

**THE APPEARANCE OF THE CONCEPT OF ENVIRONMENT IN THE MOVIE
AVATAR**

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ABSTRACT

While the movie *Planet of the Apes* directed by Franklin Schaffner tells about the somehow end of the human civilization and a distant future where the civilization of apes dominates, the movie *The Matrix* describes a habitable but a virtually unproblematic environment which has been destroyed by the man-made machines. The movie *Avatar* directed by James Cameron, which has been selected as the topic of the study, is set in a period of time in which the world is threatened with environmental destruction and the humanity is in search of restructuring to be able to continue their existence. The movie *Avatar*, the topic of the study, has been selected since it is a movie that has technical innovations and conveys intensive messages about environment. The purpose of the study is to present and analyze the elements related to the environment in the movie *Avatar*. For this purpose, a content analysis of the movie will be carried out and responses to the following questions will be sought; What kind of approach is used in the movies made about environment or environmental disasters? What are the similarities or differences of the movie *Avatar* with the other mentioned movies?

Key words: Environment, Environmental Disaster, Cinema, Science-Fiction Movies

ÖZET

Franklin Schaffner'ın Maymunlar Cehennemi filmi insan uygarlığının bir biçimde sona erdiğini ve maymun uygarlığının egemen olduğu uzak bir geleceği ele alırken, Matrix filmi yaşanabilir bir çevrenin, insan yapımı makineler tarafından yok edildiği, ama sanal anlamda sorunsuz bir çevreyi betimler. Çalışmaya konu olarak seçilen James Cameron'ın yönetmenliğini yaptığı Avatar filmi ise dünyanın çevresel anlamda mahvedildiği ve insanlığın varlığını devam ettirebileceği yeni yapılanmalar arayışında olduğu bir zaman diliminde geçmektedir. Çalışmaya konu edilen Avatar filmi, teknik yeniliklere sahip bir film olmasının yanı sıra, çevre ile ilgili yoğun mesajlar da vermesi nedeniyle seçilmiştir. Çalışmanın amacı, Avatar filmindeki çevre ilgili öğeleri ortaya koyarak çözümlemektir. Bu amaçla, filmin içerik çözümlemesi yapılarak, şu sorulara yanıt aranacaktır; Sinema sanatında çevre ile ya da çevre felaketleri ile ilgili olarak yapılan filmlerde nasıl bir yaklaşım söz konusudur? Avatar filminin, söz konusu diğer filmlerle benzerlikleri ya da farklılıkları nelerdir?

Anahtar sözcükler: Çevre, Çevre Felaketi, Sinema, Bilimkurgu Filmleri

Introduction

Franz von Baader in his work titled “Über die Begründung der Ethik durch die Physik und Andere Schriften” (On the Grounds of Physics) states the following; in the language of the ancient epics, the task of humans in the nature is not a task short of sustaining and spreading a paradise in the world. In other words, the task of human as a heavenly star on earth is to help the world produce heavenly fruits and figures; thus, providing a service similar to the one offered by an outer star, that is the sun, but much more meaningful than it does. (Baader, 1813: 33)

As understood by this citation, it is clear that there is a vital bond between the earth as a planet on which we live and us. Regarding the issue, Bloch, by making a connection with Engels, determines the following; the process of becoming no longer organic which wholly abandons the organic one and consequently the meta-cosmic one, particularly from technical aspect, with the saying of Engels, should not lose its connection with the human subject who wants to transform self-things into things for us...The process of becoming no longer organic will turn into a blessing only if the “natural magic”, that is how Bacon termed, undertakes the envision of the last predictor apart from changing the social order. Mediation of nature with

human will - regnum hominis established with the nature and from inside the nature. (Bloch, 2007: 800)

According to Bloch, nature is not something that can be consigned to the past. Rather it is the construction site that has not yet been cleared, the building tools that have not yet been attained in an adequate form for the human house that itself does not yet exist in an adequate form. (Bloch, 2007: 830) However, apparently, mankind will not be able to protect this material they have for long. In this sense, cinema as an art has some determinations about this issue, that is, the environment. For example, *The Matrix* describes a habitable but a virtually unproblematic environment which has been destroyed by the man-made machines. Besides, in the movie *Planet of Apes*, not much is told about the reason for the end of the human civilization, but as far as it is understood, the earth has become an inhabitable place due to an environmental disaster.

The movie *Avatar* directed by James Cameron, which has been selected as the topic of the study, is set in a period of time in which the world is environmentally polluted and the humanity is in search of new settlements to be able to continue its existence. It is emphasized that the intelligent beings of the planet in the movie are highly sensitive to the environment and any kind of living creatures are in fact indispensable parts of a unique living organism. Although this situation is valid for the world actually, it can not be sufficiently understood by the humanity. The assumptions regarding the end of the world can be ranged as a meteor hit, a nuclear explosion, and an explosion in the sun. Additionally, there are more mysterious and religious assumptions based on the insights of an ancient civilization like 2012. A world which is destroyed due to the environmental factors has been depicted in very few movies in the recent period such as *The Day After Tomorrow*.

The movie *Avatar*, the topic of the study, has been selected since it is a movie that has technical innovations and that conveys intensive messages about environment. The purpose of the study is to make brief determinations about the movies about environment and to present and analyze the elements related to the environment in the movie *Avatar*. For this purpose, science-fiction movies in which the movie *Avatar*, selected as the topic of this study, will be examined regarding its genre and this genre will be tried to be explained by means of some important examples.

On the Concept of Environment

Ecology has recently gained importance and has been made heard by the concern of the people who are sensitive to the environment and worry about the future of the world and by the efforts of non-governmental organizations such as Greenpeace. However, the desire of the big companies which are economically insatiable to earn more or the factories established to provide jobs for the population due to the increase in population have been responsible for the destruction of the environment. The organizations which struggles for the environment like Greenpeace are tried to be shown as the enemy of humanity no matter how they are right about the effective activities they carry out. As a result of global warming the negative changes that are being and will be in the climate of our planet earth are in the undeniable dimensions. What is required to be done is clear: all the humanity should be aware of the facts about the environment and keep their end up. As stated in the book titled “The Temporary Guards of the World” (To provide sustainability of life in the world), our mission as the temporary guard is to save and protect the planet. And this could be provided if the institutions, states and individuals find the least common denominator. This denominator is to increase our life quality on the planet by decreasing the negative effects created both by us and those before us on the environment. (King ve Lessidrenska, 2010: 58)

Although the focal point of this study is the movie *Avatar*, which is a work of cinema, to mention primarily about some of the studies regarding the environment will be beneficial. It is seen that there are important literature works besides various scientific researches about environment. One of the most important of these literature works is the book of Ernest Callenbach called *Ecotopia the Notebooks and Reports of William Weston*, which was written in 1975. The author, in the book, tells about the impressions of William Weston, who works for a newspaper called Times-Post and spends six weeks in a country called Ecotopia, by considering the imaginative conditions of the earth in 1999. In this imaginative country called Ecotopia, life is based on the principle of conservation of the environment. 'A human solves the things that he put in front of him.' This time we offer you an “ecological utopia”... In Ecotopia, which was extensively discussed when it was published, frequently published and became one of the classics of its genre, the life of those who left the USA and made a new life is told. In Ecotopia, humans do not find the meaning of their existence in “production and consumption”, which brings the entire beings on earth to the verge of destruction. On the contrary, they aim to live together with the other beings without disturbing the natural

balance. They are modest. They have no aims like being perfect, growing and being superior. They have built a decentralized society in which those polluting water or air are punished, the newspapers are printed by using ink that is volatile after two weeks in order to reuse the paper and not to destroy other forests, and 99% of the wastes are re-evaluated. They live a life in which physical contacts, jokiness and emotivism are developed much, the work and play intermingle, the laziness is not found strange, the use of marihuana is turned into a pleasure, a special effort is made to have sexuality directly.

Following this book Callenbach writes his second book about environment titled Ecotopia Emerging in 1981. This book is also seen to be about a struggle for the environment. The story in the book is based on tough facts. Water, air and food become unconsumable due to the toxic wastes. The people who devote themselves to improve these conditions help to raise new hopes. Callenbach, in his book titled Ecology: A Pocket Guide, which was written in 1998, states that ecological system is related to the human health and struggle for life. According to the author, even the smallest biological event is related to various interactions, life on the planet gives us responsibilities as the parts belonging to a whole. However, this responsibility requires us to have simple environmental (ecological) knowledge. With this enlightenment, we can be aware of many conflicts in the world. (Callenbach, 1998: 3)

Science-Fiction Movies and the Appearance of the Concept of Environment in Cinema

When it is said science-fiction, almost everyone thinks of literary works and movies that depict a period of time in the future following a disaster in space, other planets or on earth. The time in these narratives is either better than the present time, that is, utopia, or worse than the present time, that is, dystopia. As stated by Bloch; Bacon's Nova Atlantis, also with the series of the classics, is the only utopia that puts the technical producing powers in a place that will provide a better life because, in the utopias, unlike those in the real life, machine world could not always be linked with economic and social world. (Bloch, 2007: 789)

Leppert's following commentary related to the future is quite informative; that which is made visual is not intended only as the mirror of that which is but also as the indicator of that which was or is to be. That is, visual representation results from an act whose conscious or unconscious purpose is to engage a particular way of life, whether real or imagined. By definition, the image represents the past (for time stops in art) but in one way or another art is about the future. It works either to stabilize or to change what is by marking what might be.

Art engages an imagined future that is invariably social, involving others, including those who must be convinced who must follow or who must be made to follow.(Leppert, 2009: 24-25)

The movies made in cinema can not only be in the genre of science-fiction. Some struggles for environmental pollution, diseases and deaths that can occur due to environmental pollutions can be selected as themes. However, since *Avatar*, selected as the topic of this study, is a science-fiction movie, it will be to the point to mention about science-fiction movies. Vivian Sobchack, in her book entitled *Screening Space: The American Science Fiction Film*, states that science-fiction films include mixtures rather than distinct features in cowboy or war films.

Science-fiction movies can generally be classified as follows:

-Use of scientific elements: Appearance of crazy scientists like Frankenstein or Dr. Strangelove, outer space travels, explosion and destruction of distant planets due to a collision or some natural conditions and the following events and, in general, science form the focal point of this kind of science-fiction films.

-Use of extra terrestrial life styles: The concept of life, in particular intelligent life, is extra terrestrial in this kind of movies. In the early period of science-fiction films, it is seen that this way of life is presented as a politic or military power that threatens the world. During the later periods this kind of extra terrestrial way of life is handled as a gain for the planet earth such as *E.T.*, *Close Encounters of the Third Kind*, *Alien* series. In the movies such as *Contact*, *The Box*, *The Day the Earth Stood Still*, *Solaris*, *Dark Star*, there are extra terrestrial ways of life which shows its existence in the appearance of a human or in physically invisible forms showing its existence only by communicating.

-Disaster movies: This kind of science-fiction films includes the following general categories:

- **Invasion of Extra Terrestrials** —hostile intelligent beings or extraterrestrials threaten the humanity with the technical equipment and powers they have. The movies such as *The War of the Worlds* (1953), *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* (1956) can be given as examples.
- **Environmental Disaster** — Climate change can occur due to an asteroid or a comet hit or the irresponsible pollution of the atmosphere by the toxic wastes. Like the movies *Soylent Green* (1973), *Waterworld* (1995), 2012, *The Day After Tomorrow*.
- **Replacement of Technology with Human** — In this kind of films, developed robots/cyborgs, developed computers in the sense of artificial intelligence, half

machines genetically developed in the form of a human or an animal are replaced with the human beings. Like *the Terminator* (1984), *the Matrix* (1999).

- **Nuclear War** —In this kind of science-fiction films, there is generally a dystopic, that is dark future, struggle for humanity after a massacre. Like *Dr. Strangelove* (1964), *Planet of the Apes* (1968), *A Boy and His Dog* (1975), *Mad Max* (1979).
- **Epidemic** —Generally a great epidemic created by a single person threatens the entire humanity. *The Andromeda Strain* (1971), *The Omega Man* (1971), *Twelve Monkeys* (1995), *28 Days Later* (2002).
- **Monster Movies:** In this kind of movies, a monster is not a threat worldwide. Monsters are generally used in horror or fantastic films. However, the existence of monsters in the science-fiction films is based on a scientific foundation, not on a magical or supernatural reason. Science-fiction film monsters can be created or awakened by crazy scientist or they can come out as a result of a nuclear accident or a scientific experience. Like *The Beast from 20,000 Fathoms*(1953), *Cloverfield* (2008), *Godzilla*(1998).

-Movies related to the intelligence of man: Beginning from the 1980, especially, intelligence-oriented contents began to be seen in science-fiction films. *Blade Runner* involves the technological and organic creation of a human. In the movie *RoboCop*, a reprogrammable conscious related to the brain /a cyborg that is created by intelligence is the leading character. Also, in the movies such as *Frankenstein* there is a crazy scientist who transfers his own intelligence to another body. In the movies such as *Total Recall*, programmable human intelligence is mentioned. In the movies such as *A Clockwork Orange*, *The Manchurian Candidate* made in 1960s and 1970s, political brain washing processes of a government are handled. Relatedly, memory deleting or memory re-forming can be seen in this kind of films. Besides the movies in which a person is given as a computer program such as *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind*, animated series of *Serial Experiments Lain*, *Tron*, the artificial surrounding called as virtual reality turns into a real prison directed by conscious machines for people in *The Matrix* series. In some movies such as *eXistenZ*, reality mixes with each other by turning into an artificial reality called virtual reality and the boundary between becomes completely unclear.

- Robots: In science-fiction films, robots are the most frequently used elements. Generally they have functions of supporting the leading character. The woman robot in the film

Metropolis is one of the first examples and the American film in which the first state-of-the-art robot is used is *The Day the Earth Stood Still*. While robots support the characters in the films *Forbidden Planet* and *Star Wars*, what is replaced with the leading character in *Blade Runner* is the bio-engineering marvel androids or replicates. (Guttmacher, 1997: 9) In the movies such as *Bicentennial Man*, *A.I. Artificial Intelligence*, robots beware of themselves. In the popular use in science-fiction films such as *I Robot*, *Terminator*, conscious robots take the place of a human one day.

-Time Travel: The concept of time travel in this kind of films involves traveling forward or backward in time. These travels are generally carried out by means of a kind of machine which is a developed technological invention. In the movies like the *Back to the Future* triple, *Planet of the Apes*, time changes can occur as a result of the travels made through a jump or light speed in time. In some films such as *Donnie Darko*, *The Butterfly Effect*, the blackouts can lead to forward or backward time travels. Similarly, the movie *Twelve Monkeys* runs between time travel, memory and insanity.

-Movies interpreting social issues: The contents of science fiction films progress in two general narratives; utopian and dystopian. That is, the future of a society can be better (utopian) or worse (dystopian). It is seen that utopian films are less than dystopian films. In the movies such as *Soylent Green*, it is stressed how an environmental disaster or a technology-based disaster affect society or individuals. In the movie *A Clockwork Orange*, a formidable portrait of youth is depicted. In the film *Minority Report*, in 2002, the traces of 11 September attacks and an approach to prevent that kind of attacks are seen. In the movies *Children of Men*, and *District 9*, social phenomenon like cognitive collapse, xenophobia and propaganda are seen to be used.

-Movies involving dark future: Jamaluddin Bin Aziz, a professor at Lancaster University, states that science fiction films expand to the other kinds of films and take some of the features of them and uses the term dark future (future noir) for the science fiction films that takes the features of gothic horror and dark films. This expression involves irony, pessimism, insight, prediction based on what is known, hopelessness, and nostalgia. The films such as *Blade Runner*, *Twelve Monkeys*, *Dark City*, and *Children of Men*, use a lead hero. Dark future films are set in a world after doomsday. This world has an atmosphere of a dark, hopeless city or a world in which a recreated society lives. (Bin Aziz, J.

(<http://www.crimeculture.com/Contents/Articles-Summer05/JemAziz1.html>. Retrieved 17 November 2008.)

The Appearance of the Concept of the Environment in the Movie Avatar

Before the movie *Avatar*, which has been selected as the topic of the study, the movies made by James Cameron are as follows: *Titanic* (1997), *True Lies* (1994), *Terminator 2: Judgment Day* (1991), *The Abyss* (1989), *Aliens* (1986), *The Terminator* (1984), *Xenogenesis* (1978). It is seen that all these films except for the *Titanic* are science fiction films. In fact, it is seen that all the movies directed by Cameron are impressive films that have an important place regarding the art of cinema. In all the films he made in the genre of science fiction, a dark future is mentioned. However, in these films, it can not be said that there is a direct approach regarding environment. Although *Terminator* is related to the invasion of the world by the machines by their own conscious after a nuclear explosion by which the entire natural surrounding has been destroyed and the existence of a time machine that will help prevent this, not many elements related to the nature are seen in the film. *Abyss* depicts the settlement of civilized extraterrestrials undersea. A dystopic world is not seen in the movie; there is a peaceful, mechanized and natural surrounding. *Aliens*, the follow-up of the *Alien* series, depicts the instinctual destruction of those on board by a living creature that gets into a ship searching for minerals out of the world and starts to live there. The movie *Aliens*, like the other films of the series, is set on the planets other than earth or in space. Most probably, the film is about finding other resources in space since the resources in the world have been destroyed.

Cameron's latest movie, *Avatar*, which is of crucial importance regarding its context and from technical aspect, is a film that includes messages almost all are related to the environment. It will be beneficial to develop the topic of the movie *Avatar*, which forms the focal point of the study, by beginning with its title first. *Avatar*, above all, is a concept related to the virtual world. Virtual world is a world formed by computer aided graphics and animated in three-dimensions. Avatar, which is one of the most important concepts of this virtual world, makes a computer user interact with an animated character in the virtual world. Avatar manages the objects in the virtual world with the movements of a mouse used by the computer user and helps interaction with those objects. Simply, avatar is a remotely controlled character. Everything in the virtual world is related to what the computer user wants to do. The role of avatar in this virtual world can change as effective, ineffective or creative depending on the

wishes of the computer user. The avatars of virtual societies can completely be animated characters having a full personality. Avatars can swim underwater, run in the forests or fly. Houses, workplaces, clubs, art galleries, shopping malls are created in the virtual world and avatars live in these places or these places are discovered by avatars. To sum up, some things that are impossible to be made by real persons can be made by the avatars in the virtual world. In the movie, due to the atmosphere of the planet Pandora, which is not suitable for human life, conscious of a human is transferred to a cloned Na'vi (that is, an intelligent being constituting the people of Pandora having similar characteristics with a human) thus, forming an avatar, to make it possible to live on the planet.

We should mention about the book titled Avatar-A Confidential Report on the Biological and Social History of Pandora, which describes each of the elements comprising the context of the film in detail and which has been written as if it is a confidential file regarding the operation carried out on the planet Pandora. Because in the history of cinema, for a movie, such an investigation has not been published before as a book immediately after the film is released. In the book in the form of a confidential report, natural structure of the planet, weapons and transport vehicles used during and after the operation are described in detail. The introduction part of the book in the chapter titled Human Technology on Pandora is as follows: In the pell-mell rush to exploit the earth, we have fouled the water, the land and the sky. Corporations have been forced to look outward for profit – to space, to the moon, to Mars, and finally, to Pandora. Greed, coupled with the depletion of the natural resources has helped create tremendous advances in technology. Uses for unobtainium (a superconducting substance that can only be found on the planet Pandora) are still being discovered which may be a boon for earth's economy and technology. But the growing hunger for the superconducting substance also represents a continuing threat to Pandora and to the Na'vi... In the decades since arrival on Pandora, the RDA (the largest nongovernmental organization in the human universe, The Resources Development Administration, with a monopoly on all products shipped, derived or developed from Pandora or outer space) has created a proficient on-moon robotic manufacturing facility that takes care of all its vehicle, weapons and ammunition needs. All weapons are built to withstand the rigors of Pandora's electromagnetic fields. The various robo-dozers, earth movers, and slash-cutters that have decimated the few remaining patches of the rainforests also work well... Yet, the ongoing travel to Pandora, made possible by the antimatter engines may lead to tremendous benefits for the fragile, dying

ecosystems of earth. Once again, our technology contains within it the paradox of salvation and destruction". (Wilhelm, & Mathison, 2010:145-147) With this citation, the topic of *Avatar* is more or less summarized in the memories. Besides the environmental disaster that earth faces, an attempt is seen to be made to destroy the nature of the planet Pandora, whose atmosphere is not suitable for human life to survive.

The one in charge of mining the superconducting substance that the company titled the RDA tries to get from the planet Pandora is the army. In this point, the existence of an enemy can come to mind, however, the enemy is in fact the Na'vi race, which is not aware of the situation and do not behave the human race as an enemy at all. After a certain point, some personal affairs and feelings step in depending on the dramatic structure of the film; however, the natural structure of the planet Pandora takes place as a dominant element in a most effective way in the whole movie. Towards the end of the film, the destroyed nature of the Pandora makes the heart of the audience sink, and it also emphasizes how terrible the extent of the destruction made by the human race to its own planet is. There being no technological means on Pandora, meeting of any needs in a natural way and the nature's developing a connection with each living creature taking place in it, and the happiness of the beings living in this environment stimulate the thoughts of the audience regarding the nature. Although there is a similar natural environment on our planet earth, the admiration felt for the nature of the Pandora can help us think about our natural resources that we, as the human race, destroy. Because each kind of living creature or each element of the flora that Pandora has in fact shows similar characteristics with the living creatures on earth. Some can be very interesting and attractive; however, if they are examined, it is possible to come across the similar ones on earth except for the colors and some physical characteristics of the Na'vi, which has intelligent beings.

Conclusion

In conclusion, *Avatar* is separated from the other science fiction films with its viewpoint regarding the nature besides the entire characteristics of a science fiction film. Here, if it is necessary to remind of other science fiction films; science institutions, scientists and authorized officials help these films during the production, but the artistic narration of this genre is directed towards deliberate distortion or mystification of the facts instead of revealing the facts. For example, Fritz Lang worked with 2 scientists who helped Hitler in the

manufacturing of U-2s later. Some institutions related to the NASA provide support for the films, like Kubrick. (Oskay, 1985: 177)

Although it can be said that the army has provided support for *Avatar*, the military system and applications are in fact criticized in the film. Also, when the aforementioned book titled *Avatar* is considered, it is understood that a very detailed study has been carried out from biological, ecological, technological, anthropological and sociological aspects.

A structure similar to *The Matrix* can be mentioned in *Avatar*. Hanson comments to make this point clear as follows; the most cynical point in *The Matrix*, in the direction that the meaning of life is not a temporary concept but a solution of a mathematics problem, is set between two end-points as an optimism loaded with a permanent heroism and a gloomy pessimism. (Hanson, 2003: 202).

Again, as stated by Hanson; all science fiction films make predictions about a pessimistic future in which the righteous become a minority that are severely disadvantaged. *The Matrix* sets forth an integrative war against the status quo. The heroes in *Dark City* and *Gattaca* fight against the authority figures that control every place and everything, like the Big Brother in the novel of Orwell titled 1984, several of whose imitations have been produced. (Hanson, 2003: 184)

And in *Avatar*, the Na'vis, which fight for their civilization living in a natural environment and with nature, are mentioned. In 1918, in his work with a title associating the doomsday, which is "The Decline of the West", Oswald Spengler foretells the civilization will be lost on behalf of a history philosophy inspired by the natural sciences. The victory of cities is the precursor messenger of the end of an important period.

World-city and province - the two basic ideas of every civilization — bring up a wholly new form-problem of History, the very problem that we are living through to-day with hardly the remotest conception of its immensity. In place of a world, there is a city, a point, in which the whole life of broad regions is collecting while the rest dries up. In place of a type-true people, born of and grown on the soil, there is a new sort of nomad, cohering unstably in fluid masses, the parasitical city dweller, traditionless, utterly matter-of-fact, religionless, clever, unfruitful, deeply contemptuous of the countryman and especially that highest form of countryman, the country gentleman. (Spengler, 1928: 32)

This is the situation for the planet Pandora and the real owners of the planet whose integrative natural structure has been destroyed by the human race as a result of its ambition to get the superconducting substance which is of crucial importance as a technological need. According to another comment; the first American science fiction films' being poor fantastically and their only effort to invade and seize can be seen as a proof for their obligation to continue the mythos in the westerns. The astronauts in the Space opera wanders from one planet to the other just like a cowboy wandering from one water resource to the other. (Roloff & Seeblen, 1995: 123)

This structure in the science fiction films is still available and the human race destroying its own planet turns its hands to Pandora in *Avatar*. According to the geographer Augustin Berque, like the ecology being homogenous with biological expressions, phenomenological movement is homogenous with ontological expressions. Like the other living creatures, the human cannot live without an environment. (Berque, 1996: 95-96)

Regarding the science-fiction movies, it is impossible not to agree with this determination of Oskay; another characteristic of the science-fiction genre is that it reflects pessimism or optimism parallel to the periods of tension and relaxation. These films in the situation of being a genre that speaks on behalf of them instead of the audience are necessarily obliged to reflect the changes in the world politics that affect the lives of the audience even within their prism. It shows itself close to the audience with what it reflects, it becomes popular and widespread to tame, even to postpone, the attempts to find solutions to their own problems. (Oskay, 1985: 175)

It is possible to find such a determination depending on this interpretation; environmental disasters experienced as a result of a warfare continuing worldwide or never-ending ambitions of big companies to earn is naturally reflected to the films. Ecologists envisaged fifteen years ago that the world forests would completely be destroyed; nevertheless, today we learn that the problem is so big that it won't be solved with the development of the forests. This risk is an emphasis laid on the place where the society theory remains short and the irrational bad situation that makes us a common subject. (Irwin, 2003: 289) In every sense, *Avatar* is a film in which these reflections are intensely seen.

When the best ten science fiction films published by The Guardian in 2005 are considered, it is seen that there are few films related directly to the environment:

1. *Blade Runner*-R.Scott
2. *2001*-S.Kubrick
3. *Star Wars*-G.Lucas
4. *Alien*-R.Scott
5. *Solaris*-A.Tarkovkski
6. *Terminator*-J.Cameron
7. *The Day the Earth Stood Still*-R.Wise
8. *War of the Worlds*-B.Haskin
9. *The Matrix*-A/L.Wachowski
10. *Close Encounters of the Third Kind*-S.Spielberg

While *Blade Runner* considers the transformation of the humanity in a dark future atmosphere into androids, *2001* addresses some mysterious elements with space travels in a distant future and the encounter of a conscious computer with the human intelligence. *Star Wars* is related to the managerial and political structures of the stellar systems in deeper parts of the space, where there is no planet earth. *Alien* is about the fight against an alien threat that gets into a spaceship searching for mines on the remote planets. *Solaris* can be evaluated as a film with a psychological infrastructure. In the movie *Terminator* made by James Cameron, who is the director of *Avatar*, which has been selected as the topic of this study, some elements are mentioned related to the environment, even if just a bit, and the main theme is related to the machines replaced with the human race. *The Day the Earth Stood Still* can be seen the only film related to the environment among these films. A living creature coming from outer space in the form of a human to warn the human beings who do not sufficiently protect the planet earth is the focal point of the film. In the movie *War of the Worlds*, the world is invaded by biological creatures having giant machines. *The Matrix*, as it is known, narrates the fight of few human beings convicted to live in an entirely virtual universe in a destroyed world ruled by machines. In the film, it is not very clear by whom the environment has been destroyed. In the movie *Close Encounters of the Third Kind*, the relationships established with extraterrestrial conscious creatures are described.

In conclusion, *Avatar*, as a science fiction film, has the general characteristics all science fiction films have. Also, the correct assessment of the messages desired to be conveyed by the audience and, specifically in *Avatar*, the audience's starting to think about the environment is a result of the criticizing process of the film. According to Darko Suvin, not only the science fiction films but also, in the general sense, good and right criticism of science fiction should have the following characteristics:

- To consider that a big part of the science fiction products that are read and watched today are similar works,
- To consider that a level of a good science fiction work should be on a higher level than the audience it is offered,
- To consider that a good science fiction work should give a place to new, peculiar elements to be attractive; however, to consider that the focus on these elements should not throw the mind background out of focus,
- A real science fiction work should have an educational aspect,
- A good science fiction work shouldn't be open to benefit from its creator and audience not only in the sense of absolute science but also in the sense of having a social thinking ability. (Suvin, 1979: 69) It won't be a wrong determination to say the most important feature within all these characteristics that Suvin specifies with respect to the movie Avatar is that it directs people to have a social thinking ability based on common sense.

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