of magical realism to approach history and rewrite historical facts finds in audiovisual narratives a fertile ground. This is often achieved through the depiction of “an anachronous collective space that is out of sync with the dominant culture’s historical development” – as is the case with García Márquez’s Macondo in *One Hundred Years of Solitude* (LANG, 2020, p. 145). Italian director Alice Rohrwacher evokes this literary motif in the film *Happy as Lazzaro* (2018) by presenting the contemporary community of Inviolata held back in time (*ibid*.). The landowner takes advantage of the community’s isolation to exploit the families and charge expensive living fees, which forces them to stay and work for free as modern slaves. The film critically examines the consequences of exploitation by having the ageless protagonist Lazzaro (Adriano Tardiolo) miraculously survive a fall from a cliff and wake up in the future, where the illegal business of the landowner no longer exists, to find his past friends (now much older) struggling to live as scammers in a modern society. Lazzaro’s later tragic death while confused for a criminal accordingly evokes the tragic fate led by exterior interference in García Márquez’s Macondo: while the legal and modern world managed to free the community from the landowner, it did not offer appropriate support to integrate the families back into society.

Julie Dash's *Daughters of the Dust* (1991) also incorporates the theme of isolation by presenting the islander community of the Gullah people. The film provides the historical context through textual information to explain that the island inhabitants are descendants of African captives and that the community developed a distinct and original African American culture (DAUGHTERS, 00:01:48-00:02:25). The magical beliefs of the old members of the community and the magical occurrences in the narrative (e.g., the physical presence of the Unborn Child) connect Dash's film to magical realist stories from the twentieth century (LANG, 2020, p. 148; LABUDOVIC, 2003, p. 38) – particularly works focused on ontological magic and cultural identity (e.g., Toni Morrison's *Beloved* and Alejo Carpentier's *The Kingdom of this World*). The narrative approaches the cultural uniqueness of the community to evoke the postcolonial discourse of magical realism: while many members of the community seek to go north to the mainland, Dash's emphasis on "ghosts and the spiritual realm" and on characters who "stand in opposition to Eurocentric cultural forms" (LANG, 2020, p. 149) shapes the undermining of Western influences and the resistance to imperial and totalizing cultural systems.

Both Rohrwacher's and Dash's films exemplify the audiovisual representation of two conflicting worlds (see FARIS, 2004, p. 21). While *Happy as Lazzaro* explicitly juxtaposes the community's isolation with the contemporary world, *Daughters of the Dust* confronts the community's culture with the worldviews and technological objects from people from the mainland. The magic correspondingly inhabits the marginal, isolated worldview: similarly to the magical realist works of Angela Carter and Jeanette Winterson, Rohrwacher's and Dash's narratives attach the magical worldview to specific characters – mainly, Lazzaro and Nana Peazant (Cora Lee Day). *Daughters of the Dust* further explores this confrontation through the various perspective clashes between Eula Peazant (Alva Rogers) and Yellow Mary (Barbara O). In reaction to Eula's account of her mother's ghostly appearance, for instance, Yellow Mary responds with disdain and claims that the community lives like savages (DAUGHTERS, 00:42:59-00:45:56). The respective magical and empirical worlds in both films likewise represent the conflicting ideas of conservation and modernization and past and future. That is noticeable in Lazzaro's journey through rural and urban civilizations and in the generational divide following the opposing perspectives within the Peazant family.

The isolated and anachronous quality of the communities represented in both films correspondingly resonates with Anne Hegerfeldt's argument that magical realism uses "ex-centric focalizers" (see HEGERFELDT, 2005, p. 115). The aesthetic alignment with marginalized characters and spaces evinces that the audiovisual variant of magical realism adequately incorporated – at least in the films here analyzed – the political discourse inherent

to the textual structure of its literary counterpart. Both narratives present characters – especially Lazzaro and Nana Peazant – who struggle to have their worldviews taken seriously by contemporary and central society. These films likewise represent the globalization of the subversive quality of magical realism: as Italian and American film productions, they highlight the international status of the mode and demonstrate how effective the elements of magical realism might be to question established paradigms within different media and societies worldwide.

Within a variety of films that deal with history and present characteristics of magical realism, Lang (2020, p. 154) underscores that Emir Kusturica's *Underground* (1995) reveals "[t]he most sustained engagement with historicity in magical realist cinema." The film merges historical events of the former country Yugoslavia with the fictional story of a group of people kept underground for many years since World War II by one of their allies, who made them believe the war never ended. The underground group, which manufactures weapons to supposedly help their country in the war, develops unique cultural relations and worldviews – while many of them naturally forgot what the outside world looked like, Jovan (Srđan Todorović), the son of Blacky (Lazar Ristovski), one of the protagonists, was born underground and never experienced the exterior world. The unique raising of the boy resulted in his confusion to connect signifier to signified, as we notice in one of the most touching sequences in the film, where he mistakenly confuses the moon with the sun to later amuse himself with the warmth and brightness from the *real* sun. The anachronistic quality of the community constitutes the main magical realist feature in Kusturica's film and rhymes both with the Macondo residents in *One Hundred Years of Solitude* and with the communities in *Happy as Lazzaro* and *Daughters of the Dust*.

The "magical" in the film resonates with Carpentier's perception of the marvelous real and incorporates elements of the baroque[17] and the grotesque (SKRODZKA, 2012, p. 55). Skrodzka (*ibid.*) notices that Kusturica "recreates [the] exuberant energies [of Latin American magical realism] to tell the stories of the people and the region that, much like Latin America, consists of a transcultural mix of religions, ethnicities and temporalities." Kusturica renders the Balkan societies as unique and endowed with unconventional character traits: while bombs fall on Belgrade, both Blacky and his brother Marko (Predrag Manojlović) focus on respectively

[17] Skrodzka (2012, p. 55) refers to Carpentier's idea of the baroque (see CARPENTIER, 1995b): "[t]he baroque flight of fancy that characterises magic realism is [...] an appropriation of the surprises, absurdities and incongruities of a culture."

enjoying their breakfast and sexual pleasure. Paradoxically, Kusturica attributes the conventional reactions of fear and panic to animals in the city zoo – especially Soni, the monkey, who ultimately assumes a pivotal role in the narrative by controlling a war tank to explode the walls from the underground facility and expose the community to the exterior world. The film consequently incorporates and treats with excess the characteristics of the Balkan culture to present a "space where temporalities coexist and their recurrent clashing leads to a certain creative exaltation of affect and perception" (SKRODZKA, 2012, p. 55).

Skrodzka (2012) underlines that Kusturica's film connects the narrative to a magical realist framework to approach the ideas of marginality and periphery. The film assumes "grotesque and highly ironic dimensions, thus distancing itself from the norm" – that is, the center – consequently "[becoming] intentionally peripheral and [speaking] of this very peripherality (SKRODZKA, 2012, p. 55). She notices that Kusturica approaches the marginal condition of the community through a dual perspective, which is represented by the two wedding sequences between Jovan and Jelena (Milena Pavlović). The first, underground, corroborates the isolation and the roughness of the marginal condition; the second, under broad daylight, mimics the first to magically resuscitate dead characters and promote optimism (SKRODZKA, 2012, pp. 56-57). As suggested by Skrodzka (2012, p. 57), these two sequences "[contemplate] the nature of peripherality and its two opposing incarnations": while the underground wedding shows the marginal condition as a prison, the exterior celebration magically separated from the mainland renders the periphery literal to highlight the marginal condition as an expression of diversity and cultural identity (SKRODZKA, 2012, p. 58).

Kusturica's *Time of the Gypsies* (1988) likewise employs the discourse and aesthetics of magical realism to shed light on the marginal conditions of the Romani people, "whose nomadic lifestyle contradicts many of the key values of European citizenship" (SKRODZKA, 2012, p. 82). The film focuses on a Romani family living in the periphery of Sarajevo – Perhan (Davor Dujmović), the protagonist, his sister Danira (Elvira Sali), their uncle Merdžan (Husnija Hasimović) and their grandmother Hatidža (Ljubica Adžović). Kusturica highlights the uniqueness of their culture through the use of magic: while Hatidža has supernatural healing powers – which she uses to help the community – Perhan has the power of telekinesis and the ability to interact with certain animals. In consonance with the depiction of many communities within magical realist fiction – including the Gullah people (*Daughters of the Dust*), Big Indian (*What the Crow Said*) and Macondo (*One Hundred Years of Solitude*), Kusturica's film "undertakes not only the representation of contemporary Romani problems, but also delves

deeper into the heart of their community to reveal their social coda, their rituals and beliefs, and their mythical envisioning of the world" (LABUDOVIC, 2003, p. 69).

The film emphasizes the oppositional relationship between margins and center both through camerawork – as we perceive in shots capturing the Romani village with the modern Sarajevo in the background – and through the plot and characterization – as the artless Perhan goes to central Italy to later become a criminal involved in the traffic of Romani children (SKRODZKA, 2012, p. 159). Kusturica "carefully negotiates the existing [Western] stereotypes surrounding the most marginalised people of Europe," ultimately exploring the charisma of the Romani people to present a paradoxical portrayal "of miserable material conditions stand[ing] in dramatic contrast with the extravagant demeanour of every character" (SKRODZKA, 2012, p. 160). The highlighting of the Romani community's living conditions consequently represents both a denounce and preservation of their marginality: while the influence of contemporary "central" culture brings crime and death, the magic and liveliness of their culture contribute to celebrating the uniqueness of their community within the European tradition and to corroborating their "freedom and resistance to authority and institutional power" (LABUDOVIC, 2003, p. 73).

The dynamics between center and margins also reveal within "the manner in which Kusturica's film engages with other films in a rich intertextual dialogue" (SKRODZKA, 2012, p. 162). Skrodzka (*ibid*.) notices that Kusturica references "over forty different works belonging to a variety of cinematic traditions" – ranging from works by Western and Eastern directors. One can notice these references in particular scenes in the film, including the Charlie Chaplin show performed by Merdžan and Perhan's attempt to light Orson Welles's cigarette while observing the poster of *Citizen Kane* (1941). Kusturica accordingly combines magical realism and intertextuality "to renegotiate the relationship of peripheral cinema to the mainstream Hollywood/Western European centre" (SKRODZKA, 2012, p. 163): while presenting Western and Eastern references, he simultaneously appeals to universal spectatorship and approximates Western and Eastern traditions (SKRODZKA, 2012, p. 163). He consequently demonstrates his awareness of the world to subsequently incorporate and build "peripheral, [magical and unique] versions of the scenes, characters and locales borrowed from the sacred vaults of the history of Western cinema" (SKRODZKA, 2012, p. 163) – ultimately celebrating the culture and history of East Europe.

Both *Underground* and *Time of the Gypsies* blend elements of the carnivalesque, a concept theorized by Mikhail Bakhtin (1984) and a constitutive feature of Angela Carter's magical realist works (see BOWERS, 2004, and HEGERFELDT, 2005). The carnivalesque

atmosphere of both films imbues their narratives with constant festivities and music and corroborates the subversion of order and hierarchies (see BAKHTIN, 1984, and HEGERFELDT, 2005). *Underground* builds this atmosphere with groups of people dancing and singing within many sequences in the film – including both wedding celebrations and Blacky's abduction of Natalija (Mirjana Joković). The subversion of order ultimately becomes apparent through the inversion of expectations regarding humans and animals and by means of the attribution of the liberation of the underground community to a monkey. Similarly, *Time of the Gypsies* underscores some scenes with Perhan's performance on the accordion and employs the "carnivalesque sensibility […] to promote duality and ambiguity in the manner of viewing and representing the world" (SKRODZKA, 2012, p. 161). Skrodzka (*ibid.*) argues that the film reveals this sensibility through dream sequences – especially the St. George Day's festival scene, where the camera plunges from the sky into the crowd "to contest the stasis of represented reality." Kusturica's films ultimately combine the carnivalesque and magical realism to provide a new worldview and free us "from conventions and established truths" (BAKHTIN, 1984, p. 34).

Lang (2020, p. 30) correspondingly emphasizes that magical realism in cinema evokes the metafictional essence of its literary equivalent – as we mostly perceive in *The Passion*'s iconic phrase "I'm telling you stories. Trust me" (WINTERSON, 1987, p. 05) and in Aureliano's reading process at the end of *One Hundred Years of Solitude*. Spike Jonze's *Being John Malkovich* (1999) overtly illustrates the metafictional quality of magical realism through the story of Craig Schwartz (John Cusack), a puppeteer who is hired to work as a file clerk on the seventh-and-a-half floor of a corporate building, where he finds a portal that leads to the mind of the actor John Malkovich (interpreted by himself). Lang (2020, p. 105) notices that Jonze's film "uses an allegory about artistic creativity, performance, and the influence of celebrity on making art" to draw "attention to the filmmaking process itself and the constructed nature of film performances by actors." The film consequently thematizes Hollywood's stardom on a fictional level to subsequently emulate this process in reality: both Craig Schwartz and Spike Jonze benefit from puppeteering/directing John Malkovich to artistically build their careers and enjoy critical success (LANG, 2020, p. 106).

Jonze's *Being John Malkovich* moves away from historical approaches by carrying the subversiveness of the mode towards "the corporate culture and the consumerist society of spectacle of an American metropolis" (LABUDOVIC, 2003, p. 90). The "magic" of the film – mainly the absurd portal to John Malkovich's mind and a corporate environment where people have to walk bent on their back – consequently appears to be the most adequate way to represent

"a reality so outrageous that it verges on the unbelievable" (*ibid.*). The plot accordingly treats these absurdities as ordinary by making the portal become a corporate business through which people can pay to enjoy a fifteen-minute trip to John Malkovich's mind. Jonze's treatment of reality criticizes American corporate societies and their practices of "keep[ing] the employees cubicled off for extended exploitation all the while promoting the so-called 'out of the box' thinking" (LABUDOVIC, 2003, p. 98). The portal ultimately connects us to the American corporate mindset – in which puppeteers and 'John Malkoviches' engage in a game of exploitation and control.

The idea of control is immediately approached in the first scene of the film, where a lookalike puppet of the protagonist performs on a theatrical stage. While drawing attention to the "performative nature of the film" (LABUDOVIC, 2003, p. 92), this scene displays the confrontation between the puppet and himself – represented by a look in the mirror – when he suddenly becomes aware of his condition as a malleable doll. His awareness of his artificial nature likewise resonates with the artificiality of the audiovisual composition, which adds applauses and music to Craig's home puppeteering studio. This opening sequence epitomizes the metafictional quality of the film by paralleling Craig's control to Jonze's: the director controls the strings of the narrative and the audience's perspective and expectations (LABUDOVIC, 2003, p. 93). Jonze ultimately mirrors this relationship to a greater scale within the American corporate system to carry social criticism and highlight Americans' condition as puppets in the hands of corporations.

The literary feature of naturalization of magic manifests in the films abovementioned both through the conventions of film realism – as we will discuss in the next chapter – and by means of characters' reactions. The behavior of characters in face of supernatural/non-realist events reveals itself to be a literary and audiovisual device that simultaneously helps naturalize magical instances while sometimes promoting hesitation. Rohrwacher's *Happy as Lazzaro* exemplifies this dual function with people's reaction to Lazzaro's return and lack of aging: while some react with surprise to the fact that he looks the same and might be a ghost, they immediately demonstrate more real concerns regarding the possibility that they will have to share their food with one more individual. Jonze's *Being John Malkovich* and Kusturica's *Time of the Gypsies* similarly use characters' reactions to incorporate the non-realist elements of the films: while the company workers in Jonze's narrative unquestionably accept "[t]he unusual quality of the floor" (BOWERS, 2004, p. 109), the characters in Kusturica's film corroborate the paradoxical relationship between naturalization and hesitation by both accepting Perhan's power as a natural gift and reacting with astonishment to a can moved by his mind.

The analysis of characteristics of magical realism in cinema reveals that the audiovisual narratives often reject the abundance of magic that was characteristic of traditional magical realist texts in the twentieth century. Following the "northerly spare variety of the magical realist plant" (FARIS, 2004, p. 27), the films here analyzed contrast with the two indisputable examples of literary magical realism – *One Hundred Years of Solitude* and *Midnight's Children* – by presenting magical events with less frequency and quantity. In consonance with the works of Angela Carter and Jeanette Winterson, these films often save the magic "for special, defining moments," ultimately circumscribing it "within one character whose key presence in the narrative unavoidably marks it as magic realist" (LABUDOVIC, 2003, p. 38). That is noticeable in *Happy as Lazzaro* and *Daughters of the Dust*, as already mentioned, and in *Time of the Gypsies* and *Being John Malkovich*, which respectively restrict the magic to two characters – Perhan and Hatidža – and to an incident in the story world – the magical portal leading to John Malkovich's mind.

Labudovic (2003, p. 38) attributes the occasional magic of magical realism in audiovisual narratives to the particularities of the film medium: "[t]he magical has to be tightly controlled and carefully placed," because the mere transposition of the abundant literary magic to the screen "might be overwhelming, leave an impression of mere quirkiness, and possibly reverse the magical effect." Cinema consequently transformed – especially with original stories – the relationship between the real and the unreal from literature to present an unbalanced portrayal of natural and supernatural – in which the latter subtly intertwines with the matter-of-fact representation of the world. Labudovic (2003, p. 39) argues that this unbalanced relationship is compensated by "[t]he abundance of stimuli that is inherent to the medium of film," consequently "[endowing] those magical moments with prominence."

The less frequent use of magic accordingly contributes to sparse moments of literalization/allegory. Kusturica's *Underground* notably employs this process in two scenes. In the first scene, Jovan drowns in the sea and subsequently swims in the company of his wife Jelena, who likewise drowned in the underground well. The film renders visual their afterlife encounter, which materializes before the viewer's eyes to simultaneously support the literal, visual interpretation and the allegorical, symbolical one. In the second scene, all the characters reunite to celebrate Jovan and Jelena's wedding in the afterlife. While they drink and sing, the piece of land where they stand separates itself and drifts away from the mainland, ultimately constituting a visual representation of their marginal condition and uniqueness – once again supporting both literal and allegorical possibilities. The portal in *Being John Malkovich* correspondingly presents literal and allegorical interpretations. Labudovic (2003, p. 113) argues

that this magical incident "can be ultimately viewed as a portal to Jonze's and [screenwriter] Kaufman's world," as well as can constitute "a metaphor for the medium of film."

The investigation of magical realism in cinema inevitably takes us back to different literary traditions – from Latin American literature in the middle of the twentieth century to the subsequent anglophone variations of magical realism worldwide. While many of the aesthetic and political characteristics of the mode in these literary works find similar correspondences in film, some aspects of magical realism might work differently both from an aesthetic perspective (e.g., the less prominent use of magic) and from a political point-of-view (e.g., approaches to American consumerism or, as suggested by Rachel Mariboho [2016] and analyzed in the third chapter, the focus on contemporary discussions regarding politics and environment). The manifestation of the characteristics of magical realism in cinema likewise presupposes a relationship with realism that is different from that which we perceive in literary traditions. In consonance with the history and particularities of the film medium, the oxymoronic nature of magical realism assumes in cinema slightly different aesthetic and political significations.

2.2 Film reality and magical realism

The relationship between magical realism and exterior reality underwent modifications throughout the development of the concept. Franz Roh's (1995) theorization initially conceived magical realism as a response to the abstractness of Expressionism. In that perspective, magical realism originally imbued its aesthetic discourse with the valorization of the concrete and the real. Roh's theoretical concerns, however, did not keep pace with the subsequent application of his concept to literature. Literary magical realism subverted Roh's critique of the abstractness of Expressionism to shift the focus of criticism to a different direction: in literature, magical realism assumed an aesthetic and political discourse against the realist tradition, whose constitutive elements depended on the idea of concrete and truthful representation. While the literary qualities of magical realism are efficiently recognized within audiovisual media, the unique aesthetic and political bases of magical realism in cinema seem to be of difficult comprehension. Cinema employs a variety of narrative techniques, which likewise evolved/changed throughout the history of the medium and contributed to undermining a homogeneous categorization of reality and its representation.

The aesthetics of realism is part of human history: Robert Stam (2000, p. 72) argues that this aesthetics "could trace its roots to the ethical stories of the Bible, to the Greek Fascination with surface detail, to Hamlet's 'mirror up to nature,' on through the realist novel and

Stendhal's 'un miroir que se promene lelong la rue." The realist idea of representation, which followed the artistic manifestations throughout human history, likewise represented a matter of debate within the film medium. Stam (2000, p. 72) notices that the matter of realism constituted one of the arguments underlying theories for the "essence of cinema." According to these theories, the "artistic specificity" and the social purpose of film "was to relay truthful representations of everyday life," as opposed to those arguing for cinema's artificiality and "radical differences from reality" (*ibid.*).

André Bazin (2005, p. 34, originally published in 1967) considered cinema essentially realist and attributed the objectivity of film to the mechanical procedures of image reproduction. Having his basis on photography, Bazin contends that camera lenses allow images to be "formed automatically, without the creative intervention of man" (*ibid.*). He accordingly details a pure relationship between subject and object, in which "[t]he personality of the photographer enters into the proceedings only in his selection of the object to be photographed and by way of the purpose he has in mind" (*ibid.*). Photography – and, to some extent, cinema – constitutes, for Bazin, a unique form of art devoid of human intervention. The automatic processing and the (apparent) lack of human interference contributes to the credibility of the photographic image: according to him, while literature and painting depend on stylistic measures to convince and create verisimilitude, photography and cinema force us "to accept as real the existence of the object reproduced" and more easily produce credibility due to "this transference of reality from the thing to its reproduction" (BAZIN, 2005, p. 35)[18].

Bazin believed that realism – which the dynamics of photography initially corroborated – was one of the obsessions of those who conceptually invented cinema (STAM, 2000, p. 75; BAZIN, 2005, p. 40). The precursors of the seventh art "saw the cinema as a total and complete representation of reality, […] the reconstruction of a perfect illusion of the outside world in sound, color and relief" – to which he refers as the "myth of total cinema" (BAZIN, 2005, p. 40, 43). The human search for realism ultimately "dominated in a more or less vague fashion all the techniques of the mechanical reproduction of reality in the nineteenth century" (BAZIN, 2005, p. 43). Consequently, the technological advances of the medium – sound, color and editing – represented the realization of those who conceived the functioning of film in their imaginations and served as a "progression towards an ever-more persuasive realism" (STAM, 2000, p. 75).

[18] This ontological perception has been criticized on the basis that "both the cinema's apparatus and mainstream narrative practice precluded it from generating objective knowledge about the world" (ELSAESSER, 2009, p. 05).

Stam (2000, p. 142) further notices that "[t]he most conventional definitions of realism make claims about verisimilitude, the putative adequation of a fiction to the facticity of the world." Accordingly, "other definitions stress the differential aspirations of an author or school to forge a *relatively* more truthful representation" (STAM, 2000, p. 142). Within a formal point of view, realism is "a constellation of stylistic conventions that, at a given moment in the history of an art, manage, through the fine-tunning of illusionistic technique, to crystallize a strong *feeling* of authenticity" (*ibid.*). The illusory quality of realism was criticized by Bazin (2005, p. 49), who considered the manipulation of the image – whether resulting from editing or from visual elements – an obstacle that concealed what reality could truthfully reveal. Other authors and movements (e.g., Siegfried Kracauer, Italian neorealism and Brazilian Cinema Novo) likewise established a variety of formal and social principles to qualify realism and uncover or produce verisimilar representations.

The theoreticians on film realism and the movements discoursing on the subject correspondingly share the intention to conceive a type of realism opposed to that of "classical cinema" or "the classic realist text" (STAM, 2000, p. 143). Stam (*ibid.*) explains that "[t]hese terms denote a set of formal parameters involving practices of editing, camerawork, and sound which promote the appearance of spatial and temporal continuity." Bazin (2005, p. 54) identified some of these conventions in Hollywood films of the 1930s, which depended on the montage to forcefully present reality to the viewer (e.g., through establishing shot to medium shot or by means of shot-reverse-shot in dialogue scenes). Stam (2000, p. 143) further includes within this spectrum the conventions to denote the passage of time (e.g., dissolving transition), the editing and positioning techniques to conceal the cuts and present a smooth image to the viewer and the narrative devices to denote subjectivity (e.g., "eyeline matches" and "subjective shots").

Stam (2000, p. 143) argues that "the classical fiction film acquired the emotional power and diegetic prestige of the realist novel, whose social function and aesthetic regime it prolonged." To support his claim, he resorts to the work of Colin MacCabe (1985), which analyzes the classic realist text within the context of film and literature. MacCabe (1985, p. 34) defines the classic realist text "as one in which there is a hierarchy amongst the discourses which compose the text," correspondingly stating that "this hierarchy is defined in terms of an empirical notion of truth." Stam (2000, p. 143-144) draws on MacCabe's hierarchical structure to argue that the classic realist text conveys an "authoritarian stance toward the spectator," which "pervades the formulaic conventions of orthodox film technique," some of which are mentioned above (HEATH, 1981, apud STAM, 2000, p. 144). These conventions contribute to

producing a smooth representation of reality – one in which we are guided by the hand to witness a consistent and illusory version of our world.

The film practices that oppose the classic realist text reveal an attempt to improve the representational quality of cinema. Bazin (2005, p. 46) identified this effort in the qualities of the works by directors who "put their faith in reality." He especially refers to the advancement in the use of depth of field and long-take shots during the 1940s: contrary to the common editing principles of the narratives of the previous decade (which fall under the umbrella of classic realism), the production of films in the 1940s – particularly after Orson Welles's *Citizen Kane* (1941) – focused on the "continuity of dramatic space" to "create a multi-plane sense of reality in relief" (BAZIN, 2005, p. 56; STAM, 2000, p. 76). Bazin (2005, p. 54) argues that the use of depth of field allowed filmmakers to explore the dramatic effects from the actors' movements and balance the duration of the shot with that of the action. This represented, for Bazin, a rebirth of film realism: "depth of focus brings the spectator into a relation with the image closer to that which he enjoys with reality" and demands active participation from the viewer to follow the action within the frame (BAZIN, 2005, p. 57).

The search for truth and reality permeated the Italian neorealist films in the twentieth century. Vittorio De Sica, Roberto Rossellini, Luchino Visconti and many other neorealist directors held in common a narrative style that rejected the artificial look of German Expressionism and "shunned the montage techniques favored by Soviet directors" (NICHOLS, 2001, p. 92). The neorealist filmmakers evoked the ontological realism of cinema – the photographic truth of the camera lens – by focusing on a variety of narrative and production practices. These conventions included "a casual, unadorned view of everyday life; a meandering, coincidence-laden series of actions and events; natural lighting and location shooting; a reliance on untrained actors a rejection of close-ups doting on the faces of stars; […]" (NICHOLS, 2001, p. 92). The discourse imbued with neorealist aesthetics presupposed that "the interests of the different social classes do not necessarily coincide" and that reality reveals itself through the eyes of lower-class protagonists inhabiting "regional, provincial settings" (LAWTON, 1979, p. 09).

The beliefs and conventions of Italian neorealism likewise "contributed to the continuing development" of documentary practices (NICHOLS, 2001, p. 92). One can notice this in the qualities of observational documentaries (e.g., *Primary*, 1960 and *High School*, 1968), whose artistic intentions involved the free movement of the camera through the scene to

record life in its raw state (NICHOLS, 2001, p 109)[19]. Observational cinema took realism to its extreme: these films reverberate Bazin's idea of photography as a process without human intervention to advocate for the least possible interference from the documentary filmmaker in the scene. This implies that observational films often register a moving camera that is "invisible" to the social actors and merely "watches," without the resource of interviews or related processes, these actors living their lives, engaging in interpersonal conflicts and revealing aspects of their individuality (NICHOLS, 2001, p. 111). The aesthetics of observational films – often comprehending handheld cameras and long takes – evokes the nature of realism and is noticeable, to some extent, in a variety of documentary and fiction films (e.g., *Grey Gardens*, 1975, *The Celebration*, 1998, and *The Blair Witch Project*, 1999).

The realist tradition has accordingly reverberated within the context of different cinemas worldwide – "[s]ince Italian neorealism, new waves, partly or entirely committed to revelatory realism, have emerged in France, Japan, Britain and India from the late 1950s, in Eastern Europe and Latin America in the 1960s, and in Germany in the 1960s-70s" (NAGIB and MELLO, 2009, p. xiv). Realism ultimately found its revival during the 1990s, especially after Dogme 95 (*ibid.*), a movement created by Danish directors Thomas Vinterberg and Lars von Trier. The manifesto for the movement displayed a variety of rules aiming to increase realism and convey the "essence of cinema." These rules included orientations for the production and aesthetics of the films, such as shooting on location, filming with handheld cameras and rejecting the use of artificial lights. The conventions explored by Dogme 95 and other film practices around the globe (e.g., Abbas Kiarostami's and Tsai Ming-liang's films) consequently point to a contemporary trend of cinematic realism and reveal the existence of diversified aesthetics – ranging from handheld shots to fixed frames with depth of field.

Lúcia Nagib and Cecília Mello (2009, p. xv) argue that the novelty of contemporary realist cinema "is its obstinate adherence to realism when all odds would point to its succumbing to the virtual lures of the digital." They notice that technology paradoxically has worked in favor of "the recording of real locations and characters" and "the application of techniques traditionally identified with realism, such as the long take so cherished by Bazin" (NAGIB and MELLO, 2009, p. xv). The technological improvement in image stabilization and the advancements in the controlling of focus allowed filmmakers to rely more confidently on long takes and "fulfil Bazin's most extravagant dreams of spatial continuity" (*ibid.*). Thomas

[19] It is relevant to notice that Bazin builds his argument for film realism from the works of early directors, including Robert J. Flaherty, whose seminal documentary film *Nanook of the North* (1922) highly influenced the perception of realism both in film fiction and documentary.

Elsaesser (2009, p. 03-04) correspondingly connects this new realism to "world cinema directors" (e.g., Wong Kar-Wai, Apichatpong Weerasethakul and Carlos Reygadas), whose works "are integral to the transnational film festival circuit, focused notably on Cannes and Berlin" and who often "have an ambiguous relation both to their indigenous film culture and the national film industry."

The contemporary realist tradition has likewise been increasingly combining fantasy and magic with realist narratives (see NAGIB and MELLO, 2009, p. xxi). Elsaesser (2009, p. 09) notices that this tendency often "engage[s] a point of view and identif[ies] a portal or entry point that no longer takes for granted the centrality of the human agent," correspondingly "featuring protagonists whose view of the world is different" – whether as a result of physical or mental disabilities or of extrasensory qualities. This "new realism" consequently shows the world "as having special properties": "[r]elations are different, distance and proximity take on equally dangerous features, temporal registers no longer line up, terrible or miraculous things can happen" (ELSAESSER, 2009, p. 09). Elsaesser (*ibid.*) further argues that many of the films connected to this contemporary tendency reveal a mutual relationship between the protagonists and the spectator "about accepting as given or 'normal' what on the face of it is psychologically aberrant or impossible according to the laws of physics."

This "contract" between the audience and the work and the use of protagonists carrying different perspectives resonate with characteristics belonging to what we understand as magical realism so far – namely, the naturalization of non-realist, supernatural elements and the use of "ex-centric" focalizers (see BOWERS, 2004, p. 115). Indeed, some of the films Elsaesser (2009, p. 09) refers to as examples of this trend – e.g., *Pan's Labyrinth* (2006) and *Perfume* (2006)[20] – have already been mentioned or analyzed under the umbrella of magical realism (see LANG, 2020). Mello (2015, p. 24) accordingly acknowledges the current tendency of incorporating "magic" within the scope of realism by conceiving the term 'phantasmagoric realism,'[21,22] which she applies to the contemporary cinema of East Asia. These contemporary tendencies ultimately reveal that film directors have been (consciously or not) engaging with many aesthetic and discursive elements of magical realism, consequently establishing a productive network between past and future, literature and cinema.

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[20] Adaptation of the eponymous magical realist novel by Patrick Süskind.

[21] Original: 'realismo fantasmagórico.'

[22] Although acknowledging approximating points between phantasmagoric realism and "magical realism' in the Latin American literature of the twentieth century" ["realismo mágico na literatura latino-americana do século XX] and its "intersemiotic translations" [traduções intersemióticas], she argues that 'phantasmagoric realism' does not distance itself from reality in the same way as magical realism does. (MELLO, 2015, p. 24).

The practices of realism throughout the history of cinema encompass different film movements and conventions, varied aesthetics and structures, and a somewhat common discourse: the "true" realism dwells on ideas that the dominant film stream – notably Hollywood – often could not/is not willing to contemplate. That is probably why we commonly find examples of realist films within the context of Europe or developing countries (or even in the United States, but often connected to independent productions): "our notions of non-Hollywood filmmaking are generally tied to some version of a realist aesthetics" (ELSAESSER, 2009, p. 03). As opposed to the realist tradition in literature, these kinds of realism – that dispute the classic realist text disseminated by Hollywood – have never been dominant. They share with magical realism a condition of marginality (not necessarily in terms of geography, but in terms of discourse) in that they employ mechanisms to undermine the central and prevailing perspective on reality.

It is reasonable that magical realism, whose aesthetics and politics align with the margins, would comfortably associate with the ideas of at least some of the realist film practices outlined above – particularly the contemporary tradition. Elsaesser (2009, p. 05) explains that the current realism no longer trusts the image – the visual reality, as we understand it, does not account for the representation of the world. Magical realism accordingly undermines that representation: while engaging with extrasensory/supernatural qualities – powerful protagonists, magical spaces and enchanted beliefs – the film variation of the mode tends to incorporate parts of the aesthetics of realist film traditions. Magical realism consequently explores "the ontological firmness found in the material fabric of the experiential world and captured in the photographic image" to present "the unceasing dissolution of that inevitability" (SKRODZKA, 2012, p. 125).

The visual presentation of magical realism in the films here analyzed mainly dwells on the characteristics outlined by the theories and movements supporting a realist tradition – including Bazin's long takes and deep focus and Vintergberg and von Trier's handheld cameras, natural lighting and locations. By combining realist techniques with the long-believed ontological quality of the film image, these films efficiently naturalize the supernatural without much effort: "[t]he supernatural is easily made believable by the compelling nature of the image" (LABUDOVIC, 2003, p. 36), because photography (and the film camera) "produces an image that is a reality of nature" (BAZIN, 2005, p. 37). The audiovisual and realist qualities of magical realism in film consequently account for the typical matter-of-fact presentation of magic: the objectivity of realist cinema often helps to render non-realist events with sobriety and ultimately contributes to producing an intellectual effect – as opposed to the emotional

variants of fantasy or horror, which might as well engage with some realist tendencies (see ELSAESSER, 2009, p. 09).

Julie Dash's *Daughters of the Dust* (1991) uses the realist aesthetics as a framework to introduce magic and "[give] texture to a recognizable landscape that has been home to generations of Africans since the first slavers arrived from Africa in the New World" (ALDAMA, 2003, p. 45). Filmed in St. Helena Island in South Carolina (US), the film was shot mainly under natural light, which "lent a spontaneous quality to the filmmaking and promoted a responsiveness to the natural environment" (POZO, 2013, p. 429). Diana Pozo (2013, p. 428) notices that the use of natural light produces "a form of color design that, rather than separating particular colors, or imagining colors as unchanging and/or separate from their objects, portrays colors as liquid, flowing into and around one another" – as we perceive in the influence of "the sky, the trees, or other surroundings" on the color of the sea and the characters' white dresses. This fluidity of color – somewhat evoking Dash's interchanging between realism and magic and contrasting with Jameson's (1986) personal interpretation of magical realism – constitutes one of the bases for Dash's challenge of Western notions: while adhering to realist principles, the visual look of the film confronts Hollywood's use of color as separation "between important and unimportant objects" and Western studios' attempts to "mimic nature in an artificial setting" (POZO, 2013, p. 429).

The introduction of the Unborn Child (Kai-Lynn Warren) as a voice-over narrator in Dash's narrative consequently accounts for the eventual dissolution of the realism of the film image: while the content itself might be inherently realist – a child – the film resorts to the mechanisms of audiovisual language to highlight the subject's supernatural layer. In that perspective, the slow-motion presentation of the Unborn Child and the visual portrayal of her interactions with other community members account for the internal "contradictions" within magical realism – mainly between realism and fantasy – and explicitly reveal the magical perspective of the narrative. Frederick Luis Aldama (2003, p. 48) notices that the Unborn Child functions as a bridge between both codes of magical realism: "the visual and auditory tracks work in unison with the Ibo Island characters' real interaction with the magical within the storyworld." Dash ultimately fuses "unreal/real representations" by connecting the voice-over narration and supernatural appearances of the Unborn Child to the camerawork – which often constitutes the point-of-view of the child and visually presents a real, concrete world (ALDAMA, 2003, p. 49).

In addition to the presentation of the supernatural – the spiritual depiction of a child yet to be born – Laura Gaither (1996, p. 109) emphasizes that the non-realist quality of the slow-

motion shots makes them “[act] as a telescope, lengthening time.” The use of slow-motion consequently breaks with realist conventions of space and time: by showing what our eyes could not normally see, Dash’s slow-motion introduces subjects outside the fictional present of the narrative – namely, the Unborn Child and the enslaved ancestors (*ibid.*). The slow-motion alterations of space and time contrast with the realist, fixed time frame of the narrative, which is introduced at the beginning of the film as the year 1902, to present viewers with “new space, new time, new movement” (*ibid.*). The visual storytelling of the film consequently bridges not only the codes of magical realism but also our notions of present and future and the characters’ secular and spiritual worlds.

Alice Rohrwacher’s *Happy as Lazzaro* likewise employs realist conventions to capture the community of Inviolata almost as a documentary: shot in Super 16mm, the film evokes the legacy of 16mm handheld cameras in observational documentaries and uses high apertures to produce depth of field. The camerawork and the sharp-focused frames allow the viewer to plunge into the scene and get a glimpse of the lives of the different peasants and farmers in the community. As many of these working people – including Lazzaro – are non-professional actors, Rohrwacher’s film reveals, in consonance to Italian neorealism in the 1940s, a strong tendency towards realism and the depiction of the struggles of working-class or rural populations. Maria Gimènez Cavallo (2021, p. 03) correspondingly places Rohrwacher’s film within a tradition of contemporary Italian filmmakers who shoot “on film stock” and “follow a docu-fiction style” to “explore a transcendental, post-humanist, poetic form of cinema.”

This realist framework constitutes a solid ground encompassing the “magical waters” in the film, as “[t]he river of magical realism runs through the film like the one that traps the characters in their insular Inviolata world” (MULLINEUX, 2019, par. 06). The supernatural elements of *Happy as Lazzaro* undoubtedly challenge the laws of nature and do not greatly depend on special effects or similar audiovisual devices: Lazzaro’s lack of aging following his miraculous survival purely manifests itself in contrast to the aging of other protagonists, and other magical instances – such as the diegetic song that follows the characters out of church (HAPPY, 01:54:00-01:55:20) – accordingly are made possible through simple narrative devices. Rohrwacher’s treatment of realism – mainly through camerawork, acting and themes – ultimately provides enough elements to the incorporation of the central miracle of the film and its derivative magical moments as part of Italian reality.

Emir Kusturica’s films likewise incorporate magical instances within the aesthetics of realist traditions. *Time of the Gypsies* closely follows the inspirations of Italian neorealism to realistically depict the Romani community – Kusturica used non-professional actors and

explored long takes and depth of field to invite the spectator into the scenes (KARTAL, 2012, p. 366). The opening sequence of the film – a ruined Romani marriage and a man's speech – culminates in a scene where the camera captures the Romani life in a shot of approximately two minutes and a half: moving through different community members, the camera shows their houses, their relations with animals, their music (which accordingly underscores the scene) and their gambling practices (TIME, 00:02:12-00:04:30). Kusturica's portrayal of the Romani life reveals "a primal setting of a poverty stricken community" – a "setting in which incessant winds blow is steeped in mud, washed by rain, and brimming with animals and people" (LABUDOVIC, 2003, p. 66).

The magical events in *Time of the Gypsies* accordingly inhabit Kusturica's realist *mise-en-scène*. The scene in which Perhan demonstrates his power of telekinesis while moving a can with his mind makes use of editing and depth of field: a close-up of Perhan and his girlfriend intercalates with a shot of the can moving in the foreground and a drunk man in the background – where both subjects are sharp-focused. Kusturica's use of depth of field consequently evokes Bazin's (2005, p. 57) idea that "independently of the contents of the image, its structure is more realistic" to capture an apparent magical event within a realist framework. Similarly, the wedding scene where Perhan takes revenge against Ahmed conveys realism in a long take of more than two minutes. While moving through the space, the camera captures Perhan sneaking through the guests to get closer to Ahmed and subsequently being sent away by one of his guards. Kept far from Ahmed, Perhan uses his powers to stick a fork in Ahmed's neck. (TIME, 02:11:05-02:13:19). This scene pushes the realist depiction of a magical event to the extreme: as there are no cuts, Kusturica highlights the ambiguity of the film image by introducing a non-realist event within the spatial and temporal continuity of the action.

Kusturica correspondingly uses depth of field and natural light in the final scene of *Underground*. Skrodzka (2012, p. 59) argues that the magic inherent in the floating piece of land "supplements the end of the film with a magic realist correction of the dark vision that dominated the screen till those final moments" – where shadows and violence were part of the audiovisual composition. The visual layer of the scene brings the camerawork of the rest of the film to a new setting – on a natural location and under the bright of the sun – and "flaunts the limitations of realistic representation" (SKRODZKA, 2012, p. 60). The scene opens with a shot of cows in a river to subsequently cut to a wider shot, where we see the cows climbing to the land in the foreground and the wedding celebration between Jovan and Jelena in the background. Other shots of the scene continue to show different characters sharp-focused and surrounded by nature until a piece of the island suddenly drifts away from the mainland.

Kusturica's realist way of filming these moments ultimately contributes to rendering this magical and possible metaphorical scene literally – and perhaps even more realistically than the rest of the film (see SKRODZKA, 2012, p. 59).

Out of the films analyzed in the previous section, Jonze's *Being John Malkovich* is the one that less clearly engages with realist traditions. While carrying elements of literary magical realism and setting the story in *our* world, Jonze's visual storytelling mixes aspects of the classic realist text – such as the more traditional shot-reverse-shots and greater dependence on montage – with aspects of the more peripheral use of realism – including the use of handheld camera and depth of field. The subversiveness of Jonze's visual aesthetics seems to fall on how he uses the film medium to undermine "the distinction between fiction and reality, representation and simulation, true self and mimetic copy" (LAWTOO, 2019, p. 118). The camera in *Being John Malkovich* consequently provides a visual and realistic representation of the impossible: the opening scene, for instance, frames Craig's puppeteering show and the acting of his puppet as a *real* actor in a *real* theater. Lawtoo (2019, p. 122) argues that the camera lens in Jonze's film "[urges] *us* to reflect *on* the relation between fiction and reality, self and other, being oneself and becoming someone other."

In comparison with the visual realism of the films abovementioned, *Being John Malkovich* seems to shift the focus towards perceptual realism (LANGKJÆR, 2010). The film consequently uses sound and image to provide realistic details – an illusory perception of reality often criticized by Bazin – to events that defy our empirical understanding. That is mainly noticeable in the scenes where the characters are in John Malkovich's mind. Jonze conveys with these scenes the idea that someone is literally inside John Malkovich's head: the camera presents the characters' point-of-view with a vignette around the frame and the sound editing muffles sounds coming from the exterior of Malkovich's body. Jonze's treatment of sound and image ultimately contributes to naturalizing these non-realist occurrences within the realist setting and framework of the narrative.

The investigation of magical realism in the films abovementioned reveals the cross-media complexities of this concept and why it is difficult – and somewhat ambitious – to read magical realism as a single and homogeneous category. In consonance with the literary version of the mode, which does not display a homogeneous trend of aesthetic and political discourses, the elements of magical realism in cinema can be identified in a variety of films presenting different formal and political characteristics. Despite the idiosyncrasies of the films here analyzed, one can notice a tendency towards subversion: whether incorporating the subversive aesthetics of European realist traditions or criticizing the classic realism "from the inside," these

films display “reactions to mainstream realist film style” as disseminated by the Hollywood film practices in the twentieth century (LANG, 2020, p. 93). Magical realism in cinema consequently adapts the subversiveness of its literary counterpart: while literature employed the central realist aesthetics as a means of critique, the films here analyzed add to the formula the possibility of incorporating film traditions that are already “anti-central” to approach contemporary themes and undermine traditional ideas of visual representation.

3. BEASTS OF THE SOUTHERN WILD

3.1 Voices from the margins

Benh Zeitlin's feature film *Beasts of the Southern Wild* (2012) combines many of the aesthetic and political elements of magical realism analyzed in the previous chapters of this thesis. As an American product from the twenty-first century, Zeitlin's film illustrates how magical realism can merge literary traits from the twentieth century with the concerns and environmental issues of contemporary societies. The film employs the magical realist discourse and aesthetics to approach the social and ecological consequences of "a recently experienced traumatic event" – Hurricane Katrina in the United States[23] – and "depict current anxieties related to representations of race, gender, climate change, and government injustices" (MARIBOHO, 2016, p. 131). The "central" geography of Zeitlin's film helps us investigate in detail how contemporary and audiovisual magical realism adapts, as some literary works have already done, the strict postcolonial discourse of the mode to convey a broader – and, to some extent, problematic – subversion within the context of unequal and globalized societies.

Adapted from Lucy Alibar's play *Juicy and Delicious* (2012), the film presents a marginalized community living in a flooded area called the Bathtub – "an isolated bayou of Louisiana cut off from the inland by a levee built by the mainlanders to protect their land" (MARIBOHO, 2016, p. 133). The plot follows the struggles of Hushpuppy (Quvenzhané Wallis) and her father Wink (Dwight Henry) as they adapt to live in a world of environmental crisis and social inequality. The narrative focuses primarily on Hushpuppy and her necessity to face the world by herself – as her mother has been absent since she was a baby and her father is deadly sick. Hushpuppy's lonely condition consequently gives rise to her imagination: the child's vision of prehistoric aurochs realistically intercalates throughout the narrative and embeds the film with metaphorical and magical significations.

Miriam Strube (2015) intertextually connects the setting of Zeitlin's film to Wallace Stevens's poem "The Man on the Dump" (1997). Similarly to Stevens's poem, the film approaches the Bathtub as a lively "dump amidst nature" that is not perceived altogether negatively by the members of the community (STRUBE, 2015, p. 43). According to Strube (2015, p. 44), "[i]n showing this marginalized community on a dump, the film renders visible how not only discarded objects but people as well can be judged or turned into trash by

[23] Although the film never explicitly mentions Hurricane Katrina, the interpretation that the storm depicted in the film corresponds to the real-life event is predominant among the critical discourse (see STRUBE, 2015, and MARIBOHO, 2016).

mainstream society." By depicting the paradoxical relationship of the community with the Bathtub, the narrative – in consonance with the social representations in Emir Kusturica's *Underground* and *Time of the Gypsies* – simultaneously highlights and denounces the community's marginality.

The film overtly shows the peripheral condition of the Bathtub through the *mise-en-scène*: while "set on a muddy, tiny island in the Mississippi Delta that is shown to be just one levee away from being under water" (STRUBE, 2015, p. 47), the film captures the Bathtub in visual contrast with a modern and urban city in the background (BEASTS, 00:04:11-00:04:17). Consistent with the dynamics between margins and center that is inherent to magical realism (e.g., in García Márquez's *One Hundred Years of Solitude* and Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*), Zeitlin's film presents the Bathtub in visual, social and political confrontation with the modern society. According to Hushpuppy, the levee represents more than a physical division: "up above the levee, on the dry side, they're afraid of the water like a bunch of babies" (BEASTS, 00:04:40-00:04:49). This confrontation highlights not only the community's unity and uniqueness but also the idea of non-interference and alternative/non-empirical truths, of "how rationalism and science alone cannot adequately account for the human experience of the world" (HEGERFELDT, 2002, p. 64).

Stephanie Rountree (2015, p. 08) draws from Joseph Roach's (1996) analysis of spatial relations to emphasize that the levee constitutes a boundary defining "the center of a space relative to the wild frontier as the outermost boundary." The "positionalities in the film" consequently reveal the narrative representation of neocolonial relations: the center corresponds to the American empire – made up of those holding political and economic power to build a wall that "cuts [the southern people] off" (ROUNTREE, 2015, p. 08-09; BEASTS, 00:04:50-00:04:54). Rountree (2015, p. 08) argues that "[t]he Bathtub's positionality beyond the levee organizes its spatial epistemology in relation to the world north of the levee, for through the northern land's dominant oppositional relationship, Hushpuppy's home is defined as the wild, subaltern Other." This antithetical relationship renders visible the nuanced neocolonial practices of exploitation practiced by the United States (e.g., lack of social support and denial of economic resources to parcels of the population) and the Bathtub's unique cultural structure (ROUNTREE, 2015, p. 10).

The alternative discourse of the community becomes apparent both in their way of life and in their rejection of American intervention. The Bathtub overtly rejects the scientific and dominant worldview throughout the film: as the government demands the evacuation of the area and the medical treatment of members of the community, the inhabitants initially refuse to

leave their home and, after they are taken to the mainland, plot to escape the shelter hospital and go back to the Bathtub (BEASTS, 01:06:26-01:09:18). The community's stand against the dominant discourse resonates with the idea that modernization and technological advancement contribute to destabilizing the structures of peripheral communities. One can notice that in *One Hundred Years of Solitude* – in the event of the destruction of Macondo as the indirect result of external influence – and in *Midnight's Children* – through the social and political consequences resulting from British dominance over India. Similarly, Alice Rohrwacher's *Happy as Lazzaro* demonstrates how the "rescue" of people from the margins by the center might only reproduce the peripheral condition within the context of the modern world, to the point that the characters in the film dream of coming back to Inviolata (HAPPY, 01:55:30-01:56:20).

The Bathtub community repudiates central intervention to attempt to conserve their worldview and cultural practices, something the "dry world" seems to ignore as Hushpuppy has her hair, and consequently "her culture and life," "tamed" while she is in the hospital (BURKE, 2019, p. 71). The world of the Bathtub is one of the two adjacent worlds that conventionally characterize magical realist fiction (see FARIS, 2004, p. 21) – it is a world of "magic and junk, joy and mourning, excess and awareness," where the inhabitants "are surrounded by wilderness and animals and earth, making good use of obsolete objects from the other side of the levee" that separates both worlds (STRUBE, 2015, p. 47). The community is consequently not only physically separated from the mainland by the levee but is also culturally isolated: besides being only noticed by the American authorities after Hushpuppy explodes part of the levee, their world, as Hushpuppy says, is a world with neither "fish stuck in plastic wrappers" nor "babies stuck in carriages" (BEASTS, 00:06:10-00:06:17).

While the film displays the community "as an alternative to mainstream culture, living and surviving on thrown-away objects, in close connection to nature (including animals that are both food and friends), and on self-made liquor" (STRUBE, 2015, p. 47), it also underlines that the often joyful spirit of the members of the Bathtub is a strategy of coping with exclusion and isolation – a somewhat romanticized portrayal that will be further explored in this section. As a counterbalance to this controversial depiction of the community, the film also focuses on the Bathtub's "subtle irritation": "[t]he community is not shown as altogether happy; most of the community's members – including Hushpuppy – are shown drinking alcohol or getting drunk" (STRUBE, 2015, p. 47). The film representation of the Bathtub community consequently attempts to expose the complexities of their peripheral condition within the context of a world where the limits between periphery and center are often enforced.

As a portrayal of the southern marginality, Hushpuppy – whom Veronica Barnsley (2016) categorizes as a postcolonial child – carries the peripheral worldview and serves as a postcolonial lens to analyze how "vectors of racial, economic, and environmental relations intersect" in the film (BARNSLEY, 2016, p. 240). Hushpuppy's journey and possibly her imagination trigger the interplay between the marginal (and magical) worldview and the ecological fate of the Earth, ultimately resembling the relationship between the life of Saleem and the future of India in *Midnight's Children*. This begins with Miss Bathsheba's (Gina Montana) discourse on aurochs and the future of the planet: "[i]ce caps gonna melt, water is gonna rise, and everything south of the levee is going under" (BEASTS, 00:09:22-00:09:29). This scene prompts the narrative incorporation of the aurochs, which "are resurrected from the Ice Age into a material presence (and present) in Hushpuppy's story" (BROX, 2016, p. 140). The aurochs – whether resulting from Hushpuppy's imagination or not[24] – embody a real ecological warning to the world and "connect the declining health of Hushpuppy's father, Wink, to the declining health of the planet" (*ibid.*).

Barnsley (2016, p. 241) argues that the images of crashing blocks of ice caps (which precede the resurrection of the aurochs) "are integral to the film's interest in threatened landscapes and populations, showing, in a manner that recalls the magisterial wild of nature documentaries, how space for living is literally shrinking." Zeitlin uses the political and aesthetic form of magical realism – aligning the peripheral condition of the protagonist with the realist representation of extinct creatures and melting ice caps – to shed new light on narratives about environmental disasters and present an ecological vision that "[reveals] and [re-imagines], sometimes in contradictory ways, the crisis-driven reflexes of late capitalism" (*ibid.*). The depiction of these monstrous beasts coming from the South Pole[25] consequently embodies ecological anxieties deflecting from both personal and planetary levels (BROX, 2016, p. 140): respectively, regarding how this new environment will affect the already poor conditions of living of Hushpuppy and the community and how the world will handle a growing wave of natural disasters (*ibid.*).

Rountree (2015, p. 05) approaches how the film representation of a storm that closely resembles Hurricane Katrina – but that could likewise be associated with any storm of similar magnitude (BURKE, 2019, p. 70) – contributes to raising "critical questions about public memory and governmental responsibility." The reimagining of this national tragedy exposes

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[24] This entails aesthetic discussions that will be addressed in the next section.
[25] Locating the aurochs in the South Pole contradicts the historical northern origins of the creatures and reinforces their association with the Bathtub community as Southern Others.

the neglect of those living in the south of the levee: similarly to the communities of Isle de Jean Charles and Pointe au Chien – the real locations that partly serve as the setting for the Bathtub – the inhabitants of the community did not receive any support to prevent the environmental tragedy that is presented in the film from destroying their community. Rountree (2015) notices that Zeitlin's film incorporates the imaginary of Hurricane Katrina to build around the levee a contemporary tale of colonial process, in which neocolonial relations reverberate within the actions (or lack thereof) by the American government towards the disempowered parcels of their citizens.

As the film shows, natural disasters play a significant role in worsening or rendering more evident the neocolonial abyss between periphery and center: "the homogeneity of corporatist economics and the stark divisions between the wealthy and the dispossessed that they produce are exposed" (BARNSLEY, 2016, p. 242). The film dramatizes neocolonial relations to criticize how the government's failed prevention and ineffective response to Hurricane Katrina exacerbated social inequalities by treating "the people in the poor neighborhoods" as irrelevant (STRUBE, 2015, p. 48). Christopher Lloyd (2016, p. 246) argues that the storm evinced how Southern American culture treated these populations – mainly composed of black and indigenous people – as discardable: the documents of the storm show us that "[t]he throwaway bodies of the South were horrifyingly present in Katrina's floodwaters" and that "bodies (mainly black) were left for dead, simply abandoned in the storm's wake."

The contextualization of the film within the geography of Isle de Jean Charles correspondingly alludes to governmental neglect and "refigures to some extent the colonial exploitation that facilitated the global drive for modernity" (BARNSLEY, 2016, p. 242). Besides enduring the ensuing threat of coastal erosion induced by the oil[26] and gas industry (see DERMANSKY, 2013), this location suffered from "[t]he exploitative operations of George W Bush's neoconservative policies," which "included the elimination of social housing in favour of privatized developments, 'state-of-emergency' deregulation, and redirecting social spending into private coffers" (BARNSLEY, 2016, p. 242). The region of the Bathtub houses Native American tribes and "has for the most part been left off Louisiana's Master Plan for coastal restoration" due to alleged lack of scientific support to restore the area (DERMANSKY, 2013, par. 04). Julie Dermansky (2013, par. 05) further reports that the scientific consultants might hold the same interests as those of the companies, as it is suggested by claims that a head

[26] The Deepwater Horizon disaster is a recent example. It occurred during the production of the film and deeply affected the local environment.

member of one of these scientific organizations failed to disclose industry board membership (see SCHLEIFSTEIN, 2012).

Barnsley (2016, p. 243) notices that the fictional community of the Bathtub forms “a self-sufficient, economically inactive, and racially mixed group, representing exactly the kind of community which, when its fragile defences are breached, is vulnerable to corporate vulturism.” Zeitlin’s film makes effort to intertwine Hushpuppy’s experience of the slow destruction of the community with the broader and related political and climate discussions: “[t]hrough linking the multiple narratives of community, exploitation, and extinction, *Beasts* eulogizes the loss of an entire cosmos – with its attendant emplacement, culture, and lifeways” – and invites us to witness and understand a loss that “the people of Jean Charles have always known” (BURKE, 2019, p. 62). By focusing on a black child as the protagonist, the film seems to attempt to include within its political discourse the predicament of the Jean Charles community as a whole. However, the film does not give attention to native people: Lloyd (2016, p. 260) notes that “[i]t is as though native invisibility is needed to narrate the story of black precarity by displacing one racial group to show the displacement of another.”

Burke (2019, p. 62), on the other hand, argues that the political discourse of the film “reflects on the position of many indigenous communities in the United States and around the world by intertwining dueling definitions of ‘beast.’” She primarily underlines how ‘beasts’ associate with the lives of those “deeply connected to and dependent on their local ecosystems”: people who, in face of natural disasters, “are positioned as disposable, as nothing more than mere beasts” (*ibid*.). She consequently reads the film as a critique on “how speciesism can be used by environmental racism to portray specific groups of human beings as animals” (BURKE, 2019, p. 62). Conversely, she also raises the interpretation of the ‘beasts’ as a broader category comprehending our contemporary society “at the mercy of the ecological systems” that are “fracturing and breaking down”– even though some seem to be more dangerously at the mercy than others (*ibid*.).

Hushpuppy – as the protagonist of the film and the narrative ignition to the rebirth of the aurochs – not only connects her small-scale community to global and environmental matters but also illuminates the relations between humans and nature. She blurs the limits between humans and animals after internalizing Miss Bathsheba’s teaching that we are all meat: “[e]very animal is made out of meat. I’m meat. Y’all asses meat. Everything is part of the buffet of the universe.” (BEASTS, 00:08:28-00:08:40). Burke (2019, p. 68) emphasizes how this scene balances through Miss Bathsheba’s discourse and “cuts between the children’s faces, the marine life on the table, and an owl in a cage” to convey the idea that humans and animals are part of

the same "ecological chain," in which humans might likewise be non-dominant participants. The aurochs, far stronger than humans and displayed in the film as predators, consequently serve as a warning that all species are subject to the forces of nature and exploitation: "[l]ike the aurochs driven to extinction in 1627 by human-caused destruction of their habitat, the people of the Bathtub [might] be driven into extinction for the exact same reason" (BURKE, 2019, p. 69).

The Bathtub and the aurochs embody the Southern condition and share the animalization enforced by the dominant worldview. The rendering of the community as 'beasts' illustrates Kim TallBear's (2011, par. 05) point that "violence against animals is linked to violence against particular humans who have historically been linked to animality" – in which this animality correspondingly associates with considering both the community and the animals as disposable. Burke (2019, p. 67) consequently notices that "our carefully constructed and carefully maintained boundaries between human and animal (or between nature and culture) only apply to *specific* groups of human beings." Hushpuppy's relation with nature undermines the idea of human superiority and exploitation by portraying the "intractable connections of human and nonhuman life": she sees a world where "everything has a beating heart, everything speaks, everything wants to eat, and so on" (LLOYD, 2016, p. 256). The "remediation of human/animal relations" (*ibid.*) reverberates throughout the narrative and finds its climax at the end of the film, when Hushpuppy stands face-to-face with the giant and now subdued aurochs.

The arrival of the aurochs at the Bathtub represents the encounter of the geographical margins of nature with the cultural and economic margins of the contemporary world: the personal tragedy of Hushpuppy – the approaching death of her father – meets the symbol of the tragedy of the planet. Both individuals, the human and the animal, look at each other while acknowledging not only that they are both parts of the same ecological chain but also that they are both under the same environmental dangers. The frame juxtaposes them side by side to show "how tiny and small she is compared to the creature" (BURKE, 2019, p. 72) and to echo Hushpuppy's earlier sentence that "strong animals got no mercy" (BEASTS, 01:00:35-01:00:38). As opposed to Hushpuppy's expectations, the animals kneel in front of her, to which she reacts by saying they are her friends, "kind of" (BEASTS, 01:22:00-01:22:13). Hushpuppy carries the burden of animalization imposed on black and indigenous people and, as such, she "is allowed to come the edge of the human world and cathect with the aurochs" (BARNSLEY, 2016, p. 245).

Barnsley (2016, p. 250) contends that "Hushpuppy's ethnicity allows Zeitlin to draw upon the cultural legacies of slavery, while the island setting brings Native American traditions

into play, pointing backwards to colonization." The choice for Quvenzhané Wallis as the protagonist – correspondingly replacing the ten-year-old white boy protagonist of the original play with a six-year-old black girl – raised questions relating to "[what] the presence of a Black girl does to the original story and stories of climate struggle more generally" (MACLEAR, 2018, p. 05). Barnsley (2016) suggests that the geographical and political contexts of the film seem to imply that Hushpuppy's ethnicity embodies the pretension to reflect on the screen a broader idea of marginality that reverberates the predicament of the communities living in the real Bathtub: it braids race with "economic divisions" and "[demonstrates] that neo-imperialism relies upon the same motions of underdevelopment and exploitation that drove colonialism while jettisoning recognizable colour or gender-coded practices of discrimination" (BARNSLEY, 2016, p. 250).

Tavia Nyong'o (2015, p. 251) alternatively argues that "[t]he color-blind casting of Quvenzhané Wallis as the film's protagonist insistently foregrounds the tension between the particular and the universal, the local and the global, that *Beasts* attempts to manage." Maclear (2018, p. 05) emphasizes that this tension "remains unresolved precisely because antagonisms pertaining to human differences (of race, gender, class, or sexuality) cannot be subsumed by magical thinking." As suggested by Nyong'o, black feminist critics have called attention to this questionable connection between the particular and the universal: "[w]hat is the relationship between [Hushpuppy's] singular race, gender, and infancy and the ostensibly universal narrative she embodies?" (NYONG'O, 2015, p. 251). This questioning – and many others that subsequently arise – sheds new light over Zeitlin and Alibar's "story of posthuman climate resistance" to underline the problems of a story "of all-too-human racial and economic inequality" (MACLEAR, 2018, p. 05).

As a six-year-old black girl, Hushpuppy carries responsibilities that are out of compass with her age. Under her father's questionable mentoring and without the presence of her mother, she often depends on herself to learn how to survive in the 'Southern wild' and how to deal with her emotions. As a result of loneliness and "absence of loving care," she frequently engages in processes of self-blame: not only does she "[feel] culpable for her father's ailing health but also for the world's woes and fragility" (MACLEAR, 2018, p. 05). While having her as an essential character to the magical realist presentation of the world, the film seems to place on her too much the burden of resilience and naturalization – as she naturalizes both the magical worldview and social conditions of her community. Christina Sharpe (2013, par. 07) criticizes that this triumphal treatment of her character is only possible because she is black: how else could such a violent story "be inspiring and not tragic?"

Nyong'o (2015, p. 262) suggests that the casting of Quvenzhané Wallis as Hushpuppy seems to merely facilitate the inclusion of a magical worldview carrying ecological concerns: "[o]nly a black child, Sharpe [2013] reasons, can be positioned in conditions of such dire abandonment without a narrative explanation being offered." The lack of concern for black care (MACLEAR, 2018, p. 05) and the arbitrary victimization of a black protagonist renders the film as a narrative that "offers a voyeuristic look into the survival of a community of alterity living outside the biopolitical protection of the state" (NYONG'O, 2015, p. 263). This voyeuristic approach to Hushpuppy and the community is accordingly criticized by bell hooks (2012, par. 04), who argues that the spectator-film relation of Zeitlin's film is essentially similar to that of nature reality shows, where "audiences remain glued to their seats watching [...] humans struggling against harsh unnatural circumstances."

Social activist bell hooks likewise denounces Hushpuppy's representation as a survivor as the racist and sexist "miniature version of the 'strong black female matriarch'" (HOOKS, 2012, par. 03). She argues that Zeitlin's film victimizes the girl by subjecting her to numerous moments of violence and exploitation that ultimately reinforce racist stereotypes. As suggested by hooks, one can notice that in the scene where Hushpuppy is told by her father to "beast" a crab: while being taught by a member of the community how to extract the meat of the animal, Wink aggressively interrupts and tells her that she should use her hands to break the crab in half (BEASTS, 00:40:24-00:41:32). This scene simultaneously illustrates – in consonance with other moments in the film – how Wink embodies the stereotype of a ruthless, "badass black man" (HOOKS, 2012, par. 08) and how Hushpuppy is continuously taught to wildly act "like a man" and, despite her young age, face the various personal, social and environmental obstacles she encounters without being allowed to cry.

The arguably stereotypical representation of the community members resonates with the controversial depiction of the Bathtub as a place of natural cooperation and festivities, "where black and white poor folks live together in utopian harmony" (HOOKS, 2012, par. 05) and where "wildness" and "civilizational collapse" are idealistically celebrated (MACLEAR, 2018, p. 11). Maclear acknowledges how this romanticized vision is exemplified in the evacuation scene (see BEASTS, 01:01:15-01:01:59): in depicting "all forms of state care, protection, and intervention" as malevolent, the film renders the lack of care regarding the community – and, especially, regarding black people – as institutionally acceptable or even socially viable[27]

[27] Burke (2019, p. 71) acknowledges that this scene is conflicted, but she also notices how it "invokes the long history of indigenous forced removal and assimilation, compulsory absorption into a capitalist wage economy, and the attempt to erase indigenous cosmologies."

(MACLEAR, 2018, p. 11). For Maclear (2018, p. 06), this discourse carries "a tone of utopianism – fragile but persistent – that turns inner strength into a panacea and that champions the role of anarchic collectives in providing self-help for the marginalized and socially discarded."[28]

The environmental discourse, peripheral resistance and tone "that makes romance out of chronic survival" (MACLEAR, 2018, p. 06) reveal that Zeitlin's film is politically complicated – and, to some extent, ambivalent[29]: "if the Bathtub is a proxy for a world in crisis or a prophecy of the future that awaits all of us, the film is also a treatise. It offers a discernible creed. It is the creed of abandoning oneself to the wildness of all things and all moments. It is the creed of 'pride in poverty' and 'optimism from squalor'" (*ibid.*). While the film successfully evokes recent climate events of the United States to present a story of neocolonial relations between a marginalized community and the American empire, it does so at the cost of vulnerably and stereotypically representing black people on the screen. Maclear (2018, p. 15) argues that the film privileges the "mythic realm over the historical" and "establishes its own sacrificial logic wherein the symbolic child is 'saved' and the corporeal child is 'damned.'" The magical realism of *Beasts of the Southern Wild* consequently appears to be a watershed: for some, it contributes to mystifying "the historical conditions of the characters' lives"; for others, it "allows for an enchanting and 'true-feeling' evocation of the fever dream of climate collapse and dispossession" (MACLEAR, 2018, p. 12).

Wendy B. Faris (2002, p. 101) accordingly approaches the possible problems of magical realism within the context of cultural and literary studies: while constituting "a significant decolonizing style" and "permitting new voices and traditions to be heard within the main-stream," the mode can also be viewed as "a commodifying kind of primitivism." This criticism to magical realist fiction likewise reverberates through Latin American works from the twentieth century, in that the "oscillating between the cute and the romantic" is considered "little more than the standard ruling class appropriation of what is held to be the sensual vitality of the common people and their fantasy life" (TAUSSIG, 1987, apud FARIS, 2002, p. 104). While asserting that "the facts themselves may refute accusations of commodifying primitivism," Faris correspondingly acknowledges that "the dynamics of this controversy seem to be at the heart of magical realism and its critical analysis." (FARIS, 2002, p. 108).

[28] Strube (2016, p. 52), argues, instead, that "[w]hat might look like a romanticization of The Bathtub in some scenes is counterbalanced by Hushpuppy's fear" and "her sense of loneliness."
[29] Some authors – including hooks (2012) and Maclear (2018) – contend that the film unravels a conservative agenda in its representation of the community. Others, such as Barnsley (2016, p, 248), underline "Zeitlin's refusal to ratify the neoliberal recuperation of America's marginal communities in the wake of disaster."

The globalized status of magical realist fiction likewise highlights the possibilities for commodification. While it is true that magical realism might be used by the so-called central cultures to “destabilize established structures of power and control” (FARIS, 2002, p. 111) – as we have analyzed in chapters one and two (e.g., Angela Carter’s *Nights at the Circus* and Julie Dash’s *Daughters of the Dust*) – it is also possible that works from metropolitan centers might engage with certain practices of appropriation or misrepresentation. Anne Hegerfeldt (2002, p. 63), although arguing for the mode’s global status, accordingly raises that possibility: “[a]t best, there is something slightly condescending about Western attempts to jump on the postcolonial bandwagon.” It would be purely speculative to attribute the “imperfection” of magical realism as a facilitator – or, as Maclear (2018, p. 06) puts it, a utopian “framework” – for the problematic representations in Zeitlin’s film, but the characteristics of the mode inevitably contribute to (and benefit from) enlightening the problems and complexities of *Beasts of the Southern Wild* as a contemporary American film product.

3.2 Hushpuppy, magic and realism

The magical realism of *Beasts of the Southern Wild* comes not only from its ecological discourse and reimagining of postcolonial relations but also from its narrative and aesthetic elements. The film combines literary tropes employed by magical realist works from the twentieth century – such as Salman Rushdie’s *Midnights Children* and Jeanette Winterson’s *The Passion* – with the visual aesthetics of realist film traditions to present a world imbued with magic and allegory. The textual elements of Zeitlin’s film consequently serve as a base for its questioning of American imperialism and warning of environmental catastrophe: “*Beasts of the Southern Wild* illustrates that magical realism can bridge reality and fantasy in particularly productive ways when dealing with the imaginative challenges of representing climate change and environmental injustice” (BROX, 2016, p. 141). By merging magical realism with environmental discourse within the context of American culture, Zeitlin’s film reveals itself as a magical – and, as analyzed in the last section, consistently controversial – portrayal of the concerns of twenty-first century society.

The film primarily associates its magical stance with Hushpuppy – a six-year-old child – who becomes responsible for presenting to the viewer events of ambivalent representation. In consonance with the narrative resources employed by *Midnight’s Children* and Günter Grass’s *The Tin Drum*, Zeitlin’s film takes advantage of Hushpuppy’s naivety and artless quality “to focalise the act of representation in accordance with the enchantment and animism commonly

ascribed to the child's perception of the world" (SKRODZKA, 2012, p. 143). Hushpuppy not only reveals herself as the source for the incorporation of the aurochs into the narrative but also as a character who presents "a contradictory combination of wonder at the small things continuously rediscovered in the object world" (*ibid.*). She consequently perceives the minor details of the natural world as a resemblance to her own life: "[a]ll the time, everywhere, everything's hearts are beating and squirting, and talking to each other the ways I can't understand. Most of the time they probably be saying: I'm hungry, or I gotta poop." (BEASTS, 00:02:26-00:02:41).

The parallel narrative of the aurochs starts precisely after Miss Bathsheba's lecture to Hushpuppy and her other students: "[t]his here is an aurochs, a fierce, mean creature that walked the face of the earth back when we all lived in the caves. And they would gobble them cave-babies down right in front of the cave-baby parents" (BEASTS, 00:08:44-00:09:00). She subsequently connects the story about the aurochs to a pessimistic tone regarding the fate of the planet, which reverberates through Hushpuppy's creative mind throughout the rest of the film. The sequence of shots during Miss Bathsheba's discourse accordingly suggests that the aurochs are part of Hushpuppy's imagination: the frame of a picture of glaciers in the South Pole cuts to a close-up of Hushpuppy, which is followed by a shot of a frozen aurochs in the South Pole. As we perceive these images, the owner of the discourse changes from Miss Bathsheba to Hushpuppy, who confidently says, "[w]ay back in the day, the aurochs was king of the world. If it wasn't for giant snowballs and the Iced Age, I wouldn't even be Hushpuppy." (BEASTS, 00:09:42-00:09:57).

The apparent imaginary quality of the aurochs resonates with the presentation of the world through the perspective of a child. In that sense, Hushpuppy's daydream assumes the quality of reality and does not distinguish itself from other supposedly real moments in the film. The narrative realistically depicts the aurochs and the community – each one respectively connected to a real setting – and intercalates them until the point in which they finally merge, when Hushpuppy stands face-to-face with one of the beasts (BEASTS, 01:21:28-01:22:35). This scene adds even more realism to the fantastic creatures: as Hushpuppy and her friends walk on the swampy field, we perceive the beasts behind them; as the beasts get closer, the children immediately start to scream and run. The editing accordingly implies the "real" presence of the creatures through shots capturing the reactions of members of the community. The narrative and aesthetics of *Beasts of the Southern Wild* likewise impart the impression of reality to critics and researchers. Veronica Barnsley (2016, p. 242) argues that "[t]he fantastical aspects of the film are not […] incidental productions of a child's imagination […] but are

essential to its aesthetic and political coherence and indicative of the ecological debate it stages." Similarly, Ali Brox (2016, p. 141) contends that "[t]he verification by others confirms [the beasts'] existence beyond a single character's imagination."

Amaryll Chanady (1985, p. 29) correspondingly mentions that "the portrayal of hallucinations, dreams, and superstitions" can only constitute an example of magical realism if "the imagined events are presented as objectively real." This idea of objective reality seems to guide the critical discourse on magical realist works, as Maggie Ann Bowers (2004, p. 61) illustrates when she analyzes the narrator of Patrick Süskind's *Perfume* (1986): "his method of producing this scent reveals his inability as a narrator to provide a recognizable and reliable perspective […]. [W]e know that we do not share the narrator's perception of reality, and yet the form of the narrative is related to magical realism by its matter-of-fact tone" (see also FARIS, 2004, p. 94). The constitution of magical realism both in literature and cinema consequently seems to depend more on how events are depicted than on their real or hallucinatory nature. Whether *Beasts of the Southern Wild* introduces fantastic creatures or creations of a child's imagination (as the narrative tightly suggests), the objective representation and realist aesthetics render the sequences of the southern beasts as part of reality: not only do they organically intercalate throughout the narrative but they also convey real ecological implications to the Bathtub community.

Jeanne Delbaere-Garant (1995, p. 251) further contributes to highlighting Hushpuppy's magical realist imagination by suggesting three subdivisions of magical realism – psychic realism, mythic realism and grotesque realism – of which psychic realism is "a particular sort of magic realism generated from inside the psyche." She argues that works employing this kind of magical realism (e.g., Angela Carter's *The Infernal Desire Machines of Doctor Hoffman*, 1982) "usually center on an individual whose fissured self renders him or her particularly sensitive to the manifestations of an otherwise invisible reality and whose visionary power can be induced by drugs, love, religious faith" (DELBAERE-GARANT, 1995, p. 251) – or, in the case of Hushpuppy, fear and apprehension. Hushpuppy's internal conflicts and child perspective consequently assume a magical quality and produce a rupture in the realist content of the story: while displaying an "intuitive way of acquiring knowledge [that] stands in opposition to science and history," (SKRODZKA, 2012, p. 144) the narrative highlights the symbolical reality of the girl's imagination by preserving the realist tone of the film.

The source for Hushpuppy's imagination (Miss Bathsheba's story about the aurochs) directly relates to the girl and the community's fear of losing their place in face of an environmental catastrophe. This association between physical space and magic also connects

the film to Delbaere-Garant's (1995) concept of mythic realism, because "[w]hat governs the world of The Bathtub and its residents, particularly Hushpuppy, are the myths that they create, appropriate, and transform making their space into something more than just an abandoned backwater bayou" (MARIBOHO, 2016, p. 161). The magical status of the Bathtub becomes apparent through the visual aesthetics of the film (e.g., images of festivities and fireworks) and through the perception of the community's place as uniquely special in comparison to the mainland: "[a]in't that ugly over there? We got the prettiest place on earth" (BEASTS, 00:04:26-00:04:32). The singularity of the Bathtub community and the bond they create with this physical space consequently help the myths "emerge and become the foundation of the magic that is enmeshed in [Hushpuppy's] narrative" (MARIBOHO, 2016, p. 161-162).

Hushpuppy ultimately assumes the quality of a "contact zone": "[s]he brings together the contrasting narrative modes of fantasy and realism and connotes, uncomfortably [and problematically], both the hopeful survivor familiar in American culture and the dehumanized, racialized, colonized subject who has often been imagined in animal terms" (BARNSLEY, 2016, p. 246). Similarly to Saleem in *Midnight's Children*, who merges a conference of a thousand and one gifted children with the reality of postcolonial India, she bridges the Bathtub community with a magical tale – a story intertwining memories from the past and environmental warnings for the future. She likewise combines the micro and the macro by representing "an unrelenting struggle to survive against the threat of violence – immediate and slow – on personal and global levels" (BROX, 2016, p. 142). As a liminal child, Hushpuppy "finds comfort and strength in the myths that permeate her world" (MARIBOHO, 2016, p. 32) and uses her bridging imagination to fancy a future where she will be remembered for her struggles and the environment surrounding her: "once there was a Hushpuppy and she lived with her daddy in the Bathtub" (BEASTS, 01:27:26-01:27:34).

Hushpuppy's bridging between her particular world and the broader environmental narrative likewise represents a direct and, to some extent, causal connection between her behavior and the fate of the planet. In consonance with how Rushdie designs Saleem's personal life as an extension of India's national affairs, Zeitlin connects moments of crisis in the life of the six-year-old protagonist to moments of environmental unbalance. One can notice that in the scene where Hushpuppy and her father have a fight over her setting her house on fire. Soon after Wink slaps her on the face, she reacts by saying, "I hope you die. And after you die I'll go to your grave and eat birthday cake all by myself" (BEASTS, 00:18:45-00:18:52). She subsequently punches him on the chest, which is followed by a combination of heartbeats and thunder rumbling and Wink's collapse on the ground. Hushpuppy suddenly realizes that she

"broke something" (BEASTS, 00:19:44-00:19:48), which is corroborated by images of ice caps fracturing in the South Pole (BEASTS, 00:19:20-00:19:42). The editing intercalation between Hushpuppy and the cracking ice caps consequently implies extraordinary causality and "links emotional and physical trauma to ecological trauma felt in far-off places." (BURKE, 2019, p. 70).

The fracturing of the ice caps "release[s] the frozen aurochs into the sea, where they melt free, mysteriously alive, and begin to make their way toward the site of the other impending extinction" (BURKE, 2019, p. 70). The opaque causality of the scene reveals not only that Hushpuppy is the emotional and narrative bridge between the Bathtub and the aurochs but also that they inhabit the same world – as the sound and visual editing strikingly suggest. Hushpuppy's voice-over likewise corroborates that idea: "[t]he whole universe depends on everything fitting together just right. If one piece busts, then the entire universe will get busted." (BEASTS, 00:21:30-00:21:50). This crucial scene combines two "earth-shattering event[s]" for Hushpuppy's life – the imminent death of her father and the forthcoming collapse of her environment – to which she responds by magically giving life to extinct creatures (MARIBOHO, 2016, p. 152). The magic of the film ultimately associates with the emotional trauma of a child – a six-year-old girl stricken by personal and global acts of violence who manages to intertwine the mythical and the real to show us a reality that is both a rewrite of history and a prognostic of the future.

Since "there is no clear way to prepare anyone for the type of environmental devastation we are seeing around the globe," Hushpuppy resorts to her fanciful imagination not only to deal with the issue of environmental collapse but also to "put a parent's impending death into perspective" (MARIBOHO, 2016, p. 152). As the burden she carries is aggressively real, the aurochs correspondingly acquire a real representation to properly shape her fears as prehistoric beasts that, aggressive as they are, threaten her and the community's existence (*ibid*.). The extrapolation of the empirical realm ranges from the aurochs to images of her lost mother, whom she constantly tries to contact "when things go wrong, conveying the ache of a young child longing for true tenderness" (MACLEAR, 2018, p. 04). These magical creations help Hushpuppy endure enormous responsibilities and prepare for a transition period – in which "Wink represents a previous way of life in the Bathtub that will no longer be possible" and her life stands in for "the generation that will be forced to confront the history of carbon consumption and its consequences for the present and future" (BROX, 2016, p. 148).

The bridging between fantasy and realism carefully connects and makes visible two different spatial scales (BROX, 2016, p. 149). These scales constitute what Rawdon Wilson

(1995, p. 217) understands as a mixed fictional world, where "the indications of local place" present hybrid spatial structures: first, the Bathtub, realistically overlapped with Isle de Jean Charles (see BEASTS, 00:09:25-00:09:30); second, the spatial development of the aurochs, which challenges our notion of geographical distances. This hybrid structure reverberates through literary magical realist works – as already noted in chapter one – and through the narrative of Zeitlin's film: "[i]t is as if there are two worlds, distinct and following dissimilar laws, that interpenetrate and interwind, all unpredictably but in a natural fashion" (WILSON, 1995, p. 222). The film ultimately uses narrative techniques (e.g., the parallel structure between the South Pole and the Bathtub) to unfold one spatial structure into the other and "negotiate the geographic challenges of climate change": by shrinking narrative distances while keeping our exterior geographical reality at glance, the film makes it possible for the viewer to "directly [perceive] the dangers associated with events that unfold slowly and originate thousands of miles away through an individual life" (BROX, 2016, p. 149).

These two distinct spatial representations likewise make apparent how the film treats time as an indeterminate dimension. While resorting to the past and envisioning the future, the film employs the dual spatial scales and narrative stances in a way that "make[s] the Bathtub community seem imaginable in a specific place but not existent at present" (RIESER, 2017, p. 56). Rieser (*ibid.*) notices how the film combines past, present and future through the aurochs: "[t]heir liberation through global warming and their appearance in the textual present results in a collapsing of time." The historical quality of the aurochs – even if inaccurately represented by the film and therefore also contributing to temporal displacement (see RIERSER, 2017, p. 56) – carries a "powerful symbol standing for extinction (just like the Bathtub) and contemporary global challenges (the thinning of the polar ice caps and the flood)." It is through temporal (and spatial) rearrangements – typical attributes of magical realist narratives – that the film effectively manages "to illustrate the irrevocable link between melting glaciers at the poles and rising waters in the bayou" (BROX, 2016, p. 149).

While critic Roger Ebert (par. 08) argues that the specifics of *Beasts of the Southern Wild* allow people to make the film "into an allegory of anything [they] want," the geographical setting of the story and the images from the South Pole overtly connect the narrative of Zeitlin's film to the symbolism of the Anthropocene. In addition to rendering literal the slow violence of global warming within the context of a small community (BROX, 2016, p. 149), the film conveys "a metaphor for environmental management," that is, "how we protect what we see as most important in the world from various storms, increasingly of our own making" (SCHLOSBERG, 2016, p. 02). While Wink attempts to manage the resources of the community

and prepare his child for environmental collapses, it is Hushpuppy who illustrates the Anthropocene dilemma: by giving life to prehistoric beasts, the girl highlights the human component within the context of environmental crisis – which is corroborated by the images of industries up above the levee – and emphasizes that the solution for this crisis depends on the living generations and their (our) "need to scale up not only our self-knowledge, but our self-image as quasi-subjects with the terrible power to change the planet, not just individually, but as species-being" (YAEGER, 2013, par. 11).

Beasts of the Southern Wild correspondingly highlights the possibility of suspending the narrative "between two levels of signification, inviting a literal and a figurative reading at once" (HEGERFELDT, 2005, p. 59). Similarly to the allegorical possibilities in Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* and Emir Kusturica's *Underground*, Zeitlin's film provides different ways for the viewer to recontextualize the events in the story and consequently contributes to promoting hesitation (e.g., the often conflicting interpretations of the magical events in the film). This recontextualization might exclusively assume a figurative quality (see STERNBERG and YACOBI, 2015, p. 426) – in which the central magic of the film is symbolically interpreted – or it might retain the literal magic of the events and, regardless of their possible imaginary source, integrate them within the narrative as equally important manifestations (see HEGERFELDT, 2005, p. 59). While the purely allegorical integration of the prehistoric creatures accounts for what Meir Sternberg and Tamar Yacobi (2015, p. 426) refer to as "figurative mechanism," the narrative corroboration of events as both literal and allegorical accommodates the film within the understanding of magical realism as a mode, in which "the figurative dimension always remains visible, hovering, so to say, on the surface of the [literal] text" (HEGERFELDT, 2005, p. 59).

The figurative stance of the film likewise becomes apparent through the literalization of metaphors, particularly in the scene where Wink tells Hushpuppy about her conception. The girl accordingly reports the events her father told her to the viewer: "[b]ack when Daddy used to talk about Momma, he said she was so pretty, she never even had to turn on the stove[30]. She'd just walk into the room and all the water started to boil" (BEASTS, 00:36:35-00:36:46). The visual narrative follows Hushpuppy's words by showing her mother – whose face is never visible – walking through the kitchen while the stove turns on by itself and the water in cans

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[30] bell hooks (2012, par. 13-14) criticizes the sexually-focused depiction of Hushpuppy's mother in the film: "[t]alking nostalgically to Hushpuppy about her mother Wink defines her by her hot sexuality. Again the focus is on her behind, which is so sexually 'hot' Wink tells Hushpuppy that when her mama enters the kitchen, her hot ass turns on burners on the stove, boiling water, making the oven hot."

begins to boil (BEASTS, 00:36:35-00:37:00). Similarly, the protagonist of Laura Esquivel's novel *Like Water for Chocolate* extraordinarily makes the water from the shower extremely warm: "[s]uddenly the water started to feel warmer and it kept getting warmer and warmer until it began to burn her skin" (ESQUIVEL, 1989, p. 73). In consonance with the literalization of metaphors employed by Esquivel's novel and other magical realist works, the film turns the figurative idea of heat that is commonly associated with beauty or desire into the literal version of heat, in which these concepts concretely emanate high temperatures.

This movement between abstract and concrete reverberates through Hushpuppy's search for her mother. The mother's character is primarily rendered abstract by means of Hushpuppy's imagination: not only does she call out for her mother while in moments of emotional crisis but she also explicitly talks to her, whose voice materializes in the narrative while the camera focuses on her mother's jersey laying on an empty chair (BEASTS, 00:13:17-00:03:38). The narrative shifts to a more concrete (and magical) representation after Hushpuppy swims – emulating her mother, who "swam away" when she was a baby – towards a boat into the open sea, whose captain tells her that the "boat will take [her] exactly where [she] needs to be" (BEASTS, 01:12:26-01:12:38). Hushpuppy and her friends subsequently arrive in a floating brothel called Elysian Fields, where they "are greeted by maternal figures and offered sanctuary, as if resting within the eye of the storm" (JOHNSON, 2013, par. 04). There, Hushpuppy finds a concrete representation of her mother – even if possibly in her magical imagination – and acquires "strength to confront the tragedies back at home" (LLOYD, 2018, p. 190).

The seemingly magical events in *Beasts of the Southern Wild* emerge through visual aesthetics and modes of production that closely resemble realist traditions from the twentieth century – especially observational documentaries and Italian neorealism. Collectively and independently produced by Court 13, the film was shot on 16mm mostly under natural light and almost exclusively with a handheld camera, which shakenly captures the lives of the fictional (and real) members of the Bathtub community. The actors in the film were recruited from the local communities of Montegut and adjacent locations – including Quvenzhané Wallis (Hushpuppy), who had never trained as an actor, and Dwight Henry (Wink), who worked as a local baker[31]. The limited budget and the resulting integration between the film crew and the community noticeably played a crucial role in the final result of the film: "[t]his immersive,

[31] Although the film won prizes at Cannes Film Festival and run for prizes at the Oscars, the use of non-professional actors rendered the film ineligible to run for the Screen Actors Guild Awards (see FEINBERG, 2012).

grass-roots approach to filmmaking blurred the lines between Mr. Zeitlin's invented world and the place that inspired it" (ARONS, 2012, par. 12).

Selmin Kara (2014, p. 02) contends that *Beasts of the Southern Wild* displays "two seemingly disjunctive aesthetic realisms – one based in the analog representations of human loss and the other in the digital imaginations of primordiality and extinction, which are essentially nonhuman temporalities." These two kinds of realism correspondingly follow the hybrid structure of magical realism: the first, analog, focusing on the social and environmental struggles of the marginalized community; the second, digital, magically bringing to life the extinct creatures from Hushpuppy's imagination. Kara (2014, p. 01) argues that this combination and the final aesthetics of the film "point to the emergence of what one might call a speculative realist aesthetics, which poses an alternative to the photographic, digital, sutured, or post-humanist realisms in cinema in the digital age."

The "naturalistic" – or, if one may call, magical realist – narrative of the film organically combines these two seemingly opposite styles: "*Beasts of the Southern Wild* [appears] deeply invested in maintaining the facade of an analog aesthetics of realism, despite the amount of technical wizardry that [its] cosmological visions call for" (KARA, 2014, p. 03). This desire for a natural look resonates with Zeitlin's idea of making the beasts: "we didn't want to create synthetic creatures, […] they had to be alive, so we decided that we were going to try to use pigs to create the creatures." (BEASTS, 2012b, 01:47-01:52). The real-life pigs consequently received special costumes and were "filmed in front of a green screen in order to achieve the menacing look of the larger-than-life creatures" (KARA, 2014, p. 03; see also BEASTS, 2012b). Zeitlin and the film crew employed their efforts to reduce the discrepancy between magic and reality and present the events in a similar analogical manner. This intention reverberates throughout the film and closely resembles the matter-of-fact presentation of magical events in magical realist fiction.

The expressive narrative voice of non-professional actor Quvenzhané Wallis is one of the elements that ties together the fantastical and realist events in the film: "[t]he language itself […] is an immediate, expressive, and highly efficient manner of speaking. As a result, the film's dialogue takes on an unvarnished quality. The local tongue removes any pressure for sprawling soliloquy, and instead gives way to a kind of poetry" (CRAWFORD, 2020, par. 03). The regional voice of Quvenzhané Wallis assumes a quality of reliability that smoothly guides the spectator through Hushpuppy's personal conflicts and magical apprehensions. Her character and her voice are deeply "embedded in the landscape" (*ibid.*) and in the ecological context of Southern Louisiana. In that perspective, they inherently evoke a local history and partly account

for the authenticity and verisimilitude of the film – elements cherished by both literary and film realist traditions.

The seamless bond between realism and fantasy likewise depends on the cinematography of the film: the handheld camera provides unity to the narrative both by capturing Hushpuppy's life and imagination with the aesthetics of an observational documentary and by constantly adjusting the perspective to match the point of view of a child. Cinematographer Ben Richardson "made a special rig that enabled him to move the camera up and down" to capture the strength of the "height of the camera relative to her" (DESOWITZ, 2012, par. 05). This visual style also emerges in the sequences of the beasts – both as they march towards the Bathtub, in which the shaken camera from a lower perspective enhances them, and as they finally find Hushpuppy, when the camera juxtaposes both the girl and the beasts within Hushpuppy's eyeline. Richardson's camerawork ultimately provides a visual perspective for Wendy B. Faris's (2004) childlike and naive narrators: "what I think we were trying to achieve was a camera that was reactive and inexperienced, naïve, and exploratory. We just wanted the world to be revealed moment by moment, just the way she's discovering it." (DESOWITZ, 2012, par. 06).

Nowhere in the film the combination of different codes becomes more apparent than in the scene where Hushpuppy and the beasts stand face-to-face. The realist aesthetics of the film merges both subjects within the same environment and captures them in the same frame: as Hushpuppy and her friends walk, the creatures suddenly emerge in the background – initially out of focus, but later in sharp definition – and reach to Hushpuppy as if she, the very mind that created them, were their destination (BEASTS, 01:21:23-01:21:33). The subsequent shot sets both the creatures and the child in profile and materializes the different spatial scales at stake in the narrative – Hushpuppy, small and intimate, and the aurochs, enormous and universal (BEASTS, 01:21:34-01:21:40). This scene retains the lively handheld camera employed in the entire narrative, which first establishes the connection between both subjects by moving from the eye of the aurochs to the head of Hushpuppy and, later, by capturing them in deep focus as the beasts kneel in front of the girl. The depth of field of this later shot and the visual composition of the entire sequence accordingly attribute visual importance to Hushpuppy and the beasts and invite the viewer to question (even more) the boundaries between realism and fantasy.

Miriam Strube (2015, p. 46) argues that the general aesthetics of the film – notably resulting from the already mentioned "hand-held cameras, jury-rigged sets, untrained actors and a grass-roots collective of artists" – correlates with a production style that is "unbound by

studios or the usual Hollywood conventions." Zeitlin's film frames a magical and childish imagination that is "intimately connected to [the] social reality" of a marginalized culture and location (MARIBOHO, 2016, p. 173) within a formal magical realist structure that correspondingly emulates aspects of that reality. The "disavowal of a system of rule or structure" (MARIBOHO, 2016, p. 175) inherent to the Bathtub community consequently reverberates an idea of independence – or, even, of transgression – that modeled the realist film traditions from the twentieth century and likewise has governed the literary and audiovisual productions of magical realism.

Beasts of the Southern Wild is both a recollection of the literary magic of twentieth-century literature and a look into the future: not only does it use magical realism to materialize the dangers of the present and forthcoming environmental crises but it also establishes itself as a potential – even if premature and controversial – symbol of magical realism in cinema. The film embodies the dual structure of magical realist fiction to expand a regional tale of a marginalized area in the United States into a universal narrative that evokes the broader outline of the mode and the general concerns of twenty-first-century society. This amplification ultimately illuminates our understanding of the artistic and political possibilities of magical realism in audiovisual narratives and alerts us to the problematics of social/racial representation within the scopes of the film and the mode.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

There is undoubtedly something unique about magical realism – if not for its oxymoronic aesthetics and political implications, at least for surviving against all the odds and remaining in vogue both in the creative and critical discourses. The concept of magical realism was born practically dead: Franz Roh's pictorial theories did not conquer critical reception in Germany, where Gustav Hartlaub's New Objectivity assumed greater relevance, and had to be subsequently revived within the context of a different continent and a different medium. While Latin America is not the primary source of magical realism, it is certainly where its first *momentum* lies. Latin America's literary traditions established the fundamental characteristics of what readers and viewers generally identify as magical realism – a strange, paradoxical combination of realism and fantastical elements. Simultaneously, Latin America's critical discourse contributed to filling the mode with theoretical contradictions and ultimately assisted in emptying its conceptual signification.

While partially settled in Latin America, this hybrid literary form assumed different shapes and globally developed to establish new roots in countries such as India, Germany and Britain. Wendy B. Faris (2004, p. 02) notices that the widespread distribution of magical realism "means that in attempting to define the term and explain the particular power of the mode we need a theoretical perspective that includes the study of formal characteristics spanning different traditions but one that also takes account of interactions between different cultures." Consequently, magical realism is both conceptually indeterminate – or, perhaps, inexhaustible – and geographically and culturally broad: "magical realism [has] as many forms of magic and the magical in [it] as the number of cultural contexts in which these works are produced throughout the world" (BOWERS, 2004, p. 04).

The interdisciplinary and worldwide qualities of magical realism motivated me throughout this thesis not only to further investigate the manifestations of the mode within a globalized context but also to examine the broader possibilities of magical realist fiction in the film medium. As a concept originated in visual arts, magical realism has since the beginning cultivated an appeal for visual representation that, even if essentially implicit, reverberated through literature and fully grew in cinema. Skrodzka (2012, p. 127) correspondingly argues that "[t]he history of magic realism points towards an interesting cross-fertilisation between cinema and literature." This consists of the relationship between the first Latin American authors to use the mode and the film medium: "key figures within the movement were often

involved with film, through personal connections with the film industry, the choice of *auteur* cinema as artistic inspiration, or writing film scripts and film reviews" (*ibid*.).

Even if the possible impact of film practices on the writings of Latin American authors is particularly interesting and important, the most conspicuous relationship between magical realism and cinema developed with the emergence of film adaptations of literary texts and, later, with the indiscriminate labeling of 'magical realist' films. Within the scope of this thesis, I chose to go beyond the study of adaptation and focus on works that originally – and, perhaps, often inadvertently – present characteristics of magical realism. I was driven into the study of magical realism in cinema to attempt to address, even if insufficiently, a gap that is latent in film and literary studies: "there is an awkward scarcity of critical writing on magic realism in film," (SKRODZKA, 2012, p. 126), which is a "seriously understudied phenomenon" (LABUDOVIC, 2003, p. 01). This gap is even more evident within the context of Brazilian academia, where magical realism is hardly connected to works outside Latin America and where associations between the mode and the film medium are sparsely made.

Considering the scarcity of theoretical approaches to magical realism in film narratives, I structured this research bearing in mind what Anne Hegerfeldt (2005, p. 06) calls a "prototype": the idea that "the attributes used to define the mode are seen as typical without being compulsory." The first chapter consequently outlined political and aesthetic characteristics of magical realism in literature that guided and served as an ever-changing model for the subsequent chapters. I tried to establish this prototype not only through theoretical readings but, most importantly, through examples, which hopefully illustrated the function of magical realist devices within the context of specific works of fiction. The analysis of magical realism in literature ultimately served as a reference for the investigation of magical realism in audiovisual narratives: while the films analyzed displayed substantial differences, I found it possible to trace many of their political and aesthetic discourses back to literature and further explore the uniqueness of audiovisual narratives within the context of magical realism.

This thesis ultimately intended to demonstrate how broad magical realism is by echoing Jeanne Delbaere-Garant's (1995, p. 249) idea that the mode is not a simple label: "magic realism is often used only sporadically in an author's oeuvre, and sporadically even in those of his or her texts commonly regarded as 'magic realist.'" The possibility of analyzing parts of a text within the theoretical scope of magical realism highlights the mode's conceptual complexity and the existence of magical realist variations, according to which some texts seem, "by general consensus, to be at the heart of the [mode], and others [appear to be] more marginal" (FARIS, 2002, p. 102). While the films here analyzed individually relate to distinctive aspects

of magical realism, some closely associate with the magical realist prototype (e.g., *Beasts of the Southern Wild*), and others seem to use the mode more sparingly and concentrate on specific political or aesthetic traits (e.g., *Being John Malkovich*).

The investigation of magical realism both in literature and in cinema revealed that the aesthetics of the mode is intimately connected to an authentic – yet magical – portrayal of reality: "magical realism may be considered an extension of realism in its concern with the nature of reality and its representation" (ZAMORA and FARIS, 1996, p. 06). The mode's connection and simultaneous deviation from reality highlight the idea that the inclusion of fantastical elements constitutes an alternative path to grasping the truth (SALMAN, 2015; see also MARIBOHO, 2016, p. 05). Magical realism consequently amplifies a reality that "is just as fantastic as magic realist texts suggest": "[g]oing beyond the idea of mimesis […], magic realist fiction seeks to recreate more fully the experience of living in a world where post Enlightenment assumptions about plausibility and possibility no longer hold." (HEGERFELDT, 2005, p. 275).

This amplification (or magical recreation) of reality concentrates a great part of the criticism magical realism receives (see FARIS, 2002). Brenda Cooper (1998) argues that many writers – including García Márquez and Rushdie – engage in a process of patronization towards the reality they portray: as writers "belonging to a cosmopolitan, educated and literate class" (BOWERS, 2004, p. 120), they "walk a political tightrope between capturing this reality and providing precisely the exotic escape from reality desired by some of their Western readership" (COOPER, 1998, p. 48). Maggie Ann Bowers (2004, p. 120) incorporates the argument of Timothy Brennan (1989) to illustrate that the writings of García Márquez and Rushdie – and possibly the narrative of Zeitlin's film – might "reinforce western, colonialist attitudes despite their attempts to counter them." The magical representation of reality consequently carries with it a burden of doubt: "is [magical realism] popular because it offers an exotic notion of life in the Third World; is it popular because it provides a means of escaping reality […]?" (BOWERS, 2004, p. 121).

These questionings inevitably follow the indeterminate, cloudy concept of magical realism. This research did not have the intention to fully address them, but I feel compelled to mention and echo their concerns while simultaneously acknowledging that they demand further discussions. As Bowers (2004, p. 121) suggests, the assumption that magical realism is only superficially transgressive needs to consider not only the context of the author and the text but also that of the reader and the viewer: can the reader/viewer "accept fully the dignity of a non-scientific belief system as portrayed in a magical realist novel[/film]"? Magical realism is – for

readers, critics and authors – ultimately opaque and unpredictable: it “thrives on transition, on the process of change, borders and ambiguity” (COOPER, 1998, p. 27); as José Arcadio’s thread of blood in *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, it guides us through the corners of reality while showing its magic and ambiguous nature.

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