O monstro que não se vê e a cultura da participação em Bird Box

The monster that cannot be seen and participatory culture in Bird Box

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Resumo: *Bird Box, filme de terror e um dos maiores sucessos da Netflix, tem entre os protagonistas um monstro cuja imagem não é revelada. Tal estratégia narrativa resulta em amplo engajamento da audiência, que busca preencher a lacuna deixada no processo de criação do filme. Neste artigo, analisamos como a construção da ideia do monstro se dá também por meio de recursos não visuais, sobretudo sonoros, e é complementada por um imaginário que explora o tema do apocalipse, a metáfora da cegueira e a oposição arquetípica claro-escuro. A investigação fundamenta-se nas relações imagem-som propostas por Altman e Iazzetta e na teoria do imaginário de Durand. Os resultados mostram como esses elementos fomentam o engajamento da audiência, convergindo para a ideia de cultura da participação de Jenkins.*

Palavras-chave: *Bird Box; monstro; imagem sonora; imaginário; cultura da participação.*

Abstract: *Bird Box, a horror film and one of Netflix's greatest hits, has among its protagonists a monster that is not imagetically revealed. Such narrative strategy results in broad audience engagement, which seeks to fill this gap left in the creative process of the film. In this article, we analyze how the construction of the monster idea is also based in non-visual resources, especially sound, and is*

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A R T I G O

complemented by an imaginary that explores the theme of apocalypse, the metaphor of blindness and the archetypal opposition between light and darkness. The investigation is based on the image-sound relations proposed by Altman and Iazzetta, and in the theory of the imaginary by Durand. The results show how these elements foster audience engagement, converging on Jenkins' idea of participatory culture.

Keywords: *Bird Box; monster; sound image; imaginary; participatory culture.*

Introduction

In *Bird Box* (2018), a horror film directed by Susanne Bier based on the book with the same name by Josh Malerman, a type of monster travels around the world and creates a suicidal drive in the character that see it directly or through camera. Terrible memories and unbearable fears, shaped according to individual experiences, would be the consequence of the effect of the monster. The form through which the creature creates the suicidal drive is originated from an immediate state of deep depression, which dialogues with the character's experiences. That becomes obvious through what is said by the victims. Lydia (Rebecca Pidgeon), when she sees the monster (after it calls her name), remembers her mother, dead years before. The character, after being affected, says: "Mommy? Please, don't go". Olympia (Danielle Macdonald), character with a happy and simple life, when she sees the monster, reacts by saying "It is not so bad". Both commit suicide afterwards. In order not to succumb the self-destructive effects of the monster, characters cover their eyes or isolate themselves in closed environments.

While the characters can avoid looking directly towards the monster, the viewer do not have that alternative, the moment of revelation of the creature, recurring in other movies of the genre, never happens.

The decision not to show the creature was not simple. The screenwriter Eric Heisserer tells he was pressured by the producers to reveal the creature (TOPEL, 2018), which led him to write a scene in which one of the versions of the monster would appear. Susanne Bier explains that the sequence was recorded and later abandoned, because it had a comical bias. Finally, they decided to take off the scene with the monster in the editing room, because, as Bier describes:

> Whatever these beings were, they activate your biggest fear. The biggest fear of someone will be different from another person. […] When the concept is so strong, trying to illustrate it lose its meaning. Therefore, it would be a wrong decision (TOPEL, 2018).

In this case, keeping the mystery through visual absence means to deposit on other narrative resources the construction of the image of the monster. The teamwork, as we see, is unfolded, overall, in the composition of sounds. Through the sounds emitted by the creature, we can understand its threatening presence. However, as the revelation of the monster is a canon in the genre, *Bird Box* works in the incompleteness around the character that has the biggest potential to generate curiosity among viewers. Even so, it has great popularity and it reverberates online.

The movie is among the greatest hits produced by Netflix. It was watched in its debut by approximately 45 million people, according to the company. The relevance of *Bird Box* is given not only for the size of the audience but also due to their engagement to it.

Despite not being released as a transmedia product (JENKINS, 2009), fans took care of steering it into the direction of transmedia. Excited in building theories that would explain the enigmas of the narrative, they formed fandoms, created fan fictions and published them on blogs, sites, social networks and on YouTube channels. Only in one of the platforms of fanfic creation, *Wattpad.com*, there were around 68 thousand stories registered by fans from the Netflix movie[3], including crossovers. The propagation of information related to the movie took Netflix to warn their fans of the risks of participating of some of the challenges promoted on Twitter (#birdboxchallenge) motivating people to make a cosplay of the lead character, which would mean to walk on the real world with a blindfold (SHOARD, 2019).

One of the paths to understand what leads to the high fan engagement on *Bird Box*, even though the movie is not well praised neither by critics, nor by the audience[4] and it is characterized as one more production within Hollywood narrative standards, is to understand which elements in the narrative stimulate that. Within the hypothesis we developed

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3   A série Black Mirror, por exemplo, tinha cerca de 4 mil fanfics na mesma plataforma.
4   No Metacritics (https://www.metacritic.com/movie/bird-box), a avaliação média dos críticos é 51/100. No IMDb (https://www.imdb.com/title/tt2737304/), a nota média dada pela audiência foi de 6.6/10.

below, the audience participation is the result of the combination of a few key-factors: (i) decision in the creative process of not revealing the monster; (ii) use of resources, especially sonorous, to build the idea of its invisible existence; and (iii) the construction of an imaginary centered around the theme of apocalypse, within the metaphor of blindness and in the archetypical opposition light-dark.

Apocalypse and the archetypical opposition light-dark within the imaginary of Bird Box

Bird Box is inserted in the lineage of apocalyptical narratives that reaches global success since the end of the 1970's, such as *Mad Max* (1979, 1981, 1985 and 2015) *Independence day* (dir. Roland Emmerich, 1996), *Armageddon* (dir. Michael Bay, 1998), *War of Worlds* (dir. Steven Spielberg, 2005), *Cloverfield* (2008, 2016 and 2018) and the TV series *The walking dead* (created by Frank Darabont, 2010-today). To Ostwalt Jr. (1995), the traditional model of apocalyptical narratives brings the end of times and history as an immanent and imminent reality defined by God (or by the gods), while the contemporary model offers the notion that the end of times is avoidable: "[...] Modern imagination about the apocalypse removes the end of times of the sacred kingdom of gods and put the apocalypse firmly under the dominion and control of humanity" (OSTWALT JR., 1995, p. 63).

In successful audiovisual narratives, the apocalypse happens due to different causes, such as alien invasion, natural mega catastrophes, contamination of the environment, genetic mutation, scarcity of resources and the appearance of monsters. *Bird Box* is affiliated to the last category, but throughout the creative process the idea of revealing a monster as the cause for the apocalyptical scenario was abandoned in favor of a source of threat that become visible to the viewers.

The idea that there is something *invisible* in the diegetic world that in order to be seen by the character become source of suicidal or murderous impulses and it is one of the main resources to motivate the

engagement of the audience in *Bird Box*. The narrative effect that arises when they do not reveal this something that is responsible for the apocalyptical threat is decided in the creative process when the team of creation and production opted, in the editing phase, for cutting the scene where the monster appeared (TOPEL, 2018). The decision was efficient for the generation of narrative challenges in *Bird Box* that lead to the audience engagement.

With a monster that we don't see as the lead character, *Bird Box* recurs to the update as the metaphor for blindness, ancestral theme that is present in mythologies of different cultures. Among them, we highlight that are aligned with the perspective adopted in *Bird Box* and explore the paradoxical premise that *blindness – not looking* or *not seeing –* is a source of wisdom, or that the act of *looking* or *seeing* is threatening. It is present in Greek myths such as Medusa, creature who kills whoever looks at her, and Narcissus, handsome young man that, when he looks at his reflection, is taken by the *hybris* which lead him to suicide.

The paradox also appears in the dramaturgical production of Sophocles, which made his blindness as a constant motive for his plays. Buxton (1980), when analyzing the seven dramas of the Greek author that arrived to us, understands that the theme of absence of vision is a constant in his tragedies. The visual absence of the god Athens when talking to Ulisses and the visual disorientation provoked in Ajax, darkening his vision so that he confuses animals for men, in the tragedy *Ajax* (445 a.C.), "emphasize a recurring and crucial characteristic in the Sophoclean dramatic universe: the feeling that human vision and comprehension are limited when compared with the vision and comprehension of the gods (BUXTON, 1980, p. 23). But in the tragedy Oedipus Tirannus (or Oedipus King) that the metaphor of blindness gets a bigger relevance when highlighting the paradox that, as paradigm for humanity, Oedipus has the vision, but not the comprehension of the world, while Tiresias, the blind prophet of Thebes, presents a comprehension superior to any human with vision. Buxton (1980) shows that, in other five dramas from Sophocles (*Antigone, Oedipus in Colonus, Electra, The Trachiniae* e

Philoctetes), the paradox vision = ignorance and blindness = wisdom is always present.

Bird Box updates the metaphor of blindness, in its paradoxical form, present in the previously mentioned Greek plays, and inserts them into the archetypical narrative of end of time. To do so, he doesn't recur to sophisticated resources that make a complex story. The element that stimulates the engagement is simply the enigma about which is the cause of threat to humanity, once it does not reveal the monster to the viewers – and only suggests clues about how he would be from drawings made by a character and other elements of image and sound – the narrative opens other interpretative possibilities, as it begins evident in the different theories created by fans, analyzed later on.

The audience engagement in *Bird Box* happens through a conventional narrative structure, with the resource of flashbacks to show the beginning of the apocalyptical scenario in which the lead characters are inserted. The spine of the story is the *hero that overcomes the monster in order to save something,* in this case, the *hero* is Malorie Hayes (Sandra Bullock), who *overcomes the monster,* completing her journey, without succumbing to the threat of something that, seen by the character in the diegetic world, becomes deadly to them, *in order to save* Tom/the boy (Julian Edwards), her biological son, and Olympia/the girl (Vivien Lyra Blair), her adoptive daughter. The hero's relationship with motherhood – from reluctance/rejection to acceptance – establish the premise of the movie that the maternal instinct defeats all evil.

The imaginary emerged is built mainly from this premise inserted into an apocalyptical scenario, in which we highlight the great oppositions between *good and evil, order and chaos, light and shadows.*

The apocalypse is a common image to different cultures. The theme of the end of the world, represented by narratives such as doomsday, appears in mythologies of the main religions, such as Christianism, Judaism, Islamism, Buddhism, Zoroastrianism, Confucianism, Hinduism and Taoism, and in the myths of archaic civilizations (NEAMAN, 2004). The archetypical image of the apocalypse is represented by the

last clash between the forces of good and evil, preceding the arrival of a new world. In the western civilization, influenced by Christianism, the return of the messiah and the confrontation with the antichrist feed the metaphors about the apocalypse.

In *Bird Box,* with the arrival of the final day, which changes the world as they knew it, the creature that is revealed to human eyes is the Evil and damnation – this revelation is given only in the diegetic world, once the viewer doesn't see what the characters see in these moments –, remaining blindness as the only path to *good* and salvation of the characters.

If we take as reference the archetypology of Durand (2002), the imaginary of the movie is mainly built on the archetypical opposition between light versus dark, archetypes located in the most abstract field of the Durandian structure and belonging to the Daily Regime of images, ruled by the logic of opposition, combat, contradiction, exclusion and antithesis. It is important to analyze here which aspects of these archetypes prevail in the narrative and which meanings they build.

The archetype of light results in the symbolism of illumination, associated many times, as Bachelard (2001) affirms, with what is on top, because it is the same operation of the human spirit that leads us to the top and the light. Thus, as Durand (2002) shows, the celestial light, the sky-blue, the sky, celestial gods, the sun, the solar crown, the eye and the vision are symbols of the idea of clarity or luminosity. Clarity and luminosity can be associated when we think about its positive value to meanings of revelation, knowledge and clarification, or in the negative sense, when there is excessive light, to meanings of blindness and glare. In opposition to light, the archetype of dark links itself to the nictomorphic symbolism, product of our primordial experiences. The shadows, the dark, the night and the blindness are negatively valued when they refer to the unknown, the chaos and the obscure, or positively when it has its meanings inverted or transmuted in the field of the Nocturnal Regime of images – therefore, the night is euphemized and becomes divine, time of the big rest; it becomes, in this sense, a "isomorphic chain

that comes from the revalorization of night and death" (DURAND, 2002, p. 218).

On *Bird Box*, the main isomorphic chain comes from the ambivalence of the archetypes of *light* and *dark* and the inversions of their most common significances. In the film, the light is related with the vision of the creature by the characters, which results in evil consequences to them, associating, thus, to ideas of excess of luminosity and knowledge and the manifestation of evil. In turn, the archetype of dark is linked to the metaphor of blindness, that is referring to the obscure, but the only form of salvation, associating the idea of darkness or ignorance to *good*. In *Bird Box*, as with in *Oedipus Tiranus*, *light* and *vision* are negatively valued, while *dark* and *blindness* are positively valued.

These archetypical relations, which occupy the core of imaginary of the movie, feed the theories created by the audience to explain the mysteries of the movie. But before we analyze this, let's see how, from audiovisual resources, the image of the monster is brought up in *Bird Box* and how it also feeds fan theories.

Building the image of the monster in Bird Box

Culturally, depending on the context, the monster takes on different shapes and arrives in different narratives. Audiovisual productions explore different facets of monstrosity, from fantastic creatures to characters with actions considered dehumanized. The monster can be a physically uncommon creature or even a human being with attitudes considered ethically *monstrous*.

Monster derives from the latin word *monstrum*, which derives from the root *monere*, meaning warn/warning (ASMA, 2009). To Stephen Asma, the recurrence of monsters in the media happens due to its representation of everything that is unknown and/or frightening. Asma, however, reveals on his research a particular relationship between what is unknown/scary and the human curiosity. The researcher quotes an experience made by Charles Darwin: The author of *The origin of species* (1859) sought to understand the relationship between monkeys and

their instinctive fear of snakes. To do so, he put a stuffed snake in the *house* of these animals. Eventually, the monkeys realized it was a dead animal, disregarding it. Later, in that same spot, Darwin put a living snake inside a bag:

> [...] One of the monkeys immediately came closer, opened the bag carefully, took a peek and moved away very quickly. But then, in an attitude of curiosity typical of men, not one monkey resisted to give a momentaneous peek, one after another, to see the terrible animal resting quietly inside the bag (ASMA, 2009, p. 3).

The experience shows that monkeys were repelled, and, simultaneously, attracted to what provokes fear. To Asma, just like the monkeys in the Darwinian experience, "we cannot resist to take a momentaneous peek of the terrible animal" (ASMA, 2009, p. 5).

Film directors with fantastic creatures frequently build a crescent of expectation that precedes the full reveal of the scary character. That is given in different forms. In *Metropolis* (d Fritz Lang, 1927), a layer of smoke slows down Morloch's revelation. In *The Fly (d.* David Cronenberg, 1986), we follow the slow transformation of the lead character into a monster. Likewise, in *Godzilla* (d. Gareth Edwards, 2014), the revelation coincides with the screenplay climax, close to the end of the movie, in the moment of the decisive battle. These are examples which, along with others like *Jaws* (d. Steven Spielberg, 1975), *Alien* (d. Ridley Scott, 1979) and *Cloverfield* (d. Matt Reeves, 2008) point towards a canon of the genre which consists in showing a monster at some point.

Bird Box provokes the viewers and disposes of different resources to generate anticipation for the visuality of the monster. However, it breaks genre expectations and keep the monster hidden.

Imagetically, it emphasizes the reaction of the characters to the phenomenon, proposing even a different physical aspect in the eyes of the people looking at the monster. It is a way of bringing even further the curiosity of the viewers, proposing that what is seen is extraordinary. This intention is strengthened by the adjectives that the characters that are immune to the monster *(the crazy ones)* use to describe it: seeing the

monster is "seeing the truth", "it is necessary", and he is "beautiful", among others.

Image 1. Screenshot of the movie *Bird Box*. Jessica Hayes (Sarah Paulson) sees the monster.

Source: Netflix.com

About the image of the creature itself, the film suggests some characteristics. In a certain moment, one of these *crazy people*, Gary (Tom Hollander), before persuading other characters to look and succumb, disposes different drawings in a table. The illustrations can be images of the monster, and they are what the movie presents of more concrete imagetically to understand its form or one of their possible forms.

Image 2. Screenshot of the movie *Bird Box*. Illustrations of the monster.

Source: Netflix.com

In the decoupage, we perceive how the monster affects its surrounding environment. Its approximation, beyond the limits of framing, provokes the sudden movement of light elements, like leaves, treetops and hairs, that seem to be pushed by the monster and magnetized by its presence. In addition to that, when the monster approaches electronic devices, it provokes an interference. These events suggest that the presence of the monster sends some kind of energy, which also can be perceived by birds, that become agitated with its presence. From that, it would be possible to conclude that the monster is that invisible mass of energy, taking on a shape only in the mind of the potential victims. However, the movie suggests a certain concrete nature of the monster by the shadow it projects within the frame, in some sequences. The shadow gives the suggestion of the existence of a body, a shape, that goes beyond the emission of waves, and lets clear the choice of the director to not show it.

Image 3. Screenshot of Bird Box. Shadow.

Source: Netflix.com

Image 4. Screenshot of Bird Box. Shadow.

Source. Netflix.com

Frequently, in films with monsters and horror, the sound helps in the anticipation of the terrible creature and potentializes the curiosity on how is its shape. Not rarely, the viewer can listen to the monster before seeing it, as in *Predator (d.* John McTiernan, 1987) and *It* (d. Tommy Lee Wallace, 1990).

Sound has a great potential in building expectations. Baitello defines vision and hearing as senses of warning and readiness. As such, moved by fear (BAITELLO, 2012). Humans used to live on top of trees, where they had a privileged view, getting to see the environment in every direction and with great distances. "[...] Our perception would cover all spatial directions, all the sides, above and below, building an spherical perceptive surrounding [...]. Vision would know no horizon [...]". (BAITELLO, 2012). Later, when they abandoned trees and lived in the ground, the man's view was limited by obstacles, becoming less extensive, and with this reconfiguration of lifestyle, it is also necessary to reconfigure the role of senses. Hearing, in this new context, "becomes more important as a prospective sense, because in the dense vegetation you must hear what still cannot be seen" (BAITELLO, 2012).

Through this relationship with sounds, sound effects in horror movies are used to hide visual references as a way to generate suspense, anxiety

and fear. According to Whittington (2007), sound effects create bodies, and, therefore, also can be used to hide them.

When we see a voice or a sound in a movie before seeing the emitter, these sounds "[…] Become invested with magic powers as well as involved, even if lightly, in image" (CHION, 1999, p. 23). However, when a specific sound does not belong in our repertoire, therefore, it is not recognizable, and if the movie does not present the emitter, as it is the case in *Bird Box*, we build a mental image of that sound, through relations of proximity. The *Sound Hermeneutics* described by Altman (1992) helps us understand how strong is this anticipation. The phenomenon comprises the doubt of the viewer and the film response to the question: *who emitted this sound?* Leaving the audience without an answer for a long period of time would break one of the most traditional cinematographic resources, of identifying the emitter source and answering the question. When the incompleteness of *Sound Hermeneutics* takes place, the viewer stays a considerable time trying, incessantly, to answer the question, in other words, to find out who the emitter is, which would enlarge the moment of revelation of the monster. Hence, the importance of sound design on *Bird Box*: the sound makes different suggestions and creates doubt in the viewer, leaving the question without an answer while that proves great curiosity.

But, as we've seen from Whittington (2007), sound on its own is capable of building a body. Therefore, we can consider that the sound that follows the monster in *Bird Box* is its own image. Among authors that discuss the concepts of image, sound not uncommonly is mentioned, as shown by W. J. T. Mitchell in *Iconoly*: *image, text and ideology* (1986). For example, Ludwig Wittgenstein mentions sound mental images (MITCHELL, 1986, p. 15) and Edmund Burke says the pure sound of words is capable of producing effects and meanings (MITCHELL, 1986, p. 124).

In *The Hearing Image*, Fernando Iazzetta explains that

> […] Image is everything that represents something, by analogy or vraisemblance, by figuration. Therefore, it wouldn't be an irregular act, not even

a mere artifice of metaphor, to use it in the representation of another field other than visual. [...] What we can say of sound as image forming? [...] What are sounds if not an acoustic representation of something? Like what happens with what we see, what we hear is the impression created by our sensory-mental apparel through external stimuli: acoustic waves of mechanical nature in the case of sounds and light waves with electro-magnetic nature in case of lights that compose what we see. Sound and light are not opposed, but related in their capacities of impress our senses. Both originate from a source and are reflected in objects that physically occupy the environment. At the same time that there's a different in their natures – mechanical and electromagnetic –, there is also a similarity in their ways of operation in form of waves propagating int the environment. Therefore, it doesn't seem like a problem to take both, sound and light, as generators of images (IAZZETTA, 2016, p. 377-378).

In *Bird Box*, the construction of the sound image of the monster were given to the team led by Glenn Freemantle and Ben Barker. In an interview, Bier says that:

All use of sound is incredibly important. [...] Having creatures that are mainly composed by invisible things generates a great pressure that the sound is very distinct. Creatures mess with your head and play with your biggest fears, therefore, sound needs to suggest that (BURGOS, 2018).

The director asked the audio crew that the sounds of the monster were original. Despite every work has its particularity, the sound of the monster in *Bird Box* dialogues with the repertoire of horror movies. In an interview for the website A *Sound Effect*, Freemantle and Barker comment the three layers of sound that compose the sound image of the monster: movement, attack and communication. In order to suggest the monster's movement and attack, the team used as base the caption of sound of bees and different sounds emitted by animals and humans (ANDERSEN, 2019). However, as Bier explains, the sound effects are "actually composed by many different things, estimating around 30 sound layers superposed" (BURGOS, 2018).

The most important layer for us to understand how the monster affects its victims, communication, is composed, above all, by the sound

of whispers and a cacophony of intelligible and unintelligible voices. Freemantle explains that the guide for the recording was a sound effect of wind that would be mixed along with the voices (ANDERSEN, 2019). With that, they intended that the viewer felt that the whispers were surrounding and following the pattern of movement suggested by the other layers.

In the sequences that we assume Malorie Hayes (Sandra Bullock) point of view, we also assume the point of hearing of the character, and it is possible to better understand the action of the monster and how this affects her individually. Within the cacophony of voices and whispers, among what is intelligible, we hear the monster call Malorie and emulate voices of people close to her, like her partner Tom (Trevante Rhodes) and her sister Jessica (Sarah Paulson).

Several religious traditions have as characteristic the presence of voices in collective prayer, chanting and other manifestations. However, it those are presented in disharmony and dissonance, frequently are related to the occult. According to Altman, 1992, this notion is present in different historic moments:

> While Pitágoras was mapping the harmony of spheres, others developed a myth to explain the phenomenon of echo, transformed the ventriloquism into a sacred source of prophecy and made the process of speaking with many voices something of oracular use. In the Middle Ages, sounds kept having an important religious role. In order to express the devilish intentions of unfaithful warriors, epic poets regularly described them as producing a cacophony of non-Christian sounds. The divine presence was indicated by the calm harmonies of an angelical band (ALTMAN, 2004, p. 5).

The cinematographic repertoire consolidates the cacophony and whispers as a dark manifestation in fantasy and horror movies. To Whittington, *sound designers* base themselves in the sound imaginary established by other cinematographic works to create from it. This work considers many cultural aspects, such as the history of sound effects and conventions of the genre. "That is why ghosts still moan, storms still

whip and swirl around us, and computers chew data with audible hiss and whistles (WHITTINGTON, 2007).

Through the relation of the imaginary of *Bird Box* with the apocalypse and the archetypical opposition light-dark, along with a sound design capable of building an image, the monster takes on a shape and it is capable of telling the story. However, the breach of expectations generated from the choice of not revealing makes the movie open interpretative possibilities. The incompleteness of the monster and the lack of precision of its shape work as motivators for the generation of content on behalf of viewers. On the internet, interactors contributed with the construction of the image of the monster from a regimen of participative culture.

Recreation of Bird Box by fans: engagement, archetypes and theories

The engagement of fans of a narrative, through fandoms, production of encyclopedic content online (wikis) and the creation of fan fictions, for example, is the main indicator of what Jenkins (2015) defines as *culture of participation*. In *Bird Box*, part of the fan engagement is given by the development of theories that try to explain what the cause of the apocalypse is. Once the creature is not revealed to the audience, fans develop theories fed by clues on the invisible, which includes elements of sound, as we've seen in the previous segment.

In a sample of theories published on fans platforms, it is possible to observe that they converge into three types, among the most popular ones (Board 1).

Board 1 - Main types of theories on *Bird Box*

| Nature	Theory
Demons (or evil spirits)	Out of the theories proposed in the diegetic world by the characters of the film, Charlie's (Lil Rel Howery) is the one that echoes the most among fans. In it, they retrieve mytho-logic narratives of different cultures about the apocalypse, being the entity causing the endo f times a demon or na evil spirit. The mytho-logical elements are updated and expanded in fan theories that point towards demons or evil spirits foreseen in mythology as the cause of the apocalypse..
Monsters (and/or aliens)	In theories pointing out monsters as the cause of what is happening, we highlight the ones that indicate that these creatures would be similar to Cthulu, creation of H. P. Lovecraft, that also took people that saw him to insanity and, simi-larly as the creature in Bird Box, it cannot cross barriers, like doors and walls. The drawings made by the character Gary (Image 2) also re-fer to a Lovecraftian monster. As Cthulu is na extraterrestrial monstruous being, there are va-riations of this theory that suggest na attack of aliens being the cause of the apocalypse.
Hallucinations (and dementia)	Mass hysteria and projection of subconscious fears under the form of hallucination would be the cause of mass suicides and the violence in the film, according to part of the fans. They still propose the possibility of such hallucina-tions being caused by elements of a chemical or biological war, according to the idea proposed by the character Douglas (John Malkovich). A type of epidemia of a mental illness would've hit the population in a global scale, following this type of theory, which includes the suicidal behavior of people as a metaphor of depression. Still in this group, there is a theory that sees the narrative as a metaphor of the fear of becoming a mother, related to the lead character.

Source: Authors[5]

5   Resultado de levantamento de maio de 2019 em uma amostragem de 60 posts no Reddit.com, Nerdist.com, Insider.com e Wattpad.com em que 80% deles convergiam para esses três temas.

The main theories fans associate the cause of the apocalyptic situation to the perception (visual and sonorous) of *evil*, either embodied by supernatural creatures (demons, monsters, aliens or malignant spirits), either as a projection in hallucinations of what there is of dark within the human being. The sound elements, specially the whispers, present in *Bird Box* contribute significantly in these types of interpretations by the audience.

Fan theories are fed by references to mythological (apocalypse) and literary (H.P. Lovecraft) imaginaries and by clues presented by the audiovisual elements (sounds, voices, shadows, leaf movement). Thanks to mechanisms of the contemporary culture of participation, it is possible to observe some of the results in the field of reception in the process of (re)creation of the film by the more engaged fans.

In *Bird Box*, there are gaps left to the imagination by the creator's decisions (screenwriter, director, producers) that stimulate their filling by the audience's imagination. Therefore, not revealing the monster was an efficient decision in this sense. About the process of explaining the unrevealed element, what fans share most of the imaginary of the movie in their theories are the archetypical image of the apocalypse and the opposition between *good* and *evil,* inserted in the isomorphic chain of the archetypical opposition between light-dark.

The influence of these elements in the construction of fan theories is presented in the diagram:

Image 5: relations between archetypes and fan theories in *Bird Box*.
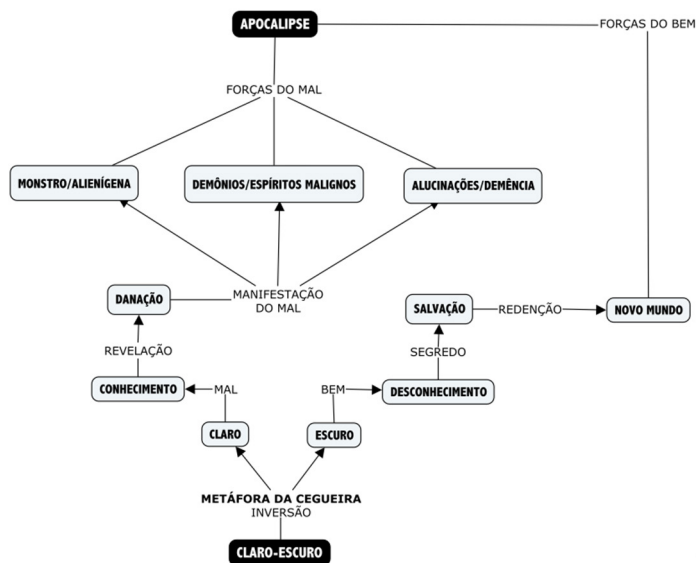
Source: Authors

The anagram shows how three groups of theories (monsters/aliens; demons/malignant spirits and hallucinations/insanity), which seek to fill the gap left in the narrative through clues (sound and visual resources) and intertextualities (references to mythological-religious and literary elements) presents in the film, are the result mainly of the influence of the myth of the *apocalypse* and the archetypical opposition *light-dark*.

The Christian myth of the final battle between forces of good and evil and the second advent and arrival of a new world – purified –, constitute itself as one of the structuring elements of the narrative, offering fans the challenge of defining which is the representation of forces of evil in this version of the apocalypse built by *Bird Box*.

Synchronically, the archetypical opposition light-dark will be another important influence. In this case, with its conventional meanings (light = good; dark = evil) inverted by the blindness metaphor, since the only person who do not see the apocalyptical creature, the ones who live in

the dark, have the possibility of reaching salvation, represented by a new post-apocalyptical world inhabited by the meek. Thus, in an opposite direction, an isomorphic chain of meanings is formed, associating light (or the excess of luminosity), that is, the possibility of seeing, knowing truth to evil, revelation and damnation, culminating in the concrete manifestation of that evil, either by monster, demon or hallucination.

Conclusion

Bird Box breaks expectations of genre when it chooses not to reveal the monster. More than an inspiring solution for low-budget films, this incompleteness acts as a motivator of an elevated audience participation.

The use of sound as the main resource of language to compose the image of the monster and the construction of an imaginary that dialogues with archetypical themes, especially the apocalypse and metaphors of blindness and the opposition light-dark, are resources that build elaborately the expectation of those watching. When it offers a sound image of the monster, the film gives sensory clues on its shape and action. When dialoguing with archetypical themes present in other works, it promotes the access of the viewer to their own repertoire of media narratives.

The fact of the monster is not seen by the viewers, not even in the climax of the movie, leaves the experience of watching *Bird Box* without a complete ending. This gap becomes, therefore, an opening to fan participation, which, when they produce diverse content and debate the aspects of the monster and the screenplay, offer to the *Bird Box experience* different motivations, explanations and endings for the mystery, as we've seen on Board 1. It is up to the viewer to interact and consume content beyond the film, choosing and debating their favorite theories.

In this case, *Bird Box* allows us to understand the importance of getting a glimpse of possibilities of fan reverberation and contribution in the conception of audiovisual works and some of the mechanism that are available to producers to stimulate the audience to participate in their stories.

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