

## Reviving the Cinema. *Meninas* of the Seventh Art

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We all judge what we see, or at least, as Oscar Wilde put it, “[i]t is only shallow people who do not judge by appearances. The mystery of the world is the visible, not the invisible.” The first art theorists, the Greek philosophers, spoke of mimesis or imitation of reality. And even today, when most critics and artists prefer to work with aesthetic criteria based on an expressive rather than a mimetic notion of art, the content continues to give us a pattern for interpreting the artworks. Beyond what we appreciate as mere readers or viewers, with our status of potential critics, artists or creators, we reinterpret what we see or, in the words of Harold Bloom, we *misread* it. It doesn’t matter whether it’s poetry, painting or cinema: originality (innovation?) lies in the point of view once everything has already been invented. In 1958, Picasso painted 44 versions of Velázquez’s *Las Meninas* in his workshop in La Californie. Although faithful to its spirit and atmosphere, Picasso *misread* Velázquez’s work until he was able to consider each version an original work of art, in addition to being appreciable as a group. This is why he would decide to donate the entire suite (the only series preserved together) to his museum in Barcelona, in memory of his friend and secretary Jaime Sabartés, to whom he would remark: “If anyone were to try and copy *Las Meninas* in complete good faith, and for example got to a certain point –and if I were the copier– would say to myself, ‘and if I just put this a little more to the right or left?’ I would try to do it in my own way, forgetting about Velázquez... In this way, little by little, I would paint *Meninas* that would seem detestable to a pure copyist –they would not be what he thought he saw on Velázquez’s canvas, but they would be my *Meninas*”. Cinema, like painting and literature, has been interrogating itself since its birth, turning cinema itself into *Meninas*, its object of worship and study.

We would like to dedicate this issue of *L’Atalante* to “cinophile directors in modern times”, to the way in which, from the contemporary perspective, they reflect on cinema through cinema, think cinema by practicing cinema, contribute to their medium by generating a dialogue *ad infinitum*, an “echo chamber”, as Barthes would call it, between their work and those that have gone before it. Quote, allusion, recreation, recycling... cinophilic practices acquire multiple forms of appropriation and homage to which film theorists have given many names: self-referentiality, intertextuality, metacinema, *mise en abyme*... Each of these terms, with their diverse nuances, attempt to define different cinophilic exercises, their connections and their transformation over time. The sections *Dialogue* and *(Dis)agreements* complement the topic of the essays in the *Notebook* section, many of which are dedicated to filmmakers who have become points of reference for this practice (Jean-Luc Godard, Víctor Erice, Quentin Tarantino, Pedro Almodóvar and Alfred Hitchcock), written by international scholars (Vera Dika, Malte Hagener, Laura Mulvey, Ángel Quintana, Santos Zunzunegui...). In the first we bring together a series of statements by Martin Scorsese to Michael Henry Wilson, revealing how his cinematic education and sense of film history have affected and continue to affect his films, and —as the filmmaker himself admits— have turned his passion into an absolute obsession. In the second we present a five-way debate, engaged in by professors, critics and museologists from three continents, (Gonzalo Aguilar, Karen Fiss, Patricia Keller, José Antonio Pérez-Bowie and Hidenori Okada) whose title poses the challenging question about the need to return to the classics of cinema. Scorsese, in *A Personal Journey...* (excerpted in the *Dialogue*), responds indirectly to this question when he affirms that it is in the classics that “we find that obscure object of desire... the need to relive the first films we saw, while being aware that we’ll never see them in the same way again... the moment when those films transformed us, transported us to another world!” Finally, we will also be transported to another world by the three essays that *vanish* in different directions in the section that closes the issue. We open *Vanishing Points* with an article reflecting on the “cybernetic utopia” presented in *eXistenZ*, with its ground-breaking video-game aesthetic; this is followed by a musical experiment based on the application of Michel Chion’s theories on audiovision to an excerpt from Tarkovsky’s *Nostalghia*; finally, we return to cinema’s origins with *A Girl’s Folly*, one of the few completely preserved films shot in Fort Lee (the epicentre of US cinema during the decade of the 1910s), which constitutes an extremely important testimonial and metacinematic exercise. We thus close the cycle on cinephilia opened with *Notebook*.

Last of all, on behalf of *L’Atalante*, I would like to offer a few words of thanks to everyone who has made it possible for this, our first bilingual edition (Spanish and English) in both print and digital format, to see the light of day. In particular, I would like to thank all of the authors and translators, and specifically among the authors I thank Michael Henry Wilson, who not only gave us permission to publish his various conversations with Scorsese, but also monitored the process closely at an especially difficult moment. Satyajit Ray believed that works of art were *cellular*, meaning that they have an *organic unity* where what is important is “the totality that results from various elements that come together”. To produce a publication of this kind, which continues thanks to the keenness and selfless labour of its contributors, also entails a certain *organicity*. We would like to conclude with these words of Ray’s on the vital nature of cinema, dedicated to our dear contributor Alberto Elena, *in memoriam*. ■