

## Face and death in *Cries and Whispers*, by Ingmar Bergman

Volume 36  
issue 2 / 2017

Contracampo e-ISSN 2238-2577  
Niterói (RJ), 36 (2)  
aug/2017-nov/2017

Contracampo – Brazilian Journal of Communication is a quarterly publication of the Graduate Programme in Communication Studies (PPGCOM) at Fluminense Federal University (UFF). It aims to contribute to critical reflection within the field of Media Studies, being a space for dissemination of research and scientific thought.

### HENRIQUE CODATO

Doctor in Communication, Minas Gerais Federal University (UFMG); post-doctorate researcher at the Graduate Program in Communication at Ceará Federal University (UFC). Brazil. E-mail: picega@hotmail.com

### FERNANDES ISABEL PAZ SALES XIMENES CARMO

Master Master's degree in Communication, Ceará Federal University (UFC). Brazil. E-mail: isabelpazsales@gmail.com

TO REFERENCE THIS ARTICLE, PLEASE USE THE FOLLOWING CITATION:

Condato, H.; Carmo, I. (2017) Face and death in *Cries and Whispers*, by Ingmar Bergman. *Contracampo*, Niterói, 36 (2), p. XX-XX

Submitted on 22nd June 2017 / Accepted on 24th August 2017

DOI – <http://dx.doi.org/10.22409/contracampo.v36i2.1026>

## Abstract

Three women await the passing of a fourth one. All three are dressed in white and roam silently across the red-wall rooms of a house. *Cries and whispers* (*Viskningarothrop*, 1972), by the Swedish director Ingmar Bergman, addresses existential questions, amongst which are family conflicts, mortality, femininity and incommunicability. Based on Deleuze's theory of image-affection (2009), we intend to analyze some of the close-ups of the movie and, in doing so, establish relations between face and death in this particular work by Bergman.

## Keywords

Face; Close-up; *Cries and whispers*; Death.

## Introduction

*The close-up is the deeper gaze, the director's sensibility.  
The close-up is the poetry of the cinema.*  
Bela Balázs

Throughout his work, Swedish director Ingmar Bergman seems to have carried out the maxim of Balázs. For Bergman, work in cinema “starts with the human face (...). The possibility of approaching the human face is the first originality and the distinctive quality of the cinema”<sup>1</sup>. (Bergman apud Deleuze, 2009, p. 154). As in most of his films, in *Cries and Whispers* (*Viskningar och rop*, 1972), the face – and the *faceification*<sup>2</sup> [*visagéification*] of other elements – plays a key role on the narrative. Combined with aesthetic experiments with black, white and red (a color of latent symbolism for the director), faces populate a space-time laden with death.

This article is divided into two parts. The first aims to analyze some sequences of the film based on the affection-image concept, as proposed by Gilles Deleuze in the book *Cinema 1 – The Movement Image* (2009). In this work, Deleuze discusses the relation between the face, the close-up and cinema, considering that “there is no close-up of the face, the face is itself a close-up, the close-up is by itself face and both are affect, affection-image” (2009, p. 138). For the author, the image-affection is formed by two poles, the first reflective or qualitative and the second intensive or powerful. Therefore, we propose to observe the passage from one pole to another of the affection-image in the close-up of the character Agnes (Harriet Anderson) in a specific sequence of *Cries and Whispers*. Other points discussed by Deleuze, such as the *faceification* of objects and the dissociation between shot and space-time coordinates, will also be developed regarding the image of the clocks – constantly visited by Bergman – and in the close-up shots that initiate the individual flashbacks of the characters.

In the second part of the article, we analyze the way Bergman stages death in *Cries and Whispers*. Set in a 19th-century aristocratic mansion, the film presents Agnes' final moments, after suffering for several years from a chronic illness<sup>3</sup>. At a time when death was still reserved for the family space, we observe how the mortuary protocols – the last moments on the deathbed, the preparation of the body for the wake, and a burial that is never seen – affect the film writing and the relations between the characters. In an interpretative movement that circulates

---

<sup>1</sup> Translated from a Brazilian edition of *Cinema 1 – The Movement Image*. See references.

<sup>2</sup> The terms *faceification* and *faceicity* are taken from an American edition of *Cinema 1 – The Movement Image*, published in 1997. See references.

<sup>3</sup> Some critics (SITNEY, 1989; MELLEN, 1973) presume that Agnes suffers from intestinal or uterine cancer.

from face to close-up and death, we will therefore try to draw points in common between these elements.

## *Cries and Whispers*, by Ingmar Bergman

For more than a year, an image haunted Ingmar Bergman, appearing and resurfacing intermittently: four white women in a red-walled room whisper to each other, maintaining a reserve behavior (Bergman, 1996, 83). Some time later, the vision became clearer when the filmmaker realized that three of them waited for the death of the fourth woman, giving rise to the plot of *Cries and Whispers*.

The aristocrats Maria (Liv Ullmann) and Karin (Ingrid Thulin) follow the last days of their sister, Agnes (Harriet Anderson), while this one is assisted by the maid Anna (Kari Sylwan), who gives support and consolation to the dying woman. Like Bergman's various works<sup>4</sup>, the drama deals with existential issues, such as death, the feminine, family relations, good and evil, as well as the inability to communicate and a latent and sometimes interdicted sexual desire.

The cries and whispers<sup>5</sup> that we hear – referred to in the title of the work – come from the four characters forced to live in isolation, in the family home, in a time of death (Veiga, 2014). Agnes' howls of pain and Karin's desperate screams mix with the whispers of the characters' secrets echoing subtly between the walls of the house. During some dialogues, specifically between Karin and Maria, the words of the two women echo discreetly, as if they were on another layer of sound.

According to Bergman (in Sundgren, 1973), the film was planned in progressions, which, combined with the musical origin of the title, seems to suggest an association with the Italian categorizations of *tempo* of the compass: *grave*, *lento*, *largo*, *larghetto*, *adagio* and so on<sup>6</sup>. It follows a rigorous rhythm marked by the rites that Agnes' death demands: the visit of the doctor, the care for the sick, the comfort in the final moments, the tending of the dead body, the religious prayer pronounced by the pastor, and a burial denied to the viewer, for the present tense of the narrative is confined between the red walls of the mansion. Only the

---

<sup>4</sup> Briefly, we can say that *Cries and Whispers* establishes strong relationships with works *So Close to Life* (*Nära livet*, 1958), which tells the story of three women cloistered in a hospital room and who must decide whether or not to keep their babies, and *Persona* (1966), film about the fusion of personalities between a nurse and her silent patient.

<sup>5</sup> The title of the film is borrowed from Mozart: "*Cries and Whispers* is not my own phrase, but comes from a review of a Mozart piano sonata. I do not remember which one. He said the slowness of movements was like cries and whispers, and I thought they fit very well. Because it is, in fact, a piece of music translated into images." (Bergman, 1996, 88)

<sup>6</sup> The musical *tempo* is indicated at the top of the score and dictates how fast the song will be played. Generally, it varies between *grave* and *prestissimo*. Such a rating is calculated in bpm (beats per minute).

prologue to the film and Agnes' recollections occur in the property gardens. The time narrative is interspersed with flashbacks of each of the four women.

Such sequences in flashback begin and end with the red color that invades the screen, focusing on the close-up of the character whose memories we are about to see staged. The flashbacks do not have an exact narrative function for the film – that is, they do not contribute in an effective way for the story progress –, but reveal something of the intimacy of each of the protagonists and to introduce other characters in the plot, such as Agnes' doctor, Karin and Maria's husbands, and Anna's deceased daughter. Michel Philibert (1975) underlines, in the same sense, three other sequences throughout the film, interrupting the chain of actions and the chronological order of the story. These are the scenes involving the reading of excerpts from Agnes' diary. The first is a recollection of Agnes herself as she writes; and the other two are read aloud by Karin, before her quarrel with Maria, and again by Anna at the end of the movie. In the same sense, it is also necessary to mention Anna's dream sequence.

Philibert (1975) points out a fundamental difference in the flashback scenes regarding the enunciation of the recollections to which they refer. For Agnes, for example, it is her voice over that leads us through the happy memories of her childhood. As for Maria and Karin, it is the voice over of a narrator<sup>7</sup> who comes to introduce their memories. According to Philibert, while the past functions as a kind of jubilant suspension for Agnes, which takes her out of the pain and suffering lived in the present, for the other two women the past is a joyless time filled with remorse and frustration.

Thus, by refusing to conceive a unique time in *Cries and Whispers*, Bergman attempts to show, in a Bergsonian perspective, that:

[...] the subject is not simply taken by the succession of instants that slide without remission from the future to the present and from the present to the past; he takes off from this succession, he interprets and reorders it. He does not submit to time, but gives it a certain meaning<sup>8</sup>. (Philibert, 1975, p.179)

The living blood on the walls *leaks* into other objects on the scene – the costumes, the bedding, the curtains, the flooring of the furniture – establishing a fanciful *mise-en-scène*, populated by poignant characters who follow the rigorous rhythm set by the director: Maria's, Karin's and Anna's flashbacks last for ten

---

<sup>7</sup>Bergman himself is the narrator.

<sup>8</sup>In the original: "Le sujet n'est pas purement et simplement entraîné par la succession des instants qui glissent sans rémission de l'avenir vers le présent et du présent vers le passé ; il se détache de cette succession, il l'interprète et la réordonne. Il ne subit pas le temps, il lui donne un sens". Excerpt translated by the authors.

minutes each, while Agnes' death takes place in the almost exact half of the film. The omnipresence of the color red<sup>9</sup> is indicative not only of a transposition of visual aggression towards concrete physical violence (Agnes' mortal agony, the attempted suicide of Maria's husband, the blood that comes from Karin's mutilations), but also of a moral and psychological violence (Maria's betrayal, Karin's coldness and harshness, their indifference to Anna's situation).

Life and death unite, then, these four women, imprisoned in the enclosing space of the house and the harshness of time. The time of death, marked by the ticking of the clocks, is interrupted by these temporary suspensions, whose starting points are always the actresses' face in close-up. Captured against the light and looking at the camera lens, the characters do not seem to engage in a confrontational attitude, as in the disconcerting look cast by Monika's character (also played by Harriet Anderson) in *Summer with Monika* (*Sommaren med Monika*, 1953), but circumscribe a moment apart by means of an interior monologue also addressed to the viewer.

## Faceification and close-up

In *The Movement Image*, Deleuze (2009) enshrines Bergman as one of the filmmakers who most insisted on the combination of three elements: cinema, face and close-up. In *Cries and Whispers*, the close-up fulfills an essential role of unravelling for the characters – each flashback begins with the close-up of the corresponding actor's face – and the relations between them. On several occasions, as we will try to show, the faces of the actresses are touched by the characters with whom they are interacting, in attitudes that could denote comfort, affection and love, but also gestures of perception of a truth or of consequent repulsion.

In the first sequence of the film, we observe a montage operation that approximates three close-ups and relates them closely, in what Deleuze calls the internal composition of the close-up, "the relationship of the close-up, either to other close-ups, or to itself, its elements and dimensions" (Deleuze, 2009, p.161). The ticking of the clocks, as a sound backdrop in the prologue of the film, serves as a link between the bright garden and the claustrophobic interior of the mansion. When the space of the house is penetrated by the camera, the first objects to be filmed, always in close-ups and extreme close-ups, are the clocks – an image that is repeated in several other works by Bergman, as in *Wild Strawberries*

---

<sup>9</sup> For Bergman (1996, p.90), red is the color of the interior of the human soul, imagined by him as the shadow of a blue-gray dragon with a reddish interior.

(*Smultronstället*, 1957), *Winter Light* (*Nattvardsgästerna*, 1963), *Hour of the Wolf* (*Vargtimmen*, 1968) and *Fanny and Alexander* (*Fanny och Alexander*, 1982).

Embellishments, pendulums, needles, and the numbers marked on the white surface of the dial are treated like a face – the part of the body that gave up "most of its motoricity in order to become the support for organs of reception" (Deleuze, 2009, p. 138). The clocks manage time in the micromovements of the clock-hands, a major expression of our mortality<sup>10</sup>. For Deleuze (2009), the Face is not limited to the human face. Things can take on a *faceicity* [*visagéité*], can be seen or *faceified* [*visagéifié*], and the close-up becomes, in this sense, an active agent of this investment, corroborating what Jean Epstein (1974) had already said about the ability of objects to acquire, in the close-up, a personality or a metaphorical character:

[...]is the revolver character, that is, the desire or remorse of crime, failure, suicide. He is as dark as the temptations of the night, shining as the reflection of coveted gold, taciturn as passion, brutal, robust, heavy, cold, suspicious, menacing. He has a character, habits, memories, will, soul<sup>11</sup>. (Epstein, 1974, p. 141)



Figure 1 – The first close-ups

The images of the clocks are followed by the close-ups of Maria and Agnes. It is in this combination of shots that lies the internal composition of which Deleuze speaks. Maria is shown in deep sleep. Her beautiful, young, flushed face is opposed to the next close-up, on which Bergman dwells longer. Agnes sleeps, her breath is louder than Maria's, and the pallor of her cheeks denounces her disease. She then opens her eyes and is awake, with no trace of drowsiness or indisposition. However, soon after, comes the first access of pain. The eyes close, the muscles tighten, the mouth contracts, the eyebrows draw closer, while the face, once serene, translates, in its features, the agony of pain.

<sup>10</sup> As she gets up from the bed, Agnes winds the clock on the mantelpiece, triggering the narrative time and her own mortality.

<sup>11</sup>In the original: "Et un gros plan de revolver, ce n'est plus un revolver, c'est le personnage-revolver, c'est-à-dire le désir ou le remords du crime, de la faillite, du suicide. Il est sombre comme les tentations de la nuit, brillant comme le reflet de l'or convoité, taciturne comme la passion, brutal, trapu, lourd, froid, méfiant, menaçant. Il a un caractère, des moeurs, des souvenirs, une volonté, une âme". Excerpt translated by the authors.

In this close-up, we can observe a transition of the two poles that Deleuze (2009) attributes to the affection-image: the qualitative pole, of a wondering face, is an object of admiration and is therefore a reflecting surface (in which the viewer could project himself, as in a mirror); and the intensive pole, which expresses the desire and inserts micromovements of expression. To each pole, we could assign questions that would facilitate our understanding of the affection-image: to the qualitative pole, the question "what are you thinking about?", and to the intensive pole, "what do you sense or feel?" In Agnes' thoughtful gaze, at first, is the face-contour, linked to the surface; in the next few seconds, when this same face is crossed by suffering, we see the micromovements of the intensive face, the traces of *faceicity* that disturb the surface.

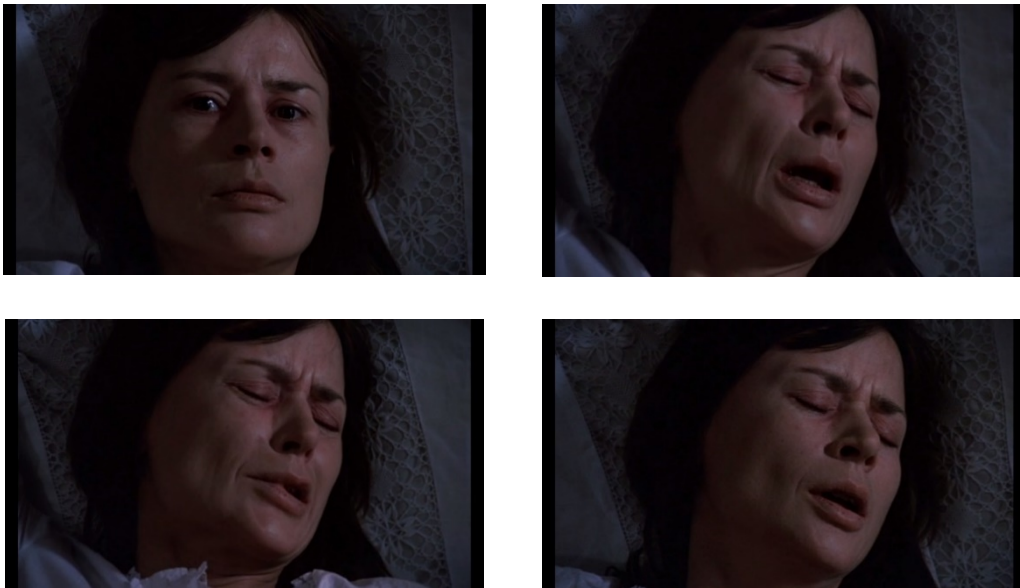


Figure 2 – Face and close-up: from qualitative pole to intensive pole

The editing work puts us in front of three frames that progressively move from the qualitative pole to the intensive pole, marking the rhythm of the film as a whole and establishing itself as an allegory of human mortality itself. By leaving a motionless surface – the clock or the face – Bergman proposes a dive in subjectivity, and particularly in the protagonists' bodies, marked by both desire and pain.





Figure 3 – *The Three Ages of Man and Death* (Grien, 1543)

Also, this composition – from Maria’s face to that of Agnes, visually inaugurated by the clocks and placed against the aural background of their insistent ticking – suggests, to a certain extent, the flow of life. The clock marks this deathly time of youth’s evanescence, from Maria’s face to Agnes’s decrepit and ill face. In this interstice, not immediately apparent, there would be maturity, embodied by Karin, thus constructing a picture similar to that of Hans Baldung Grien (Figure 3), *The Three Ages of Man and Death* (1543). The Bergmanian triad of women revolves around the memory of the mother, a latent absence in filmic matter, but personified, to some extent, by the character of Anna, the maid.

## The interludes

As stated before, the rhythm of the film owes much to these narrative breaks, marked by both the flashback sequences and the digressive scenes related to Anna’s dream. Through these interludes, the director’s intention is perhaps to give some meaning to the cries and whispers of the characters, thereby revealing secrets and mysteries that surround them. Between the oppressive redness of the walls of the house and the nearness of death, such images reveal to us past events, or else serve to stage a daydream<sup>12</sup>.

Structurally, such interludes are introduced and finalized by means of a transition: red screen; close-up of the character’s face; and another red screen, which starts the flashback / dream sequence. The red color becomes, in this sense, a visual leitmotiv that usually demarcates a temporal passage or a change of space, announcing itself as a cut in the diegetic present that comes to explain or justify, in a somewhat didactic gesture, the actions of the characters in relation to themselves and towards others.

In the wake of Balász’s theory, Deleuze (2009) understands the close-up not as a part taken from the whole of the film, i.e., as a partial object, but rather as something that abstracts away from all the spatio-temporal coordinates. “For the expression of a face and the signification of this expression have no relation or connection with space. Faced with an isolated space, we do not perceive space. Our

---

<sup>12</sup> The last sequence of the film is a memento of Agnes, read by Anna in the diary. As it is not triggered by the character itself, we consider this more of an epilogue to the film than a flashback.

sensation of space is abolished. A dimension of another order is opened to us." (Balázs *apud* Deleuze, 2009, p. 149). This new dimension is, according to Balázs (2010), physiognomy itself, which would reveal an inner truth, exposing the real face underlying the surface that spreads on the screen. No falsehood would resist to the magnifying glass of the close-up.

In *Cries and Whispers*, the close-ups that begin and close the interludes are paired to the red screens. Therefore, one can notice an intimate connection between space and time by means of the color. The red screen / close-up / red screen play, even if it serves to introduce or complete a certain temporal suspension, characterizes a permanence of space, as if it translated or directly interfered with the subjectivity of the characters. The omnipresence of the red color and the close-up frames that are limited by Bergman to the edges of the faces against the light, gain a claustrophobic effect, denoting a certain constriction (Figure 4).

If the incursions into the past of Maria and Karin are presented by the voice of an omniscient narrator, in the case of Agnes the memory is brought to the fore by the character itself, who narrates to the spectator episodes of her relationship with her mother, in a construction outside the red screen / close-up play. We enter and leave the flashback through the image of a white rose, a possible metaphor related to the mother, whom Agnes is constantly thinking of. Harriet Andersson's character seems to be the only one who does not need mediation: not from the narrator, from the red screen, or even from her own face in close-up to begin that incursion. For her, there are no whispers or secrets possible, only the cries of pain. In his postmortem blessing, the pastor says, "Her faith was stronger than mine." However, the sisters cannot really love her; their actions are conditioned by the fear and repugnance that the presence of death brings with it.





Figure 4 – The close-ups of Maria and Karin in the interludes

Still concerning Karin and Maria's flashbacks, something imminently deadly cuts through the scenes recalled. Death is lurking in both the attempted suicide of Maria's husband, Joakin (Henning Moritzen), and Karin's mutilation – she cuts herself with a piece of glass inserted into the vagina after arguing with her husband, Fredrik (Georg Årlin). After the mutilation, she puts the blood on her lips and face. Thus, the red rushes from the walls and materializes in the blood of the characters, closing the film as a still-alive matter. It is as if somehow the blood we see on the screen sprung from a wound that opens inside the narrative itself, and that leaks through the memories triggered by the two women. In this case, it moves us to another place, another time; elsewhere between life and death, reality and memory, the materiality and the immateriality of the filmed bodies.

In Anna's dream, Karin and Maria's social masks fall to the ground. Again, the presentation of this interlude is the same as the red screen / close-up / red screen play, with background alternation for each illuminated face. However, unlike the other flashbacks that bring about something intimate and private from the characters, Anna's dream describes the events that circumscribe the final moments of Agnes and the role that the other women play in the face of their sister's death. The martyrdom caused by illness (or, perhaps, by the burden of carrying the suffering of all around her so that she could intercede for them with God, as the pastor asks) has made Agnes so exhausted that she cannot make the passage to the other world. This is where all the dislike among sisters reappears. Disgusted by the presence of death, Karin and Maria resist the appeals of the dead sister, who finds comfort only in Anna's arms, the only character who, in fact, takes care of Agnes, even offering her breast, as a provident and pious mother would do, in a depiction of the Pietà (Figure 5), in which nakedness is exchanged<sup>13</sup>. Indeed, Anna's silent character – who is neither a member of the family nor an aristocrat –

---

<sup>13</sup> In the scene, the one who finds herself naked is Anna – the mother – instead of Agnes, who assumes here the role of the Christ.

seems to be the dissonant note of this *melodramma serio*<sup>14</sup>orchestrated by Bergman.



Figure 5 –Anna's dream

The figure of the mother<sup>15</sup> – also played by Liv Ullmann – appears in the memories of the three sisters as a ghost that comes to haunt the gloomy daily life of the cloistered women. During her recollections, Agnes describes her as "sweet, beautiful and lively, and so intensely present. But she could also be cold, subtly cruel, and repel me". Those characteristics seem to be replicated in the two other sisters: Karin, also cold, cruel and distant; and especially in Maria (the fact that both are played by the same actress reinforces the connection between them). She is beautiful and vivacious, and at the same time, disingenuous and scornful, as evidenced by her relations with David, Joakin and Karin, whom she ironically repels in the last sequence of the film.

The maternal absence prompts Agnes to always look for Anna in times of pain and suffering. We note here a double transference: from Agnes to Anna, who takes the place of the deceased mother; and from Anna to Agnes, who plays a kind of substitute for Anna's deceased daughter. Nevertheless, in some moments of the film, the scenes carried out by the two women are crossed by a latent homoeroticism, embodied by the caresses, the tender kisses and the exchanged glances between them – as it also happens in the sequence after Agnes' death, in which Karin and Maria reconcile after a violent argument.

## Agnes' death

---

<sup>14</sup>*Melodramma serio* or *Opera seria* is the Italian genre of opera that presents human dramas and passions as central themes. It is historically opposed to the *Opera buffa*.

<sup>15</sup> Another bergmanian autobiographical trait. The director even admitted in an interview after the release of the film that the characters carry various characteristics of his own mother, with whom he always had a very conflictive relationship. See Sundgren (1973) in the references of this work.

In *Cries and Whispers*, Bergman makes us visit a time of death different from that to which we are accustomed to in the 20th or 21st century. Set in the nineteenth century, death happens in the familial space, assisted by relatives, after a long illness. Medicine has not yet taken on the task of normalizing the care of the patient (Mendes, 2011), so much so that the visit of the doctor is useless, only serving to announce that soon Agnes shall pass<sup>16</sup>. In fact, there is nothing she or the other women can do, except wait, as the countless clocks in the mansion seem to demonstrate.

The present time of the narrative, marked by the protocols of death, drags itself agonizingly, while accompanying Agnes' suffering in her final moments and tapping into the memories of the other women: as painful as the incurable disease that plagues the dying woman. Like the shadowy space of the mansion, time also confines the protagonists and seems to condemn them to a permanent remembrance of their mortal condition, bound to an eternal *memento mori*.

Bergman does not spare us from suffering or pain, stamped on the pale and wan face of the patient. We know that death is near. Agnes senses it: "There's someone out there." The doctor confirms the patient's precarious state of health to Karin, and says there is little time left. Before the lingering pain that runs through Agnes' last night, Karin, startled, asks Anna, "Are you listening?" It is death that arrives, announced by the clocks, whispered by the wind. At this point, *Cries and Whispers* becomes almost a horror film, lulled by Agnes' fickle and frightening breath, whose movements, caused by the intense pain, may remind us of a spirit-possessed body.

The suffering of the character is much more marked by pain than by conscience or fear of death. Agnes awakens the tenderness in Anna, who had witnessed the death of her own daughter. Karin, on the other hand, is pragmatic: she thinks of the doctor who has to be warned, of what will be done with the family property, of what will happen to Anna. Maria, in turn, seems to be helpful, but the physical closeness of the most critical moments leaves her without action. However, she is the only one who cries (as if this was also a protocol measure). This estrangement from the sisters towards Agnes and her death is shortened in Anna's dream, during which we are shown what could have been the true sororal behavior, were it not for the social conduct that represses it. It is in the sisters Maria and

---

<sup>16</sup> Agnes, from the Latin *hagnes*, means pure, chaste. Although not sharing the same etymological root, Agnes is associated with the lamb (*agnus*), due to the similarity of pronunciation between the two terms, hence the attribution of meaning "docile as a lamb." The name is sometimes confused as a variation of Anna. These factors, combined with the strong religious influence in Bergman's life and work, reinforce the redeeming character of the personage as the Lamb of God and its intrinsic relationship with the maid Anna. Retrieved from (in portuguese): <<https://www.dicionariodenomesproprios.com.br/agnes/>>.

Karin that the horror of death, materialized in the repugnance of the body in putrefaction, will awaken.

Karin's immediate refusal ("No one would do what you ask. I'm still alive, I will not accept involvement with your death") and Maria's disgust testifies to the horror of death and the uneasiness associated with the possibility of the dead returning to life, a terror that accompanies humanity from the earliest days. To avoid this horror of contamination, one must take distance from the dead. In asking for help and comfort in her crossing, Agnes breaks with the hygienizing norm and becomes a specter to persecute the living: "the morbid state in which the 'spectrum' is found during decomposition is nothing more than the fantastic transference of the morbid state of the living"(Morin, 2003, p.27). Perhaps that is why Anna, at the beginning of her dream, finds Maria and Karin inert, prostrated against the red walls, their faces pale and ghostly, mumbling inaudible whispers.

*Cries and Whispers* is "a consolation-film, a film to console," says Bergman (1996, p. 122). In fact, several sequences of the film show a gesture of consolation that is repeated, depicted by the meeting of the hands with the face (Figure 6); between Agnes and her mother, during the memory of the tightening of the bonds between the two ("I raised my hand and put it on her face, at that moment we were very close," says the voice over); between Agnes and the doctor, who comforts her in her illness; between Agnes and Anna, as she kisses and caresses her sick sister's cheeks. The hand/face gesture is no doubt a sign of closeness, but also of a realization: Maria's husband, when he suspects her betrayal, touches her lightly on the face, seeming to make sure of it. Karin, who vehemently rejects any physical contact (with her husband or Anna, at that moment when the maid looks at her), finally gives way, trying to get closer to Maria.





Figure 6 – Repetition of the hand/face gesture in *Cries and Whispers*

Finally, we could ask: what really can be determined of a face, even more of a Bergmanian face? For Deleuze (2009), Bergman took the nihilism of the face to the extreme, that is, "its relationship in fear to the void or the absence, the fear of the face confronted with its nothingness. In a whole section of his work Bergman reaches the extreme limit of the affection-image, burns the icon, consumes and extinguishes the face" (Deleuze, 2009, p. 155). The face in Bergman not only loses its main functions, individuating, socializing and relational or communicating (Deleuze, 2009, p. 153-154), but proceeds in a total annihilation.

## Final remarks

*Cries and whispers* is built in this movement: from the gaping terror of the present to the features of the past in the silent interior monologues of the characters. The inapprehensible future, becomes the vision of death itself, staged by Agnes' Golgotha. Double character, which is replicated in the words of Edgar Morin (2003) about the horror of death:

A horror at once noisy and silent, which will return to meet this double character throughout human history. Noisy: it explodes at the moment of funerals and mourning, thunders from the top of the pulpits, cries in the poems (...) Silent, it erodes, invisible, secret, ashamed, the conscience in the very heart of everyday life<sup>17</sup>. (Morin, 2003, p. 30)

Whispers and cries uttered by the orbiting faces of these women trapped in this mortuary center. Faces that jump from pole to pole, faces comforted by the heat of human touch, faces drawn in the reddish darkness, faces that appear under the shadow of death. Bergman explores the faces at the very limit of fear, at the

---

<sup>17</sup> In the original: "Un horror a la vez ruidoso y silencioso, que volverá a encontrarse con ese doble carácter a lo largo de la historia humana. Ruidoso: estalla en el momento de los funerales y del duelo, atruena desde lo alto de las púlpitos, clama en los poemas (...) Silenciosa, va corroyendo, invisible, secreta, como avergonzada, la conciencia en el corazón mismo de la vida cotidiana". Excerpt translated by the authors.

edge of life. For, finally, perhaps Bergman's film is not, in fact, a movie about death, but about life.

The final sequence is a precious specimen of solace. In these sublime shots, the affection-image refuses the emptiness and rises over its substance, "affect of desire and of astonishment – which gives life to it– and the turning aside of faces in the open, in the flesh" (Deleuze, 2009, p. 157). The reading of Agnes' diary by Anna ends the work in a hopeful way, in the face / close-up of the one whom we have seen suffer so much throughout the film, living, perhaps, her happiest memory. A face-affection.

## References

Balázs, B. (2010) *Bela Balázs: Early film theory. Visible man and the spirit of film.* New York; Oxford: Berghahn Books.

Bergman, I. (1972) *Cries and Whispers.* Sweden. Cinematograph AB; SvenskaFilminstitutet.

\_\_\_\_\_. (1996) *Imagens.* São Paulo: Martins Fontes.

Deleuze, G. (2009) *A imagem-movimento: Cinema 1.* Lisboa: Assírio & Alvim.

\_\_\_\_\_. (1997) *Cinema 1 – The Movement Image.* Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Epstein, J. (1974) *Écrits sur le cinéma.* Paris: Éditions Seghers.

\_\_\_\_\_. (2010) *O inquietante.* In: \_\_\_\_\_. Sigmund Freud: obras completas, vol. 14. São Paulo: Companhia das Letras.

Machado, R. (2009) *Deleuze, a arte e a filosofia.* Rio de Janeiro: Zahar.

Mellen, J. (1973) *Bergman and women: Cries and whispers.* Film Quarterly, Oakland, vol. 27, n. 1, p. 2-11.

Mendes, A. C. (2011) *Rostos da morte na era da técnica.* Revista Alicerces, Lisboa, n. 3, p. 131-145.

Morin, E. (2003) *El hombre y la muerte.* Barcelona: Editorial Kairós.

Philibert, M. (1974) "Image et discours de la mort dans Cris et Chuchotements de Bergman" In: *Archives de sciences sociales des religions*, n°39, 1975. Évolution de l'Image de la Mort dans la Société contemporaine et le Discours religieux des Églises. Actes du 4e Colloque du Centre de Sociologie du Protestantisme de l'Université des sciences humaines de Strassbourg (3 a 5 de outubro de 1974), pp. 175-183.

Sitney, P. A. (1989) "Color and myth in Cries and whispers". *Film Criticism*, Ann Arbor, vol. 13, n. 3, p. 37-41.



Sundgren, N. P. (1973) *Le cinéma selon Bergman*. Entretiens. Paris: Seghers.

Veiga, R. (2014) *Rosto e palco: a espreita da morte e a construção do horror em Gritos e sussurros*. *Devires*, Belo Horizonte, v. 11, n. 1, p. 70-81, jan/jun. 2014.