

THE IMPERFECT SIDES OF A PERFECT CIRCLE (MORALITY TOWARDS LOVE)

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ABSTRACT

Assuming we consider that the film art isn't merely a simple representation or expression, but that promotes a moral understanding, we are considering that the film acts as a contributing mean to understanding philosophical aspect of human beings. It is through films that we have access to stories and characters that lead us to analyze the way we live. Based on this idea, comes this audiovisual essay *The Imperfect Sides of a Perfect Circle*, that explores the way that these moral aspects are translated to films, more explicitly how it is done in the film *How to Draw a Perfect Circle* (2009), from the director Marco Martins.

Keywords: Moral understanding; Audiovisual essay; Marco Martins; Philosophy.





Franz thinks about everything and about nothing,



he doesn't know whether
it is the world that is becoming a dream

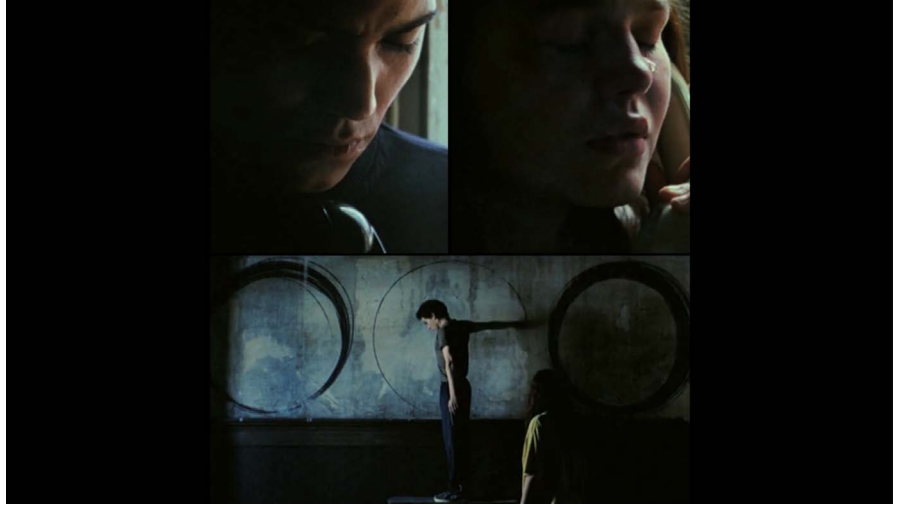


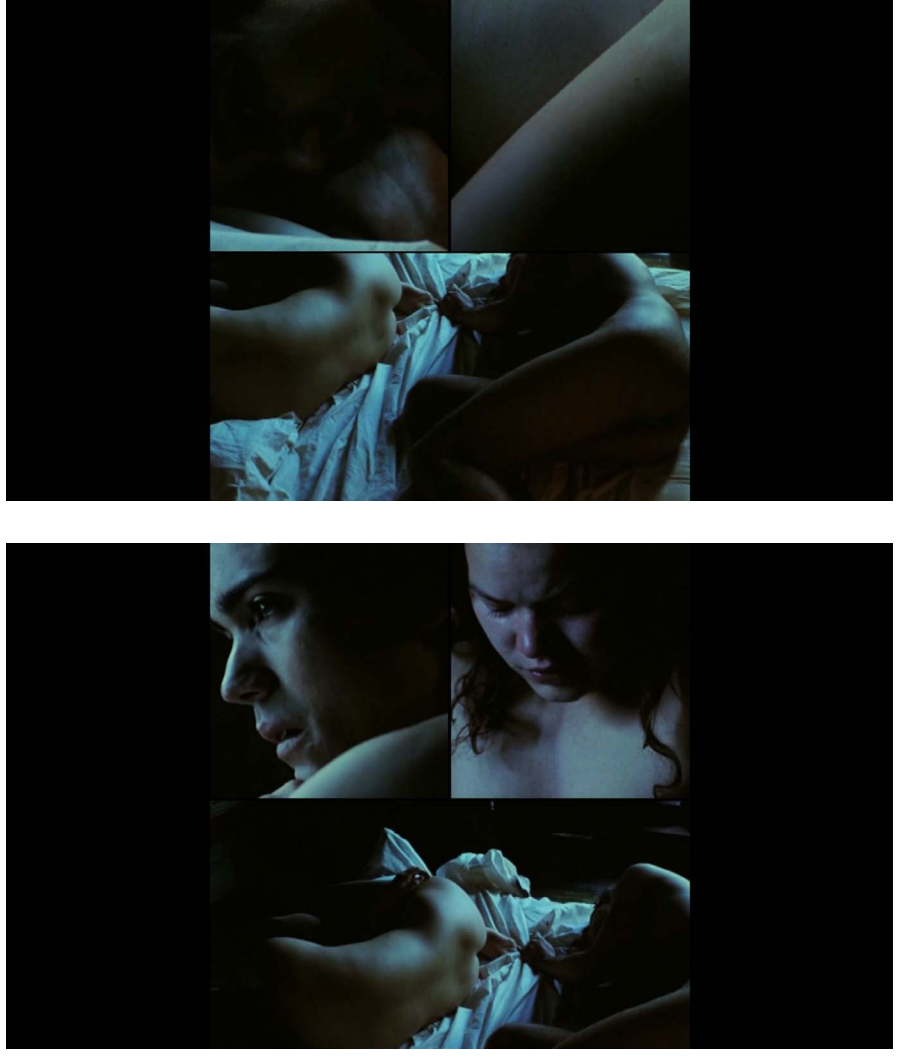
or if the dream is becoming a world.













Despite the flourishing of philosophy of film in recent decades, only a few theorists saw an opportunity to explore the understanding of cinema through philosophical approaches, through not only the more technical issues presented by cinema as an art form, in relation to its aesthetics, but also through the possibility that comes from cinema to contribute for a philosophical understanding. This change of perspective, or this ethical turn (Sinnerbrink, 2016), was possible after an ethical potential was applied to cinema, starting to guarantee the possibility of exploring moral issues, as it is considered as a mean of ethical experience (by promoting new paths for philosophical thinking and exercising moral imagination) and not just as a mean of exposing values. This ethical potential was normally neglected in the theory of cinema, since its origin, cinema has been presented as an art concerned with the representation of the human figure in motion, however, it was only after the Nouvelle Vague that cinema ceases to be solely concerned with aesthetic analysis and also begins to address ethics, truly caring for topics such as the psychological and emotional relationships and conflicts of the human being.

This phenomenological and cognitive intersection is made through cinempathy (Sinnerbrink, 2016). Cinempathy consists in creating an affective connection with the moving images through scenes of empathy (Plantinga, 1999), where we usually find several characteristics that correspond to elements that provoke emotional responses, such as the use of close-ups, mainly focused on the facial expressions and body gestures of the characters, so that an emotional relationship is created and the use is carefully, and previously thought out, in terms of lighting, color and music. In this way, filmmakers exercise, according to the demands of the narrative and above all with their own intentions, the audience's moral feelings by appealing to a sense of moral approval or disapproval, which, depending on the complexity and freedom of the narrative, they can cause changes of "sides".

Having these lines of thinking previously researched for an academic assignment, that relates them to the filmography of the director Marco Martins, came the idea of using some parts of the text and transform them into an audiovisual essay, using excerpts of a film. To justify my decision, I think that, first of all, Marco Martins' cinema is especially interesting to analyze in this ethical context, as the director dedicates himself immensely to certain ethical themes and reproduces morally relevant problems and scenarios in his works. As he says:

Writing a script implies a great reflection on a certain subject that we choose to tell, long before, in my case, even having a story to tell. There is a theme, it's a little bit like what happened in *Alice*, I wanted to talk about Lisbon, about urbanity and about the way people live in the city today, talking about the big daily migrations from the suburbs to Lisbon and those people who seem alone, and almost urban zombies. And I think that this is a theme that I will continue to

develop (...), the urban and the isolation of people in Lisbon today, not only socially but familiarly, that's what I'm interested in talking about. (...) I think that people should obviously go to the cinema more (...) mainly because it implies making choices and not receiving what they are given without thinking about what they are seeing, I think that people are finding it increasingly difficult to think, and going to the cinema it's a little bit to create a culture of thinking, of choosing and saying "I'm going to see this film and then reflect on it". (Martins, 2005)

Of all his filmography, the film *How to Draw a Perfect Circle* (2009) was the one that caught my attention the most, and the one that made the most sense for me to explore, as we are presented with a rather difficult question to answer without using an ethical reflection, since the theme of the film (incest) constitutes a taboo in our society. Thus, the starting point would be to expose that the director really puts at the center of the narrative a theme that can be morally debatable, while moving the characters in parallel in fields of personal conflict. The main characters of the film, the twins Guilherme and Sofia, automatically become the characters chosen to be deconstructed. Surrounded by an unbalanced and increasingly decadent family, the lack of stability is directly reflected in their lives: Guilherme has a huge fixation on his sister, not only at the emotional level, but also at a sexual level, as they grew up sharing experiences and, little by little, they discover their sexuality; however, Guilherme has only one goal- to be the first to have sex with Sofia (even if he is not reciprocal). Thus, and based on the main theme of the film, the theme of the audiovisual essay becomes the obsession towards love.

Bearing this in mind, I noticed the existence of a repetition of the use of a shot / reverse shot, sometimes with a different tone and a different framing in the characters of Guilherme and Sofia, namely when he chases or observes her, and from there it emerged the idea of dividing the framework. The upper part divided in two: it consists of singular, more closely framed and sometimes darker shots, placed simultaneously on the screen, of the psychologically and morally unstable characters Guilherme and Sofia, while they react and dialogue with each other, creating an illusion of whole dialogues. Here we also see how the two wander in the same spaces, but that Guilherme hovers over his sister, watching with an aura full of envy and desire, while Sofia clings to an attempt to live a reality different from the one she knows, but one she will never manage to run away, because of the emotional pressure that her brother puts on herself. Below, an overview that risks offering a certain beauty in the instability, showing poetically constructed shots which sometimes can complement a scene or show a contrast in relation to what is being shown above.

Finally, the scenes used at the beginning and at the end also have their importance for the tone of the audiovisual essay. For me, the *Bande à part* (1964) quote "It's time to open parentheses and describe the feelings of the characters" - that echoes in the film's TV and which is then followed by a plan of the main characters with their mother-, serves

as an invitation from the director for us to enter his film and get to know these characters. And it's the same in my audiovisual essay, because it's time to deconstruct the characters' feelings and moral postures. The final shot, with the three perfect circles crossed out, serves as a closure of the narrative, but mainly a closure for Guilherme's objective, after having achieved what he wanted from his sister. In the end, all the excerpts edited in this essay were used to construct an illustration of some problems exposed in the film, more objectively of a morality that confronts love.

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