The Inter-Semiotic Negotiation between the Literary and the Cinematographic Image

Carmen DOMINTE, *Lecturer PhD.*
Hyperion University Bucharest, Romania
carmendominte@yahoo.com

Abstract

Considering the postmodern perspective, a text or a discourse never ends, but continues in other texts and discourses. Besides the physical limits, any literary text or discourse develops in a literary system of references belonging to other texts or discourses. The concept of inter-semiotic negotiation describes the process of inter-action realized between two semiotic systems and shows that the meaning generated from one system can be transposed into another semiotic system and, even more, from the writer to the reader, and even further, from the director to the spectator, but mediated through different types of codes. Transferring the aesthetic meaning from one form of art (literature) to another (cinematography), there are specific changes for the artistic manner of performance and reception but the common element that may link both arts is represented by the image: literary and cinematographic.

Keywords: *artistic representation, imaginary, negotiation, semiotic codes.*

Introductory Unit

The article "The Inter-Semiotic Negotiation between the Literary and the Cinematographic Image" intends to analyze the inter-semiotic relationship that was established between a narrative text and its cinematographic representation. Both were considered discursive forms of artistic representation which are involved in the process of meaning transfer from one semiotic system to another. The study is a comparative analysis based on the relationship established between literature and cinematography. The link between the two forms of representation is represented by the literary text transposed into the film adaptation. Applied on Andrei Tarkowsky's *The Stalker*, the interdisciplinary analysis will try to emphasize the connection between the two artistic forms of representation which are interrelated in order to create new artistic meanings. Being narrative

discourses, the literary text and its cinematographic representation are both put in relation with the reader / audience discourses. In order to transform a narrative text into a moving picture, the director has to connect his artistic discourse as a reader to the discourse of the text, even if the text is only a pretext for the film. That is why the theory of literary reception is taken into consideration when referring to the literary and cinematographic imaginary found in a narrative text and also in a cinematographic performance. Even if it is differently exposed, using distinct codes that belong to different semiotic systems, the *image* represents the element that makes the connection between the two forms of artistic representation.

1. THE THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The starting point is represented by the narrative text. As it is known, any literary text may be seen as a virtual space where specific ideas, paragraphs, characters, plots, mix together, generating other literary discourses. There is no literary text that was not inspired by other literary text, or any artistic form of representation or performance that was not inspired by other artistic form of expression. This process was defined by Roland Barthes as the possibility of continuing a finite text into another text and further on into another type of discourse or another kind of artistic representation.[1] A literary text is only the starting point for the process of reading, interpretation and inspiration for other artistic discourses. Considering Julia Kristeva's point of view, any narrative text may be taken into consideration only in the eyes of the reader. It is the reader who gives meaning to the text, and not only the author. The two perspectives, the reader's and the authors, collide and generate the galaxy of the multiple meanings of the same narrative text.[2] In order to analyze the relationships between the author's perspective and the reader's perspective, it is necessary to see the author's function inside the text. Each narrative text is a form of a discourse representation, and each discourse is bi-vocal expressing two different intentions at the same time: the speaking characters' intentions and the author's intentions. The character is a locator of the narrative text and, thus, his / her words may function as "ideo-logemes."[3] The function of an ideo-logeme is to link a concrete narrative structure

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[1] Roland Barthes, *Romanul scriiturii*, trad. Adriana Babeți and Delia Șepețean-Vasiliu (Bucharest: Univers, 1987), 206.

[2] The meaning of a narrative text, as well as the meaning of any literary text, is transferred not only from the author to the reader, but it is also created by the reader, or at least mediated through.

[3] Mikhail Bakhtin, *Probleme de literatură și estetică*, trad. Nicolae Iliescu (Bucharest: Univers, 1982), 194. An ideo-logeme represents the particular type of language used only by a single character. It has the function to individualize the character through his / hers discourse.

(the narrative text) with other narrative structures (the discourses). This kind of function may be noticed only at an inter-textual level of a narrative text.[4] Each character uses a specific language in order to create his / her discourse (different from the others) and to represent a certain and unique point of view regarding the world.[5] His / her actions are sustained ideo-logically.[6] But the characters are not the only forms of the locator. There are also impersonal discourses or different literary genders intercalated in the narrative text. All these personal and impersonal discourses are directly connected to the reader, who, in his or her turn, will transform them into his or her own discourses.

Generally speaking, the discourse represents the emitter, but it also represents itself, in other words, the discourse becomes the object of the narrative discourse. The character who speaks and his / her discourses require special formal procedures when extended to other forms of representation. The narrative text becomes more than an artistic representation of a single discourse, of a single linguistic conscience, the author's or the characters', it connects all the discourses placing them in an inter-relation network, each one lighting up the other ones. This network of discourses will later be used by the reader as his / her individual response to the literary text.

2. THE READER RESPONSE THEORY

The reading experience is mainly a subjective and communicative one. A literary text is understood as a response generating structure which is meant to promote the meaning within the text. Thus reading a narrative text becomes responding and interpreting the same text, finding new artistic values. This is the point where the inter-semiotic negotiation between any literary text and other artistic representation of the same text is made possible. Interpreting the literary text, the reader transposes its artistic meanings into other forms of representation, giving other new artistic values or even new artistic meanings.

Extending the analysis outside the narrative text, the network of the discourses that function within the narrative text is put into a discursive relationship with the reader in the process of reading. In his turn, the reader first assumes the discourses of the narrative text and, secondly, he creates his own discourse as forms of artistic response and artistic interpretation. The new

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[4] Julia Kristeva, "Problemele structurării textului," in *Pentru o teorie a textului*, trad. Adriana Babeți and Delia Șepețean-Vasiliu (Bucharest: Univers, 1980), 268.

[5] In fact, all the discourses in a narrative text are distant forms of the author's discourse.

[6] The characters act according to the purpose of their discourses, which may be rendered as such or not.

discourse does not function in a written form as the others do. It is imagined by the reader while he is reading the text. It could be said that he is imagining the discourse.[7] Thus, the narrative texts could generate other type of discourses outside the written form. But each narrative text generates a theoretical pattern that function only inside the text.[8] Summing up these patterns there could be established many narrative structures and a lot of narrative strategies that are to be used in writing other narrative texts or in analyzing them. But this is an impossible theoretical strategy as well, because each narrative text must be different from other narratives texts.[9] The difference is not an irreducible quality of the narrative text itself, but it is a progressive difference created by the infinite literary space that gravitates around the finite narrative text.[10] This is the place where the discourses from inside the narrative text inter-act with the discourses from outside the text (the readers' discourses). This particular space is also the place where the meaning generated by the discourses of the narrative text, so unfinished and incomplete, mingles with other meanings created by the reader/s' discourses. The process of reading becomes a creative one, producing imaginative texts.[11] In this type of text, the meanings create a huge network of meanings never superposing one another, but giving different perspectives of understanding and interpretation to the finite text. The imaginative text could be seen as a panoramic view over the meanings that a finite narrative text is capable to generate. This process never ends and it does not have a specific starting point, it configures the plurality of meanings of a narrative text. In the moment of reading, the reader becomes an author functioning in the imaginary context that he creates. Thus, between the two authors there could be developed a literary dialogue, investing each other's discourse with meaning. But meaning is not transferred directly from the author to the reader. It is expressed by the author in the form of a literary text unveiled by

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[7] This particular discourse, the reader's, functions only in relation to a specific narrative text. The reader may imagine a personal and individualized discourse to each narrative text that he reads. It is not the same distinctive discourse that relates the reader to the narratives texts that he reads.

[8] The same narrative pattern could be applied to most of the narrative texts, but this does not mean that it generates other narrative texts. Besides, it does not influence the reader and it also does not extend its function outside the narrative text, generating the reader's discourse.

[9] Barthes, *Romanul scriiturii*, 160.

[10] The meaning of the term "difference" does not refer to "otherness", but it expresses the relationship between the meaning of a narrative text and its literary representation, the relationship between what is expressed and how it is expressed. Paraphrasing Jacques Derrida's point of view, Christopher Norris considers that "meaning is never finished or completed, but it keeps on moving to encompass other, additional, supplementary meanings, which «disturb» the classical economy of language and representation." Christopher Norris, *Jacques Derrida* (London: Routledge, 1987), 15.

[11] These texts do not exist as such, because they are writable forms of narration.

the reader in the process of reading. A narrative text does not exhibit only one meaning, but an infinite number of meanings, according to Umberto Eco. The actual meaning of a narrative text is mediated through the reader's perspective. Following Roland' Barthes' theory, the meaning of a narrative text does not reside only in the text itself, promoting the author's discursive perspective, but it is also created by the reader in relation to that particular narrative text.[12]

The Inter-Semiotic Negotiation

In the process of writing a narrative text, the author inserts in the text a meta-fictional perspective upon the past that it is related. Each narrative text includes a "histoire" that is to be literally developed and turned into fiction. The textual incorporation of the past triggers the author's perspective, because it was he who selected the facts, who arranged them in a logical form, who completed the puzzle, who created the plot and who started to write the text in his own individualized style. On the other side, there is the reader, who understands and interprets the content of the narrative text, who places himself in the process of communication with that particular text, who speaks not only about what he reads, but also about the notices beyond the text, in the imaginative space around the text.

Extending this analysis to the next level, there could be noticed that the same process takes place when the narrative text is turned into a cinematographic representation, replacing the narrative discourses with the cinematographic one. It was already mentioned that the narrative text is a discursive form of artistic representation, just as the cinematographic representation. As a discourse, the narrative text is made of other individualized discourses that interact defining the narrative reality. This reality is created by the verbal manifestation of all the discourses that are connected to one another. The hermeneutics of the verbal text is able to analyse the inter-relationships between the discourses at a linguistic and literary level. Besides the communicative intentions that any discourse may presuppose, the narrative discourse exceeds the linguistic level of representation.[13] It may become the object of the cinematographic representation.[14] It presumes the

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[12] Barthes, *Romanul scriiturii*, 161. Continuing this analysis, the reader actualizes the entire network of literary texts, not only the narrative ones, in the process of reading.

[13] Wallace Chafe, "The Analysis of Discourse Flow," in *The Handbook of Discourse Analysis*, eds. Deborah Schiffrin, Deborah Tannen, Heidi E. Hamilton (Oxford: Blackwell, 2001), 86.

[14] Each character uses a specific language in order to represent a certain and unique point of view regarding reality, defining his / her discourse. The characters' discourses function as references for their acts and reactions. Being textually expressed, they create an inter-textual cinematographic discourse which was depicted and made of other discourses.

intention of influencing and modifying the receiver.[15] The cinematographic representation is linked to the imaginative discourses of the audience. Thus, the film becomes the place where the past is turned into present, where *histoire* is watched just in front of the audience, because of the author, who proposed the narrative text, then the director, the actors, the sound engineer, the light engineer, and all the people involved in the process of making a film.

The cinematographic representation becomes the place of convergence of all verbal and non-verbal semiotic forms of artistic performance and reception. The general meaning of the cinematographic discourse is rendered in connection with other semiotic systems: music, mimicry, gestural language and proximity, etc. The inter-relation among all these semiotic cods of performance is possible because of their syncretism. The cinematographic discourse as a performative artistic representation becomes possible and functions as a materialized form of the narrative text. It is received by the audience as an artistic act generated by the superposition of the significant heterogeneous structures which perform simultaneously generating a bi-dimension perspective. The new dimension focuses on creating the illusion of reality. The audience functions as a reader, just as in the case of the narrative text. The audience generates its own cinematographic imaginative discourse. It is not quite the same as in the process of reading. While watching a film, the audience may respond or not to the illusion of reality that they are confronting, but the discourse that is imagined, this time, is less imaginative, because the audience has the purpose of recognizing, accepting the reality that is presented, and not to imagine one. The audience discourse is somehow altered by the reality that is watched, but, even so, the discourse of reception manifests itself as a form of acceptance, of believing in the reality performed on film.

The Literary and the Cinematographic Image

Most of the theories concerning the artistic image developed different types of aesthetic discourses on the basis of the notion of representation. The word *image* was used to express a copy, and any artistic act became an act of mimetic representation. There are also many other possibilities of framing a new perspective of interpreting the *image*, separated from the representational practices. The new ontology considers the *image* as a synthesis of affects and not representations according to the perspective proposed by Deleuze and Gattari. Any act of creating an *artistic image* is based on the confrontation between the forces

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[15] Sara Mills, *Discourse* (London: Routledge, 1997), 5.

that are directly involved in the process: the author's and the receiver's. Continuing the theory presented before, it could be said that the *literary image* is in fact the artistic meeting between reader and the literary text, and in extension, between the film and the spectator. The *image* merges into sensation, providing vitality for any work of art and, more than that, turning art itself into an element of sensorial development specific for *homo faber*.[16] The visible and the invisible, the real and the imaginary are melt into each other.[17] *Image* does not stand anymore for the mediation between the author and the receiver on the grounds of representation, but for the emotions that the work of art is able to generate through it.[18]

Extending the philosophical perspective, *image* may interfere in different other activities such as thinking and understanding. Far from being placed beyond reason, the figurative manner of thinking develops a poetic intellect[19] which becomes the basis for understanding not only the visual images but also the verbal ones (the literary images).[20] There are two types of artistic image, according to Wunenburger: the literary and the cinematographic. The most realistic one is the cinematographic image. It implies the cutting of a shred out of reality, disconnecting it from its sensitive coordinates and re-creating it on the screen. On the other hand, the literary image is the less realistic image because it is not set up according to the simultaneity and appearances of reality, but it is developed in the moment when the reader is facing the literary text.

The process of shaping the cinematographic image is based on the subtle differences between temporal and action shots. That is why the film is not a simple projection, an act of representation, but it has its own potential of creating time and action. The post-war cinematography cannot be related to the possibilities of action-and-reaction upon different situations, but to the process of turning the logical progression of the cinematographic images into the possibility of experiencing the images as such. The spectator is facing the absolute optical and sound images unaltered by the narrative development.[21]

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[16] Herbert Read, *Imagine și idee*, trad. Herdan Ion (Bucharest: Univers, 1970), 10-11.

[17] The shape, the colour, the line, the outline, the perspective, the movement are linked together in order to give a meaning for the vivid image. Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Merleau-Ponty Reader*, ed. Ted Toadvine, Leonard Lawlor (Evanstone, Illinois: Northwest University Press, 2007), 359-360.

[18] Jean Jacques Wunenburger, *Filosofia imaginilor*, trans. Muguraș Constantinescu (Iași: Polirom, 2004), 226.

[19] The human thinking is not possible in the absence of an image of thinking.

[20] Wunenburger, *Filosofia imaginilor*, 248.

[21] Gilles Deleuze, *Diferență și repetiție*, trans. Toader Saulea (Bucharest: Babel, 2005), 48.

The transition from action to perception destroys any type of chronology, and introduces a series of present moments generating the direct time-images of a film.[22] The temporal constituency could be defined as the rhythmic intensity of any shot. Thus, time may materialize when there is an emotion that goes beyond the optical and sound situations on screen. The rhythm itself is determined by the pressure of the time and not by the length of the shot. In the contemporary cinema theories, the rhythm is the dominant element and not the montage, which remains only an important feature of the style.[23] Because the cinematographic transposition of any literary text involves an aesthetic perception which is different from the aesthetic perception necessary for understanding a narrative text and for managing the literary images, there could be said that the receiver, meaning the audience, needs to develop specific abilities in order to decrypt the cinematographic images which suppose optical and sound situations at the same time. The following chapter will present two strategies used for encouraging the spectator's active recognition of the sound and optical motifs.

The Stalker

Andrei Tarkowsky's film, *The Stalker*, released in 1976, represents an ambiguous allegory of decay, being one of those works of art that both prompts and eludes interpretation at the same time. The story of the film is about a Writer and a scientist, the Professor, guided by a man called Stalker, on a journey through a wasteland referred to as the *Zone*. The aim of their journey is to reach the *Room*, a place where all wishes are granted. At the end, they fail in their quest because of their lack of will. The logical development of the poetic approach to a narrative composition represents one of the main important characteristics of this film. The conventional narrative structure has been abandoned and then replaced with an alternative way of creating a cinematographic composition. The dramatic events of the film are unfolded in a logical chronological order and the original style becomes a presentation of these events in a straightforward manner.[24] In the case of *The Stalker*, the cinematographic image is not composed of different shots arranged in a specific structure within a sequence that is meant to develop in time,

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[22] According to Bahktin's theory of the chronotope, the same specific interrelationship of time and space may be used to describe the time-image interconnection in a film.

[23] Ian Christie, "Formalism and Neo-Formalism," in *The Oxford Guide to Film Studies*, ed. John Hill, Pamela Church Gibson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 62.

The modern tendency of the cinematographic art is to emphasize the importance of time inside a shot. This tendency was called *slow cinema*.

[24] Maya Turovskaya, *Tarkowsky: Cinema as Poetry* (London: Faber and Faber, 1989), 118.

but it is given as the expression of the matter world. The time inside the shot generates the emotions that go beyond the events on the screen. The act of experiencing such cinematographic images mediates for the direct perception of time, whose rhythm illustrates a new way of seeing the essence of life. In order to develop this new manner of perceiving the cinematographic images, Tarkovsky introduces certain devices in his work to cue the audience's familiarization with this new manner of transposing the cinematographic images on screen.

As an example of this strategy is the introduction of the musical fragments that accompany the train wheels' rhythmic pulse. In the opening scene, this device appears in the opening scene – shots 2 and 8 – and it recurs three times later. In the scene 6, the sound of the trolley cart is accompanied by electronic music composed by Eduard Artemiev and later, in the scene 15, the train is heard within a fragment from Ravel's *Bolero*, and also in the scene 17, the train is again accompanied with a fragment from Beethoven's 9th Symphony. The aim of the musical accompaniments to the train's rumble is to cue the spectator to recognise a "background diegetic sound" which is the train as an important and deliberately introduced device.[25] At this moment, Tarkovsky's intention was to encourage the audience to perceive the film sound in the same way as they perceive music, mainly as an aesthetic and potentially cinematographic element.[26]

Another strategy that was used in the same film is the emphasis that the director gave to Stalker's role as an auditor. This strategy could be easily identified in the scene 3 which represents the moment when Stalker introduces Writer to Professor in the bar. The two intellectuals become more and more engaged in the first of their aggressive conversations. In the scene there could be noticed the gradation of their interaction: Writer dominates the proceedings, denigrating both his and the scientist's professions as "inane searches for an unattainable truth" while the Professor tries to give his own point of view.[27] The whole conversation is represented in a single take, framing the three men in a long-shot composition standing around a tall bar table.

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[25] Thomas Readwood, *Andrei Tarkowsky's Poetics of Cinema* (Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2010), 280.

[26] The Romantic (Beethoven) and Modern (Ravel and Artemiev) musical elements that were introduced represent an attempt to emphasize this principle.

[27] Readwood, *Andrei Tarkowsky's Poetics of Cinema*, 211.

The Stalker (photography from the film)[28]

Professor is on the left, Writer is on the right and Stalker is in the middle. While Professor and Writer bicker, the camera tracks slowly forwards, directing the audience's attention to Stalker, who remains quiet during the whole conversation. The centred character, Stalker, does not speak nor seem to register the chatter of the other two characters but it could be notice his reaction to the off-screen sounds: the train whistle, the boat horn and the train coming to a halt. Only after all these sounds "interruptions" he dares to speak to his clients: "Do you hear it, our train?"[29] This scene represents an example of a direct perception of a cinematographic image. It is the moment when the audience see and hear beyond the idle banter between the writer and the professor and is cued to pay attention to the introduction of the off-screen sound motifs. The optical and the sound motifs stand for a cinematographic imaginary which interconnects the spectator to a stylistically driven film.

The two strategies that were used for exemplifying the manner in which the sound motif sustains the optical motif and vice-versa, in order to obtain a complete cinematographic image, may seem extraneous in a conventional narrative film, but in this case, they become relevant. Tarkowsky's purpose was to *decentre* the film's human elements.[30]

Even if they are used for establishing the narrative information in a conventional film, the characters' actions and their dialogues were developed off-set by the Russian director's stylistic strategies. Any form of anthropocentric manifestation was blocked, engaging the audience to recognise other elements in mise-en-scene and to consider the narrative functions these elements perform

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[28] *The Society for Film*, accessed on June 10, 2015, http://thesocietyforfilm.com/?s=stalker.
[29] Readwood, *Andrei Tarkowsky's Poetics of Cinema*, 123.
[30] *Ibidem*, 136.

within the cinematographic image. That is why the spectator needs to develop the abilities of viewing and listening activities away from the conventions of classical cinema and also to engage with the film on its own terms.[31]

Conclusion

Analyzing the film *The Stalker*, there could be said that the literary text is only a pretext for re-creating a different universe, a real cinematographic parable. In this case, the director eliminates all the collateral narrative elements from the script because the focus needs to be on the fantastic essence of the cinematographic discourse and not on the action or on the realism of the plot. The literary discourse becomes a cinematographic metaphor. In order to expose the cinematographic imaginary, the director uses other forms of artistic representation except the verbal discourse. It is the sound and the image as the two semiotic codes involved. The visual code contains different cinematographic elements that belong to other semiotic systems: the colour, the light, the perspective, the angles, the camera moving, the background, etc. Each specific element or technique transfers a structural characteristic that, in its turn, gives a specific meaning. For example the transition between the urban area and the rural area is based on the mixture between the colours: the sepia for the urban background and the powerful colours, such as green, for the rural zone. As the characters are getting closer to the centre of the zone, the colours become more intensified too. The meaning besides this colour changing is that as the characters are leaving a dystopian universe, filmed in sepia, a colour of disintegration, they are approaching the zone of hope and desire and the colours are meant to express the contrast between the two universes. The sound is sustained by the sound track, the noise and the sound effects. At the beginning the sound track is monotonous and it becomes more vivid as the characters enter the zone. The sound of the train or the wheels is changed into the sound of the leaves and birds. The characters themselves are changed into symbols. They become more abstract, any particular feature is eliminated in order to maintain the concept within the symbol: the professor, showing discipline and obedience, and the writer, showing rebellion and caprice. The reality rendered in the cinematographic image and discourse suggests the illusion of reality, but in the case of *The Stalker* the cinematographic metaphor becomes the main means of artistic communication based on the cinematographic imaginary that could be recognised in the superposition of all the cinematographic structures and codes

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[31] Readwood, *Andrei Tarkowsky's Poetics of Cinema*, 137.

involved in (re)creating the bi-dimensional illusion, the most important function of the cinematographic art.

The study "The Inter-Semiotic Negotiation of the Inter-Textual Imaginary" links two artistic perspectives: literature and cinematography. Both are semiotic system of artistic representation. They carry on a discursive form of expression. Considering that the cinematographic representation is the place where the narrative text reveals its qualities and turns into an act of artistic performance, the literary images become more sensitive being directly perceived by the spectator. This transposition from the literary imaginary into the cinematographic one is made possible in the process of an inter-semiotic negotiation. As a performance, the cinematographic representation of the literary images uses other semiotic systems in order to create the illusion of reality. All the sensations, the affects and the emotions that are given by the literary imaginary and could be developed in the moment the reader meets the literary text, are turned into cinematographic images perceived as expressions of the matter of the world. But the cinematographic representation may also be the place where the time of the past events, in other words the *histoire*, becomes the present of the performance and of the reception, with the only purpose of becoming reality or parable. In order to perform or to understand the artistic process, the events must be inter-connected with the previous events, the narrative discourses with previous discourses, the literary images with the cinematographic images. The reader who has experienced the literary adventure becomes the spectator who receives the cinematographic representation in his / her own manner. No one is fully innocent in this matter. The illusion of reality that comes from the cinematographic images and discourse is turned into reality or metaphor. This new type of reality could be accessed by all the people involved.

Analyzing the syncretism of both aesthetic form of manifestation – literature and cinematography – the conclusion is that each one is meant to highlight the other in a continuous inter-systemic, inter-semiotic and inter-discursive dialogue in order to create new artistic meanings and new manners of artistic perception.

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