

METACINEMA AS CINEMATIC PRACTICE: A PROPOSAL FOR CLASSIFICATION*

Introduction

It is an established fact that cinema is capable of vampirism. An example of this can be found in *Rapture* (Arrebato, Iván Zulueta, 1979), in which the protagonist, filmmaker José Sirgado, is ultimately vampirised by the camera. This fate is foreshadowed at the beginning of the film: after the opening credits, Sirgado and his film editor debate on how their film should end. The Moviola shows a vampiress coming out of her coffin. Her gaze directly at the camera is turned on her next victim, who is none other than the filmmaker himself. Sirgado says goodbye to his film editor joking with a false set of vampire teeth and a blood-stained neck to the music of Richard Wagner –which we will also hear at the end of the film, when the filmmaker is carried off by the camera. For Juan Miguel Company and Javier Marzal (1999: 72), the inclusion of the subject in the “photochemical nature” of cinema may be “the most amazing cinematic fantasy of all” [Figure 1].

Rapture is one of those films that have been able to portray how addictive cinema can be for those cinephilic filmmakers who, as Martin Scorsese says, consider their medium of expression, rather than a passion, an obsession (MICHAEL HENRY WILSON, 2011: 285). It is no accident that this US filmmaker with Italian roots should start his personal journey through American film history¹ with a quote from Frank Capra comparing cinema with heroin². Zulueta does the same in *Rapture*, in which Sirgado is hooked not only on cinema but also on the aforementioned morphine derivative.

Cinema also flows through the veins of the Spanish filmmaker Lorenzo Llobet-Gràcia. In his only film, *Vida en sombras* (1948), his alter ego in the film, Carlos Durán, is born into a world of cinema, raised as a cinephile and ends up becoming a filmmaker. It is the same path taken by most cinephilic filmmakers who, rather than considering filmmaking a



Figure 1. Vampirism process in *Rapture* (Arrebato, Iván Zulueta, 1979)

trade, perceive it as a way of life, and show this through constant study of their medium of expression. The purpose of this article is to explore how these filmmakers think about filmmaking by making films.

Metacinema is the cinematic exercise that allows filmmakers to reflect on their medium of expression through the practice of filmmaking, whereby cinema looks at itself in the mirror in an effort to get to know itself better. This practice is not exclusive to cinema; other arts, such as painting and especially literature, have engaged in it previously. In a literary context, Brian Ott and Cameron Walter (2000: 438) describe it as “a mode of writing that deliberately draws attention to its fictional nature by commenting on its own activities”. Indeed, many of the points of reference for this prac-

tice are taken from literature, along with other terms such as *metalan-guage*, *metadiscourse* or *metafiction*, which have emerged to define the *meta*-practices in this medium. All the definitions made in this regard can be extrapolated to the cinematic field, such as the definition that Patricia Waugh (1988: 6) suggests for *metafiction*: “the lowest common denominator of metafiction is simultaneously to create a fiction and to make a statement about the creation of that fiction”. In addition to offering this definition, Waugh also suggests an idea that may prove revealing, which is the fact that there are two coexisting processes in this activity: on one hand, creation, and on the other, criticism.

Although it may seem that metacinema was born with the rise of cinematic post-modernity, it is actually a tendency that has been present throughout the history of film. It has been practised since its origins, possibly due, as mentioned above, to the influence of the literary medium. Nevertheless, it is true that it has become more popular in the post-modern era, to such an extent that it can be asserted that metacinematic practice is one of the symptoms of post-modernism. Specifically, for Gilles Lipovetsky and Jean Serroy (2009: 70), “self-reference” is the third process that defines the hypermodern image, while for Manfred Pfister (1991: 215) “the ideal-type postmodernist text is, therefore, a ‘metatext’, that is, a text about texts or textuality, an auto-reflective and auto-referential text”. However, we cannot forget that before postmodernity came modernity, and with it, an openly critical stance on what a certain type of filmmaking –the excessively mannered and industrialised variety– meant and entailed. Thus, this criticism on paper was transferred to the screen with the purpose of refuting those excesses, proposing an alternative and defending *auteur* filmmaking against standardization.

Indeed, if we look back on film history we will find that metacinema has been practised in many different ways at different times. This diverse quality forces us, if we want to decipher its complexity, to posit a classification of the different strategies that have been proposed in the past and how they continue to be used in the cinema of the present. In other words, the objective of this paper is to support a typology of the different ways

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of approaching metacinematic practice and explore how they are being updated in contemporary filmmaking. To this end, my starting point is the proposition made by Jacques Gerstenkorn in 1987, updated in 2008 by Jean-Marc Limoges, suggesting that metacinema can be split into two generic categories that describe the two basic practices that define it: “cinematic reflexivity” and “filmic reflexivity” (GERSTENKORN, 1987: 7-8). Whereas the first focuses on the processes and mechanisms of film creation and reception, the second turns its attention towards film history.

While directors most often choose one or another, sometimes both forms appear in the same film. In fact, two very early examples illustrate this combination perfectly: on one hand, the film directed by Robert W. Paul in 1901 titled *The Countryman and the Cinematograph*, and on the other,



Figure 2. Reflexivity in early films

Edwin S. Porter's 1902 film *Uncle Josh at the Moving Picture Show* [Figure 2].

In terms of cinematic reflexivity, both films focus specifically on the process of reception. This is not at all surprising since the most striking aspect of that era was, precisely, how the viewer reacted to the new medium. Thus, both films feature a viewer who, amazed by what he is watching, leaves his seat to move closer to the film screen, allowing the projection and his reactions to be seen simultaneously in the same frame. It is significant that in both films one of the scenes watched by this spontaneous viewer should be the recreation of *Arrival of a Train at La Ciotat* (L'arrivée d'un train à La Ciotat, Lumière, 1896). The well-known reaction that such images incited among viewers of the time turned the film, within a few years, into a benchmark for both exercises in reflexivity. This referentiality to a previous film is what makes these films examples of the second practice of the suggested typology: filmic reflexivity.

Cinematic reflexivity

In addition to the reception process, the shooting process was also of interest at the dawn of cinema. It was the presence of the camera what fascinated the most the contemporaries of the era, and its central role can be seen in *How It feels to be Run Over* (Cecil M. Hepworth, 1900) and *The Big Swallow* (James Williamson, 1901). In both cases, the camera doesn't escape unscathed: in the first it is run over

by a vehicle, and in the second it is swallowed by a character. A few years later, in 1914, the moment of shooting would resume its leading role in the film *Kid Auto Races at Venice* (Henry Lehrman). In this case, the focus of interest is how the presence of the camera affects the behaviour of those being filmed. Charles Chaplin, playing his best-known character, Charlot, attends a race and, when he sees the camera, he can't help but being the centre of the shooting, unleashing a conflict between him and the film director, who clearly sees him as a nuisance [Figure 3].

As cinema began taking shape as an industry, the attention moved away from film mechanisms themselves towards the characteristics that began defining the flourishing industry. Thus, at the end of the twenties, King Vidor, with his film *Show People* (1928), created a new category of cinematic reflexivity, a category essentially focused on revealing the inner workings of Hollywood. As Robert Stam argues, these are "Hollywood films [which] treat Hollywood itself as milieu, and focus, accurately or inaccurately, critically or uncritically, on the process of film production" (1992: 77).

The fifties turned out to be especially fruitful for this type of film, beginning with a mythic

film in this respect, *Sunset Blvd* (Billy Wilder, 1950). It was followed by other emblematic examples, such as *Singin' in the Rain* (Stanley Donen and Gene Kelly, 1952), *The Bad and the Beautiful* (Vincente Minnelli, 1952) and *A Star is Born* (George Cukor, 1954). This last director had already made a foray into this category (which we might define as "metahollywood") in 1932 with his film *What Price Hollywood?*. A recurrent theme of this type of film is the transition from silent films to talking movies and its consequences for the industry. A recent return to this theme was made in the film *The Artist* (Michel Hazanavicius, 2011), in which the French director of Lithuanian origin recreates the atmosphere and style of those films by returning to black and white, the 4:3 format and the silent soundtrack. The disappearance of one system (the silent film) and the appearance of a new one (the talking movie) resulted in changes to production procedures but, above all, it had consequences for the actors: old stars vanished while others were born. In *The Artist*, the first group is represented by George Valentin, evidently based on Rudolph Valentino, while the second is represented by Peppy Miller, possibly inspired by Peggy Pepper, the star of *Show People* (King Vidor, 1928).

This, ascent and decline intersect in *The Artist* as the result of one of the most important changes in film

Figure 3. Charlot is unwilling to stop being the centre of the regard of the camera



history. This transformation initially sparked a revolution within the industry, but as time passed the conflicts between the old system and the new one dissipated; hence the triumphant ending of the movie with the dance number between George and Peppy [Figure 4]. *The Artist* could therefore be considered a contemporary example of that discussed above, i.e., the mixture of cinematic reflexivity, focused in this case on the changes that took place in the industry as the result of the arrival of sound, and filmic reflexivity, here exemplified by the referentiality to the films that had tackled this theme in their time.

However, reflection on the production models and Hollywood methods of representation has not only been performed from within, but also from the margins, especially from the perspective of modernity, which arose precisely as an alternative to film classicism. In this case, the reflexivity proposed is not so amenable; on the contrary, it is conceived as a criticism of the prevailing status quo. One of the main exponents of this practice is Jean-Luc Godard, who through his filmmaking has sought to vindicate the work of the *auteur* while dismissing the industrial methods that restrict creative freedom and impose a standardised approach to filmmaking. For instance, in the opening scene of his film *East Wind* (*Le vent d'est*, 1970), Godard rails against Hollywood's aim to convince the viewer that the image shown is real and not the result of a discursive construct, in other words, as Don Fredericksen

(1979: 315)³ puts it, Godard questions Hollywood's desire to "hide this apparatus, to guard the impression of reality through a strong impression of reality"⁴. Stam refers to this modernist stance —following Mikhail Bakhtin— as "carnavalesque", an "aggressive antiillusionism... which explodes and transcends conventional narrative categories" (1992: 167).

Another category that can be identified within cinematic reflexivity is the one made up of those films that narrate the difficulties that have to be overcome for a filmmaking project to succeed. The most common formula features a director who has to struggle against the troubles that arise during the film shooting. This plot is the perfect excuse for the filmmaker, through an alter ego, to air his thoughts on cinema. For instance, in the case of *Day for Night* (*La nuit américaine*, François Truffaut, 1973), Truffaut plays his own alter ego in the role of the filmmaker Ferrand. A contemporary example of this category is *Road to Nowhere* (Monte Hellman, 2010).

While the challenges might be of a very different nature, there is one that proves constant in most of these films: the presence of the figure of the producer, the director's antagonist and the person responsible for his biggest setbacks. An outstanding example of this is the film *The State of Things* (*Der Stand der Dinge*), directed by Wim Wenders in 1982

[Figure 5]. Its protagonist, a German director, Friedrich Munro, has to stop the shooting of his film *The Survivors* —his version of the science fiction/horror film *Day the World Ended* (Roger Corman, 1955)— to travel to the United States in search of the producer to get him to continue funding the film. The producer, already deep in trouble, refuses to do so and in fact regrets having partly funded a black and white film with no possibility of commercial success. The conversation between them ends with the producer making a declaration in defence of Hollywood. In short, the two characters represent two completely opposed ways of conceiving cinema: on one hand, that of the producer, who defends the commercial machinery by placing the profitability of the project above all else; and, on the other, that of the director, who seeks creative freedom and views the quality of his film as paramount.

Clearly, the difficulty associated with pursuing a risky project that doesn't conform to the standardised formulae is another constant that defines this type of film. Another example is the 1996 film *Irma Vep* by Oliver Assayas. In this case, the project, unfeasible from a commercial perspective, is a remake of *Les vampires*, a French silent cult series filmed by Louis Feuillade in 1915. In *Contempt* (*Le mépris*, 1963), Godard offers another example of this constant; specifically, the impossible task of adapting Homer's *Odyssey* within the usual parameters of film production⁵. Nor is it easy to adapt the com-

Left. Figure 4. The triumphant dance in *The Artist* (Michel Hazanavicius, 2011) / Courtesy of Cameo
Right. Figure 5. *The State of Things* (*Der Stand der Dinge*, Wim Wenders, 1982)



plex work *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy*, written by Laurence Sterne in 1759, and it is precisely this difficulty that drives the plot developed by Michael Winterbottom in his film *Tristram Shandy: A Cock and Bull Story* (2005).

Adaptation is the title of the film directed by Spike Jonze in 2002, based on the difficulties that his screenwriter Charlie Kaufman had in real life to adapt the novel *The Orchid Thief*, written by the American journalist and novelist Susan Orlean. In contrast with the previous examples, we are not shown how a movie is filmed, as the images seen by the viewer are those which the screenwriter in the story, also called Charlie Kaufman (Nicolas Cage) creates as he writes. Thus, it is not so much about the production process of a film as about how the film takes shape. In this sense, we could distinguish two practices: on one hand, the practice that renders visible the process of creation of a film (the creation of a statement) and, on the other, the practice of *the* film itself, that is, its own statement.

For Gerstenkorn (1987: 7-9) this second practice deploys the “game of mirrors that a film engages in with itself”, which makes it possible to speak of its self-reflective character. This feature associates the film with the idea of a reflecting structure and in turn with the idea of mirror construction, from the French term *mise en abyme*, a commonly used term to describe this type of practice which, as Christian Metz (1978: 130-136) suggests: “lends itself quite well to that structure permitting all the effects of a mirror” (METZ, 1978: 130). Metz considers *Eight and a Half* ($8\frac{1}{2}$) (Otto e mezzo [$8\frac{1}{2}$]) directed by Federico Fellini in 1963 to be one of the exemplary films of this exercise, as it

is not only a film about films, or a film about a filmmaker, “but a film about a director who is reflecting himself onto his film” (METZ, 1978: 131). In doing so, Fellini not only addresses the external demands of producers or the pressures of the critics, but also the internal demands emanating from the filmmaker himself, in this

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case, creative doubts or fear of failure, which become his worst enemy, to such an extent that they may even paralyse his creative process.

Filmic reflexivity

Filmic reflexivity does not focus so much creation as on the appropriation of film history; hence, unlike cinematic reflexivity, the attention is not directed on the process of construction of a film or on the film itself, but, again following Gerstenkorn (1987: 7-9), on “the game of mirrors that one film plays with other films.” As Lipovetsky and Serroy (2009: 70) suggest, “cinema is not just ‘art without culture’ as described by Roger Pouivet, but an art that creates its own culture and is nourished by it [...]”. In this sense, according to Paul Willemen, there is a certain quality of necrophilia inherent to this tendency of cinema to turn its gaze on its past: “something that is dead, past, but alive in memory” (WILLEMEN, 1994, 227).

Thus, one of the characteristics that define this second approach to metacinema is the constant interpretation of film history, what was defined by Noël Carroll (1982: 52) as “allusion to film history”, whether to a genre, a specific era, a particular movement in film history, the plot of a film, its

theme, the style of a filmmaker, one of his works, a famous scene, a shot, a legendary character or even one of that character’s actions. Regardless of the reason behind it, whenever it is done, according to Vera Dika (2003), it is an exercise in *recycling* the past in the present.

Filmic reflexivity thus invariably leads us to the concept of intertextuality, a term coined by Julia Kristeva in 1966⁶ in response to Mikhail Bakhtin’s theories on literary dialogism. For Kristeva (1980: 66), “any text is constructed as a mosaic of quotations; any text is the absorption and transformation of another.” This initial meaning of the term developed over the years into a different one posited by advocates of structuralism and hermeneutics, led by Michael Riffaterre and Gérard Genette, among others, whereby intertextuality ceases to be an inherent characteristic of any text to instead become a voluntary act of referencing the texts that have preceded it. In this case, intertextuality is understood as a clearly deliberate exercise in referentiality, a reference between quotation marks that the filmmaker expects to be recognised by, at least, one part of his audience and whose aim is to provide the text with additional layers full of meaning.

The retrospective gaze at film history can be articulated through two strategies: one is the “restaging”, as defined by Antonio Weinrichter (2009: 32), of that filmic past into the diegetic present, and the other is the appropriation of the past and the establishment of a dialogue between it and the non-appropriated material. I’ll call the first “restaged allusion” and the second “appropriationism”. The well-known sequence on the stairway in *Odessa* in *Battleship Potemkin* (Bronenets Potemkin, Sergei M. Eisenstein,

1925)⁷ can serve as an example to distinguish the two practices.

On one hand, the aforementioned sequence was partially reproduced by Brian De Palma⁸ in *The Untouchables* (1987) and by Terry Gilliam in *Brazil* (1985), and was even parodied in *Naked Gun 33 1/3: The Final Insult* (Peter Segal, 1994), within the game of intertextual excesses to which the contemporary image has accustomed us. As Weinrichter (2008:32) points out, “Segal’s is a revised and expanded version of the variation created by De Palma seven years earlier [...]; the sequence is ultimately revealed to be a nightmare of the protagonist.” Thus, as is frequently the case in commercial cinema, any strange events must be diegetically justified; in this case, the parodic allusion is normalised through the inner world of the character.

On the other hand, the images of the stairway in *Odessa* have been appropriated by (among others) Chris Marker in *The Base of the Air Is Red* (*Le fond de l’air est rouge*, 1977) and Zbigniew Rybczyński in *Steps* (1987). In both examples, what is interesting

is how the old images engage in a dialogue with the newer ones: whereas in Marker’s film past and present interact through the shot-reverse shot [Figure 6], in Rybczyński’s the images interact in the same shot through an early example of multi-layer composition [Figure 7]. While in Marker’s film the relationship between these two different materials is established in the sequentiality, in Rybczyński’s it is articulated through *collage*, by self-consciously juxtaposing different layers in one shot and thus achieving the simultaneous materialization of the dialogue in the discourse.

Both in Marker’s film and in Rybczyński’s, the appropriation is not diegetically justified, but simply forms part of the discursive strategy articulated in the film. This is quite different in more commercial fiction films, in which the recycling previous material is articulated as part of the diegetic world, most commonly through its projection onto a film screen.

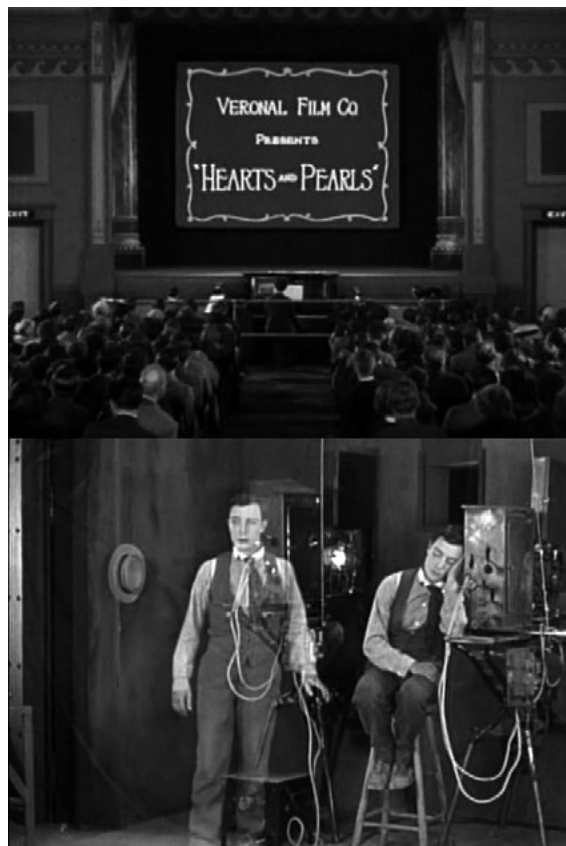
Unlike Porter’s film, mentioned at the beginning of this paper, in which the protagonist, that spontaneous viewer, is denied entrance into the film being projected (as when he tries to do so he pulls the screen down, thereby revealing the filmic mechanism), in *Sherlock Jr.*, directed by Buster Keaton in 1924, the protagonist is given that privilege. Nevertheless, entry into the screen is only possible in a dream: the projectionist, played by Keaton, falls asleep while the images of the film *Hearts and Pearls* flicker on the screen [Figure 8]. It is no surprise that the way into the projected diegesis should be by means of a dream; cinema has been repeatedly compared to the act of dreaming. Furthermore, the story unfolding on the screen turns out to be an idealised depiction of the life of the projectionist, clearly a metaphor for the relationship established between the typical viewer and the idea of cinema as a dream factory⁹.

The process of “systematic idealization”, as Stam has called it (1992: 38), which is established through the dialogue with a film screen is taken up again later by Woody Allen in his film *The Purple Rose of Cairo* (1985). Here, the one who crosses through the screen is not the protagonist of the main plot, Celia (Mia Farrow), but one of the characters in the film on the screen. Both Celia and the projectionist in Keaton’s film are humble people who find in cinema a means of escape; in the first case, a way out of her humdrum life, and in the second, a solution to his problems. In essence, *Sherlock Jr.* and *The Purple Rose of Cairo* can be considered paradigmatic examples of this category which, as Xosé Nogueira (1994:48)

Left, top. Figure 6. *Odessa* and *The Base of the Air is Red* (*Le fond de l’air est rouge*, Chris Marker, 1977)

Left, bottom. Figure 7. *Steps* (Zbigniew Rybczyński, 1987) in *Odessa*

Right. Figure 8. *Sherlock Jr.* (Buster Keaton, 1924)



suggests, was accurately defined by Jordi Costa (1993:24) as the “permeable screen” or, according to Nogueira himself, “from one side of the screen to the other”.

However, this is not the usual way of representing the relationship between the main story and the story on the screen; the most common cases are those where the threshold of the screen is not crossed. A good example of this is *Targets*, directed by Peter Bogdanovich in 1968, which begins with the projection of the last sequence of the film *The Terror* (1963), directed by Roger Corman five years earlier¹⁰. After approximately three minutes of the projected film, which coincides with the opening credits, we are shown the reverse shot of these images, an establishing shot revealing a projection room with the characters of the main plot. This strategy is relatively common in this kind of practice. The film begins with a series of images only to reveal, that they are merely images being projected on a screen or filmed, as happens, for example, in Wenders’ film *The State of Things*.

Returning to the film *Targets*, the producer’s only concern is the promotion of the movie; the only concern of the director (Sammy Michaels, played by Bogdanovich himself) is its final product, and the actor, Byron Orlok —an ageing horror star who plays Baron Victor Frederick Von Leppe— is only concerned with his archaic interpretation. Byron, in a move obviously fraught by mixed emotions, announces his decision to retire from films, which triggers a conflict with the producer. Outside, on the street, the director tries to dissuade him. At that moment, Byron is seen through the sight of a rifle; the person aiming at him is young Bobby Thompson (Tim O’Kelly), who is in a gun shop right in front of the place where the actor and the director are talking, testing the rifle that he finally decides to buy.

The two lines of action featuring Byron and Bobby intersect once again

right at the climax of the film, when Bobby —up on a platform behind the screen of a drive-in— shoots with that same rifle at the viewers who, comfortably seated in their cars, are watching the premiere of *The Terror*. This scene ends with the confrontation between them, in which Bobby,



Figure 9. Transfictional raccords in *Targets* (Peter Bogdanovich, 1968) / Courtesy of Paramount Home Media Distribution Spain

now at ground level, continues to instil panic in the audience. He looks to his right, and the obligatory reverse shot shows Baron Victor Frederick on the screen, moving towards him; again we return to the shot of Bobby, who looks now to his left, where in this case it is Byron who is moving towards him [Figure 9]. To Bobby’s disbelief, this series of shots is repeated, and ends with him shooting both at Byron and Baron Victor Frederick. For Bobby, for a few seconds, fiction and reality —both represented by Boris Karloff, a legendary figure of the horror genre— are one. In this montage of images, the continuity between the two stories, the main plot and the one on the screen, is established through what José Luis Castro de Paz defines in his analysis of the film *Saboteur* (Alfred Hitchcock, 1942) as *transfictional raccords*: “the role of the film projected in the theatre will be decisive throughout the staging process [...] through a complex game of double angles in which the two re-

presentations will be fused in a *mise en abyme*” (CASTRO DE PAZ, 1994: 36).

This type of *raccord* can also be useful for explaining other types of relexivity, such as that found in the film *Dead Men Don’t Wear Plaid* (Carl Reiner, 1982), a film which, both for its aesthetics and for its plot, as well

as its clichéd characters and typical situations, exemplifies an obvious parody of the film noir genre. In this case, the articulation of shot (main plot) and reverse shot (appropriated story) does not require justification through the projection on a screen of the latter, as it is articulated directly in the montage. For example, the film’s protagonist, detective Rigby Reardon (Steve Martin), in a moment of difficulty, telephones detective Philip Marlowe; the shot of Reardon is followed by a shot from *The Big Sleep* (Howard Hawks, 1946), where we see Marlowe, played by Humphrey Bogart, answering the phone [Figure 10].

In this case, the genre is what is being alluded to, which leads us to the idea of “architextuality”, a category proposed by Genette in his book *Palimpsests*. In his book, the French theoretician introduces the term “transtextuality” to refer to “all that



Figure 10. Reardon needs Marlowe's help

sets the text in relationship, whether obvious or concealed, with other texts" (GENETTE, 1997: 1). He then proposes a classification in order to better define this idea, outlining five categories, including "architextuality", which serves to define the adherence of a text to a genre.

A contemporary example of this is the film *The Conjuring* (James Wan, 2013), where horror is the genre alluded to. In his adaptation of a true story, Wan appropriates the conventions, basic ideas and aesthetics that characterise this genre and proposes his updating through the repetition of the strategies that describe it. Furthermore, the film makes allusions to the most significant films of the horror genre, such as *Poltergeist* (Tobe Hooper, 1982) and *The Exorcist* (William Friedkin, 1973), as well as motifs which over time have become iconic elements of the genre, such as the haunted house in *The Amityville Horror* (Stuart Rosenberg, 1979)¹¹ and Chucky, the diabolical doll in *Child's Play* (Tom Holland, 1988).

Thus, *The Conjuring* is a clear contemporary example not only of a tribute to the horror genre but of a pastiche replete with references to representative films of that genre. In many cases, these allusions, like the tribute to *The Birds* (Hitchcock, 1963), are justified not so much by the plot as by the discursive strategy that the film itself constructs. Post-modernity has made this practice both common-

place and excessive, to such an extent that many of these films are the result of a Frankensteinian construction of allusions. Fredric Jameson warns against these excesses, criticising this practice of "postmodern pastiche", which he defines as a "blank parody" (1985: 114), in recognition of their tendency towards mere copy with no apparent reflexive intention. For instance, Jameson (1985: 117) considers *Body Heat* (Lawrence Kasdan, 1981) a mere "allusive and elusive plagiarism of older plots", a description that can easily be extended to the case of *The Conjuring*¹².

Conclusion

Although the degree of its importance may vary depending on the case, reflexivity is one of the defining features of metacinema, whether focused on the creative process itself ("cinematic reflexivity") or on film history ("filmic reflexivity"). In the latter case, intertextuality is a key factor for its configuration. However, an abuse of this referentiality may lead to the kind of products condemned by Jameson, as noted above, where other sources are not only alluded to but serve as the foundations of the film's discursive scaffolding. Some years ago Waugh coined the term "intertextual overkill" to refer to, according to Stephen Mamber (1990: 29), "the wholesale incorporation of source materials from outside the created fictional work".

Moreover, we have seen that, in both types of reflexivity, this practice may or may not be diegetically justified. In the first case, the metacinematic act is encompassed in a plot construction that renders it transparent; in the second, it is rendered self-conscious by revealing the discursive mechanism or the referent that is the object of the allusion or appropriation. It is obvious that the first practice is much more common in commercial films, whereas the second is more common in *auteur* or essay types of films.

In short, there are many forms of metacinema. In this paper I have proposed a basic typology to serve as a baseline for future research. I have defined or characterised this complex phenomenon in more detail and have offered keys to enable a better understanding of its use in contemporary cinema. To this end, I have drawn on both early and contemporary examples while focusing on the most emblematic films that have made referentiality a core element in the history of cinema. ■

Notes

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- 1 I refer here to the documentary that Martin Scorsese himself directed together with Michael Henry Wilson, titled *A Personal Journey with Martin Scorsese through American Movies* (1995).
- 2 The quote is as follows: "Film is a disease. When it infects your bloodstream, it takes over as the Number One hormone; it bosses the enzymes; directs your pineal gland; plays Iago to your psyche. As with Heroin, the antidote for film is more film" (CAPRA, 1971: 223).
- 3 See Fredericksen (1979) for a more in-depth study of the reflective features of this sequence.
- 4 In this respect, Lipovetsky and Serroy suggest that: "[a]t this moment, cinema, which is questioning its own illusionist capacity, is entering a new modernity, a modernity of reflexivity and deconstruction, with the appearance of an *auteur* cinema that claims its classification as a work of art in opposition against the disposable products of commercial cinema. At this point it gives rise to its own religion: cinephilia" (2009:48).
- 5 See Laura Mulvey's detailed study on this film in this same monograph issue.
- 6 The term appears in print in the essay titled *Bakhtin, le mot, le dialogue et le roman* (Word, Dialogue and Novel, 1966).
- 7 For an in-depth study of this question, see Weinrichter (2009: *El reciclaje en el cine comercial*).
- 8 Brian De Palma is probably one of the film directors who have used "restaged allusion" with a parodic tone the most in their careers. He has been doing it since his first short film, *Woton's Wake* (1962), in which the references range from *The Phantom of the Opera* (Elliott J. Clawson, 1925) to *The Seventh Seal* (Det sjunde inseglet, Ingmar Bergman, 1957). According to Carroll, *Woton's Wake* "culminates in what in 1962 was a hilariously awkward and intentionally tacky allusion to the last scene in *King Kong*" (CARROLL, 1998, 255).
- 9 In this context, two films as different and far apart in time as *Welcome Mr. Marshall* (¡Bienvenido Mister Marshall!, Luis García Berlanga, 1953) and *Paprika* (Satoshi Kon, 2006) can be considered analogous. In both films it is through dreaming that the characters become the protagonists

of recognizable scenes from film history. In the first of these examples, Don Pablo (José Isbert), the mayor of the small town of Villar del Río, dreams of being a fearsome sheriff who imposes law and order in the saloon of a town in the Old West, whereas in the second, the protagonist, Paprika, among other characters, takes a journey through film history in her dreams, turning into Peter Pan or running away from a red tide, a clear reference to the well-known scene in *The Shining* by Kubrick (1980).

- 10 Once again, the referent is a film of Corman's, which was also a referent for Wim Wenders in *The State of Things*, as noted in the previous section.
- 11 Among the reports studied by Ed and Lorraine Warren, a real couple of demonologists, was the house that inspired *Amityville Horror*.

12 The allusion to the genre is not only articulated through a new contextualization that repeats its basic rules, as in the case of *The Conjuring*, but may also undergo a process of rewriting with variations, as Godard, Altman and Truffaut, among others, did in their day with *Alphaville* (1965), *McCabe and Mrs Miller* (1971) and *Confidentially Yours* (Vivement dimanche!, 1983), respectively. The genre may also be parodied, as discussed previously; in this case, its essential features are taken to the extreme. And, finally, the notion of genre may undergo a process of hybridisation, as we find in contemporary cinema, where the boundaries between genres are blurred through transfers of their features from one to another.

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Figure 11. More horror with *The Conjuring* (James Wan, 2013) / Courtesy of Warner Bros Pictures España

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