

# **METACINEMATIC GESTURES**

## **AN INVESTIGATION OF THE PRODUCTIONIST ASPECT OF SELF-REFLEXIVE FILMS**

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## ABSTRACT

The thesis focuses on the dilemmas raised by self-reflexive filmmaking through the scrutiny of different metacinematic gestures. This thesis presents a definition of metacinematic gesture as a film segment which exhibits the mediality of cinema and opens up a discourse on its technical, linguistic and organisational implications. This definition and its attendant reflections are the result of a critical understanding of the notion of gesture for Giorgio Agamben and Walter Benjamin. Subsequently, I propose a grid of intelligibility of different categories for metacinematic gestures: *Referential*, *Realist*, *Surrealist*, *Experimental*, the *Look into the Camera* and *Productionist*. This classification contributes to fill the theoretical gaps within Film Studies literature about metacinema and narrows down the category that this research explores: the productionist. Productionist metafilms expand and reflect on the processual dimension of filmmaking to the extent that the frontstage of production might be said to coincide, or tend to coincide, with its own backstage. In fact, it is proposed that productionist metafilms serve to reveal and construct a self-reflexive form of directorial subjectivity through the acknowledgement of some specific strategic choices operated on the set. But, the emergence of these subjectivities is mostly influenced by the material conditions of production, the budget, the film crew, the environmental conditions or the limits set by the screenplay.

So, the main contribution of this research is to provide a new theorisation of self-reflexivity in films with particular focus on the productionist aspect of metacinema. The last point is explored through the analysis of ten selected productionist metafilms, by highlighting how their unpredictable occurrences are surfaced by means of a multi-faceted exposure of cinematic mediality. These films produce scenarios and visual articulations which are revelatory of otherwise invisible aspects of the filmmaking process. Finally, this thesis presents its analytical results about filmmaking as endowed with a distinctive degree of linguistic and technical experimentation, but also with precious information of how cinema observes itself as a form of organised work.

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Marcel Duchamp, *Avoir l'apprenti dans le Soleil* (1914)

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## Introduction

Metacinema is a mode of filmmaking which unveils the cinematic artifice. It has been often informally debated as a simplistic, if not generic, theoretical appellative to approach filmic segments, sequences or other self-reflexive patterns. Rather than being contested within an official Academic debate, the notion has been silently and gradually dismissed over the years. It was commonly accepted that the notion of metacinema would rather work as a feeble theoretical justification not to tackle cinematic patterns through a more operable epistemological lens. More broadly, the idea of *Meta* as a prefix, defining a discourse on a particular rhetoric formula of artistic expression, has been disqualified as a concept which labels a set of expressive patterns supposedly deemed to be complex but in reality not that complex at all.

My suspicion is that the set of criticisms I have heard through the grapevine was the residual substance of a crystallised attempt to overcome the structuralist approach which gave birth to the semiotic debate revolving around this notion. From an epistemological standpoint, it was a natural passage which sealed the waning of semiotic approaches as becoming challenged by postmodern accounts and other post-structuralist contributions. Naturally, I share the idea that the communicative power of some metacinematic expressions, such as the “look into the camera”, have been certainly weakened by the relentless diffusion of analogous gestures featured in other media whose use has been more diffused in the last decades. In fact, the widespread habit of smartphones’ selfies or the proliferation of television products and commercials directly addressing potential consumers have certainly diminished the receptiveness towards the so-called “breaking of the fourth wall”.

In spite of that, I believe that there are some valuable examples of modes of reflexivity that still puncture spectators’ immersive viewing and, somehow, reawaken them from the entertained numbness generated by passive reception. Actually, the first input for this research stemmed from the importance of how past metacinematic movies have transmitted a considerable degree of reflexive spirit to other audiovisual works, which in turn have diffused their estranging patterns within other products of the cultural industry, like TV series, TV programmes, Science and Nature documentaries, music videos, commercials, photography, videogames, comics, artistic performances, figurative

arts and other crafts. Even if it is not my intention to produce here an exhaustive overview of how self-reflexivity have been imbued in all these expressive modes of production, which have been extensively discussed by Noth and Bishara in their *Self-Reference in the Media* (2007), I can certainly mention some works which are exquisitely connected with the idea of the making-of as a particular mode of suspension of the spectator's disbelief. For instance, the great success of the Italian thought-provoking and hilarious TV-series *Boris* (Vendruscolo et al., 2007-2010) is a case in point. The series revolves around the stages of production of a lame soap opera entitled *Gli Occhi del Cuore* (The Eyes of the Heart) whose film crew appears as a bunch of unenthusiastic and mythomaniac layabouts.

It partially recalls the previous British TV-series *Extras* (Gervais and Merchant, 2005-2007) in which an aspiring actor struggles to attain a prominent role in the draconian context of cinema, theatre and television industry. In turn, the domain of reflexivity expressed by *Extras* is certainly the result of the self-referential tone of *The Office* (2001-2003) in which Ricky Gervais constantly winks at the camera during his flailing managerial performances and, thus, establishes the mockumentary trait of the sitcom.

For what concerns reflexive television, without mentioning all the reality shows which have been inspired by their progenitor *The Big Brother*, it suffices to allude to the self-reflexive nature of the last sequences of each episode of *Planet Earth II* (2016). For few minutes the spectators are invited to a *productionist* reflection by some excerpts dedicated to expose the harsh conditions of the stages of creation of the documentary they have just savoured. Already these examples fulfil the promise of rendering an increased reflexive slant of our contemporary mediatic experience. Yet, many more have surfaced the hypermediated world in which we live, but this investigation neither had the space nor the desire to explore their wider range of influence. It rather departed from the urgency to focus on how these self-reflexive patterns have been experimented and combined within the linguistic specificity of cinema.

The self-reflexive approaches have become a mode of expression and reception steadily ingrained in our everydayness and, perhaps, one might take this as a cue to deny the possible revolutionary contribution of this domain and, thus, disqualify any point of interest in dissecting its mainstream manifestations. But, on the contrary, I believe this aspect should be an incentive to further attention to what has become a *leitmotiv* of our contemporaneity. In addition, it would not be too radical to assert that self-reflexive products still contain a vital creative spirit which is performed by challenging our taken for granted modes of reception of audio-visual representations.

So, these are the foundational reasons which ignited the conception of the present work and have been cultivated throughout its gestation. But, as said, my efforts will be directed to discuss how self-reflexivity has been translated within metacinematic forms. As proposed by a Ph.D thesis from forty years ago, ‘Metacinema can loosely be defined as cinema whose object is an analysis of the manners in which cinematic forms function and signify’ (Mayne, 1976: 1). Dwelling for a moment on this definition, it could be argued that every film is metacinematic to a certain extent. In fact, so many products can be said to contain at least a single allusion to how the film has been shot, that expounds the fictional nature of the representation or that somehow hints at other films both from a visual or a discursive standpoint. The issue of situating theoretically the framework of cinematic reflexivity has been extensively undertaken in Film Studies since the times of the theoretical debates between Bazin (2004), Metz (1974a, b, 1978, 1991) and Comolli (1980, 1986, 2004) with regards to arguments such as cinematic realism or the critique of illusionism and ideology (Polan, 1974).

The concept of metacinema has been further explored by Elsaesser (1973), Siska (1979) and Stam (1992, 2004), the latter focusing on the intimate relationship reflexivity establishes between film and literature. Without rejecting the important core of the debate expressed by these authors in the course of the years, it should be said that, except for Canet (2014) and Chinita (2014, 2016), not many efforts have been recently made in the direction of outlining a consistent definition of metacinema and a navigable classification of different metacinematic forms. This is the reason why, the study of a plausible definition of metacinematic gesture and a systematisation of its internal distinctive nuances through a navigable grid of intelligibility are the first objectives of this research. But even more crucially, a substantial part of this thesis, namely the analytical part, will be dedicated to uncovering the dimension of secrecy around the art of filmmaking, a condition which undermines the suspension of disbelief commonly attributed to works of fiction. Following this path, such a dimension of secrecy will be unpacked precisely by suggesting that films cannot be read solely as closed texts or finished products, but mainly as processes of production.

To sum up, the main contribution of this research is to provide a new theorisation of self-reflexivity in films with particular focus on the productionist aspect of metacinema. The last point is explored through the analysis of ten selected productionist metafilms, by highlighting how their unpredictable occurrences are surfaced by means of a multi-faceted exposure of cinematic mediality.

On a different note, in the context of a vast discussion held by the field of Critical Management Studies involving the development of research and education, O'Doherty has pointed out that 'the arts and humanities form a reflexive and constitutive practice that is inextricably a part of the way in which business and management gets done. In other words, there is no separation between business and art, or business studies and the humanities' (O'Doherty: 2016: 524).

More particularly, it has been argued that the use of fictional forms and storytelling can produce investigable data within the broader domain of social science (Usher, 1997). These issues have been problematized extensively in the Organisation Studies literature in order to understand to what extent fictional stories stemming from literature (Czarniawska, 1995, 1998, De Cock, 2000) and popular culture (Hassard and Holliday, 1998, Rhodes and Westwood, 2007, Rehn, 2008) can produce robust insights within sociological and organisational domains. Other works have focused on how popular culture displays practices and provides "strong plots" which seem to affect more significantly the current exercise of management in comparison with other sources of knowledge (Czarniawska and Rhodes, 2004).

Further research has explored the issue of reflexivity as an epistemological mode apt to describe how a given organisation operates (Chia, 1996) and others have included some theoretical and methodological justifications for the use of narrative approaches to organisation studies (Rhodes, 2001, Rhodes and Brown, 2005). From the same field of study, some valuable accounts have been produced around cultural representations, particularly exploring the animated television series, *The Simpsons* (Ellis, 2008; Rhodes and Parker, 2008), analysing the various depictions of the military subject within popular culture (Godfrey, 2009) or investigating the figure of the manager within cultural representations through questions of power, gender and fictionality (Matanle et al., 2008, Czarniawska and Gustavsson, 2008, Panayiotou, 2010, 2011). Indeed, it has been suggested that popular culture texts are actually more critical and questioning than management textbooks and often produce a counter-cultural vision of organisations (Parker, 2006).

As argued by Parker, critical management scholars 'do not have much of an impact in the world outside the university' while 'contemporary popular books and films contain implicit or explicit representations of management and organisations that reflect a fair degree of ambivalence and often hostility' (Parker, 2002: 134,135). Finally, akin to

this are other examples of research focusing on how management topics resonate through the products of film industry (Sloane, 2003, Bell, 2008).

In the context of the work summarised above, the proposed research will also explore metacinema as it relates to the problematic nexus of organization/representation. In contributing to this literature, however, this specific investigation is concerned with the exploration of the *productionist* dimension of cinema in self-reflexive films, a category that will be outlined in the context of a classification of different metacinematic gestures and will be dissected through the analysis of a selection of *productionist* metafilms. This means that rather than examining how cinema represents work and organisations in general, this thesis examines how cinema represents the work of film production that has created the cinematic artefact in which it is represented. In sum, this investigation will extend beyond the way Organisation Studies have been interested in how work and management are represented in literature and popular culture while focusing on the way the art of filmmaking expounds cinematic production as a form of organised work.

The structure of this work has been conceived as it follows. In the first chapter, I tackle the argument of self-reflexivity from a broader perspective by engaging with the representational enigmas of paintings like *Las Meninas* by Velazquez. The aim of this section is to highlight the possible conjunctions between self-reflexive patterns of different media. In this regard, I will illustrate how the “look into the camera” of cinema has been absorbed by photography which, in turn, has drawn it from painting. Then, it is proposed how the overarching input of this investigation is to address those self-reflexive filmic enigmas by accessing the shaded zone of the representation (Comolli 2004), another way to name their metacinematic core. Then, in the second chapter I locate an introductory discussion of the debate between cinematic illusionism and reflexivity and an in-depth analysis of the main Academic accounts on metacinema with particular regards to those which have attempted to formulate a categorisation of different metacinematic forms.

In the third chapter, I define the theoretical boundaries of metacinema in the attempt of making it available as an epistemological tool through its juxtaposition with a critical reading of the notion of gesture as it was problematised by Giorgio Agamben (2000) and Walter Benjamin (2003). Then, six different metacinematic gestures have been outlined in the fourth chapter in order to isolate the category I purport to analyse within this investigation: the productionist one. There it is clarified how the productionist



side of metacinema addresses those works focusing on the particular role of authors as the agents of production, while also considering how other aspects of filmmaking, such as the means of production, the budget, the size of the film crew, the environmental conditions and the limits set by the screenplay, can determine the overall shape of a metacinematic gesture. But, what truly distinguishes a productionist metafilm from the other categories is that in the former the frontstage of production might be said to coincide, or tend to coincide, with its own backstage. Therefore, all the selected films follow this logic.

In that, the movies to be analysed have been disposed in three separated chapters in accordance with their slightly different nuances. In the fifth chapter, I explore those metafilms which expose their productionist side within the narrative construction of fiction stories: *8½* (Fellini, 1963), *Le Mépris* (Godard, 1963), *La Ricotta – Ro.Go.Pa.G* (Pasolini, 1963), *La Nuit Américaine* (Truffaut, 1973). The sixth chapter revolves around three examples of documentaries which present a high degree of productionist metacinematicity: *Chronique d'un Été* (Morin and Rouch, 1961), *American Movie* (Smith, 1999) and *Grizzly Man* (Herzog, 2005). While, in the seventh chapter, I analyse two products which epitomise the productionist category in a paradigmatic manner: *The Five Obstructions* (Von Trier, 2003) and *The Act of Killing* (Oppenheimer, 2012).

In the last section, my efforts have been directed towards the recapitulation of the main theoretical and analytical findings of this investigation. The selection of movies is certainly not exhaustive, for many other examples mentioned throughout the analyses can account for high degrees of productionist metacinematicity. But the selected films expound well-delimited systems of signification within which this productionist material distinctiveness arises. The direct act of showing the process of production through a film uncovers a wide array of technical, linguistic and organisational solutions. In this regard, I underpin the existence of an economy of exposure of secrecy through which a complex entanglement of concealment and disclosure operates. In particular, my analysis highlights some productionist metafilms whose gestural means entirely coincide with their gestural ends.

## **1.0. Reflexivity and Visual Representations: Prolegomena to the Metacinematic Gesture**

The first chapter of this research will gradually introduce the concept of metacinema by attempting to provide some implications emerging from a broader discussion of self-reflexivity in arts. I am going to proceed with an introductive interrogation of the issues related to the idea of representation along with their deep correlation with the self-reflexive and the meta-representational level. Some passages will scrutinize the role of reflexivity in different aesthetic forms and others will focus on self-reflexive films. The function of this section will be that to introduce how a certain dialectics of visibility/non-visibility influence the emergence of self-reflexive or meta-representational elements within a given work of art.

Along this path, I will attempt to demonstrate how the visible elements of a painting, film or photography, often address the eye of the observer towards what is not visible, towards the “shaded zone” of the field of representation. This problematisation of the tension between the visible and invisible elements, often alluded ones, can trigger the emergence of speculations around self-reflexivity. I will then introduce and discuss in-depth those examples of cinematic art which present an intense and explicit reflection over the technical, linguistic and organisational aspects of film-making. I will also attempt to introduce one of the most significant meta-representational “rhetorical figures” of cinema which is “the look into the camera”. Finally, the last subchapter will explore the concept of the “suspension of disbelief” and introduce the debate around illusionism and the breaking of the fourth wall, the latter representing one of the hallmarks of cinematic reflexivity. Therefore, the intention of this chapter is to substantially underpin a *fil rouge* between the role of reflexivity and that of the gaze within visual arts and to connect these nearly immediate self-reflexive connotations of painting with those present within filmic segments.

During the course of this investigation about self-reflexivity in arts I will analyse in depth the painting by Diego Velasquez, *Las Meninas* (1656), by highlighting its analogies and contrasts with the cinematic language, in general, and with the metacinematic forms, in particular. That is to say, I will consider those signs of the

representational language which are eminently pictorial and others which have been successively re-employed or rearticulated by the cinematic medium. More specifically, I will analyse how in *Las Meninas* the enigma of the self-reflexive representation lies in the construction of a dialectics of visibility/non-visibility and that, thus, problematises the aesthetic and ontological status of the painting even flowing beyond it by encountering cinema. In *Las Meninas* a crucial role is played by the encounter and clash of different lines of sight, that of Velasquez himself, as represented in the picture, and that of the observer, both continuously floating from the position of the viewer and the viewed. In that, such a work of art appears to question the status of what actually are the subject and the object of the representation, thus radicalizing one of the everlasting queries of the history of art. I will draw on this painting as a thought-provoking springboard to introduce the discourse of self-reflexivity in arts and also to provide a concrete grasp on what concerns dealing with metacinematic gestures. But at this stage, I am going to explore the issue of representation in the way it intersects different regimes of mediatic language in order to outline how, in some cases, they can be separated from one another and where they can be deemed to overlap each other.

**Figure 1.1**



Diego Velázquez: *Las Meninas*, (1656), oil on canvas, 318 cm × 276 cm  
(125.2 in × 108.7 in), Museo del Prado, Madrid.

## 1.1. The Enigma of the Reflexive Image

Fundamental though it is to the languages of expression, representation has always emerged as a problematic issue throughout the history of art. Any reflection upon such aspects must inevitably cope with a multitude of elements creating a dense tangle of questions that might confuse one's mind. At the same time this intricacy is fascinating for several reasons.

The first and, perhaps, more immediate aspect hinges on the fact that anytime one faces an enigma, it is captivating *per se*. The captivation can emerge when the mysterious knots generated by such an intricacy affects us in the guise of a nearly obsessive drive to decipher it. Indeed, the immediate consequence of this might reside in the urgency to unravel those mysterious components emerging within the image being represented. Namely, the urgency to put some order, to bring the elements to light and rationalize them in the form of a linear sense is possibly the sole fashion to grasp an intelligible meaning of a given representation. But the principal drive is perhaps to dissolve the obsession into the wonder of a readable, ecstatic vision.

Therefore, it is crucial to understand that the impulse to clarify the issue of representation strictly resides in their peculiar enigmatic nature. Yet, we might be tempted to assert that such enigmatic features could be embedded *a priori* within representations. But, conversely, to be honest, the acknowledgement of the enigma would not exist without an interpreter who positions himself in the possibility of reception of this intricacy. Therefore, it is unlikely that 'being enigmatic' might be considered as an immanent property of works of art, but rather as one of the plausible effects of the way we read and interpret them.

For instance, the very constitution of a representational enigma is due to various factors: the aesthetic form of the depiction, the historical context it makes reference to, the intertextual relationships with other works of art, the artistic techniques employed to produce the final result and the cultural tendencies in which the representation can be inscribed. Yet, what makes the issue more tangled is that a representation can be read through different layers of complexity. That might be due to different degrees of specific knowledge attributed to the observer, to different cultures, levels of education, age,

gender or social backgrounds. So, again, the subjective status of the viewer is entirely crucial in this respect.

Nevertheless, I believe that certain works of art bear more potential than others in terms of communicating the impulse for a deeper understanding of the object of the inquiry, as if the contorted elements presented in the field of representation demand a resolution of an enigma. So, even if we would all agree that *Las Meninas* can be read as a complex representational enigma, on account of the dialectics of visibility/non-visibility, the relationship between the viewer and the viewed and, for the presence of other diverting elements, we cannot assert that a simple portrait, as *Olympia* (Manet 1863) does not contain any enigmatic trace or does not pose any question either. For instance, we might interrogate why Olympia is staring at us, or what kind of inner drives inspire the encounter of her gaze. But, we can still admit that it can be considered as a less intricate rebus to solve when compared to the acknowledged layers of complexity of *Las Meninas*.

Along the same lines, we should take into account that the degree of intricacy of a representational enigma is not directly proportional to the numbers of elements presented in the painting. A suitable example is Magritte's *The Treachery of Images* where the image of a pipe is ruthlessly denied by the tagline *Ceci n'est pas une pipe* (this is not a pipe). Here, the apparently simple contrast between just two elements is more than sufficient to imply the suggestion of a possible diatribe between the graphic and the written value of the field of the representation. Thus, the contrast between the apparent scarcity of the two elements of the painting is however crucial to trigger intense philosophical and aesthetic speculations as the well-known interpretation by Michel Foucault (1976). In particular, it has been pointed out that the intricacy of such a work of art can trigger manifold interpretations according to different philosophical and linguistic points of view emerging from the connection of these apparently simple elements. For instance, Brown and Stenner have commented on Magritte's work as containing two distinct ways through which the phrase "this is not a pipe" can be interpreted:

'The conceptual *proposition* of a pipe is distinct from the *image* of a pipe is distinct from the *causally efficacious* pipe that has the power to be filled with tobacco, lit and smoked. [...] The linguistic enunciation is distinct from the conceptual proposition is distinct from the image, and all are distinct from the causally efficacious pipe of power. We will mark this last distinction, which draws attention to the domain of communication, with the word *enunciation*. [...] *Power, image, proposition* and

*enunciation* give us four initial letters that together do indeed sum to a pipe of sorts. Together, our four pipes give us the psyche stuffed in a pipe, or at least a mnemonic device for it. That is to say, we wish to suggest that, suitably understood, they cover the full domain of experience' (Brown and Stenner, 2009: 204).

The four different articulations suggested by the analysis of this enigmatic depiction are then deepened by these authors via the epistemological approaches proposed by various thinkers as Deleuze, Whitehead, Bergson and Spinoza. In that, one might say that such variety of conceptual implications would prove that the emergence of those theoretical speculations is precisely due to the intimate and complex relationship between language and representation which *The Treachery of Image* is endowed with. Plus, the extremely detailed and realistic representation of the pipe proposed by Magritte refers again to the visibility of the object at such and plays with the allusions on the gaze as part of the cognitive process. In this sense, even if we look at a real pipe, the result will always be an inner representation mediated by our sensorial perceptions followed by an abstract and mental reprocessing of it.

Figure 1.2



Édouard Manet, *Olympia*, 1863, Oil on canvas, 130.5 cm × 190 cm (51.4 in × 74.8 in), Musée d'Orsay, Paris.

Figure 1.3



René Magritte, *The Treachery of Images*, 1928-29, Oil on canvas, 63.5 cm × 93.98 cm (25 in × 37 in), Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Los Angeles, California.

Along this path, the second reason to further explore the issue of representation is that the creative activity deals time by time with a particular mimetic degree. That is to say, the problem of representation does not exhaust itself at such, but always refers, with or without the explicit willingness of the author, to a certain degree of correspondence with reality. The idea of mimesis stems from Plato who maintained, consistently with

Aristotle's position, that poetry, drama and comedy should have been classified as "imitations". Moreover, Aristotle added that these artistic forms could be seen as "imitations of actions" (Rhodes and Pullen, 2009). 'This point relates to the "magic of mimesis", where mimesis can be understood, going back to Aristotle and relating on Greek tragedy as the imitation of life and action in art, artefacts, poetry, language, and so forth' (Rhodes and Pitsis, 2008: 74). A magic sense which is the result of a complex combination of elements of resemblance and elements of distinction from the real action, object or subject which is represented.

After having defined the substance of mimesis as related to the Aristotelian concept of tragic imitation of an action, I draw on Jacques Rancière clarification: 'In the aesthetic regime, artistic phenomena are identified by their adherence to a specific regime of the sensible, which is extricated from its ordinary connections and is inhabited by a heterogeneous power, the power of a form of thought that has become foreign to itself' (Rancière, 2011:22, 23). That is the reason why we might be prompted to identify the mimetic principle within the aesthetic regime as a combination of representative coherence and autonomous, imaginary construction.

Along this path, 'the mimetic is always other than the original and in this sense in excess of the original' (Rhodes and Westwood 2007: 45). The "other" exceeding the reproduction of reality is a sort of "aesthetic surplus" of the mimetic representation, namely the artificial and fictional construction that affects the imagination by relating on reality and flowing beyond it at once (Taussig, 1993). So, if we concur with the fact that the aesthetic surplus of a work of art is what exceeds the mimetic reproduction of real objects, we would also be able to assert that it might coincide with the fictional or abstract connotations expressed by the author and filled up by the imagination of the observer. In other words, it would be the creative part as such, as the additional contribution of the author to the mimetic process. In that, the work of art can be inspired by different degrees of correspondence with reality and other degrees of abstraction that distance the contents expressed from tangible examples of the real world.

Having clarified this, despite the different degrees of abstraction of a given artistic representation, it is almost unavoidable to pin down some traces of the reality emerging within it. In fact, from the observer's standpoint, even if staring at the most abstract of the representations, we can imagine how the eye would automatically transfer to the brain a question such as: to what degree might this representation be collocated in relation to our idea of reality? Or, at least, this primary reflection over the possible correspondences

between work of art and reality might well serve as a springboard to prepare the mind to create or receive the abstract connotations either self-constructed or suggested by the author.

For instance, if we take Lucio Fontana's works of the late 1950s, the well-known series of “slashed” paintings called *Tagli (Spatial Concepts)*, we observe that the cuts inflicted to the canvas can certainly be attached to the idea of negation of the figurative art at such, as evoked by the abstract substance of these gestures. Yet, the cuts might be read as releasing the innate tension of the canvas by opening up a space of otherness which flows beyond it, a space for the imagination that conveys a sense of infinity. Although these readings might all appropriately stick to the meaning conveyed by the author, we can also hypothesise that this kind of representation might entail a less elaborate understanding of it, or a first stage of reading. Or, in other words, a simpler reading might suggest questions such as: what does this cut remind us of? Where did we already experience it?

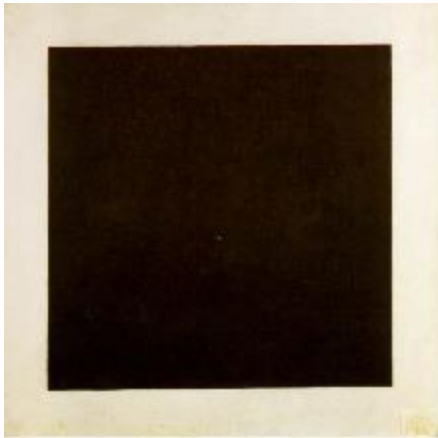
With this, I am only attempting to communicate the idea that without a constant and direct evaluation of representations, according to their relation to other real referents, a further reading connected to the possible suggested abstractions would be nearly impracticable. As proposed by an interesting study on the dialectics of representation, ‘Malevich questioned the necessity, and perhaps the possibility, of evaluating representations in terms of their relation to (real) referents. In what sense is Black Square an imitation? To what does it refer? What, if anything, is imitated?’ (Zelazo and Lourenco, 2003: 57). Again, the path towards a possible grasp of the Suprematist representations proposed by Malevich passes through the attempt to trace out a plausible mimetic aspect of the painting. Drawing on Paul Ricoeur, internal representations are mimetic in the sense that they involve a transfiguration of the subjective experience that goes through a series of processes.

In the first process, mimesis corresponds to actions that we recognize and that push us to refer to something that goes beyond them. These actions are crucial in terms of prefiguring a first interpretation of what is represented. In the second phase these actions are re-arranged in a coherent story that is fundamental in enhancing the readability of the artistic object. Then, the final interpretation is actualized by the third phase of mimesis: the transfiguration. That is to say, it is through the first prefiguration of the mimetic actions combined with the interpreted story of the second phase, that the idea of the representation gets transfigured in an abstract vision. The transfiguration is thus the



result of a circular process that, in Fontana and Malevich's cases, prompts the interpreter to attach the abstract and conceptual connotations to the first mimetic prefiguration, the first stage of reading that digs out the traces of reality in the form of actions (Ricoeur, 1981). I believe this point of view stresses the importance of how the interpretation of aesthetic representations passes through mimetic reconstructions even with abstract artworks.

**Figure 1.4**



Kazimir Malevich, *Black Square*, 1915,  
Oil on linen, 79.5 x 79.5 cm, Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow.

**Figure 1.5**



Lucio Fontana, *Concetto spaziale/Attese*,  
(*Spatial concept/Waiting*), 1962, Oil on Canvas,  
39 1/2 x 32 inches, Collection Museum of Fine  
Arts Houston, Museum purchase.

So, we see how crucial it is to bear in mind the strong interconnection of those elements constituting the dialectical couple representation/reality in order to attempt an analysis of how representations are constructed and conceived. To a certain degree, every artistic representation deals with a mimetic reproduction of reality, to the extent that even the most abstract or surreal of them is supposed to convey some acknowledgeable hints of the real world. That bears witness of the importance of the subjective experience and perception of reality for the aesthetic construction of the rules of representation.

Another reason to explore this domain stems from the idea of representation as a story. A story set by the limits of a canvas, a frame or a picture. At first glance, it might seem radical to assert that a story is intrinsically present in a photographic shot. But every doubt can dissolve while acknowledging the many narrative levels expressed by a given artistic object. In point of fact, all the possible mechanisms of identification with the author comprise an entire set of questions directed to grasp the sense of his original intentions. And this is already the beginning of a narrative interpretation that provokes

the emergence of some plausible interrogations: what did he want to show us? What sort of story did he want to tell? Given that, every time an artist tells a story, we must take into account, as interpreters, that at the moment the author narrates or shows something he/she does it at the expense of other discarded elements. So, another question related to representations could be: what does the author avoid showing in the act of representation? But also, why? We will see how this view of representations as stories is more than compatible with *Las Meninas* case.

Moreover, it should also be noted that every language of expression presents its own specificity with a certain degree of differentiation from the others. Painting, photography, cinema and theatre have different languages and express their contents by means of specific linguistic rules, which are by far different from one another. On the contrary, it is also true that a kind of linear genealogy reflects the affiliation of the more recent languages of expression to the previous ones. For instance, cinema derived some of its fundamental linguistic procedures from photography and the latter had to confront with the longstanding heritage of painting throughout centuries of evolution. In other words, every medium *remediates* the linguistic elements and procedures of the previous ones (Bolter and Grusin, 2000).

Once we realize the importance for cinema of the so-called *out-of-frame effect*, what is out of the boundaries of the camera's field of vision, or off-screen, we understand that what is not visible generates a particular tension in the spectators' mind. In point of fact, drawing on Noel Burch's insights, 'off-screen space is, after all, purely imaginary, and only something that is the particular and *principal* focus of attention can bring into play'. As he goes on to point out, 'this off-screen space might conceivably remain imaginary if no wider shot, no shot taken from another angle, or no camera movement is introduced revealing the person to whom an arm belongs, to whom an off-screen glance is directed, or the exact off-screen segment toward which an existing character has headed' (Burch, 2014: 20, 21).

It has also been argued elsewhere that 'this illustrates a structural principle of the film whereby the camera is unable to keep up with the events (i.e. it is not omniscient) and consequently there is a profound tension between on-screen and off-screen space' (Branigan, 1975: 61). Yet we are dealing with a tension connected to photography for it is similarly generated when the observers focus on the framed elements, being conscious that what is in the shot has been purposefully selected by the photographer at the expense of other elements. In this sense, cinema *remediates* the off-screen effect from

photography, which in turn derives it from painting. Such a mechanism can also reside in the manifestation of the tension generated by the limits of a frame in a painting.

**Figure 1.6**



A young tourist's "off screen" glance in Macchu Picchu, Peru, (14<sup>th</sup> August, 2017).

This said, there is certainly room for speculation on how a given artist might decide to play with these boundaries. For example, as in Diego Velasquez's *Las Meninas* (1656), the observer is not only captured by the subjects and the elements framed in the painting, but also by what is not visible. Specifically, Velasquez portrays himself caught in the act of painting while casting a glance towards us, beyond the limits of the frame. In this gaze we can easily recall the "look into the camera" of cinema, when a character gazes into the camera lens producing the elusive effect of looking at the spectator. Assuming this is equivalent to a particular off-screen glance, an ensuing interrogation might be: what is Velasquez painting? Is he perhaps portraying us on the canvas we do not see? But for the moment, let us just hold onto this idea of tension triggered in *Las Meninas* by this particular "off-screen glance" analogous to a "look into the camera".

Again, with cinema, when we see characters as framed, we often observe them casting a glance beyond one of the sides of the field without immediately seeing the object of their interest. In this case we would claim they are looking off-screen. As we have recalled with *Las Meninas*, what happens in these particular cases is the activation of a precise need perceived by the spectator's brain. Inevitably, as educated throughout years

of cinematic viewing, the spectator's eye develops the necessity to compensate the void of knowledge generated by the "off-screen" tension of the first shot with a counter-shot. In this regard the counter-shot satisfies such a need of visual compensation in the sense that it would presumably show the unknown object of the character's glance seen in the previous shot. Or at least, this mechanism would reflect what is expected by the spectator's eye which, according to cinematic grammar, has been accustomed to manifest the need to dissolve such a tension with the aid of a counter-shot.

At this stage, the articulation shot/counter-shot (or reverse angle shooting) is only a suitable example to clarify that the realm of representation presents a set of precise rules which have been established throughout the development and evolution of a specific language of expression. Nonetheless, I should clarify that reverse angle shooting is the result of a linguistic refinement that was developed through the evolution and progresses of the cinematic medium, especially in terms of satisfying more complex narrative exigencies to be rendered on the screen: in this case principally the performative interaction among dialoguing characters. Thus, we are not dealing with a linguistic pattern which has been inherited from pre-cinematic media (as zoetrope, magic lantern or praxinoscope), but rather from the exigency of certain directors to render the continuing editing and, consequently, a logical coherence between the shots in order to facilitate the spectators to accept the suspension of disbelief. In fact, those precursors of cinema principally rendered the illusion of motion that certainly already contained the seeds of a rudimentary editing, but did not present the complex narratological structure originated by the succeeding Lumière's *cinématographe*.

So, an analogous spectatorial visual reaction to the reverse angle shooting did not exist in pre-cinematic experiences nor in the history of painting. In spite of that, I believe that the products of pre-cinematic media, photography and some experimental painting already played with the dialectics of visibility/non-visibility to a certain degree and, that they somehow prepared the ground for the emergence of the visual tensions developed by cinema. With this, I would like to stress the fact that the confines between different media are adequately blurred to allow those linguistic patterns to flow from one expressive means towards another and then retroactively influence the previous media again. It might be argued that visual language is a flexible matter that can be adapted and readjusted in different fashions and can be continually dislocated and relocated.

As a consequence, the fact that these rules are precise and semiotically defined does not mean that they are regulated by a rigid *ratio*. Indeed, the rules are modulated by

cultural changes, geographical and political connotations, by the evolution of the medium, the technological advancement of the device and the variability of the strategies of communication. This bears witness of their flexibility and their peculiar property of being receptive to change. Yet, the rules of representation reflect the way we experience reality or the way in which we understand the world and rationally comprehend the surrounding environment. What I am attempting to claim here is that these rules are influenced by so many variables and therefore eschew any sort of static definition. They rather appear in all their floating nature and thus what we might aspire to grasp, as analysts, would rather be the particular momentum in which the artistic representation has been created.

That is to say, we should be able to explore the field of the representation and isolate a visual segment which can be illustrative of the crucial instants of the constructive process which significantly engraved the final output. That would probably unravel some traces of the representational enigma by revealing precious insights about the creative gestation of the artwork.

But, it should also be clarified that this act cannot be operated without a focus on our perception of reality as experienced with our senses and, in particular, with our sight. In this sense the languages of visual representation reflect the modalities through which the sense of sight isolates and composes the elements present in the framing in order to attach them with an understandable meaning.

As mentioned above, the dynamics triggered by the articulation shot/counter shot are peculiar of the cinematic language as the reflection of a specific grammar that regulates the possible interpretations of a given sequence. Yet, it is not extreme to assert that this articulation can be operationalised through a dialectics of visibility/non-visibility. Plus, it is also interesting to recognize how the linguistic evolution of a medium like cinema might have taken inspiration from some radical and isolated experiments made by both painting and photography. This aspect is crucial in order to define the importance of outlining the loose boundaries of the different regimes of representation. Nonetheless, the assumption does not consider all the possible linguistic patterns cinema has inherited from previous media. In fact, during the first years of evolution, early cinematic experimentations were created with the camera standing in a fixed position, as it had to render the documentary effect of photography fused with the effect of a theatrical stage. Some remarkable examples are *The Sprinkler Sprinkled* or *Workers Leaving the Lumière Factory* (Lumière 1895).

With their realistic effect, those movies reproduced a fragment of life that could be, on the one hand, hilarious and, on the other, contemplative or thought-provoking. Indeed, Lumière brothers' films opened up the possibility for the birth of future genres as slapstick comedy or political cinema. In any case, the first big paradigmatic leap, in terms of playing with the illusionistic features of cinema was possibly stimulated by the quasi-magic experiments devised and created by George Méliès. The innovative visual solutions implemented by the French director have persuaded a theorist like André Gaudreault to create a neologism for his cinema as "trickality" (Gaudreault, 2011). As a matter of fact, Méliès constantly played with the regime of visibility introducing many visual illusions, above all, by creating the shape of the moon as a grotesque and alive human face whose eye gets struck by a rudimental spaceship during its clumsy landing approach. Méliès populated his moon with strange lunar monsters who suddenly appear and dissolve behind the smoke of unexpected gas explosions when hit by the scientists' umbrellas while giant mushrooms grow in the environment before spectators' incredulous eyes.

Such a fictional scenario certainly challenged the logical coherence of plausibility and verisimilitude the spectators were used to experience till that time. Moreover, in this surreal and dreamlike exposition of the conquest of our satellite the adventurous side is enhanced by a frantic editing rhythm (in comparison to other films of the same period) that supports the narrative ellipsis and the abrupt changes of setting. *A Trip to the Moon* (1902) 'contains a succession of four shots in less than twenty seconds! (I have viewed more than 1,500 films from the period between 1895 and 1907 and, as far as I can recall, no other film I have seen contains an example of such rapid editing)' (Gaudreault, 2011: 38, 39).

No other author had played with the illusionist and magic side of cinema to that extent, by providing convincing elements to the theory that films had established a new regime of visibility that could certainly embed the undeveloped potential of previous media, as painting and photography, along with the addition of new technical and visual possibilities never experienced before. Yet, with his films, perhaps, Méliès proposed the very first reflection over the linguistic potentialities of the cinematic medium, over the relevance of what is visible and what is not, over the importance of what the author decides to show in the framing and what he/she intentionally conceals. Plus, he essentially proved that there are different ways to display stories through films, from a realistic degree of expression to a more complex, dreamlike and technically elaborated regime of

representation. From the experience of George Méliès cinema discovered new linguistic and technical expedients which would have invariably prepared the ground for the emergence of self-reflexive elements within cinematic representations.

Finally, I believe that Méliès was inspired by what he could not see, as a spectator himself, in the *Sprinkler Sprinkled* or in *Workers Leaving the Lumière Factory*. Why did cinema build up his first representations following a documentary *ratio*? What is lacking here? What are the real potentialities of cinema as a means of expression? Probably Méliès realized he could immediately subvert and expand the unexpressed or unseen side of cinema with his phantasmagoric creations by pushing the linguistic and technical possibilities of the medium to the extreme.

So, the suggestion is to depart from this, perhaps, bold assumption: the images we see on the screen (or on canvas) are always correlated to what we do not observe, or to what we are precluded to see, to what is off-screen, out of frame, beyond the field of visibility. Understanding the importance of the non-visible might give more relevance to what is voluntarily rendered visible and, simultaneously, attach significance to such an omission by stimulating some interrogation about the motifs that drive a director to express this lack, as the author who is responsible of the nature of the elements contained in the final output he put the signature on. The acceptance of this idea can facilitate the access to the domain I am attempting to investigate here. I am going to discuss the problem of self-reflexivity in cinema and, thereby, it would be interesting to focus on the broader meta-representational status of art. Here the prefix *Meta* is linked to those creative works that refer to themselves or to the exposure of the conventions of their different genres and linguistic specificities. Therefore, it might be relevant to identify and study what such self-reflexivity of art, in general, and of cinema, in particular, overtly shows and, conversely, chooses to omit.

## 1.2. The Shaded Zone or the Blind Spot of Meta-Representation

This reflection on the issues related to representation began with a set of problematic aspects. In particular, I outlined the concept of representation as an enigma that should be unraveled. That passage was followed by some observations on representation as indisputably connected to reality and to our perception as observers. As related to this point, we have seen how such an entanglement between representation and reality have generated and continue to create a set of rules, receptive to change and in constant evolution that regulate the way artistic representations convey their sense. Yet, I have highlighted the fact that a given representation can be regarded as a story narrated by its creator. It was not by chance that I called into question Velasquez's *Las Meninas*, for this painting appears to manifest all these points by insisting on their problematisation.

Furthermore, *Las Meninas* provides an attempt to solve the tension between those points simply by means of the elements present in the field of representation. What is immediately evident is how this painting proposes a reflection of the meaning of the visible elements within the field of representation and about all the possible conceptual implications that might arise from the observation of the allusions on what is not visible. In general *Las Meninas* presents itself as an enigma to be deciphered. This operation can be enacted only by going through the disposition of the elements and subjects depicted in the painting and actually following a linear sense, a kind of story. What seems to be the main object of the painting, the aristocratic infants in the foreground, can be completely ignored on behalf of a more mysterious and insightful path for the gaze. The last, but not least important aspect is that eventually such a journey ends up in a transcendence of the fictional domain of the painting by invading reality exactly for the sake of its representational allusions. In fact, those allusions drive the observers towards an unavoidable confrontation with reality, for the painting appears to point at us flowing beyond the limits of the canvas.

As we have seen, the presentation of some elements within the frame is exerted at the expense of others. In this way, the lack of these elements may abruptly invade the imagination as an immense realm of obscurity spreading out the mysterious folds of the unsaid. It might be argued that this omission opens up what Jean Louis Comolli (2004) called "the shaded zone" within the context of his ontological observations about cinema.



His idea revolves around the fact that cinema shifts the “visible” in time and space. It hides and subtracts more than it shows. Yet, it holds this shaded zone exactly as its constitutive condition. The result of which is that the shaded zone becomes the agent of representation. Yet, its role is similar to that of an activating engine for the construction of the layers of signification in the representation. In other words, it allows the possibility to perceive and, perhaps, to comprehend what it is not immediately perceivable. As a direct consequence, it enables the possibility to access what is below the surface of the visible. So, the way Comolli puts it is that this shaded zone of the non-visible is an indispensable instrument to grasp what it is precluded or what it is voluntarily prevented from being shown. Namely, he adds that the domain of the unsaid relates to what petrifies the mechanical eye (slow processes, organisations, work, power relations, structures, surplus value) (Comolli, 2004).

These considerations are evidently precious if oriented towards an analysis of the omitted elements within cinematic representations, even in terms of highlighting the material constraints of production, the hidden tension among collaborators in the cinematographic set, the often harsh environmental conditions of production and the overall organisation of work. But I would like to underline how the conceptual implications of this “shaded zone”, as the obscure realm of the unsaid or the non-visible, can valorize the idea of self-reflexivity and meta-representation at such.

Such an idea might give proof of the voluntary, or involuntary selection of what has been disclosed by the author and what has not been shown. The meta-level of representation can therefore be characterized by the artificial construction of the author who uses the technical and linguistic instruments of the artistic medium to clarify something about that medium itself. The basic problem is whether an author consciously or not decides to reveal some portions of knowledge and perceptions about the functioning of the artistic medium by extracting them from the shaded dimension of secrecy concealed below the surface of representation. As a matter of fact, the purpose of this research is to investigate and perhaps, validate the importance of the artificial construction of such an attempted revelation.

So, now it is perhaps the right moment to spend few detailed words about the meta-representational elements of *Las Meninas*. As we have seen, the observation of the painting begs a lot of cryptic interrogations. Velasquez painted *Las Meninas* in 1656/57 with the apparent intention of magnifying the symbolic power of the Spanish royal family.

The painting is set in the Alcàzar, equipped by Velazquez as a studio, and shows the heiress to the throne, the Infanta Margarita, with her court (Wolf, 1999: 81).

But the uncanny factor is that he portrays himself at the side of a big canvas which displays its back to us and occupies the main part of the left side of the painting. The painter holds the brush and casts a glance towards us, the observers. We either see him looking at us in the interruption of the artistic gesture – that ‘off-screen’ moment I referred to earlier – or we recognize ourselves as being caught in his momentary focus on the object of the portrait. Can it really be the case that he, beyond all time, is portraying us?

‘The painter is looking, his face turned slightly and his head leaning towards one shoulder. He is staring at a point to which, even though it is invisible, we, the spectators, can easily assign an object, since it is we, ourselves, who are that point: our bodies, our faces, our eyes. The spectacle he is observing is thus doubly invisible: first because it is not represented within the space of painting, and, second, because it is situated precisely in that blind point, in that essential hiding-place into which our gaze disappears from ourselves at the moment of our actual looking’ (Foucault, 2002: 4).

As Foucault points out, the exact moment of start of our journey through the painting begins when we realize the enigma of such double invisibility. The non-visibility of what is depicted on the canvas and the disappearance of our gaze which flees from us in a hazy drift within the field of the representation. Such a floating dimension of our look entails the acknowledgement of a pure reciprocity, a putative identification with Velasquez himself precisely for the sake of our sharing the same uncertainty. That is to say, none of us, the observers nor Velasquez, truly knows what is being looked at. Yet, the disappearance of our gaze in the folds of the representation imposes the relocation of our identity, condemned to an imprecise and continuous postponement of self-recognition. Thus, questions begin multiplying themselves. What is effectively depicted? How do we position ourselves within this scenario? Plus, given our disappearance in the folds of the painting, what is our subjective status at that precise moment?

It might be asserted that all these questions are pointless or impossible to answer. But, on the contrary I believe that they precisely constitute the meta-representational status of this piece of art. Yet, such awareness plays a crucial role within a representation that reflects on itself and on the general meaning of making art. Moreover, these interrogations are the point of departure of a journey through the gaze at such. The gaze

gets lost while being subjected to the impulse of locating itself somewhere and it is captured in the attempt to escape from the unknown shaded zone, from the blind spot of meta-representation.

The idea of such an obliged path of dispersion for the gaze in the field of representation finds resonance in a reading by Lacan of Hans Holbein's *The Ambassadors* (1533) in the context of his reflections on the fundamental concepts of psychoanalysis in the Seminar number XI. Drawing on Lacan's account, we can relate the two paintings together on the same grounds as being both focused on the reflexive function of vision. With regard to *The Ambassadors*, Lacan claims that the importance of the painting does not reside much in the figurative depiction of two human figures but more in the "anamorphic" object in the foreground: a distorted skull. The anamorphosis of the skull, namely its distortion, would then represent the annihilation of the subject, caught in a moment of uncertainty or falling in the symbolic nothingness of death. Once the observers realize the presence of this disturbing image, they begin to feel doomed in the desperate reacquisition of their lost identity through the chaotic folds of the painting.

**Figure 1.7**



Hans Holbein the Younger, *The Ambassadors*, 1533,  
Oil on oak, 207 cm × 209.5 cm (81 in × 82.5 in),  
National Gallery, London.

‘This picture is simply what any picture is, a trap for the gaze. In any picture, it is precisely in seeking the gaze in each of its points that you will see it disappear’ (Lacan, 1981: 89). Therefore, according to Lacan, the journey through the enigma of vision of *The*

*Ambassadors* is bound to fail. The annihilation alluded by the anamorphic skull is thus destined to exert its primacy over the attempt to re-establish a solid position for the gaze and for the identity of the observer. The anamorphic skull of *The Ambassadors* therefore reflects the meta-representational blind spot of the gaze, a disturbing element that orients the observer's thoughts towards the deep sense of the artistic representation causing a dispersion of the subjective standpoint in the enigmatic folds of the picture. Nevertheless, is it the case for *Las Meninas* too?

Similarly, once the observer metabolizes the intensity of this double invisibility in *Las Meninas*, his glance begins to float around the elements of the depiction in order to search for a solution of the enigma, to relieve the tension caused by it. The spectators then examine the far side of the room where Velasquez depicted a series of pictures hanging from the wall. Among them, one glitters as enlightened by a mysterious source. 'But it isn't a picture: it is a mirror. It offers us at last that enchantment of the double that until now has been denied to us' (Foucault, 2002: 7). We see two figures reflected by the surface of this mirror. Abruptly, we realize they are likely to be the two persons depicted by Velasquez on the reverse side of the canvas that we do not see. The mirror recalls those employed for their duplicating function in some Dutch paintings as for the case of Jan van Eyck's *The Arnolfini Portrait* (1434), a painting that Velasquez must have known. But the point here is that the image of these two figures superimposes over ours as spectators by invading the empty space left by our floating identity and peremptorily occupying the blind spot of our gaze. Precisely in that sense 'the mirror provides a metathesis of visibility that affects both the space represented in the picture and its nature as representation' (Foucault, 2002: 9). Therefore, such drift of the gaze allows us to walk through the plot of a story. But, how does this story end?

On the right-hand corner of the background we see a man at the threshold of the room descending some stairs and approaching an open door. His right hand holds a curtain as if he would like to remove it to better observe the scene of the representation. As a matter of fact, he does not seem involved in any activity other than overlooking the whole scenario completely isolated from the rest of the depiction. Indeed, he appears to be the only subject utterly detached from the picture. Suddenly, I swiftly realize that it would be precisely my position, should I wish to be an observer of the whole enigma put in place by the Spanish painter. That would be the only useful spot from which the entire set of visible and non-visible elements of the representation could be observed. That is to say,

at the crossroad between reality and fiction or, at least, at the privileged point of view to better dissect the meta-representational level suggested by the painting.

Eventually, while positioning myself in the role of the careful observer, I immediately understand that the enigma has to be unravelled or at least should be further investigated. Or better, that it might be the position from which a strong impulse would finally start flowing through the gaze, through the mysterious puzzles of the painting. Identifying with this spectator in the background allows us to imagine shedding some light on the shaded zone, or the blind spot of meta-representation.

### **1.3. Metacinema: The Look into the Camera**

Velasquez's meta-representational gesture has been recalled here to introduce the argument of self-reflexivity in art. The spot of the spectator located in the background of *Las Meninas* has not solely recalled a privileged position for an overall and undisturbed observation of the depicted elements but foremost as a special place for a detached analysis of the situation. With regard to this, some hints on self-reflexivity suggested by literary and theatrical experimentations can enrich the argumentation.

For instance, the concept of *metafiction*, a term coined by the American novelist William H. Gass (1970), can vividly support our reflection on self-reflexivity. As Waugh (2013: 2) defines the matter: '*Metafiction* is a term given to fictional writing which self-consciously and systematically draws attention to its status as an artefact in order to pose questions about the relationship between fiction and reality'. For instance, William Burroughs' *The Naked Lunch* (1959) and Italo Calvino's *If on a Winter's Night a Traveller* (1979) can be listed as models of metafictional novels for each of them push the classical narrative patterns towards their most extreme solutions and highly experimental landing places. In such a way, literature helps to inscribe itself into a process

of renewal by exposing its artifices and thus disrupting the relentless flow of conventional story-telling.

‘So here you are now, ready to attack the first lines of the first page. You prepare to recognize the unmistakable tone of the author. No. You don’t recognize it at all. But now that you think about it, who ever said this author had an unmistakable tone? On the contrary, he is known as an author who changes greatly from one book to the next. And in these very changes you recognize him as himself’ (Calvino, 1998: 9).

‘There is only one thing a writer can write about: *what is in front of his senses at the moment of writing*... I am a recording instrument... I do not presume to impose “story” “plot” “continuity”... Insofar as I succeed in *Direct* recording of certain areas of psychic process I may have limited function... I am not an entertainer...’ (Burroughs 1959: 212).

The idea of Metafiction can be also related to Russian Formalists’ theory of evolution or to what Shklovsky defined the process of *ostranenie* (estrangement) in which the exposure of the linguistic artifice creates a moment of defamiliarization or denaturalization of the fictionalised content (Boym, 1996). The estrangement effect in metafictional novels allows the reader to question most of the taken for granted literary patterns which are usually presented to convey the main tenets expressed by the products of hegemonic cultures and the set of conformist values embedded within them. So, this particular standpoint provided by literature enhances the idea that the denaturalising effect of self-reflexivity in art does not only engage with aesthetic matters but also with aspects of sociological and political relevance. It does it by putting in evidence the separation between the observer/reader and the piece of art by arresting the suspension of disbelief through a process of estrangement being activated by reflexive linguistic procedures.

One of the most eminent allusions to the concept of suspension of disbelief is attributed to the English poet Samuel Coleridge who, in 1817, commented on the genesis of his Lyrical Ballads as it follows: ‘It was agreed, that my endeavours should be directed to persons and characters supernatural, or at least romantic; yet so as to transfer from our inward nature a human interest and a semblance of truth sufficient to procure for these shadows of imagination that willing suspension of disbelief for the moment, which constitutes poetic faith’ (Coleridge, 2009: 239). According to Coleridge, the effort of the reader should be directed towards the embracement of romantic and supernatural events

that are to be attached with a semblance of truth emerging from inward to render possible the transmission of narrative and lyrical contents. In that, the reader should embrace a poetic faith and build up an imaginary context of plausibility in order to dive into the fictional contents as if they were real. In point of fact, what the denaturalising effect of reflexive art does is to arrest the suspension of disbelief by displaying the linguistic procedures of the medium, an arrest of the suspension that is tightly correlated to the estrangement effect pinned down by Russian Formalists.

Namely, the same aesthetic estrangement can be retraced through the analysis of the dynamics of the gaze in *Las Meninas* and provides evidence of how these reflexive moves are transversally rendered by analogous theoretical reflexive patterns in different forms of art, even though liable to be presented through different practical procedures according to the given linguistic specificity of each artistic medium. In fact, there are also some examples taken from theatrical experimentations that reflect on the estrangement effect as a shock to the usual perception of art.

In point of fact, Bertolt Brecht likewise aimed to defamiliarize the passive reception of disengaged realism of mainstream theatre in his works, in order to spring up political activism and destroy the habitual way of looking at social and political facts to reveal their internal contradictions (Wekwerth, Nicolaus and Munk, 1967). In his outstanding compendium of metatheatrical forms Lionel Abel commented: ‘For Brecht these [realistic] playwrights and Ibsen too, represented the bourgeois drama which he was interested in subverting and in replacing with some other dramatic form’ (Abel, 1963: 103). This metatheatrical approach seems to be intended as a veritable act of sabotage towards the conception and diffusion of hegemonic ideological narratives.

In spite of that, as many theorists like Jean Louis Comolli have claimed, it is almost impossible to subtract a dominant ideology from the substance of the cinematic representation because ‘the tools and techniques of filmmaking are a part of “reality” themselves, and furthermore “reality” is nothing but an expression of the prevailing ideology’ (Comolli and Narboni, 1971: 30). This assertion leaves little room for the premeditated or unpredictable creation of films with such disrupting potential. Or, at least, they would not guarantee enough space for the counter-cultural and political effectiveness of such metafictional experimentations. Nonetheless, the Academic debate involving self-reflexive cinema has generated further insights well-disposed towards the revolutionary potential of self-reflexive cinema. Drawing on the idea of “cinema of poetry” as coined by Pier Paolo Pasolini, Naomi Greene affirms:

‘Once the important role accorded to style in “meta-cinema” is established, the vital question is: do such films liberate themselves, as Pasolini suggests, from neo-capitalistic structures or modes of thought? The most obvious objection to be made is that when art begins to turn inwards upon itself it reflects society by its very refusal to deal with it. [...] So Pasolini has essentially suggested that the “cinema of poetry” is practised by members of the bourgeoisie in order to express their basically irrational or neurotic vision of the world. All this would indicate that the “cinema of poetry”, which is basically “meta-cinema”, far from escaping from capitalist structures, reflects them. But Pasolini refuses to take this argument to this logical conclusion. Instead, avoiding this conclusion, he ends his essay on a more optimistic note suggesting that this kind of cinema, which put structures into question, constitutes a new language. [...] In other words, Pasolini is arguing that the meta-linguistic nature of this cinema serves a vital function: making us aware of forms, it enables us to change them’ (Greene, 1974: 140, 142, 143).

These ideas revolving around the suggested “vital function” of metacinema suffice to clarify why it is interesting to tackle this topic and explore a well-definite range of artworks which reflect upon themselves. However, an investigation of metacinematic products should not be driven by an uncritical approach that dogmatically trusts this counter-cultural property of self-reflexive products. On the contrary, any possible contesting purpose should be open to question at every moment because the awaited counter-cultural outcomes of an author might not eventually be met in the final output of the productive process.

Instead it might be interesting to clarify what sort of material and artistic constraints had driven the realization of a film towards a final output that does not meet the original intentions of the author. Nonetheless, one might argue that there is never absolute evidence of the original intentions of an author for in most cases those creative impulses are not even recognizable by themselves. But, at the same time those intentions might have been revealed before the production or within the movie itself. Therefore, a possible comparison between those disclosures and the way the process of production has effectively modified the initial expressive and technical strategies appears to be an opportunity to be seized.

In order to achieve such knowledge, the researcher should look for any accessible statement, declaration, interview, made by the director, and other members of the film crew and, therefore, provide evidence of the particular contingencies that led him towards the final output. The probable consequence of approaching this information could shed



light on the material and artistic constraints that might have influenced the production of the film, on the one hand, towards a thoroughgoing encounter with the original purposes of the author, or, on the contrary, towards a more or less significant deviation from the presupposed final effect of the process.

However, any consideration about a possible problematisation of self-reflexive films cannot avoid a previous engagement with another, preliminary, set of questions. What is metacinema? What is a metacinematic gesture? And what does this gesture commit us with as researchers?

In the first place, it might be said that the technical specificity of the cinematic medium is *per se* metacinematic. Namely, every time the spectator observes on the screen the technical magic, or the illusionistic nature of cinema, she or he is automatically encouraged to reflect upon its linguistic status. In that sense, the simple screening as a technical machinery can always be deemed to instil a metacinematic reflection. One of the first cinematic screenings of the history, the *Arrival of a Train at La Ciotat* (Lumière, 1895) is a key example in that sense. In this pioneering work, a naïf audience observes a train approaching the station towards their direction. Deluded by the perception of being imminently run over by the train, the spectators experienced feelings of fear and confusion (Loiperdinger and Elzer, 2004). Likewise, such an impression is literally displayed in the short silent film: *How it Feels to be Run Over* (Hepworth 1900).

Similarly, in the slapstick movie by Edwin S. Porter, *Uncle Josh at the Moving Picture Show* (1905), we observe a cinematic show and a person watching the images projected on the screen. We see him inflamed by the dance of a girl, frightened by the arrival of a fast train and eventually surprised when he accidentally removes the projection cloth and suddenly interrupts the flux of the images by unveiling a guy who was concealed behind screen. The trick is thus unveiled and the spectator reacts by engaging in a brawl with the guy who was concealed behind the projection cloth. What kind of mysterious and unsettling thoughts could have assaulted his mind? Perhaps, it is not that radical to assert that this sequence might be a metaphor of a possible strange reaction after the first metacinematic reflection provoked by the sudden arrest of the suspension of disbelief.

In reality, after cooling down these strong emotions, the spectators could have thought about the technical nature of the show they had just come across and it is likely that some metacinematic observations could have come up to their minds. This kind of profound reflection seems to materialise also with the case of *The Big Swallow*

(Williamson, 1899) where a man is framed in medium shot while jauntily gesticulating. Then the camera tightens on him till the point he literally swallows the operator with his mechanic tool. Surprisingly the film eventually discloses the real nature of what appears to be a sort of metacinematic gag.

Figure 1.8



*The Big Swallow* (Williamson, 1909)

So, the issue does not revolve around the fact that metacinema recreates the shock effect generated by the vision of Lumière brothers' film, but rather that the cinematic medium already contained a self-reflexive potentiality and that, as a medium, it was naturally, or ontologically, inclined to produce such a kind of insights in the spectators' minds. In the early stages it mostly did it through the peculiar forms of expressions typical of slapstick comedy. It suffices to think that Buster Keaton realized one of the first metacinematic reflections in his *The Cameraman* (1928), a beautifully crafted dramatic comedy which accounts for the inherently comical potentiality of self-reflexive patterns.

Furthermore, the cinematic device has often displayed the elusive power of the eye. For instance, the famous scene of the mirror in the Marx Brothers' masterpiece of slapstick comedy *Duck Soup* (1933) is a case in point. Harpo destroys a mirror trying to escape from Groucho. Then he decides to wear the same moustaches and glasses as Groucho and when the two comedians stand in front of a mirror that is no longer there, the illusion is set up. Harpo begins to imitate the gestures made by Groucho so that the

latter ends up believing that the image of the disguised Harpo is his own image reflected by the mirror. The shock effect is created when the actors traverse their own side of the mirror invading the other one. Groucho then suddenly realizes the nature of the illusion, the trick set up by Harpo is revealed and the joke reaches the end of the line. It might be said that what this sketch alludes to is a metaphorical recall how the illusionistic nature of cinema can be interrupted by sudden, self-reflexive acts. As William Earle pointed out in relation to films that arrest the suspension of disbelief: 'Here our experience would be an ironic one, doubly aware both of the scene passing before our eyes and of our seeing through images. In a purely realist film, every effort is devoted to making the audience unaware of the camera, unaware that they are seeing only a reflected reality' (Earle, 1968: 150).

Moreover, cinema has often produced the shocking effect of estrangement by means of some peculiar linguistic expedients. As mentioned previously, "the look into the camera" is one of those tricks. In Jean Luc Godard's movie *Vivre sa Vie* (*My Life to Live*, 1962) two young women are sitting in a typical Parisian bistrot having a glass of wine. They are discussing about the moral responsibility of their everyday acts along the lines of what seems to be an existentialist conversation. Later, the main character starts a monologue around the issue regarding her friend, the camera still framing her with a close-up. Then, she suddenly stops talking and slowly turns her head towards the camera; she literally looks into it, staring at us. The fictional trick of the cinematic machinery is thus voluntarily shown by Godard. The responsibility becomes ours, the reflection turns to be about our actions and the film calls into questions our status of spectators in flesh and bones. In that, the eyes of the character on the screen truly invade our space of intimacy, they draw us into feeling participants of the spectacle before us.

I believe there is no more exemplary metacinematic feature than that expressed by the "look into the camera". The main reason is that the look swiftly breaks the fourth wall of the representation, by demolishing the fundamentals of the artifice and dissolving the separation between fiction and reality. Nonetheless, even though it might be asserted that metafilms significantly reconfigure the gaze, this subtle mechanism does not necessarily entail the disappearance of the fourth wall. They rather weaken the unobstructed influence of the fourth wall and the ensuing suspension of disbelief through the exposure of the artifice.

Figure 1.9



Anna Karina in Jean-Luc Godard's *Vivre sa Vie*, (1962)

In conclusion, an investigation about metacinema entails an effort comparable to that of the spectator in the background of *Las Meninas*. We cannot just dwell on the threshold of the representation, trying to observe the overall scene and pretending to figure out what sort of mechanisms are put in place. On the contrary, we should analyse in detail what are the motifs, inflections and developments of metacinema, trying to refine the boundaries of the category and questioning its problematic nature. Is it a genre, a playful activity or what else? How many metacinematic forms exist? Can they be categorized or labelled somehow? In short, we shall glance back at that look and attempt to traverse the elusive mirror of the camera too.

In this chapter, I have introduced how the issue of representation is intimately linked with the specific languages of different artistic expressions. I have expanded the idea of representation as an enigma to be deciphered, along with its deep correlation with the mimetic reproduction of reality and as a story that expresses a particular narrative path which has to be experienced by the observer. I started to consider the analogies and contrasts between different forms of expressions by focusing on the possible self-reflexive patterns shared by painting, photography and cinema. In particular, I attempted to bridge Velazquez *Las Meninas* and other paintings with cinema by discussing how they might contain some embryonic traces of what it would be linguistically developed by cinema (as the “off-screen glance” and the “look into the camera”).

It was also stressed that these linguistic correlations have rendered the emergence of self-reflexive forms in art possible. I then broadly scrutinized the issue of self-

reflexivity in arts by introducing some relevant examples from different artistic disciplines (metafiction, metatheatre). I also considered how an accurate analysis of these types of representations has to take into account a dialectics of visibility/non-visibility where the “shaded zone” becomes a significant agent of the representation as suggested by Comolli. The shaded zone of representation should problematise what a given author decided to display or conceal within the representational domain.

The estrangement effect has been recalled as embodying the intrinsic potential of the metacinematic experience. It also pointed out how the denaturalizing effect of art allows the emergence of social and political reflections, as for Pasolini and Comolli. I will explain further aspects akin to this concept and to the distinction between illusionistic and reflexive cinema in the first part of the next chapter.

Also, I have introduced the concept of metacinema by mentioning one of the most significant self-reflexive gestures of cinema: the look into the camera. For the moment, metacinematic gestures must be intended as segments which expose the cinematic artifice by arresting the suspension of disbelief. In that, further discussion of the literature about metacinema must be tackled before further speculate on this matter.

Thus, in the next chapters, I will pave the way towards the sketch of a definition of metacinematic gesture and a loose classification of different forms of cinematic reflexivity in order to isolate the category I will thoroughly investigate during the development of this thesis. So, the first step will be that of examining the various ways in which metacinema has been treated by different theorists through an analysis of the primary and secondary literature.

## **2.0. Literature Review on Metacinema**

In this chapter I will describe the object of the enquiry more specifically with particular regard to the analysis of different theoretical accounts regarding metacinematic language. Namely, I will expand on the distinction between illusionistic and self-reflexive cinema. In this regard, I will tackle in-depth the debate around the estrangement effect in figurative arts and the controversy between Jean-Louis Comolli and André Bazin revolving around realism in cinema and its possible ideological effects. Consequently, the second part of this chapter will focus on a dissection of the Academic literature which has tackled the topic of metacinema.

I will produce a critical analysis of the relevant literature by summarising some of the aforementioned theoretical insights and by including some additional accounts on metacinema from different fields of study mainly drawing on Semiotics, Aesthetics and Film Studies. This chapter therefore aspires to propose a substantial overview of the main theoretical accounts around the investigated topic. In light of this, the following paragraphs will be propaedeutic to the foundations of a more cautious definition of metacinematic gesture and of a plausible classification of metacinematic gestures. Hopefully, this whole chapter will shed light on the possible acknowledgement of common perspectives and *traits d'union* between different scholarly accounts and, thus, it will attempt to put some order in the apparently maze-like emergence of such a topic within Film Studies.

### **2.1. Illusionism and Subversion**

As the example of Jean-Luc Godard's *Vivre sa Vie* precisely illustrates, the estrangement effect provoked by the sudden look into the camera of the protagonist contains a subversive potential which arrests the suspension of disbelief. Self-reflexive moves have

been considered potentially subversive since the Surrealist Avant-garde experimentations of Renée Clair and Marcel Duchamp, but also later with the advent of the French New Wave (Nouvelle Vague). François Truffaut and Jean Luc Godard in particular were the main proponents of a cinematic movement that posed itself in rebuttal against most of the American classical genres (Wiegand, 2012).

Such subversive potential resides in the fact that those kinds of self-reflexive gestures reveal the narrative and technical conditions which constitute them and produce an estrangement effect by disrupting the spectator's suspension of disbelief. Indeed, conscious of the fictional nature of the film, the spectator reinforces his expectations towards the show with the notions stemming from his own cinematic education (Ciciotti, 2006).

Thus, the spectator sees himself seeing. He/she accepts an active, critical role towards the acknowledgement of the various components of the productive mechanism: the film industry, the cinematic apparatus and the cinematic institution. Moreover, as Greene has observed, it is precisely within this estrangement effect that the subversive potential of metacinematic products resides (Greene, 1974). This occurs in the sense that self-reflexive films make us aware of new forms and modes of expression that enables us to change or call into question the most common filmmaking solutions disseminated by mainstream cinema and therefore they virtually prepare the ground for change. As mentioned above, the process of *ostranenie* (estrangement) entails the exposure of the linguistic apparatus and consequently generates a principle of defamiliarization or denaturalization of the fictionalised content (Boym, 1996)

'Thus it is worth pointing out that the concept of "reflexivity", which is derived etymologically from the Latin *reflexio/reflectere* ("bend back on") and was first borrowed from philosophy and psychology, referred to the mind's capacity to be both subject and object to itself within the cognitive process' (Stam, 1992: xiii). The point of being both "subject and object" of oneself does not only recall the aesthetic allusions provided by *Las Meninas*, but gives us also access to a political and sociological domain of reflection. What "seeing ourselves seeing" enables is an interesting reflexive circuit that interrupts the unobstructed flow of our common perceptions about art - and, perhaps, also about the social and political reality - we were accustomed to on account of the previous education to the consumption of audio-visual products.

But what does activate such a mechanism? According to Walter Benjamin, Bertolt Brecht differentiated his epic theatre from the dramatic theatre, the former not being

supported by the Aristotelian unity of action, time and space (Benjamin, 1968a). Indeed, Brecht's theatre does not attempt to restate the illusionistic effect of reality but, on the contrary, it points at the subversion of the mimetic impulse by means of several interruptions. Along these lines,

'Benjamin compares the alienation (or estrangement) effect of epic theater to the sudden freezing of a domestic quarrel when a stranger enters the room. The stranger is confronted with a set of conditions – troubled faces, an open window, a devastated interior. The interruption has made the conditions strange. [...] Brecht for his part interrupts the action by songs, by the intrusion of other media, by frozen *tableaux* and by direct address to the audience. [...] While illusionist art strives for an impression of spatio-temporal coherence, anti-illusionistic (or self-reflexive) art calls attention to the gaps and holes and seams in the narrative tissue. To the suave continuities of illusionism, it opposes the rude shocks of rupture and discontinuity' (Stam, 1992: 6, 7).

The breaking of theatrical illusion occurs in Brecht's work precisely through the constitution of a series of signs which emerge to remind the spectator he/she is truly attending a theatrical spectacle. In other words, all these signs are *indexical* for they seem to point the finger at the very essence of theatre at such. Within the disrupting folds of Brecht's work, metatheatre lays bare the tools of the fiction not only by putting in evidence a virtuosistic gesture, but also allowing the revelation of the "other", namely the sociological or political truth. (Ciciotti, 2006).

So, even though these literary and theatrical applications of the concept of *ostranenie* might not seem to affect the discussion around metacinema and self-reflexive films, we will see how the estrangement effect can also be provoked by metacinematic segments that interrupt the natural flow of the filmic illusion. Sympathetic discourses have been tackled by many scholars pertaining to the difference between illusionistic and self-reflexive art with an attendant focus on the issue of realism.

Contextually, but with regard to different cinematic regimes of communication, Casetti and Di Chio argue that two fundamental patterns can be distinguished: the "referential communication" and the "metalinguistic communication". The first is mainly endowed with the transmission of the content, the presentation of an object, the denotation of reality. Instead, the second regime of communication, the metalinguistic, is focused on the act of communication at such. The metalinguistic regime does not hold a mirror to the



world, even though a portion of reality is inevitably present, rather it focuses on the very act of “showing” and “seeing” (Casetti and Di Chio, 2009).

In this fashion, metacinema, the metalinguistic form of communication for cinema, disrupts the reality precisely by imposing a new one which is typically cinematic and that, although it unavoidably recalls the signs of reality, insists to drift from it by heralding the independence of a linguistic and technical specificity. So, using Pasolini's words, even though ‘cinema expresses reality with reality’ (1988: 133), metacinema, or what he would have called “cinema of poetry”, advocates the autonomy of the cinematic language from reality itself. According to Pasolini, the self-reflexive development of cinema entails a deep and focused reflection over the linguistic and technical specificities of the medium and, therefore, it distances itself from the real referents. This detaching process is precisely validated by the “estrangement effect”, but undoubtedly it does not completely eschew the confrontation with reality.

The debate around realism had also reached a considerable turning point in the 1960's with the clash between Jean Louis Comolli and André Bazin. Their dispute concerned about the enhanced effect of realism caused by the adoption of *deep focus* (or depth of field) in cinema which was considered by the latter as purely an aesthetic phenomenon (Bazin, 2004) and by the former as a vessel of ideological content (Comolli, 1980; 1986; Comolli and Narboni, 1971). Where Bazin supports a perspective more oriented towards the technological progress of the medium, Comolli embraces an opposite line of thought. If for Bazin cinema is best when it most closely imitates his vision of what the real world is like, Comolli, on the contrary, takes up a materialist view which problematises the economic substance of the film industry (Harpole, 1980).

Yet, Bazin argues that the invention of the deep focus ameliorated the possibilities for films to adopt the *long take* at the expense of the very rapid cutting technique or montage. Thus, somehow, he analysed the way cinema has developed its illusionistic nature on behalf of a more realistic output for the show. For Bazin, the effect of realism engenders the spectatorial identification with the main characters of the film, a mechanism which is currently enacted and supported by the technical and grammatical transparency promoted by classical American cinema (Bazin, 2004). This process would therefore generate an immersive viewing. Interestingly, Comolli has criticised the transparency produced by means of the particular technics through which classical Hollywood cinema would ideologically mystify the content of film sequences (Comolli and Narboni, 1971).

In fact, according to Comolli, depth effects and long takes are important because ‘they indicate the extent to which an ideological way of representation is embedded in a mass medium’ (Harpole 1980: 14). In a nutshell, Comolli believes that the Studio System, as the worldwide dominant industry of cinematic production, has always sustained a realistic view in order to reassure the higher classes that the world is just as it looks on the screen. This debate is thus important for it highlights how the technical side of the cinematic medium is never neutral, but often includes germs of political and sociological content and generates contrasting opinions.

Indeed, the adoption of a particular technique at the expense of another might be chosen by an author for ideological reasons to confirm the justness of the current social order or, conversely, to disrupt what is taken for granted in sociological or political terms by mainstream movies. Nonetheless, it is not the purpose of this research to dissect the radical points expressed by Comolli, nor to minimize the crucial contribution of Bazin with his aesthetic insights. But rather to underscore how the difference between illusionistic and self-reflexive cinema exists and how the latter might be said to produce films which were substantially critical of the hegemonic forms of expression by contesting the most widespread solutions offered by film industry. At a later stage, we will see how and to what extent this potentiality can be expressed by metacinematic films. Nevertheless, what can be contested to both authors is that it might be risky to allocate any specific, unilateral effect to a particular cinematic technique. Again, it seems an issue which depends on who is watching or interpreting a film. Therefore, the political or aesthetic factors are only some of the possible variables that influence the understanding of an artistic product.

With this in mind, it should be clarified that my interest does not deal much with the political substance of metacinematic movies, but it rather revolves on how self-reflexive depictions construct their own reality and what they disclose or conceal about cinematic art at such. Nonetheless, it cannot be said either that an ethical and political reading of some particular metacinematic gestures should be utterly disregarded. But, in order to include any possible specific investigation with regard to metacinematic forms it is now crucial to summarise some of the concepts being explored and to introduce new discourses and approaches to self-reflexivity in cinema in order to give a sense of the considerably vast array of insights being produced around this subject matter.

## 2.2. The Cauldron of Cinematic Reflexivity

There are many authors who attempted to discuss the manifold aspects related to metacinematic moves from different disciplines, using the more diverse theoretical perspectives. This is why there is an urgency to organise the chaotic universe overwhelming the topic of metacinema and self-reflexive films. Hence, in this section I will list some of the most significant accounts providing an insightful contribution with regard to this subject matter.

Naturally, it is not my intention to further discuss the crucial relevance of Russian Formalists' concept of *ostranenie* (estrangement) in laying the foundations of the principle of the suspension of disbelief. Nor would it be necessary to further investigate the various trajectories opened up by this linguistic concept in other forms of art, e.g.: metafiction (Waugh, 2013) or metatheatre (Abel, 1963; Wekwerth, Nicolaus and Munk, 1967). Indeed, I believe that this set of theoretical implications have been extensively treated in the previous chapters in order to broadly introduce and contextualise the argument of self-reflexivity in arts.

Primarily, it should be pointed out that many authors have proposed a thorough analysis of cinematic texts from a semiotic point of view. One of the most eminent voices on this matter was Christian Metz who emphasised the virtuous aspects of semiotics in accounting for even the minutest signs liable to be pinned down in a filmic text. Indeed, he clarified with a remarkable intellectual rigour the methodological limits of semiotics or its factual impossibility to exhaust an accurate scrutiny of all the complex implications opened up by the filmic products. In this regard, he has drawn his distinction of filmic fact and cinematic fact from an innovative essay by Gilbert Cohen-Séat: *Essai sur les Principes d'une Philosophie du Cinéma* (1946) - (Essay on the principles of a philosophy of cinema), where a precise distinction between *fait filmique* and *fait cinématographique* has been proposed.

According to Cohen-Séat's, the filmic fact reflects a depiction of life experienced in the real world as constructed through visual images (natural or conventional) and auditive images (auditory or verbal). Whereas the cinematic fact would be related to the documents, ideal sensations or materials supplied by real life and put into shape by the film through its linguistic means of expression (Cohen-Séat, 1946: 54). Christian Metz

contributed to clarify the empty gaps left out by such a distinction by way of claiming that ‘film is only a small part of the cinema, for the latter represents a vast ensemble of phenomena some of which intervene before the film’ (Metz, 1974: 12). The cinematic fact would thereby imply the whole complexity of sociological, economic and technological phenomena which influence the making-of a movie along with possible accounts of the political and ideological impacts of the film on different publics, audiences etc.

In this sense, this set of considerations would also imply an understanding of the crucial role of other professional collaborations and, in general, of all the possible variables influencing the making-of a film. For this reason, Metz was compelled to reduce the peculiar spectrum of analysis of film semiotics to the sole filmic fact on account of its signifying nature as a text. Metz’s suggestion was that semiotics should have expanded its sphere of analysis towards the cinematic fact but did not possess at the time the necessary epistemological instruments to undertake it.

Indeed, both filmic and cinematic facts depict life through visual and auditive means of expression and, therefore, a semiotic lens would represent another plausible way to approach a careful consideration of sociological, economic and technological aspects that can emerge through self-reflexive moves. In this regard, the value of Metz’s thoughts resides in having devised a possible expansion of film semiotics towards such broader implications that influence the processual dimension of filmmaking and that are continuously incorporated into different aesthetic outputs.

On a different note, Pisters’ insights (2012) revolve around the existence of certain cinematic products which exhibit the material presence of the camera. As aforementioned via Greene’s critique, the articulation of Pasolini’s concept of “Cinema of Poetry” is framed as a new formalist cinema of “style” which exposes the machinery. It has been outlined how ‘Cinema of Poetry’, as a neoformalist authorial style, foremost reflected by Fellini, Antonioni and Bertolucci’s cinema, could have also been read as an ambiguous expression of bourgeois late capitalism. However, according to Pasolini, such an exposure of the machinery was so peculiar that not even the visual narratives expounded by Chaplin, Mizoguchi or Bergman (1988: 185,186) were able to materialise it. Indeed, as Green points out, cinema of poetry flows beyond its derogatory bourgeois connotation, but also displays particular meta-linguistic patterns whose beneficial function is that of making us aware of cinematic forms and, therefore, enables us to change them (Greene, 1974).

Notwithstanding, I believe Pasolini's reading is fruitful in terms of outlining the possible limits of metacinema.

As a matter of fact, Pasolini's overall admonition haunts our investigation as a spectre and compels us to consider that cinematic products have been mostly enclosed in and ruled by the economic regulations of capitalist modes of production. Therefore, in order to eschew a possible naïve and uncritically optimistic view of the cultural influence of metacinema we should bear in mind the extent to which such dominant powers must have influenced the choices operated on the set by filmmakers and technicians.

Offering a different point of view, the work by Robert Stam, *Reflexivity in Film and Literature, from Don Quixote to Jean Luc Godard* (1992) expounds the concept of reflexivity within two different forms of expressions by highlighting the under-theorised status of metacinema as a concept.

As pointed out by Semenza (2013), the importance of Stam's work rests upon the analysis of how the reflexive aspects of particular novels and literary works are promptly translated within cinematic works. This principle also extends to "metatheatrical" adaptations of plays by William Shakespeare such as *King Lear* (Warde, 1916) and *Scotland PA* (Morrisette, 2001), a modernised version of *Macbeth*. Along these lines, it has been suggested that the cinematic medium can also be read as a privileged means of expression to convey the reflexive elements embedded in previous literary and theatrical forms. In this regard, such aspects related to the adaptation of meta-dramatic aspects of Shakespeare's theatre into metacinematic forms have been extensively treated by Kenneth Rothwell (1987), Agnieszka Rasmus (2001; 2008) and by Sarah Hatchuel in the book *Shakespeare from Stage to Screen* (2004).

Furthermore, Semenza adds that Stam's work is probably the only extended theoretical study of metacinema which explores so many different narrative genres and historical periods. From my point of view, I can expand on this by saying that Stam's book represents the most serious work in terms of correlating the metalinguistic expressions of literature (Cervantes, Fielding) and theatre (Jarvis, Brecht) with those pertaining to cinema (Hitchcock, Buñuel, Fellini, Godard).

Finally, it includes fruitful insights on the psychoanalytical concept of subversive *voyeurism* and on how reflexive cinema derives from the dynamics established by a desiring gaze. Then, it explores the way Hollywood has exposed its own mechanisms of production with films such as *Sunset Boulevard* and *Fedora* (Wilder, 1950, 1978) and how the burgeoning self-awareness of cinematic products heralded the advent of a

modernist season for the seventh art which, passing through the 1960's and the 1970's, arrived at the dawn of the new millennium.

In the introduction Stam has also problematised Jean Genette's concept of transtextuality along with a thorough analysis of its four different declinations. Similarly, Lucía Tello Díaz (2014) has expanded on Genette's classification of transtextual features by employing it as a lens to describe the signs of reflexivity expressed by fake documentaries (or mockumentaries), which have been significantly elaborated along the same lines also by De Villiers (2011).

Arguably, the merit of Díaz's article rests on the elaboration of some categories which define different metafictional approaches within cinema. In the first place, Díaz alludes to some metacinematic forms which expose the machinery of production, secondly, she mentions those films which quote other films. In point of fact, I have directly drawn on these interpretations to better define my first two categories for metacinema that I will present in the next chapter. What pushed me to elucidate a more granular definition of other categories was the vague distinction made by Díaz of her third and fourth metacinematic definitions: 'In the third and fourth place, metacinema can be carried out whether reflecting on the own nature of the cinematographic medium, known as "reflexive discourse", or employing cinema as a situational "context"' (2014: 118). Indeed, the lacking interpretation of these lines appears to leave substantial space for the reader's imagination and hence convinced me to further speculate on how to frame other possible forms of metacinematic gestures.

## 2.3 Genesis and Development of Metacinematic Perspectives

This section concerns the very chronological order of appearance of arguments related to metacinema and self-reflexivity in films. Before starting the following review, I want to clarify that the texts being scrutinised will be arranged in a chronological order for one might judge of significative importance how some theoretical standpoints have been influenced by previous accounts.

The main relevance of the first articles will revolve around the early attempts to define what metacinema and self-reflexivity represent within movies, and in what manner they have been acknowledged and put into practice by several film directors. In this sense, one of the first intellectual endeavours oriented to underpin the reflexive status of cinema is that by Thomas Elsaesser, with his article “The Cinema of Irony” (1973).

In this article the author expands on contemporary European cinema, in particular French, Italian and German, by stressing how the proposal of metacinematic reflections went beyond the respective national differences. In that, the emergence of the idea of director as an artist seeking self-expression met the growing aspiration to the realise reflexive patterns in a way that traversed and levelled out the various national distinctions (Elsaesser, 1973).

Elsaesser suggestively chose the term “irony” to evoke reflexivity and stated that, if it had to be categorised, then it would be designated as a “low-mimetic genre” (Ibid.: 1), and more attuned to the genre of romance rather than to tragedy and comedy. In his idea, irony and romance - typified by quest, love and adventure - are “low-mimetic genres” because they are mixed, being the result of multi-faceted elements that stem from other genres. But the most important aspect is that ‘as such, irony is dialectical in intent and invariably points out a potentially significant gap or break between the signifier and the signified’ (Ibid.: 2). This gap between the signifier and the signified, engendered by the Cinema of Irony, is what breaks the naturalistic action and psychological realism of classical cinema with the appearance of an estrangement which undermines the functioning of the suspension of disbelief.

This idea might also recall the content of William Earle’s *Revolt against Realism in the Films* (1968), where the author connects the ironic experience provided by movies, which calls attention to the ontological status of the image, to the breakage of the

suspension of disbelief. 'Here our experience would be an ironic one, doubly aware both of the scene passing before our eyes and of our seeing it through images' (Earle, 1968: 150). Dissimilarly, Elsaesser only implicitly mentions we are dealing with new self-reflexive forms of expression. In fact, when drawing on the cinema of Herzog, Chabrol, Tanner, Rohmer and Buñuel's uses the term "irony" to locate what was still an undefined theoretical notion at that time.

Instead, he refines this notion as reflecting European filmmakers' distrust of the taken for granted function of fiction features from both an ideological and ontological standpoint. His ontological reflection upon cinema mainly revolves around an 'a priori correspondence between the universe of fictionality (in which a feature film necessarily moves) and the "real world" (of which it iconically represents the external world)' (Elsaesser, 1973: 1). In regard to this matter, I have already discussed the extent to which metacinematic and, more broadly, self-reflexive expressions in figurative arts problematise the intricate relation between fact and fiction. However, I will insist more extensively on the theoretical implication during the course of this investigation.

Finally, Elsaesser points out that the self-referential status of the Cinema of Irony is provoked by the displacement, reversal, detachment, suspension of verbal, visual and structural patterns in which a statement, a message, a communication, image or action may be qualified, put in question, inverted, parodied or indeed wholly negated while still preserving as visible that to which it refers ironically (1973: 1, 2). Yet, he punctually describes Werner Herzog's films as illustrative of these procedures. With regard to *Even Dwarfs Started Small* (1970) and *Aguirre, Wrath of God* (1972), Elsaesser stresses the evidence of montage-effect, which emerges at the expense of both naturalistic and psychological realism and makes the overall narrative atmosphere fluctuate between the actual material presence and the absence of action.

Next, the difference between illusionistic and reflexive cinema have been treated in a brief paper entitled "Metacinema: a Modern Necessity" (Siska, 1979). Here, the author demonstrates the antithetic standpoints provided by the narrative transparency of orthodox traditional Hollywood and the modernist attitude of dealing with the strategy of embedding films within other films. Siska reevaluates the most common dichotomy between illusionism and reflexivity and offers a twofold way of reading metacinema in which: '1) the artist reflects upon his medium of expression; and 2) the artist as creator reflects upon himself' (Siska, 1979: 285).



Therefore, the proposed reading of metacinema operates a difference on whether the reflexive gaze is pointed at the medium, by presenting a certain exposure of the cinematic machinery, or bends back on the enunciative position of the author who posits himself as a self-reflexive filmmaker. Another compelling passage focuses on two distinctive reflexive techniques: that of *showing the process of production* and that related to the *construction of narrative intransitivity*. The first aspect is suggested to relate to films such as *Sunset Boulevard* (Wilder, 1950), in terms of revealing the dimension of secrecy usually concealed by Hollywood Studio System, while the notion of narrative intransitivity is bound to the sudden interruption of the narrative flow with the emergence of spatial and temporal fragmentation. Even though Siska does not present any film sequence to demonstrate the theoretical applicability of the second point, apart from some vague references to Godard and Makavejev, I will employ the concept of narrative intransitivity in one of the categories of the following chapter.

After the evaluation of these initial ideas revolving around a theoretical sketch of the idea of reflexivity in films, I will proceed with the scrutiny of some pieces of work which attempted to envisage a rough outline of different approaches to self-reflexivity paving the way towards possible classifications of different metacinematic approaches.

In the same year of Siska's "Metacinema: a Modern Necessity", Don Fredericksen's declared to pursue the intent to demonstrate the "multi-faceted character of reflexivity" in his piece of work entitled "Modes of Reflexive Film" (1979). The author mainly draws attention to Jean-Pierre Gorin and Jean-Luc Godard's film *Wind from the East* (1969) as an "obvious piece of metacinema" by stressing how the voice over - or commentative sound - is an eminent reflexive element of the film and relates it, again, to the Russian Formalist concept of *estrangement*.

Yet, he clarifies that, even though reflexivity initially appears to be only a contemporary strategy, also early twentieth century comedies, or surrealist and avant-garde works which make parodies of dramatic films, reflect such a modernist approach to metacinema. Then, quite intriguingly, Fredericksen refers to the Russian semiologist Roman Jakobson's theory of the six constitutive factors of "speech events" in order to outline a comprehensive outline of the modes in which reflexive films arise (1979: 305, 306). In this sense, he advocates the necessity to sketch a first classification of metacinematic gestures by labelling some "modes of film reflexivity".

In point of fact, he attempts to relate metacinematic forms to the meta-discursive functions presented by Jakobson: namely, the referential, poetic, emotive, conative, phatic

and metalingual functions (Jakobson, 1960). Without exploring in-depth the different metacinematic declinations of this categorisation it is sufficient to say that, according to Fredericksen: 'Reflexivity can, for example, stress the role of form in the artistic process (as in the poetic function), it can stress the place of rhetoric in film (as in the conative and phatic functions), the genesis of the images (as in the emotive function), or their ontology (as in the referential function)'. Or 'it may become a semiotic of expression and reception, as in the metalingual function' (Fredericksen, 1979: 319). Even though the author seems to satisfy the theoretical lack of a semiotic codification of different reflexive moves with a thought-provoking juxtaposition of various discursive functions with the specificity of cinematic language, the analysis presents some debatable passages. If, on the one hand, the semiotic codification of reflexive moves appears to provide a useful grid of analysis of metacinematic gestures, on the other, it conveys the sensation of entrapping them in the rigorous formality of a sealed-off classification.

On the contrary, I believe the nature of metacinematic moves to be more flexible and therefore unfitting with a rigid scheme which reflects only different discursive functions. In fact, I argue that metacinematic gestures are a combination of linguistic, technical and organisational elements and that the sole consideration of their discursive function would not even remotely exhaust their complex and multi-faceted nature. With this I do not intend to disqualify the proposal of a semiotic classification of metacinema, but that providing a classification which is characterised by a rigid perspective lens might be judged as reductive and, in a few circumstances, also inappropriate. This aspect can be inferred by the evidence of frequent conceptual superimpositions of different discursive functions in the article - such as the conative and phatic - along with the difficulty to provide a substantial range of filmic examples to be paired with such theoretical speculations. In fact, the analysis revolves around the same three examples: *The Man with a Movie Camera* (1929), *8½* (Fellini, 1963) and *Wind from the East* (Godard, 1969).

In conclusion, although Fredericksen's insights have the virtue of representing the first attempt to sketch a categorization of reflexive patterns for cinema, his work might appear to leave some gaps of knowledge for what concerns the recognition and scrutiny of other mechanisms of production and aesthetic solutions which might have led towards the emergence of a given metacinematic gesture. This is the reason why there is urgency to further investigate in the direction of a more expansive classification, which can be read as a flexible grid of intelligibility. In this sense, a more flexible and broad categorization could be useful to delineate a richer correspondence between examples of

film sequences and a theory deprived of any semiotic straightjacket. That would also favour the intent to produce a plausible overview of the particular cases in which metacinematic gestures emerge and a more exhaustive examination of the various implications lying behind the construction of self-reflexive patterns.

From another point of view, the paper *Le cinéma auto-réflexif: quelques problèmes méthodologiques*, (Self-reflexive cinema, some methodological problems), Takeda (1987) expands on the historical transformations of methodological approaches towards metacinema. In the first place, Takeda explains how the notion of self-reflexivity took inspiration from André Bazin's critique and from the commentaries provided by the filmmakers belonging to the French New Wave (Nouvelle Vague). Then he argues how the following theoretical steps have been introduced since the critique to the "structural film", term coined by P. Adams Sitney to comment upon American experimental filmmakers - such as George Landow and Peter Kubelka - who played with the different thresholds of representation by working on the material shape of film stock at the expense of an orderly narrative coherence.

According to Takeda, the structural film highlights certain constitutive elements of filmic segments in the way they allow the emergence of enunciative reflexivity (Takeda, 1987: 87). In doing that, he advocates the theorisation of an enunciative-psychoanalytical semiotics of cinema. The most part of semiotic references are mainly related to Christian Metz's accounts on the spectatorial identification and to Jean Louis Baudry's concept of *dispositif* (apparatus).

In parallel, the psychoanalytical side is explored through Jacques Lacan's account on narcissism and on the concept of lack as a constitutive absence. Along these lines, Takeda proposes a digression through the theoretical notions which seal the methodological *traits d'union* between these two fields of study. In the body of the text, then, he presents an interesting differentiation between the ideas of *dispositif suturant* and *dispositif réflexif*. As pointed out elsewhere, a *dispositif* (apparatus) refers to 'the general set of institutional devices aimed at preparing in advance the place of the cinematic subject' (Neumeyer, 2013: 395).

Here the dichotomy stands for what we have discussed as "illusionistic" and "self-reflexive" in the sense that we would either have a *suturing* or *reflexive* gesture. The concept of suture derives from Lacan's rewriting of classical Freudian psychoanalysis and it is reused as an account of how a filmic discourse can be constructed through a natural or imaginary unity (2013: 397). In a nutshell, the *dispositif suturant* (suturing

apparatus) is the set of devices that unites all the statements, utterances, images and sounds in a complex and uniform linguistic collage which confers the impression of reality and a credible imaginary reading of the fictional content. On the contrary, the *dispositif réflexif* (reflexive apparatus) refers to all the set of different devices operating and transmitting a symbolic meta-reading of the cinematic medium (Takeda, 1987: 89, 90).

Having clarified this, the author attempts to outline a classification of different levels of functioning of the reflexive apparatus (*dispositif réflexif*), which is the passage which contains the most detailed information about his perspective lens. The proposed classification grounds its *ratio* on a set of theoretical nuances articulated through a semiotic jargon.

1. Firstly, in the *Métafilm*, reflexivity utterly disrupts and subverts the “diegetic focalisation” - which is the first phase of the *dispositif suturant* that enables a complex mechanism of primary identification with the film and summarises all the aspects belonging to the intelligibility of the narrated story. The peculiar subversion of the diegetic focalisation operated by *Métafilms*, for Takeda, applies to experimental filmmaking (e.g. Landow and Kubelka’s works).

2. Then, *Film à réflexivité narrative* operates on the “narrative focalisation”. Unlike the diegetic focalisation, the narrative focalisation privileges a certain subject of the *diegesis*, both alive and inanimate, through which it confers some supplementary values concerning a network of predicative relations, namely spatial, temporal and logical. It is constituted by two sub-categories:

- a) *Réflexivité intranarrative*, which concerns the suturing modalities and introduces a certain symbolic domain at the level of diegetic relations - typical of classical narrative films whose intrigue addresses the cinematic medium at such.

- b) *Réflexivité metanarrative*, which objectifies and problematises the suturing function of narrative focalisation without disrupting the imaginary status of diegetic focalisation - as, on the contrary, it is subverted by *métafilms*.

3. Finally, the *Film auto-réflexif* applies to both diegetic and narrative focalisation by questioning the illusory effect of the whole suturing apparatus. This is the most stringent and characteristic meaning of self-reflexivity because it is canalised in a process of de-narrativisation and de-diegetisation which enables a recurring interrogation of the suturing apparatus. This category applies to certain cinematic reinterpretations of classical films and it is epitomised by the work of Fritz Lang (Takeda, 1987: 92, 93).

Although Takeda states that this classification presents some ideal entities, yet also admitting that real films would surely manifest different variations and degrees of affinity with this or that category, my overall impression is that some aspects need further clarification. For instance, from a purely semiotic standpoint, there is no neat and clear separation between the first category, *Métafilm*, and the last one, *Film auto-réflexif*, because the former would disrupt the sole diegetic focalisation, but not the narrative focalisation - and Takeda does not specify how and to what extent - while the latter should subvert both kinds of focalisation. The only reference to Fritz Lang's filmography is also quite reductive.

In this sense, even though the attempt to provide a semiotic rigour to these modes of reflexivity is thought-provoking, such an endeavour appears not to hit the target to unravel the blurred and interwoven aspects of each category. In my opinion, the undeniable defects of Takeda's categorisation reside in a twofold reason. First, the outline of these categories almost utterly lacks credible examples, stemming from specific film sequences, which could support each semiotic code of textual interpretation; second, the overall conceptual framework appears to be strictly bound to the sole semiotic language, which, as an extremely specific jargon, easily falls into the trap of disregarding a thorough relationship with concrete filmic texts. Finally, the hinted attempt to exceed the limits imposed by the semiotic straightjacket, attaching Lacan's account of *suture* to the notion of *dispositif suturent*, is eventually excluded from the proposed categorisation which only operates through the theoretical implications of the *dispositif réflexif*.

After having criticised Takeda's semiotic reconstruction of different reflexive approaches we continue to dissect other proposed classifications. It is worth mentioning that presented by Gloria Withalm in the paper "The Self-Conscious Screen - Aspects of Reference to the Movies in the Movies" (1995). Here the author uses a specific rationale to categorise a series of reflexive sub-groups under four main labels: 1) *Production*:

*Filming the Filming*, 2) *Distribution: Media Industries*, 3) *Consumption: Movies and their Industries*, 4) *The Product Film*.

In the first place, it can be acknowledged that the originality of this partition consists in the way it recalls the different phases of film production, departing from its inception, passing through its commercialisation and finally tackling other aspects related to the specificity of its linguistic expedients. According to Withalm, all these elements would echo different approaches which mould self-reflexive patterns. For instance, in the *Production* category the author gathers the following subgroups:

- 1.1) *A Look behind the Screen*: The sequences include the actual situation of shooting the very film itself. The set shown has to be the very set of the film, and the people appearing on the screen are clearly members of the film crew, such as the camera operators or sound engineers. E.g.: US serial *Moonlighting*, (Werner, 1986)
- 1.2) *Focus on the Camera*: The sequences show a camera involved in the film production on the same level as any other object on the screen. E.g.: *High Anxiety* (Brooks, 1977).
- 1.3) *Film - a Work in Progress?*: The sequences display an ongoing film production which can be subject to changes until the last minute. E.g.: *Maltese Bippy* (Panama, 1969).

By contrast, the category *Distribution* gathers the following self-reflexive subgroups:

- 2.1) *TV-Movies, Characters and Networks*: The characters in movies or TV-series comment on their being characters in TV programs and they seem to be conscious of their own status. E.g.: *Moonlighting* (Werner, 1985).
- 2.2) *Series, Serials, and Sequels*: Series or serials are particular types of television programs. The audience obviously knows that the series is a series and that one episode follows the other. And, sometimes, the characters seem to know it. E.g.: *The Green Archer* (Roland, 1960).

Additionally, Withalm defines another category by naming it *Consumption* and includes Movies or TV-series which displays items or references to their own commercialisation and merchandising or the very act of watching/consuming a movie:

3.1) *Movies Shown in a Movie Theater*: Films which show the characters going to the movies and watching a film. E.g. *Hellzapoppin'* (H.C. Potter, 1941).

3.2) *"Their World" - "Our World"*: In some films the border between the reality of the movie and real life becomes permeable when items from the extrafilmic world are integrated into the diegesis. E.g.: *Jurassic Park* (Spielberg, 1993), in which Richard Attenborough presents an area where all the merchandising products related to the amusement park will be showcased. These items look exactly as the real merchandising articles related to the film.

Last category, entitled *The Product Film*, is possibly the most cryptic for it relates to the emergence of aesthetic and discursive expedients of cinematic language within films. Yet, the sub-groups do not seem to fully reflect the specific nature of these linguistic signs, but they rather disregard the existence of further linguistic patterns:

4.1) *On the Materiality of Film Aesthetic Means*: in certain self-reflexive films the aesthetic elements - titles or graphic inserts - are presented as belonging to the diegesis and, in others, they even pervade the actual surroundings of the characters. E.g.: *The Man with Two Brains* (Reiner, 1982).

4.2) *The Film is a Film*: there are films that, either at the beginning, at the end or even throughout the whole viewing, make us aware of their being a movie. The film introduces itself as a movie, or tells the audience something that violates, or at least disturbs, the illusionist immersion into the movie's dramatic world: E.g. *Hellzapoppin'* (H.C. Potter, 1941).

Although the original rationale leading to this classification is remarkable, as I already hinted beforehand, some problems can be still pinned down. For instance, the set of categories devised by Withalm does not consider the difference between documentary and fictionalised content or, yet, the extent to which some movies tend to convey a stylistic outcome at the expense of another. I believe that such a differentiation should be taken into account in order to provide some plausible nuances existing between each category and each subgroup. Furthermore, even though the proposed categorisation includes a consistent variety of examples, this paper falls into the opposite trap of classifications that, such as Takeda's, are more bound to a semiotic epistemology.

That is to say, whereas on the one hand, Withalm refuses the constraints of an epistemological straightjacket, on the other, she completely eschews the engagement with any theoretical support while devising the parameters for her categorisation. Lastly, the risk of using criteria mainly revolving around temporal stages of production resides in the fact that different self-reflexive gestures might overlap each other in different subgroups. In fact, the constitutive elements of few subgroups might be said to overstep the boundaries of a given macro-category with the result of misleadingly falling one into another. In my opinion this aspect can generate confusion and it particularly applies to the subgroups within the categories 1) *Production: Filming the Filming* and 4) *The Product Film* for what concerns the areas of interest related to the reflexive role of the camera, the exposure of the machinery of production (or work in progress) and the materiality of aesthetics means. Despite these elements of confusion, as I already mentioned, the overall value of Withalm's classification is that of highlighting how the various phases of film production can be used as a perspective lens to outline different reflexive patterns.

From a more rigorous standpoint, Nicolas Schmidt has expressed various insights on the main reflexive procedures in the article "Les Usages du Procédé de Film dans le Film" (2007) by stating that the film within the film presents itself in different forms which can be pinned down in three main categories: *coulisses* (behind the scenes), *citation et/ou référence* (citation and/or reference) and *miroir* (mirror). In the first case (behind the scenes), the procedure of the film within the film presents itself like a machinery whose functioning mechanisms are displayed by makers and users (*fabricants et utilisateurs*), as exemplified by *La Nuit Américaine* (Truffaut, 1972). According to Schmidt, the same effect of the "behind the scenes" have produced a set of works which can be gathered under the label of "back stage movies" within American Cinema (2007: 103).

For what concerns the category of citation and/or reference, the citation would refer to an exported filmic object which is embedded within a receiving film. It entails the integration of images belonging to a film within another one with which they automatically establish a deep semantic correlation. In the case of *Vivre sa Vie* (Godard, 1962) a character watches *The Passion of Joan of Arc* (Dreyer, 1928) while the whole sequence is shot as if it were a silent film. So, the direct citation is manifested by the screening of the old film and the referential side is also reinforced by the overall filmmaking style which stylistically recalls Dreyer's work.



If the outline of the first two categories is convincing, the third, concerning the “mirror”, does not appear to be clearly specified by Schmidt. In fact, even though it would directly reflect the duplication of the film within the film, the author does not draw a distinction between the citationist and the “mirror” pattern. But he rather confuses the reader with the example of *Stardust Memories* (Allen, 1980) where the film proposes a clear reference to *8½* (Fellini, 1963). One might argue that this is more a citation of a film than a “mirror” of Fellini’s movie.

However, despite the few inaccuracies pinned down in this threefold classification, one might say that the merit of Schmidt’s article is that of reaffirming how the exposure of the reflexive status does not utterly dismantle the illusionistic character of cinema, but it rather triggers a particular observational status which does not alter the overall nature of the movie. Such an assertion is applicable to many self-reflexive moves, as they are often marginally employed within movies, but also to other self-reflexive films which tend to completely subvert the suspension of disbelief and the illusionistic effect. This is another invitation to reformulate a classification of metacinematic gestures.

Along similar lines, Jean-Marc Limoges’ article *Mise en Abyeme et réflexivité dans le Cinema Contemporain: Pour une Distinction de Termes trop souvent Confondus* (Placed into Abyss and Reflexivity in Contemporary Cinema: Towards a Distinction of too often Confused Terms) (2008) provides an interesting and exhaustive expansion of the concept of self-reflexivity. According to Limoges, even though Christian Metz, maintained that reflexivity and the “placed into abyss” can be considered, if not as synonyms, at least as largely coextensive concepts (Metz, 1991), we should instead concur with Lucien Dällenbach and Jacques Gerstenkorn who both suggests that a peculiar difference between the two notions does exist.

Before mentioning the criteria for this distinction, which is in my opinion of secondary interest, Limoges explains how he owes most of his theoretical speculation around the first concept of reflexivity to Gerstenkorn’s typology (1987) who mainly differentiates: “cinématographique reflexivity”, which, on the one hand, “makes the cinematic device sensitive” and, on the other, “exposes the whole cinematic apparatus”, and “filmic reflexivity”, which entails the game of mirrors or the kaleidoscopic effect through which a film can engage with other films (heterofilmic reflexivity) or with itself as a film (homofilmic reflexivity).

Nonetheless, Limoges believes it would be more stringent to focus on the notion of “cinématographique reflexivity” (réflexivité cinématographique) by a different

bipartite division which stresses the enunciation of the filmic apparatus in act: *affiche ou rend sensible “le” dispositif même*, (autoréflexivité), and on the enunciation within the film of a particular cinematic device included in the diegesis: *affiche ou rend sensible “un” dispositif*”, (réflexivité). For reasons of clarity, I included here below the original diagram of classification with the amendments of Gerstenkorn’s typology made by Limoges (2008: 4):

Figure 2.1

RÉFLEXIVITÉ			
RÉFLEXIVITÉ CINÉMATOGRAPHIQUE		RÉFLEXIVITÉ FILMIQUE	
AUTORÉFLEXIVITÉ Affiche ou rend sensible « le » dispositif même	RÉFLEXIVITÉ Affiche ou rend sensible « un » dispositif	RÉFLEXIVITÉ HÉTÉROFILMIQUE	RÉFLEXIVITÉ HOMOFILMIQUE
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>°Montrer ou rendre sensible la caméra même</li> <li>°Montrer ou rendre sensible le micro même</li> <li>°Montrer ou rendre sensible l’envers du décor même</li> <li>°Adresse ou regard à la caméra même</li> <li>°Apparition d’un acteur en lui-même</li> <li>°Film sur le tournage du film même</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>°Montrer ou rendre sensible une caméra</li> <li>°Montrer ou rendre sensible un micro</li> <li>°Montrer un envers de décor</li> <li>°Adresse ou regard à une caméra diégétique</li> <li>°Apparition d’un personnage jouant un acteur</li> <li>°Film sur le tournage d’un film</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>° Clin d’œil</li> <li>° Citation</li> <li>° Allusion</li> <li>° Parodie</li> <li>° Pastiche</li> <li>° Remake</li> <li>° Hommage</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>° Mise en abyme</li> </ul>

Limoges’ categorisation of cinematic reflexivity

Without going in detail with its contents, I included *Figure 2.1* mainly to highlights how Limoges’ adjustments can be misleading as different reflexive nuances are labelled with similar names: e.g. *Autoréflexivité*, *Réflexivité*, etc.

Nonetheless, that is the scheme through which Limoges tracks down at least three different senses of reflexivity: a “large sense” attached to all wide citations and allusions made by actors, props and scenographies. A “strict sense” which refers to the *particular* camera, prop or actor making reference to cinema at such. And finally the “particular sense” which is related to the intrinsic definition of *mise an abyme* (placed into abyss) that for Following Dällenbach is ‘every internal mirror which reflects the *ensemble* of the narration’ (Dällenbach, 1977: 11). What Limoges progressively proposes is a combination of different *mises en abyme* corresponding to each respective “sense” among the “large, strict and particular”. But I will not expand on these ideas for it might appear redundant in respect of what has been already discussed.

Instead, I would like to clarify that the expression of *mise en abyme*, as popularised by Dällenbach (1989), stems from André Gide's idea of fragments of little mirrors, being visible within paintings, novels and plays, which reflect on the characters and on the status of the work itself. Here the word "mirrors" can refer both to the real objects reflecting the images represented in the work, as in *Las Meninas*, or, more extensively, to a set of expedients that bend back on the reflexive status of the artistic medium. Then, Dällenbach asserted that three types of *mises en abyme* can be outlined, while still referring to the concept as a whole.

The *mise en abyme* can be: "simple" when the embedded fragment relates to another work which includes a circumscribed connection of similarity. It will be "infinite", when the embedded fragment relates to an interplay with another work with which it establishes an endless relationship of similarity like an infinite mirror game. Finally, it will be "aporetic" when the embedded fragment precisely includes the work-in-progress of the film in which it is inserted. Last point particularly refers to those moments when the specific film refers to its own process of production through linguistic patterns, visual expedients, direct or indirect allusions and through the general exposure of the production process displayed through the actions of the members of the crew, the actors and the director himself.

The fundamental value of Limoges's analysis and classification lies in the attempt to distinguish various facets of reflexivity and *mises en abyme* (placed into abyss). Yet, the proposed typology of reflexive gestures is quite specific but still unhampered from a coercive semiotic jargon.

Nonetheless, I would like to restate how the use of similar labels to outline different categories such as "réflexivité" and "autoréflexivité" might bewilder whoever approaches the argument through Limoges' article. On the contrary, naming categories with distinct titles would possibly benefit the intelligibility of a particular typology, but foremost its enduring memorisation.

But it is crucial to stress how Limoges' work and the attendant critical insights he refers to have been absorbed by subsequent authors. Given that, it is possible to acknowledge the existence of a theoretical genealogy which has treated the subject of reflexivity and cinema along similar lines, starting from Cohen-Seat, and Christian Metz passing through the analyses of Dällenbach, Gerstenkorn, Takeda, Limoges and Canet.

It can be argued that all these critics have started devising their own classifications from the already mentioned distinction between filmic fact and cinematic fact. To sum it

up, the filmic fact has to be intended as the filmic depiction of life experienced in the real world, of its spirit and imagination of both beings and things through visual images (natural or conventional) and auditive images (auditory or verbal). While the cinematic fact would be more related to the documents, ideal sensations or materials supplied by real life and put into shape by the film through its linguistic means of expression (Cohen-Séat, 1946: 54).

The important clarification operated by Metz on such a distinction rests on the idea that ‘film is only a small part of the cinema, for the latter represents a vast ensemble of phenomena some of which intervene before the film’ (Metz, 1974: 12). So, this aspect is crucial when we consider how some particular reflexive patterns are related to the linguistic specificity of the sole filmic fact, while the technical solutions are reflected by the filmic fact, but go also beyond it, towards the cinematic elements that influence the movie before, during and after the actual making. Finally, we might also be able to outline how the organisational implications entirely belong to the broader cinematic fact. Indeed, they do refer to the complex web of relationship between professional collaborators, screenwriters, members of the film crew, producers and audience.

However, I will now discuss a more recent metacinematic typology proposed in the article “Metacinema as Cinematic Practice: A Proposal for a Classification” (Canet, 2014), where the author’s purpose is directed to explore how filmmakers reflect about filmmaking in their works. In order to achieve such an intent, Canet has drawn on the aforesaid distinction provided by Gerstenkorn and reaffirmed by Limoges between “cinematic reflexivity” and “filmic reflexivity”.

In that, ‘the first kind focuses on the processes and mechanisms of film creation and reception, the second turns its attention towards film history’ (Canet, 2014: 18). In this sense, we can understand how the cinematic fact is aligned with a particular mode of reflexivity which dwells on the inspiring documents, ideal sensations or materials that have led towards the production of a particular movie. Instead, the filmic fact is attuned to a kind of reflexivity which is more internal to cinema, as an enclosed medium which follows its specific linguistic rules, and that rather refers to how a given movie is bound to others by intertextual links.

Furthermore, Canet distinguishes a subdivision within the category related to “cinematic reflexivity”. The first one concerns the solutions oriented towards the display of “the process of film creation” and the other focuses on “the practice of the film itself” (Canet, 2014: 21). In my opinion such criteria of subdivision should have been more

refined. According to Canet, the first kind would be exemplified by a film like *Adaptation* (Jones, 2002), based on the tricky creation of a screenplay by the writer Charlie Kaufman based on the imaginary novel *The Orchid Thief*.

In this movie, we observe the different plots imagined by Kaufman during the writing process gradually invading his reality to such an extent that the main character turns out to be entrapped in a nearly schizophrenic atmosphere. As a matter of fact, the ambiguous reality surrounding Charlie Kaufman, interpreted by a particularly inspired Nicholas Cage, engenders a psychogenic atmosphere in which the main character turns out to be unable to draw a line between the real world and that created by his mind.

The second subdivision is more attuned to the *mise en abyme* effect and would be exemplified by *8½* by Federico Fellini (1963). Thus, it is not a film about other films, or, only a film about a director working on a film project but, as stated by Metz (1978), a film about a director who projects himself, his inner drives, fears and desires, into the conception phase of his own work. In this sense, Canet does not really provide a neat and clear distinction about this subdivision within the category of “cinematic reflexivity”, for both *8½* and *Adaptation* might be deemed to reflect a similar conceptual matrix actualised with different visual solutions.

In fact, we cannot distinguish where *Adaptation* would display “the process of film creation” or where *8½* would show “the practice of the film itself” for both attributions might be applicable to these movies. Moreover, even though, for Canet, and as maintained by Gerstenkorn, the “practice of the film itself” would recall Metz’s idea of *mise en abyme* (placed into abyss), there is no plausible reason to assert that *8½* operates this mirror game more than *Adaptation* or vice versa.

For what concerns Canet’s reading of “filmic reflexivity”, we are dealing with a category where the interest is not directed towards the process of construction of a film but rather on the game of mirrors that a film establishes with another. In fact, he clarifies how this category recalls the application of the semiotic concept of intertextuality as coined by Julia Kristeva (1978) and further articulated by Gerard Genette (1997). It refers to the act of quoting texts, in this case filmic texts, with the result of creating a chain of referentiality within different films. In this category, the metacinematic act would be rendered by revealing the discursive elements of the referent being it the object of both an allusion and an appropriation. According to Canet, a “restaged allusion” would refer to the restaging of the filmic past into the diegetic present (2014: 21) as represented by the famous sequence of the Odessa’s steps of *Battleship Potemkin* (Eisenstein, 1925). Or,

also in the way the same sequence has been partially vampirised by movies such as *Brazil* (Gilliam, 1985), *The Untouchables* (De Palma, 1987) and, I would add, *Il Secondo Tragico Fantozzi* (Salce, 1976)

The practice of the allusion would thus be much more present in mainstream cinema and diegetically well-justified; that is to say it must fit in the narrative economy of the film. Instead, the “appropriation” would be a more sophisticated metafilmic act where the referential aspect is not diegetically justified but simply shapes parts of the discursive and technical strategy articulated in the film as exemplified by Chris Marker’s *Le Fond de l’Air Est Rouge* (1977) and Zbigniew Rybczyński’s *Steps* (1987).

The last film is particularly interesting for it includes the famous Odessa’s steps sequence within a multilayer composition which takes advantage of a rudimentary, but effective *Chroma Key* technique. In that, *Steps* creates a filmic universe where the sequences and characters of the Odessa’s steps overlap the physical intrusion of clumsy visitors from the present. In fact, in this film a group of American visitors is invited in a high-tech studio where they are involved in a virtual reality in which, suddenly and awkwardly, they find themselves interacting with the characters of Eisenstein’s masterpiece. ‘In this way, Rybczynski connects three generations of fake reality technologies: analogic, electronic and digital. He also reminds us that it was the 1920s Soviet filmmakers who first fully realized the possibilities of montage which continue to be explored and expanded by electronic and digital media’ (Manovich, 2000: 170).

However, I believe that the category of filmic reflexivity proposed by Canet does not completely exhaust a description of the features surfaced by this kind of metacinematic gesture. It certainly dwells on the interesting distinction between cinematic and filmic fact, but it probably lacks some clarity in the way it attempts to subdivide the cinematic reflexivity type into two different subcategories which are too blurred to provide a neat orientation through different reflexive patterns. This last point is quite revelatory of how the classification of the categories attempted by most of the authors mentioned in this review lacks clarity and this claims for further investigation towards the creation of another possible typology for metacinematic gestures.

Furthermore, even though in this research there is urgency to embark on the challenge of devising a new kind of classification, I will firstly conclude this review by briefly discussing two last recent articles. These pieces of work do not particularly deal with the proposal of any kind of typology, but they rather summarise, problematise and

rearticulate the well-explored metacinematic patterns identifiable within Hollywood production.

**Figure 2.2**



*Steps* (Rybczyński, 1987)

Among the numerous epistemological approaches to self-reflexivity in Hollywood cinema, the Academic contribution provided by Fátima Chinita resides in an investigation of why metacinema, as a genre, has been generally neglected by the Academy Award (Chinita, 2014). As the Portuguese researcher points out, there is an extended variety of theoretical accounts dealing with the argument of “Hollywood on Hollywood”. But, what her standpoint promptly underlines is that there is a basic difference of approaches between Hollywood and European cinema with regards to self-reflexivity in films. For instance paraphrasing Christopher Ames words, Chinita agrees that Hollywood has always perceived the exposure of the ideological contradictions of American cinema in a problematic way (Ames, 1997), while in Europe, since the birth of French Nouvelle Vague, self-reflexivity has been overtly treated as a particular style of filmmaking directed towards the provocative and, sometimes, parodistic exposure of its own mechanisms of production.

In this sense, Chinita highlights the peculiar discrepancy between American and European reception of metafilms stating that when we deal with Hollywood ‘one way to

preserve the *status quo* is to not expose the tricks of the trade' (Chinita, 2014: 4). She brings forth the example of *Sunset Boulevard* (Wilder, 1950), as significantly being overlooked by the Academy Award because it was nominated for eleven Oscars but managed to win only three among which Best Screenplay Written for the Screen. Here, the perfidious irony of the Academy probably aimed at punishing the director Billy Wilder for his depiction of a Hollywood screenwriter portrayed like a figure isolated by the ruthless, exploitative dynamics of the Studio System.

In fact, it can be argued that this was the actual way the industry treated this category of workers. Many authors have discussed how the Academy have perceived self-reflexive patterns as disruptive in the way they reveal an exploitative attitude towards their workers. Also, the Academic debate has often drawn attention to the fact that the stylistic trend of Hollywood on Hollywood has been broadly treated as a distinctive genre (Behlmer and Thomas, 1975; Bidaud, 1984; Elsaesser, 1993; Soroka, 1983).

Nonetheless, Chinita stresses that, if we take into consideration metacinema as a genre, or even as a particular discursive approach of filmmaking, we should also admit that 'an anthology of (meta) cinematic allegories is yet to be made' (Chinita, 2014: 6). So, this statement proves that there is still some room for creative, analytical and theoretical speculation in relationship to the sketch of possible grids of intelligibility for metacinematic gestures.

However, what Chinita has conversely developed in another piece of work, "Meta-cinematic Cultism: Between High and Low Culture", is not the sketch for a classification of metacinematic moves, but rather an attempt to understand the main kinds of metacinematic receptions, that is to say an analysis of how different kinds of spectators perceive and elaborate metacinematic contents (Chinita, 2016). She interestingly addresses a significative division between "cinephiles" who are a niche who basically manifest adoration towards filmic masters and the "fans", as consumers keen on certain filmic universes and their respective figures and motives (Chinita, 2016: 28). According to Chinita, the former category would be representative of a "high culture" within the large spectrum of cinematic audience, while the latter would be more revelatory of a "low culture", as reflecting a less rigorously prepared type of spectator.

So, whereas the category of cinephiles refers to those viewers obsessed by the impulse of watching as many films as possible, as immersed in a sort of accumulative process, the clan of fans would be more prone to watch repetitively the same film, or the same kind of films following a *ratio* of genre, style or author. Firstly, it might be argued



that the way Chinita approaches these categories appears to flag up two particular kinds of compulsive reception and consumption of movies, even though this aspect lies as an unexplored subtext of the article.

Besides that, the most thought-provocative passage of this work, draws on the fact that it is customary for many directors to dedicate at least one film in their whole career on metacinematic issues (Sojcher, 2007). Indeed, this aspect would signal that a consistent number of authors have experienced the impulse to treat self-reflexivity and, thus, it bears witness of the existence of various types of metacinematic moves.

In parallel, Chinita points out, rephrasing Yannick Mouren's concept (2009) which recalls Pasolini's idea of "cinema of poetry", that the poetic art, stemming from the Latin expression *ars poetica*, refers to a filmic subgenre that reveals the working methods, the aesthetics and ethics of a certain director who is straightforwardly present in the work, either in person or in the guise of a fictional alter ego (Chinita, 2016: 29). Then, Chinita adds that the directors who produced poetic art, before becoming directors had already manifested their passion towards cinema as spectators, or cinephiles. In that, one of the main arguments sustained by Chinita revolves around the recognition of how their past of critics or experts of cinema made these directors more sensible and prone to explore the argument on metacinema after their transition to practitioners.

But what is even more crucial is that albeit this article cannot be said to explore any particular typology of metacinematic moves, in a clear passage it underscores that 'There is not necessarily a single way for films to be "about" the cinema in general' (Chinita, 2016: 28). This last passage, with which I conclude this wide-ranging review, certainly represents the ultimate incentive to dedicate a section of this investigation to the sketch of a further classification of metacinematic gestures.

However, I would like to stress how this literature review's purpose was directed to achieve a thorough understanding of how the argument of metacinema originated and through which theoretical perspectives has been developed within the Academic debate. In fact, different insightful standpoints have been presented and critically evaluated on the score of the analysis of their points of strength and their epistemological insufficiencies. In general, we have acknowledged how there is a main French tradition that have departed from Metz distinction of filmic fact and cinematic fact, yet followed by another which has adopted a semiotic lens and that culminated with Takeda's analysis.

Then, there are other scholars, such as Withalm, that privileged a typological rationale which rather takes into account the different phases of film production or, like

Chinita, who shifts the focus on the reception of Hollywood metafilms and on the difference between high and low-culture audiences. It can be argued that all these standpoints provide a valuable contribution to the multi-coloured jigsaw of the metacinematic debate, but it can also be asserted that further implications of reflexive approaches to filmmaking are yet to be explored and can still be refined despite all these attempts of classifications.

So, after a review of the main theoretical accounts, typologies and classifications made around metacinema, I will attempt to define my idea of metacinematic gesture which stems from Walter Benjamin and Giorgio Agamben's theorisation of gesture. So, the next chapter will be dedicated to the aim of better clarifying theoretically the object of the enquiry, in order to have a broad orientation over the particular cinematic segments I am interested in. In particular my reorientation of the concept of gesture will be connected towards cinematic reflexivity by taking into account the issues around authorial intentionality and around the teleological elements present in different degrees and forms within these reflexive segments.

The reason why I decided to dive into these theoretical points is that, in my opinion, they have been mostly overlooked by the relevant literature which have been thoroughly scrutinised in this chapter. Therefore, the very objective of the next section is to sketch this definition and to provide a theoretical contribution or a new conceptual path, conscious of the grounds of the Academic debate on cinematic reflexivity which have been scrutinised so far.

### 3.0. The Notion of Metacinematic Gesture

In this chapter, I am going to clarify what a gesture is and what lies beneath its fundamental intersection with the exhibition of mediality as discussed by the philosophy of Giorgio Agamben. I would like to start this theoretical reflection by introducing which philosophical underpinnings I relate to gesture in order to facilitate a thorough understanding of what I would like to emphasise about Agamben's conceptualisation, and what, conversely, I would like to refine and intersect with my original contribution. Thus, what I outline as metacinematic gesture is *a film segment which exhibits the mediality of cinema and opens up a discourse on its technical, linguistic and organisational patterns*. It can be argued that such a definition might sound either obscure or excessively simplistic, but I would like to stress that it implicitly contains some interrogations related to the issue of authorial intentionality; for instance, in the way a metacinematic gesture intrinsically addresses various implications related to intentional and teleological elements within the process of film production.

As we have seen in the previous chapter, the issues related to the role of authorial intentionality has been almost utterly disregarded by the Academic literature which focused around metacinema and film reflexivity. On the contrary I believe that the aspects related to the authorial intentions, the *telos*, or the final purpose towards which cinematic products are directed, have to be considered critically to better understand cinema as an artistic and working process. But, for the moment, it is advisable to bear in mind the aforementioned definition of metacinematic gesture and its intrinsic implications while they will be all smoothly deployed in the following sections.

Firstly, for what concerns the interplay of metacinema and the idea of gesture, the urgency is to clarify a few conceptual points in order to construct a sound basis to our discourse along with the possible inclusion of other considerations about the physical, ethical and political substance of the metacinematic gesture. In the central part of the *State of Exception* (Agamben, 2005), with regards to the critique of violence, Agamben focuses on Walter Benjamin's attempt to disconnect human action from the means-ends dialectics in order to postulate the existence of a pure action, which has its own end in itself (Benjamin, 1968b). But where Benjamin has more extensively discussed the notion of gesture (*gestus*) is within his essay on Brecht's Epic Theatre. Benjamin underlines that a

property of gestures is that of being frame-like, as interrupting actions that break the illusionistic flow of mimetic naturalism performed by traditional drama. What makes this gestural theatre reflexive is precisely the emergence of a dialectics to which all the others are subordinated: namely that between recognition and education. Or better, the interrupting actions Benjamin framed as gestures in Brecht's epic theatre acquire a didactic function, precisely on account of their identifiability within the flow of the drama. Therefore, what Benjamin suggests, and can be applied also to metacinematic gestures, is that the recognition of these interrupting actions or gestures with a definable beginning and a definable end, is already educational, didactic and, from my point of view they exquisitely spawn from the unveiling of the hidden process of production in theatre and cinema. This constructive mechanism enables epic theatre, but also cinema, to treat elements of reality as they 'were setting up an experiment' (Benjamin 2003: 4).

It is precisely the indicated experimental feature of *gestus* that I want to explore through this investigation. Following the words of the German philosopher: 'The gesture demonstrates the social significance and applicability of dialectics. It tests relations on men. The production difficulties which the producer meets while rehearsing the play cannot - even if they originate in the search for "effect" - be separated any longer from concrete insights into the life of society' (Benjamin, 2003: 24, 25). So, in this sense a metacinematic gesture is certainly a film segment which breaks the continuity of illusion established by the narratologic and linguistic instruments employed by illusionistic cinema. In that, gestures as interrupting actions represent a stratagem apt to arrest the suspension of disbelief and open up a reflexive scenario which make cinema critically bend on itself. It is proposed that in those particular moments in which metacinematic gestures arise we are finally allowed to see how the complex network of intersubjective interactions crucially contribute to shape an otherwise invisible mechanics of production. Thus, the paradigm of this interrupting action would be the pure gesture that, also for Agamben, can be retraced in the performative arts.

Gesture is an 'an optic that Agamben uses to view cinema not as a series of moving images but as a mode of communication and historical transmission. Yet if gesture is the site of a potential within cinema to operate historically, it is also the locus of a biopolitical investiture in the human body that takes place towards the end of the nineteenth century' (Harbord, 2016: 14). Agamben constructs a history of the gesture departing from the medical imaging techniques of Etienne Jules Marey, passing through the photographs of Muybridge, the studies of neuropsychiatric disorders conducted by Gilles de la Tourette.

All these interdisciplinary contributions would seal the zeitgeist of a biopolitical catastrophe of gestures.

To schematise its complex trajectory: gesture is expropriated by biopower; the former then becomes the focus of an aesthetic attempt to reclaim it; ultimately, in this attempted reclamation, gesture provides an opening to the future, to the coming community as the fulfilment of a non-statist, non-teleological, non-identitarian politics, that is of politics as a pure mediality, means without end (Levitt, 2008: 194).

In that, the historical genealogy traced by Agamben observes the simultaneous birth of cinema after the invention of Lumière brothers as the desperate attempt of the modern Western bourgeoisie to recapture its gestures at the moment of their dissolution and loss (Clemens, 2008).

Furthermore, in his punctual correlation with the cinematic substance of gesture, Agamben (2000) provides an insightful reading by interlacing it with Gilles Deleuze's proposition of the idea of cinematic image-movement. The following insights have been drawn from the paragraph: *The element of cinema is gesture and not image*, in the context of a set of reflections included in the chapter *Notes on gesture* within the philosophical compendium *Means without end, Notes on Politics*. There is a crucial passage in the folds of the discourse where Agamben paraphrases Deleuze (*Cinema 1: The Image Movement*, 1986) overriding the deceptive psychological distinction between image as psychic reality and movement as physical reality. In that, cinematic images result to manifest themselves in the guise of *coupes mobiles* (mobile sections), which recall at different moments both the psychological and perceptive effect of their ghostly materialization as images and their dynamic tangibility as virtual gestures which exert a pressure towards their own actualisation.

It is necessary to extend Deleuze's argument and show how it relates to the status of the image in general within modernity.

This implies, however, that the mythical rigidity of the image has been broken and that here, properly speaking, there are no images but only gestures. Every image, in fact, is animated by an antinomic polarity: on the one hand, images are the reification and obliteration of a gesture (it is the *imago* as death mask or as symbol); on the other hand, they preserve the *dynamics* intact. [...] And while the former lives in magical isolation, the latter always refers beyond itself to a whole of which it is a part. Even the *Mona Lisa*, even *Las Meninas* could be seen not as immovable and eternal forms, but as fragments of a gesture or as stills of a lost film wherein only they would regain their true meaning. And that is so because a certain kind of *litigatio*, a paralyzing power whose spell we need to break, is continuously at work in every image; it is as if a silent invocation calling for the liberation of the image into gesture arose from the entire history of art (Agamben, 2000: 54, 55).

If the reification of a cinematic gesture into the illusory and artificial flatness of the image, or assembled *death masks* of images, would functionally activate the suspension of disbelief (towards what I would relate to illusionistic cinema), conversely, the dynamic, nearly physical, nature of a cinematic gesture might be deemed to refer ‘beyond itself to a whole of which it is a part’. Namely, a cinematic image that displays the metonymy or, in other words, that conveys a part the stands for the whole metacinematic apparatus.

Therefore, I believe that such a spontaneous self-exposure of gesture would echo a function more attuned to self-reflexive and anti-illusionistic cinema, as an “invocation calling for the liberation of the image into gesture”, as a valuable claim for a discourse on cinema or metacinema. My argument, thus, revolves around the fact that the exposure of metacinematic gestures provides an attempt to give breath to this virtual dynamicity and materiality of the cinematic image while images are usually captured into the complex artificial construction of illusionistic cinematic language. Therefore, the idea is that the cinematic gesture is usually embedded in the linguistic patterns suggested by the dominant audio-visual practices of cinematic language and that these rules are subservient to the aim of rendering an illusion of reality. On the contrary, a proper metacinematic gesture, caught in his moment of rupturing dynamic suspension of not yet actualised virtual materiality, would certainly play against the illusionistic functions of the cinematic apparatus. Along these lines, it might be said that a gesture is always a materialisation of its own suspended contingency, without neither any externality nor any direct objective.

So I agree with Levitt when she argues that ‘Agamben submits Deleuze’s vitalist cinematic image to a critical genealogy of life as the joint production of modern biopolitics and new media technologies’ (Levitt, 2008: 193). And this point is key for it stresses that the birth of cinema is an attempt to retrace gestures in the very aftermath of their subjugation to biopolitics, but it also highlights that cinema is gestural by nature and that it clearly and fully expresses this ontological property only in those films that we can label as metacinematic.

### 3.1. Rethinking Gestures and Teloi

As mentioned elsewhere, the evolution of the nature of the gestural is generally obliterated and occluded, functioning as only a means to an end, whether entertainment or pedagogy (Noys, 2014: 92). Thus, it is not surprising, if Agamben is particularly prone to argue that cinema generates dislocated, erratic and therefore, less visible gestures which are commonly stabilised in a kind of hypertrophy of constructed gestures, as it typically happens when images are put in motion within action movies. In this case gestures are truly “means to an end” more than ever (Anderson, 2008).

Despite this generally acknowledged foreclosure of the gestural side of the image in the context of a cinematic practice oriented towards objectives, an intriguing critical interpretation of Agamben provided by René Ten Bos highlights that a politics of gesture could be only read as an activity liberated by any teleological straightjacket (Ten Bos, 2005). Or, in other words, the gesture would represent “a means without an end”, a linguistic segment devoid of any final objective (*telos*), namely, it does not present any goal and, thus, it can be seen as pure communication. So, the crux of the problem passes through the following assumption: ‘The gesture interrupts language precisely at the moment when it is actualising itself [...] it shows language as pure communicability’ (Ten Bos, 2005: 40). Gestures, therefore, do not have any *telos* but they rather open up a realm of pure communicability which should not be a sole prerogative of human beings either. Namely, gestures would allow communication of and with non-human and less-human forms exactly for the sake of their linguistically unshaped status. In other words, we are not yet in a linguistically codified domain, but rather in a paralinguistic realm (Ten Bos, 2011) where, once more, gestures would exhibit the vehemence of their dynamicity and materiality.

In that, Agamben certainly attaches an ethical side to the aesthetic one when he reflects on the importance of failed acts of communication such as echolalia, stuttering, and spastic behaviour, symptoms of Tourette’s syndrome and animal sounds as eminently representative of the gestural nature. Indeed, with this emphasis he does want to exalt the profound ethical impact of those acts in which ‘communicative success cannot be guaranteed beforehand’ (Ten Bos, 2005).

But this last point might appear as a double edge sword. In fact, as Ten Bos points out, one of the problems is that the gesture is more like a substitute of spoken language

and that it is also difficult to rectify. It also eschews precise definition for its nature is ambivalent and somewhat nebular (Ibid.). The gesture is a quick and non-reflective act which lays claim to be different from language or metalanguage (Ten Bos, 2011). Yet, the more the gesture is self-reflexive, the more it slips away from itself. So, in this sense a gestural act would not supposedly be liable for a thorough analysis. If we stay with Ten Bos, who radicalises gesture's pure moral significance as a spontaneous bodily movement, as it can be retraced in the dance for instance (Ten Bos, 2005), the gesture would not solely refrain itself from manifesting any specific goal, but it would also flee a detailed understanding from a linguistic standpoint.

But, even though Ten Bos' arguments seem to reflect Agamben's struggle to establish a new direction for political theory and ethics, he also clarifies how his development of the idea of gesture goes more in the direction of situating it between the boundaries of a moral reflection rather than entering an aesthetic domain. So, I argue that these arguments might also be problematised with regards to our discourse on metacinema, particularly for what concerns all the set of filmmaking practices that reflexively investigate the cinematic language while attempting to give voice to the pure communicability of cinema at such. But I have to clarify that, even though one might agree with the strong ethical accent attached to the idea of gesture, it is also complicated to transpose the whole theoretical construct built up by Agamben and developed further by Ten Bos into my argumentation.

In fact, the practical and theoretical problem of the present investigation is related to the scarce possibility of underpinning cinematic gestures as utterly devoid of any final objective and that, therefore, would be deprived of any involvement of a political and ethical substance.

Yet, the impossibility to locate a pure gesturality within my idea of metacinematic gesture does not completely eschew any political or ethical implications either. In that, I would rather stress how metacinematic gestures attempt to give breath to the gestural as partially intended by Agamben and Ten Bos. That is to say, precisely at the moment where the gesture unleashes the unexpressed and straightjacketed potentiality of the cinematic medium by pointing out how cinema ontologically contains the thrust to emerge as pure language. In point of fact, this would not necessarily prevent metacinematic gestures from conveying political and ethical contents, on the contrary, but it is the fact that these aspects can only be contained within gestural acts devoid of any end or any linguistic and metalinguistic construct, as the constitutive assumption of Agamben's idea of gesture,



that does not convince me in its radicality. I would like to reflect for a moment on the idea of gesture as a means, to which idea Agamben would add “without an end”. What I would give relevance to in this sentence is the potentiality of gestures of emphasising the mediality of cinema and, only secondarily and through a different perspective, their potentiality to include a discourse about their teleological side.

So, even though I would not completely adopt Agamben’s ideas when he radicalises his thoughts around the relationship between gesture, ethics and politics, I am conversely tempted to embrace the discourse on the exaltation of mediality as pure communicability, which is stressed likewise by Ten Bos.

In this sense, Agamben squares the circle around the complex issue of what a gesture is with the intention of sketching a definition that might connect this notion with those of metacinema and self-reflexivity: ‘*The gesture is the exhibition of a mediality: it is the process of making a means visible as such.* It allows the emergence of the being-in-a-medium of human beings and thus it opens the ethical dimension for them’ (Agamben, 2000: 57).

According to Agamben such an exhibition of mediality is attuned with Guy Debord’s work which displays, in *The Society of Spectacle* (1973), an unorthodox, Marxist, cinematic experiment uncovering our “being-in-language” or “pure gesturality” by compelling us to reflect on those particular moments when we are exposed to the mediatic bombing of diverse images such as those of police repression, war, devastation, eroticism, politics, violence and toil. The cinematic pure gesturality of this isolated experiment is reflected by the apparently flat juxtaposition of such *pastiche* of images that in reality reveals our condition of commodified spectators who passively undergo these visual solicitations produced and diffused in order to justify the relations of production in effect within our societies. Ten Bos has also pointed out that Debord’s work stresses how the society of spectacle transforms us in ‘solitary atoms who are merely capable of absorbing images like commodities’ (Ten Bos: 37) and therefore employs a language unable to create a communal sense. In that, the society of spectacle would be more specialised in promoting segregation and social atomisation. Furthermore, Ten Bos refines via Agamben the poignancy of Debord’s discourse in standing against the domain of spectacle as an extreme form of biopolitical expropriation of the communal form. In fact, the Roman philosopher had extensively treated those spectacular forms through which language encounters the audience in an exploitative way (Agamben, 2001).

Figure 3.1



*The Society of Spectacle* (Debord, 1973)

Figure 3.2



*Histoire (s) du Cinéma* (Godard, 1988)

Such an idea is also consistent with Jean Luc Godard's project of *Histoire(s) du Cinéma* (1988), the colossal pseudo-historiographical itinerary over the evolution of cinema realised by means of the constant transfiguration of images operated through sophisticated processes of montage. What Agamben highlights is 'Godard's powerful manipulation of montage as a form of thought, where the French director is fully aware that there must also always be a margin for beauty, error and mystery, or the unexplainable and unknowable' (Williams, 2016: 45). A form of thought which expresses an exceeding aesthetic and political value.

As it has been pointed out elsewhere, 'for Debord and Agamben language is essential to both the function of totalising forms of power and their undermining from within' (Murray: 2008: 174). Through this lens, the political value of Debordian work is directed to emancipate the society from the biopolitical control by means of a self-reflexive act. But, even though Agamben exalts Debord and Godard's work at the moment where the gesture seems to release the aesthetic and political potentiality of the cinematic medium by pointing out how cinema ontologically contains the thrust to emerge as pure language, I am tempted to argue that in these works there have to be some signs of authorial intentions expressed through some linguistic and meta-linguistic expedients.

That is the reason why, a crucial part of my investigation focuses on the relocation of the role of authorial subjectivity in relationship with the exhibition of a purely material mediality. But, such operationalisation would naturally include a rethinking of the intertwining between the idea of lack of *telos* and gesture.

### 3.2. The Contingent Author

At first, I concur with Agamben when he hypothesises that: 'Gesture is the basic expressive element of cinema' and that one 'could say that the moving image is gestural by nature. It takes not immovable and rigid forms but material, bodily dynamisms as its subjects' (Väliaho, 2010: 17). That is the reason why a pure gesture flees any form of subjectivation, but it rather elevates the materiality of the image, being caught in its deep dynamicity. Here lies the mystery of its undecidability and the core of its lack of any end. But I argue that when the gesture is allowed to appear in a cinematic form in the guise of such an erratic or undecidable nature which flees exact interpretation, it also works against the apparatus which generates specific identities.

That is why I am prompted to agree with the idea that a gesture neither reflects nor speak about the subject but it rather demonstrates its elusive contingency. A gesture is the empty space of identity, a space that cannot be inhabited as a permanent or fully-knowable phenomenon (Harbord, 2015). Again, following Agamben: 'If we call "gesture" what remains unexpressed in each expressive act, we can say that the author is present in the text only as a gesture that makes expression possible precisely by establishing a central emptiness within this expression' (Agamben, 2007: 66). Even Foucault, among the others, arguments around a possible dethronement of the historicised figure of the author by arguing that 'the mark of the writer is reduced to nothing more than the singularity of his absence' and that 'we must locate the space left empty by the author's disappearance, follow the distribution of gaps and breaches and watch for the openings this disappearance uncovers' (Foucault, 1998: 207, 209). Then, one might argue that in those peculiar cases we would deal with an emptiness which bears witness of the presence of the author *in absentia*, or that we are talking about gestures which shape authors, rather than vice versa. Nonetheless, within such theoretical speculation the author should be irrevocably relegated to a minor role on account of the emergence of the linguistically unshaped nature of gesture, as its only possible ontological assumption.

In point of fact, the missing presence of the subject in the process of materialisation of the gesture would exactly represent the possibility for the author to present himself as an ethical subject. According to Agamben the emergence of the ethical subject derives from the ongoing and past historical confrontation through which the

authorial subject has attempted to actively resist to be reduced to the various apparatuses which historically emerged as the result of constructed medial languages. In my opinion, this would represent the very subversive aspect ingrained within metacinematic gestures. Namely, the way authors emerge by giving voice to the unsubjectivised mediality of cinema in all its dynamism and materiality. This last point would already allow an expansion of Agamben and Ten Bos's idea of gesture as a categorically non-reflective act which is different from language or metalanguage.

Agamben also argues that 'a subjectivity is produced where the living being, encountering language and putting itself into play in language without reserve, exhibits in a gesture the impossibility of its being reduced to this gesture. All the rest is psychology, and nowhere in psychology do we encounter anything like an ethical subject, a form of life' (Agamben 2007, 44).

But this passage entails that the author, as an ethical subject, can only be offered up and played out in the work, that is to say, his sole unexpressed intentions has to be that of exhibiting in a gesture the impossibility of being reduced to this gesture as a subject. But, this way, the risk is to propose the self-removal of authorial expression as the only possible openness towards the acknowledgement of an ethics within the gesture. Or, at least, it would only comprise a set of expressive elements as entirely subtracted from the active, influential intention of the author, if not that of exhibiting an attempt of self-exclusion which might seals the emergence of the ethical subject as a being-in-a-medium. Moreover, even if this conceptual passage represents the fundamental reason lying behind Agamben's gestural turn from aesthetics to ethics, one might say that such an aspect would be heralded at the unbearable expense of the aesthetic side.

In fact, the way Agamben maintains how gesture can open up the sphere of ethos is based on the assumption that the image revealed as gesture is much more prone to privilege an ethical discussion of the human (non-human and less-human) and that, hence, ethics is definitely distinct, and possibly, superior to the aesthetic factor on this matter (Agamben, 2000).

But my objection is do we really need to theoretically support such strategic prioritization between ethics and aesthetics? Instead, cannot those domains be productively counterbalanced within a dialogue that might favour a readable encounter between the authorial contribution, even beyond the struggle for his/her own subtraction, and the gestural, non-subjectivised, materiality and dynamicity of the image?

Thus, if we are ready to accept this, we would also be probably compelled to hypothesise the coexistence of teleological and non-teleological elements within metacinematic gestures. Therefore, in my reading I propose that the metacinematic gesture can be considered as partially reflecting Agamben's conceptualisation. Namely, even in those cases where the intention of directors is not specific we might possibly encounter a certain intentionality spawning from a more or less voluntary subtraction of the authorial or individual subjectivity from the metacinematic gesture. Plus, these signs of intentionality would also be the result of the conscious affirmation of a metacinematic content which would be certainly marked by the seal of an authorial utterance. Incidentally, such a construct can apply to both Godard and Debord's work in the sense that the various declinations of my rethinking of the idea of gesture can be apparently pinned down in these French directors' films.

In that, the breakthrough of this conceptual adaptation of the gestural to the metacinematic would hence reside in the fact that there is not a real destination for the gesture, but possibly a set of authorial directions or orientations which are influenced by many factors involved within the process of the cinematic production. Or, in other words, a metacinematic gesture might also be said to clarify a pure intention that would presume to describe a clear outcome.

Thus, in a nutshell, the veritable outcome of a metacinematic gesture would that of exhibiting the mediality of cinema regardless of an author intentionally declaring its paternity. The reason is that we would probably understand the relationship of contingency between the author and the gesture precisely at the moment in which we acknowledge how the self-reflexive segment exhibits the mediality of cinema at such. Indeed, the sole fact of recognising the presence of a particular metacinematic gesture within a film sequence would presumably prove that we are dealing with a subversion of the illusionistic cinema which has been didactically made possible by an author, whether or not he/she was attempting to conceal or point out his/her authorial or individual subjectivity behind that particular gesture. In a nutshell, an author might always be perceived behind the curtains of a metacinematic gesture as caught in a relationship of contingency rather than in one of necessity.

### **3.3. The Shady, Unpredictable Nature of Metacinematic Gestures**

In those segments where the breaking of the fourth wall arrests the suspension of disbelief and demands an educational reflection on the medial status of cinema we would acknowledge that the author is more or less consciously providing a selection of issues regarding the art of filmmaking and that this would not prevent us from judging this act as ethical on account of the interference with the pure dynamism and materiality of gesture. On the contrary, we might rather be legitimised to acknowledge the appearance of a clear ethical act expressed by a veritable ethical subject.

I want to clarify that this interpretation is far away from being an attempt to dismantle Agamben's articulation of the idea of gesture, but it rather purports to argue that the role of the authors' intentions should not be disregarded. On the contrary, an author seen in the guise of significant agent of production should be considered as an inescapable factor in constituting the way gesture, ethics and mediality are interwoven together.

In spite of that, it is crucial for this investigation to recall that, even if it is acceptable to claim that in some instances the film director is the main agent of production, there is a whole set of factors that influence his/her decisions before and during the process of production. In order to achieve such knowledge, the researcher should look for any accessible statement, declaration, interview, made by the director and other members of the film crew, to provide evidence of the particular occurrences that led him towards the final output as: the means of production, the budget, the size of the film crew, the environmental conditions and the limits set by the screenplay.

The probable consequence of approaching this information could be that of clarifying how some practical and artistic solutions might have influenced the production of the film, on the one hand, towards a thoroughgoing encounter with the original orientation of the author, or, on the other, towards a more or less significant deviation from the presupposed intentions of the whole production. Yet, the analyst should bear in mind that an investigation of this kind would not render the whole spectrum of the possible individual and collective implications that have exerted an influence on a given film sequence.

Nonetheless, drawing on the context of undecidability of these authorial intentions, directed to allow the emergence of metacinematic gestures, I am not prone to solely research how and what the author had declared or believed to address as his/her final destination for the filmic product, but rather whether a clear orientation has been outlined for each gesture along with a more or less explicit selection of what the author allowed to disclose or conceal about the art of film-making at such. I claim this just to introduce in what sense such a partial rehabilitation of *telos* gains relevance for the articulation of my idea of metacinematic gesture.

In fact, among the aspects that might be discovered and analysed as being explicitly offered by metacinematic gestures, particular relevance should also be attributed to those aspects that films did not show, that belong to the realm of the unsaid: the shaded zone or the blind spot of meta-representation. In theory, if there ever might be a *telos* for metacinematic gestures it would possibly be that of unveiling those mechanisms of production and specificities of cinematic language, techniques and organisation which are generally covered by the illusionistic veil.

Or by subtraction, the omissions would inevitably highlight all those aspects speaking about the process of filmmaking which were not supposed to be disclosed or that have been less visibly embedded within them. These metacinematic contents: overtly affirmed, implicitly present or utterly silenced can be said to be comprised within the whole array of significative elements pointed out by a given metacinematic gesture. In that the more cryptic and silenced aspects unrelated to the overt disclosure of technical, linguistic and organisational elements, would peculiarly belong to the shaded zone or the blind spot of the meta-representation.

Within such a scenario, I might add that the authorial intentions are in a relationship of contingency with the metacinematic gesture as much as the shaded zone emerging from them, but they are never in a relationship of necessity with regards to the expression of a final outcome statement or an unconditional subjective *telos* for the whole film or for cinematic art in absolute. In other words, metacinematic gestures are visible for they present a set of already codified or acknowledgeable linguistic signs that stand for self-reflexive segments at such, no matter if they are overtly declaimed, announced or destined to a particular end. On account of this, they have no end but in themselves, in the totality of shown, opaquely implicit or unsaid self-reflexive contents which belong to the contingency in which they emerge.

In that, the contingent character of the authorial intention or non-intention, as embedded within metacinematic gestures, does not include those reflexive forms which are entirely accidental. I am referring to the non-intentional gestures which are evident in some poorly produced films or can even be present in Studios productions such as editing mistakes or general accidents. This sort of occurrence might arise when a microphone boom suddenly invades the frame or when we notice that a character of a historical movie set in ancient Rome wears a watch or adorns ahistorical dress which are more attuned to contemporary fashion. Even though these utterly non-intentional segments unwillingly break the illusion of the fourth wall, we have here to distinguish between a simple non-intentionality and a more complex form of non-intentionality.

Whereas, I am strongly tempted to integrate more complex forms of non-intentionality which are somehow deliberately permitted by the author and the film crew, that is to say, those exhibitions of mediality which tends to efface the authorial subjectivity of the director or allow it to fade into the processual flow of filmmaking, influenced by many other environmental factors, subjects and unpredictable occurrences. These unpredictable occurrences, allowed through an unregulated exposure of mediality, can veritably produce some significant scenarios and attendant unexpected visual articulations, yet casually revelatory of unorthodox procedures within of the filmmaking process.

### **3.4. Authors as Gestures, Gestures as Authors**

Given that, the following passage can be agreed: ‘the encounter between Agamben and cinema solicits both a broader genealogy of what cinema has been, and of a cinema to come. Not, then, a cinema that unfolds from a beginning to an end along a *telos*, but towards an *ethos* (Gustafsson and Gronstad, 2014: 15). It is exactly around this point of disclosing unpredictable scenarios that the exhibition of mediality can open up an *ethos* oriented towards the future development for the art of filmmaking. Yet, this last point brings us towards the very crucial lynchpin of Agamben’s conceptualisation when he



argues that ‘the gesture then breaks with the false alternative between ends and means that paralyzes morality and presents instead means that, *as such*, evade the orbit of mediality without becoming, for this reason, ends’ (Agamben, 2000: 56).

Thus, I believe that this claim neither repudiates a significative acknowledgement of the contingency of authorial intentions within metacinematic gestures nor the rejection of the existence of an ethical subject within such a correlation, but on the contrary it traces a potential ethical path for cinema. In fact, I would argue that it rather activates both of them.

Furthermore, the prevalence of authorial intentionality or unintentionality within metacinematic gestures is strictly bound to the fact that, in the first case, we will be prompted to talk about authors that make gestures, in the second about gestures that make authors. Here, the latter would represent all these metacinematic gestures which are apparently influenced by a complex set of variables belonging to the various aspects of the process of production. That is to say, a metacinematic gesture could be foremost influenced by the employed means of production, the budget, the particular intervention of the director of photography, the influential behaviour of other members of the film crew, the environmental conditions or the narrative constraints of the screenplay etc.

In view of what we have discussed so far, such rethinking of the concept of gesture opens up an uninvestigated and unsuspected inclination towards metalanguage which might challenge the contribution to the work of Agamben’s critics and reviewers: ‘On the surface it may sound like nothing more than yet another reformulation of the aesthetic project of self-reflexivity. But that is not what is at stake here’ (Gustafsson and Gronstad, 2014: 7). Or as suggested by Ten Bos, namely, that the gesture is a quick and non-reflective act which lays claim to be different from language or metalanguage’ (Ten Bos, 2011).

In the light of what we have discussed so far, I will restate again the definition of metacinematic gesture, already mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, to which I surely intend to superimpose Benjamin’s idea of gestures as interrupting actions and Agamben’s articulation of gesture as an act of pure communicability. Thus, to me, a metacinematic gesture is *a film segment which exhibits the mediality of cinema and opens up a discourse on its technical, linguistic and organisational patterns*.

Undoubtedly, this idea imposes us to reflect upon the extent to which the role of the author might significantly affect the self-reflexive realm of cinematic language when interlacing with the concept of gesture. It follows that we should clarify matters of crucial

importance. What is impossible to be concealed by the author, no matter the effort she/he makes to subtract her/himself from the representation? What selection of technical, linguistic and organisational expedients he/she makes to expose the process of filmmaking? But also, and even more crucially, what is the material distinctiveness of those metacinematic gestures regardless of the focus on authorial intentionality? In that the idea of metacinematic gesture as the exhibition of cinematic mediality, as the combination of teleological and non-teleological elements which bend back cinema on itself certainly opens up a wide array of unpredictable technical, linguistic and organisational implications. *Unpredictability* is the very key word for it summarises the way these films or segments of films subvert and divert the classical narrative, linguistic, technical and organisational patterns.

In the following chapters of this investigation I will explore how the ethical choices and aesthetic practices operated by different authors emerge through metacinematic gestures and how they can be exposed, or concealed, by the tension between what is rendered visible and what is not within certain film sequences. This just shows that the dialectics of disclosure/concealment is strictly related to what has been deliberately shown, or, conversely, kept secret or enigmatic in a movie. It mostly concerns the processes of production, the exposure of the cinematic apparatus, the complex power relations between professional collaborators or even the profound sense of what cinema represents as a medium, as a dynamic and processual form embedded into the creative minds of these technicians at work.

Thus, the way all these metacinematic contents have been devised, selected and exposed, have more than something to do with the ethical choices and aesthetic practices operated by the author/director, but they are also notable remarks about the economic and practical constraints authors are subjected to. In spite of that, I believe that the intrusion of the productive and creative process into the ideally pure, dynamic and spontaneous, exhibition of mediality of the gesture does not prevent us from thoroughly dissecting the various significant and unpredictable fragments embedded within what we have sketched as metacinematic gestures. The reason is that these creative, material and economic intrusions are as contingently part of them as the film director and all the other members of the film crew. In that, the aim of this research is that of shedding light on the unpredictable implications emerging from the various and different interrelations of these productive and creative elements emerging within metacinematic gestures.

However, before going in-depth with the scrutiny of a selection of films it is urgent to present a grid of intelligibility for metacinematic gestures with the purpose of isolating the category in which the cross-section of movies to be analysed should be framed. That is the reason why I will attempt to present an original classification of six main metacinematic forms in order to highlight the category to which this investigation purports to contribute through dedicated analysis. Lastly, the overall importance of devising a typology of this kind is that of providing a contribution to the gaps left out by previous scholarly attempts to classify and categorise metacinematic moves and that of functioning as a guide through to the broad constellation of the various self-reflexive gestures appeared over the history of cinema.

#### 4.0. A Grid of Intelligibility for Metacinema

In this chapter I am going to present a flexible classification of different metacinematic gestures. Six different kinds of metacinematic styles will be sketched in order to isolate what I am proposing to dissect in this research. Namely, this grid of intelligibility might be useful to clarify what I care of about the process of filmmaking in order to narrow down a precise theoretical ground and a focus on a particular cross-section of movies that will be discussed in the following chapters. To achieve this point, I am going to define and isolate a specific metacinematic function from the others (referential, realist, surreal, experimental and the “look into the camera”) that I will label as “productionist” with the aim of employing this category to clarify and define the boundaries of a specific selection of films proposed for the analysis.

These six categories do not follow a *ratio* related to temporal or geographical conditions of production, but they are rather akin to a reflection about the different aesthetic nature of metacinematic gestures. Therefore, to sum up I outline six metacinematic categories as: *referential*, *realist*, *surrealist*, *experimental*, that of the *look into the camera* and the *productionist*. The referential attribute is related to those works which recall visual and technical solutions employed by past movies. Realist metacinema problematises the conceptual and practical implications derived from the presence (or absence) of the camera in the filmic representation. The surrealist category refers to those films whereby a sudden, unforeseen metacinematic expression emerges in a dreamlike fashion to disrupt the linear narrative flow of the story. The “look into the camera” will be labelled as a “category without boundaries” and will be located halfway between the realist and surrealist as reflecting some elements stemming from both of them. Experimental metacinema is a category that mainly summarises the work of authors which deal with structural, materialist films.

Finally, the productionist side of metacinema addresses those works focusing on the particular role of authors as the agents of production, while also taking into account how other aspects of the filmmaking, such as the means of production, the budget, the size of the film crew, the environmental conditions and the limits set by the screenplay, can determine the overall shape of a metacinematic gesture. So, productionist metafilms, expand and reflect on the processual dimension of filmmaking to the extent that the

frontstage of production might be said to coincide, or tend to coincide, with its own backstage. We will see how the tendency of productionist metacinematicity would be that of coinciding with a complex result of the various technical, linguistic and organisational implications which represents the material conditions affecting the filmmaking process. In a nutshell, we will explore how this metacinematic category intimately and complexly deals with a selective, and each time different, exposure of the processual dimension of filmmaking.

#### **4.1. Referential Metacinema**

*Referential* (or citationist) Metacinema is the category which displays the use of postmodern *pastiche*, or the blend of different aesthetic forms extracted from past works as other films and audio-visual representations. The referentiality directly draws on some examples from literature as Raymond Queneau's *Exercises in Style* (1947) or David Lodge's *The British Museum Is Falling Down* (1965). In these works the referent is precisely related to the use of a literary pattern which is *remade*, *reemployed* or *rearticulated* in other forms.

Therefore, the idea of referential metacinema describes the presence in some works of blatant excerpts of other movies which creates an intertextual chain of cinematic referents. In this regard, it has been pointed out that 'likewise, there are movies that introduce elements belonging to preceding cinematographical texts (meaning as a text any expression with communicative purpose), which are defined as "transtextual films" (Díaz 2014: 114). This concept directly stems from the idea formulated by the structuralist semiologist Jean Genette: 'Today, I prefer to say more sweepingly, that the subject of poetics is *transtextuality* or the textual transcendence of the text, which I have already defined roughly as "all that sets the text in a relationship, whether obvious or concealed with other texts"' (Genette, 1997: 1).

Although this is not the appropriate context whereby the different articulations of transtextuality analysed by the French theorist should be mentioned, it must be added that Genette has drawn one of them from the rereading of Julia Kristeva's semiotic concept of intertextuality (1978). In turn, the term intertextuality, the first kind of transtextual declinations for Genette, takes inspiration from the concept of "dialogic" from Mikhail Bakhtin which refers to the mutual presence, within a literary work, of two texts which simultaneously dialogue with each other (Stam, 1992). Yet, Genette's concept of metatextuality, namely the critical relationship established between two different texts, perfectly applies to our definition of referential metafilms. Nonetheless, if the nuances between metatextuality and intertextuality are somehow troublesome to be defined, the latter has been further clarified by the postmodern theorist Frederic Jameson who, more recently, brought the concept to novel attention:

The word remake is, however, anachronistic to the degree to which our awareness of the preexistence of other versions (previous films of the novel as well as the novel itself) is now a constitutive and essential part of the film's structure: we are now, in other words, in "intertextuality" as a deliberate, built-in feature of the aesthetic effect and as the operator of a new connotation of "pastness" and pseudohistorical depth, in which the history of aesthetic styles displaces "real" history (Jameson, 1991: 20).

Along the lines suggested by Jameson, I believe that what it has been defined here as referential metacinema might be correlated to the reconceptualization of history as performed by popular culture being it the result of the reuse of previous aesthetic styles replacing the real history. In that sense the remake or reemployment of old patterns truly contributes to the formation of a cinematic history which attempts to break the connections with the real historical chain of events. So, the historical reinterpretation here necessarily passes through the past aesthetic styles and the way they have been resemantised within entirely new forms.

Having assumed this, referential metacinema can be associated with filmmakers such as Quentin Tarantino: *Reservoir Dogs* (1992), *Pulp Fiction* (1994), *Kill Bill vol.1* (2003) and *vol.2* (2004), *Inglorious Basterds* (2009), *Django Unchained* (2012), and Baz Luhrmann: *William Shakespeare's Romeo + Juliet* (1996), *Moulin Rouge!* (2001). Moreover, I can mention other films such as Rob Marshall's *Chicago* (2002) Martin Scorsese's *Hugo Cabret* (2011), but also the "auto-referential" Takeshi Kitano's

*Takeshi's* (2005) and *Glory to the Filmmaker* (2007) can also be representative of this category. For instance, Tarantino's filmography is highly relevant for its constant reference to Italian *B-movies*, Spaghetti Westerns, and Japanese cinema (Speck, 2014; Von Dassanowsky, 2012).

His work is so dense of old iconographic forms extracted from previous films and incorporated in new unprecedented assemblages that Tarantino's movies create from scratch original stylistic threads. 'In this new aesthetic sensibility, cinema is ultimately a cinema of style and an aestheticization of prior cinematic representations. [...] Tarantino's cinema means only through cinematic *topoi* and that is the reason why his films require an awareness of their intertextual [but more crucially, *metacinematic*] strategies to appreciate their aesthetic possibilities' (Isaacs, 2008: 159, 160, 181). Similarly, Scorsese's *Hugo Cabret* presents explicit recalls to George Méliès and Harold Lloyd's cinema up to the famous citation of *The Arrival of the Train at La Ciotat*. Referential metacinema is, therefore, a cinema which constantly quotes, self-cites and cannibalizes sequences of other movies.

The citationist side of this category might also be epitomised by the voluntary use of aesthetic and visual solutions proposed by other directors in previous films. The case of Scorsese's *Mean Street* (1993) is relevant for the American director explicitly makes use of Pasolini's characteristic point of view in *Accattone* (1961) and *Mamma Roma* (1962). In point of fact, Scorsese has often deliberately acknowledged the importance of Pasolini's cinema in the proposal of a theretofore unexpressed original observation of a particular cross-section of social subjects: the focus on urban sub-proletariat that was, perhaps, anticipated only by Italian Neorealism.

Scorsese acknowledged that the significantly empathic tone of Pasolini's sequences could resonate as a universal model of observation. Indeed, he noticed that the same humble people framed by Pasolini could be recognized in Italy as much as in New York because the dusty atmospheres of Roman suburbs could similarly resonate in his personal, subjective way of looking at the same lower classes and surrounding urban desolation of Manhattan.

Yet, the intimate relationship between the characters of *Mean Street* and *Accattone* is ultimately established by some aesthetic traits of the cinematic sequences, but it is unlikely that one might find any real analogical correspondence on the score of the different geographic locations, urban scenarios, historical periods or economic contexts in which those scenes are located. Thus, such an intimate relationship is purely

cinematic or connected by some iconographic analogies which flow beyond the strict sense of linkages with reality. In that, we are dealing with a cinematic universe that intrinsically constructs its internal *liasons*. In this sense, it is safe to assert that the referential side of metacinema is foremost bolstered by the internal chain of linguistic signs which are disjointed from reality and enclosed in the linguistic specificity of cinema.

By the same token, the linguistic specificity of self-referential metacinema draws its sources also from real life experiences already filmed in the past and reassembled in new products replete of a revamped signification. It is the case of the products which refers to the real private life of the filmmaker or to that of their intimate friends or relatives. By way of example, Alina Marazzi's, *Un'Ora Sola ti Vorrei* (For One More Hour with You, 2002) is a reedition of her grandfather's home movies and photographic archive focused on her mother who committed suicide at the age of thirty-three. Analogously, *Tarnation* (2003) by Jonathan Caouette is a reedited collection of his own footage, VHS videotape and photographs taken throughout the years since his childhood. The very intent of the American director is to display the excruciating life of his mother, Renee Le Blanc, who was treated with electroshock in the attempt to relieve her mental illness. Both films point at a particular form of self-referential, private metacinema for the films have the function to unite together in a meaningful way a whole set of otherwise disjointed and dispersed footage and photographs related to their own private experience.

But, as we have seen, the referential category foremost relates to the intertextual chain, as a construct bridging different movies which allude, cite or phagocytise each other. Thus, within this category, narrative patterns and visual solutions acquire relevance by virtue of the intertextual links created by the authors of different cinematic works. In this sense, as explained by Schmidt (2007), the category utterly recalls the *citationist* side of those movies which integrate images of other movies by establishing a mutual kinship between the multiple creators of a film, a genre or an epoch.

This allowed, referential metacinema might also be associated with a rather different and more puzzling consideration: 'within the context of postmodernism, reflexivity evokes the quotation-like aspects of pastiche art, the hyper-real world of media politics, and the incessant self-consciousness of contemporary television programming; in short it represents the referentless world of the simulacrum, where all of life is always already caught up in mass-mediated representation' (Stam, 1992: xvi). These metacinematic expressions thereby deal with a series of aesthetic referents which float within the representational world as its direct emanation. The chains of aesthetic referents



isolate different sets of intertextual links whose *ratio* is dominated by analogical correspondences, or yet their juxtaposition is ruled by the reuse of patterns expressed by the schemes of previous cinematic genres that contribute to the continuation and evolution of these genres themselves.

These lines do not solely evoke a trajectory moving from the presence to the disappearance of the referent within the mediatic and technological universe, as suggested by Jean Louis Baudrillard's *Simulacra and Simulation* (1994), but also a well-founded theoretical framework to be associated with the aforementioned category of metacinema.

#### **4.2. Realist Metacinema**

*Realist* Metacinema is the kind of self-reflexive cinema I associate to those cinematic works which take into account all the theoretical and conceptual implications related to the real or induced presence of the camera on the screen - but also to its absence or to its voluntary concealment. However, it is important to stress that they differ from other forms that I will label under the *productionist* category.

In fact, the reflections of realist metacinema revolve around the aesthetic value attributed to the presence/absence of the camera regardless of other aspects which are prevalently organisational, practical or related to the intersubjective relationship between the members of the film-crew involved in the process of filmmaking. In other words, stemming from Deleuze's *Cinema I, The Image-Movement* insights (1986), metacinema has been referenced as displaying the burgeoning camera-consciousness.

This has been exemplified in the analysis by Pisters (2012) of Alfred Hitchcock movie *Rear Window* (1954). The proposed insight by Pisters attends to the way that certain cinematic products exhibit the material presence of the camera: 'we now live in a metacinematic universe that calls for an immanent conception of audiovisuality, and in which a new camera consciousness has entered our perception' (Pisters, 2012: 170). This exhibition is constituted within a fictionalised context, that is to say, the camera becomes

part of the objects which are displayed in the framing - like the character of James Stewart who peeks at people living in the building in front of his flat with his camera. In this sense, films such as *Rear Window* exalt the camera as if it were a character of the story. On a similar note, *Sex Lies and Videotapes* (Soderbergh 1989) explores the possibilities of inherently reflexive video forms after the diffusion of VHS camcorders. In this film the disturbed protagonist obsessively videotapes women disclosing sexually related confessions. Quite differently, the classic of Independent Cinema, John Cassavetes' *Shadows* (1959), does not really show any cinematic device, but it employs a filmmaking style in a way that the glitchy camera movements reveal its own presence as if it had an independent point of view, extraneous to the story and untied from any directorial agency.

However, what these films fail to address is a reflection on the productive dimension of cinema. In any case, the material presence of the camera, along with its aesthetic and moral implications, is exactly the point of departure from which I am attempting to define realist metacinema. But it should be pointed out that here we are not only dealing with fictional movies, but also with other works whose features are more attuned to documentary, as genre.

A significant example of a realist metacinematic gesture is the short Czech feature doc *The Unseen* (Janek, 1996) that directly proposes an unorthodox didactic program directed to teach photography to blind children. In a particular scene we observe a blind kid trying to use a camera in order to take a picture of Janek, the filmmaker (Gaydos, 1997). When we get to see the picture, surprisingly, the operator and his camera are almost perfectly framed by the blind child's shot. In this case the presence of the camera operator is over-exposed by the fact that the photographic shot inserted in the editing of the short-film has been caught by a person who could not even see anything. Thus, the visual intensity of this excerpt of *The Unseen* reveals that the only metacinematic gesture of the whole movie has been materially made by a blind kid. This metaphorically reinforces the idea that self-reflexive elements are triggered by the tension generated within a dialectics of visibility/non-visibility. In this sequence the shaded zone of the visual representation, its blind spot, invades the scene with an unrivalled powerfulness.

As a matter of fact, such over-exposition of the camera was inaugurated by the Russian director Dziga Vertov with his silent documentary film *Man with a Movie Camera* (1929). In this film, the self-conscious dimension of cinema was stressed through a representation of how a little man, armed with a movie camera, leaves the little fake world of the film-factory and heads for life. [...] Wherever he appears, curious crowds

immediately surround his camera with an impenetrable wall: they stare into lens, feel and open the cases with film cans (Vertov, 1984: 286).

Unlike the products of mainstream cinema of that time, in which the camera was mainly hidden, here the technical magic of the cinematic device is displayed *via* its cumbersome and captivating presence. This technical mystery is also stressed by the imaginary Vertov's fusion with the camera lens. That is what the concept of *Kino-glaz* (Cine-eye) aimed to embody along with the attendant allusions to a further stage for human evolution. Namely, from that of being a flawed creature destined to transform into a more precise, technologically empowered species finally able to produce *Kino-Pravda* or Cine-Truth (Musser, 1995).

In the scenario created by Vertov, the mechanical eye thus entails a reflection on the prosthetic dimension of cinema as technology. To me, that was the dawn of realist metacinema in the sense that it represented the disclosure of the camera as the main ontological materialisation of the cinematic essence. In this sense, *Man with a Movie Camera* prefers not to dissimulate but rather to display the cinematic apparatus in the way it produces its own forms of language as suggested by the Russian Constructivist sociologists who were heralding an intellectual reformation of society also through the aid of literary and artistic production.

Moreover, it can be asserted that Vertov inaugurated a filmmaking style which can be genealogically underpinned in the work of many successors. By way of example, Jean Rouch's ethnographic interests led towards the creation of 1960's *Cinema Vérité*, as inspired by the precepts of visual anthropology. The film director and theorist Edgar Morin had already clarified the essence of filmmaking as a potential research instrument inclined to dissect the "phenomena of nature" (Morin, 1956). In this sense, Vertov was one of the precursors of *Cinema Vérité* along with Robert Flaherty and his documentary experimentations (*Nanook of the North*, 1922; *Man of Aran*, 1934).

This was a genre that spread throughout Europe as the result of a methodological step beyond *Direct Cinema* which preached the vanishing of the author behind the "fly on the wall effect": that is to say the tendency to conceal oneself, as an operator and researcher, in order not to disrupt the authenticity of the social ritual. In point of fact, the "fly on the wall effect" can find resonance in Vertov's words when he 'argued that *Kino-Pravda* required the non-participation of the film maker as a fundamental condition of attaining sociological authenticity' (Hassard and Holliday, 1998: 45). But if *Direct*

*Cinema* was more attuned to positivist epistemology, on the contrary, *Cinema Vérité* insisted on the possible active participation of the filmmaker.

Even though Rouch's early works revolving around Sub-Saharan African rituals were much more abiding by the rules of *Direct Cinema*, he progressively made a methodological leap towards the *Cinema Vérité* style. With short films such as *Les Maîtres Fous* (1955) and *La Chasse au Lion à l'Arc* (1965), at the time of direct-filmmaking, Rouch was convinced that the camera operator could not disrupt the authentic flow of these rituals for the participants were too involved in them as, for instance, they manifested signs of trance states during their performative acts (Rouch, 2003). While diving into the very essence of animist rituals performed with the aim of liberating the tribes from the psychological and material pervasiveness of British colonization in Ghana, Rouch did not wish to obstruct the ritual with his actual presence within the "stage". In fact, he had understood that those 'direct' films he was personally engaged with in the early stages of his ethnographic work and mainly proposed by the North American school represented

A denial of what all ethnographers are forced to learn: that realities are coconstructed and that meanings always change as contexts of interpretation change, continually revealed and modified in numerous ways. Provoking, catalyzing, questioning, and filming are simply strategies for unleashing that revealing process. Rouch insisted that the presence of the camera, like the presence of the ethnographer, stimulates, modifies, accelerates, catalyzes, opens a window (phrases he has used over the years); people respond by revealing themselves, and meanings emerge in that revelation (Rouch, 2003: 16).

Indeed, 'Rouch has said that he sees his own films as being an attempt to combine the personal and participatory concerns of Robert Flaherty with an interest in process derived from Vertov' (Ruby, 2005: 7). I would say, that the work of Jean Rouch can be distinguished by two different phases, the first adopting *Direct Cinema* style that produced works much more influenced by anthropological observations around the material presence or absence of the camera and the second where he proposed a *pars costruens* which criticises the orthodoxy of *Direct Cinema* and advocates for a major participation of the filmmaker. Namely, when he straightforwardly approached the openness of solutions provided by *Cinema Vérité*, by embracing what I would call the processual and productionist dimension of filmmaking.

Therefore, I believe that those kinds of ethnographic concerns stemming from the reflections on the aesthetic and moral implications of the presence/absence of the camera, stand for what I refer to as realist metacinema. However, we will see how the stress around the process of filmmaking is not actualised by realist metacinema, but conversely performed in other experiments made by Jean Rouch - *Chronique d'une Été* above all - that can be embodied in the *productionist* side of metacinema.

Finally, in the context of this category it is worth mentioning a set of horror and sci-fi movies which present an original use of the camera in "Point of View Shot" or subjective camera. That is to say, those stories narrated through particular technical solutions which allow the spectator to identify with the point of view of the protagonist who is actually filming the events. The result is that these fictional films masquerade as documentaries while, in reality, recounting fake stories that are subtly constructed in order to generate the illusion of verisimilitude. The term "mockumentary", popularly known as a fictional audio-visual product, was coined for the first time by Rob Steiner to describe the fake "rockumentary" *This is Spinal Tap* (1984) and somehow demonstrates the facility through which nonfiction can be faked (Hight, 2015).

Examples of mockumentaries are *The Blair Witch Project* (Myrick, Sánchez, 1999), the story of three young filmmakers who disappeared in the woods of Maryland while filming a documentary, *Cloverfield* (Reeves, 2008), set out as a recovered footage in the aftermath of a Godzilla-like creature's attack in New York and *[Rec]* (Balaguerò, Plaza, 2007), depicting a zombie assault in a fireman's barrack. It has been pointed out that the 'Metaization in these mockumentaries allows them to reflect critically on the role of the camera and the signifiers of raw footage in the production of various 'truth effects' in filmmaking' (de Villiers, 2011: 369). In fact, the reason why these works can be enclosed in the category of realist metafilms appears to be on account of their problematisation of the role of the camera as a privileged instrument to allow the identification of the spectator with the protagonists. With these examples, the camera adjusts the setting to the point that it becomes a pervasive instrument which guarantees a full immersion in the film's atmosphere as if the spectator had to deal with the exploration of a virtual reality.

### 4.3. Surrealist Metacinema

*Surrealist* Metacinema is a self-reflexive slant characterised by the interruption of the normal flux of images exerted by the sudden invasion of dreamlike visual effects or free associations of metacinematic discourses. In general, we deal with a set of images that disrupt the logical sequence of the shots which follow a spatio-temporal coherence. That is the reason why surrealist metacinematic gestures appear not to be diegetically justified, being their unforeseeable manifestation disjointed from the rest of the logical narration, as the sudden incursion of a dream in a false awakening. First of all, it should be stated that there are many analogies between the dreamlike language and the cinematic.

On the one hand, the film within the film entails that the nature of the narrative plot of the film includes a reflection upon cinema, on the other, it refers to the illusory feature of the whole cinematic work of art at such. In this sense, the illusion of reality, during the viewing of a narrative film, is inversely proportional to the degree of awareness of the cinematic mechanism, the former exerting the function of keeping the suspension of disbelief operative especially when the cinematic machinery is hidden behind the elusive curtains of the narrative plot.

Therefore, as it happens for realist metacinema with their diegetically justified reflections on the status of the camera, the degree of awareness of the cinematic trick can be heightened by some wake-up calls scattered along the sequences of the movie. These wake-up calls have the function to bring back the spectators' attention to the cinematic truth, towards that "beyond" which deposes the illusion. Drawing again on Agamben's account around the centrality of the gesture as the core part of cinematic forms of expression, we can find a passage which productively dialogues with the idea of surrealist metacinema.

'Cinema leads images back to the homeland of gesture. According to the beautiful definition implicit in Beckett's *Traum und Nacht*, it is the dream of a gesture. The duty of the director is to introduce into this dream the element of awakening' (Agamben, 2000: 55). In this sense, any metacinematic gesture might be said to engender a heightened level of awareness, bringing the spectator's attention back to the truth of cinematic language through the expedient of highlighting some of the linguistic, technical and organisational means that cinema often employs. Moreover, Jean Louis Baudry had previously discussed

how a reflexive effect can be triggered by the inclusion of a dreamlike sequence within a film. In point of fact, he maintained that the disconnecting potentiality of a dream inserted in the film produces the inevitable effect of redirecting the spectator's attention towards his/her own conscious experience of spectator; thus it imposes a distance that unmasks the cinematic artifice (Baudry, 1975). William Siska's definition of narrative intransitivity can also apply to this category. That is to say, 'Narrative is rendered intransitive when the chain of causation that motivates the action and moves the plot is interrupted or confused, through spatial and temporal fragmentation, or the introduction of alien forms and information' (Siska, 1979: 286).

In the light of these theoretical foundations, I am deeply tempted to attach a particular feature to the idea of surrealist metacinema. Namely, the description of a gesture which includes one or a set of images, mostly disjointed from other sequences, with respect to narrative coherence and linear logic, but still liable to be interpreted as "dreamlike wake-up calls". That is to say, as a set of surrealist recalls to the self-reflexive construct of metacinematic discourses emerging from another degree of awareness which stimulates an altered state of consciousness.

Some examples of surrealist metacinema might be represented by the frantic, nonsensical and dreamlike sequences of a few avant-garde films of the early twentieth century as *Entr'acte* (Claire 1924), *Un Chien Andalou* (Buñuel and Dalí 1929) or even the successive *Film* (1965) by Samuel Beckett who presents a hypnotic and unforgettable performance by Buster Keaton. In these examples, the power of the surrealist sequences lies precisely in the shock effect they generate in the spectator's mind with the ensuing function of awakening him/her from the illusory numbness of the narrative absorption. The history of modern cinema, especially from the 1960's onwards, is replete of surrealist passages of this kind. Therefore, it is not too audacious to assert that examples of surrealist metacinema can be retraced by so many hallucinatory and visionary sequences. The incipit of Ingmar Bergman's *Persona* is particularly significative for it presents on the screen a series of surreal images which emphasises its metacinematic status from the beginning:

The darkness of the movie theater is suddenly illuminated on screen by the flash of light from the projector arc, followed by a shot of film leader running through the machine. Images of unrelated figures - an animated cartoon, close-ups of hands, a spider, an eye, animal entrails - alternate with blinding reflections of white light off the empty screen, accompanied by abstract sounds. After the

shocking close-up of a human hand with a spike driven through it, the picture dissolves into a montage of wintry scenes and of aged faces, apparently corpses, as we become aware of the sound of dripping water and then a distant ringing (Michaels, 2000: 1).

With this example, it is precisely the imminent, dreamlike appearance of the lights generated by the projector arc to establish the surrealist correlation.

**Figure 4.1**



Incipit of *Persona* (Bergman, 1966)

These interruptions of the illusionistic flow of images abruptly disrupt the narrative development unfolding before our eyes. For instance, in the animated series by Osvaldo Cavandoli *La Linea* (*The Line*, 1969), ‘the hand of the artist appears regularly to alter the horizontal line in which the characters are formed, at a speed that is consistent with the act of drawing or erasing’ (2009: 276).

*La Linea* is a case in point for the surrealist intrusion of real drawer’s hand on the screen unveils the constructive matrix of the animation. It entails a reflection upon the art of animation pictures and it is surrealist for its nonsensical overlapping of different ontological regimes: the real human hand and the animated drawing created by it. Along the same lines, the episode *Rabbit Rampage* of the Bugs Bunny animated cartoon series (Jones 1955) displays the famous rabbit looking into the camera and interacting with the animator in a provocative way. He verbally addresses the drawer with numerous complaints about the awareness of being a prisoner in the cage of an animated feature he cannot voluntarily control or modify. In turn, the animator answers with his paint brush



by constantly modifying the scenario of the cartoon, Bugs Bunny's semblance or generating physical obstacles which cause his grotesque reaction.

Here, the interaction between the character of the fictional universe and the animator is functional to reveal the artifice of the visual creation in a dreamlike fashion by means of free associations which, in my opinion, heralds the emergence of this particular metacinematic content. Other examples are the famous outtakes at the very end of many Pixar animated movies as in *Monsters Inc.* (Docter, Unkrich, Silverman, 2001), where we see the hilarious bloopers and even an octopus using the clapperboard to ratify the failure of a particular shot.

Other hints on surrealist metacinematic movies are also showcased by famous comedies such as *Monty Python and the Holy Grail* (Gilliam and Jones, 1975) where the medieval battlefield gets abruptly invaded by police cars from modern age that interrupt the fight and arrest the chevaliers who were responsible for the explosion of violence. A policeman then approaches the spectators by getting close to the camera stating: "All right, Sonny, that's enough. Just pack that in". He literally obstructs the camera at the end and switches it off, with this act sanctioning the very end of the movie. Along similar lines, in *The Meaning of Life* (Jones 1983), a fake television announcer provides false yet hilarious news from recent events, makes jokes about the film which has just been shown while sitting in a room on top of which a banner displays the words "The End of the Film". When she finishes her speech, an unexpected hand pops out from a vase at the centre of the framing, the camera tightens on the television which was previously located at the right corner of the scene and the overall setting surrealistically starts to flow in the universe.

Finally, it is worth mentioning David Lynch's works which constantly plays with the subtle confines between dream and reality. For instance, some "dreamlike" wake-up calls are present in *Mulholland Drive* (2001), especially in the famous scene of club *Silencio*. 'The Club Silencio scene expresses affect with detailed but also impersonal attributes in terms of a celebration of the voice as image. Rather than the voice that refers back to a lost connection with the Real, Lynch makes full use of the medium of cinema to make the voice one component in a set of singularities, a voice, a tear, a colour, a sadness' (Berressem, 2012: 84,85). It is exactly the focus on the voice and sound that creates the presupposition for a particular metacinematic move. A presenter and a trumpeter are on the stage before a little audience composed only by the two main female characters. Then, an unexpected event occurs. When the trumpeter suddenly moves away

the instrument from his mouth the clear sound of the instrument continues resounding in the atmosphere. In the meanwhile, the presenter comments in various languages: “No hay banda, it is all a tape, il n’y a pas d’orchestra, it is all illusion!” So, the overall scene appears to hint at the magic illusion of cinema and particularly to the labile boundaries between fiction and reality with which cinema constantly plays. A case in point is also represented by *Mummy* (Dolan, 2014), a film mostly shot in the unusual square aspect ratio of 1:1. Throughout the film the frames are visible within a shape that limits the gaze of the spectators and metaphorically reinforces the psychological and material straightjacket experienced by the characters. But, at some point of the story, during a relieving sequence in which they are cycling and skating in the neighbourhood, the camera tightens on the protagonist, the young Steve, who makes a gesture of distension with his arms and simultaneously opens up the boundaries of the frame till a more canonical 1.85:1 or 2.35:1 aspect ratio. This gesture, as a sudden, dreamlike wake-up call combines the diegetic world with the filmic specificity of the space being framed by the camera and, therefore, surrealistically connects the medium and its content in a disconcerting, unexpected way.

#### **4.4. A Category without Boundaries**

Realist and Surrealist metacinema are categories which comprehend various kinds of self-reflexive gestures. But, where should we locate the aforementioned “look into the camera”? That is to say, the type of metacinematic gesture involving a character which stares into the camera and breaks the fourth wall by directly speaking to the spectator - or just watching beyond the boundaries of the frame - as he were himself part of the story.

As mentioned above, it is a widespread mode of expression that I attempted to connect with some particular renditions of figurative art, such as *Las Meninas*. It was pinned down in *Vivre Sa Vie* (Godard 1962), but it is also present in *À Bout de Souffle* (*Breathless*, Godard 1960), in the scene where Jean Paul Belmondo drives through the French countryside and briskly addresses the spectator with the apparently nonsensical

words: “If you don't like the sea... if you don't like the mountains...if you don't like the city... then get stuffed!”.

However, it can be traced in a vast plethora of films: the ending of *The 400 Blows* (Truffaut 1959) where a young Antoine Doinel (Jean-Pierre Léaud) walks back from the sea towards the spectator until the renowned *freeze-frame shot*. Yet, it manifests with the shocking eyewink made by the young serial killer in *Funny Games* (Haneke 1997), with comical implications in many Woody Allen's films, *Play it Again Sam* (Ross, 1972) and *Whatever Works* (Allen 2009), where for narrative reasons the protagonist momentarily detaches himself from the fictional universe to exert the explicative function of clarifying some aspects of the story. We can observe it in the ending of *Psycho* (Hitchcock, 1960) or with the touchy, wonderful glance of Giulietta Masina in the ending of the *Nights of Cabiria* (Fellini, 1957) and in many other different films which propose this metalinguistic solution for manifold reasons, above all, that of provoking a direct emotional involvement in the spectator's mind.

The “look into the camera” appears to be the result of a combination of different metacinematic nuances and, in some cases, can even aspire to convey the political subtext of a given story as it emerges in one of the scenes of Louis Buñuel's *Los Olvidados* (*The Forgotten*, 1950). Pedro is stuck in a reformatory in the suburbs of Mexico City with other adolescents. We see him carelessly dealing with a bucket full of eggs in the courtyard. Over the course of the story we came to know that he is an underclass with no expectations of a better life. Suddenly, in the grip of fury, he unexpectedly grabs an egg, turns his head towards us and throws it at the camera, against the operator, the director and the spectators altogether.

Leaving aside for a moment the evident self-reflexive side of this pervasive “look into the camera”, it can be added that here the metacinematic gesture is precisely subservient to the transmission of the idea of protest. ‘But in terms of ideology this gesture is also very significant because it symbolizes an attack first against the filmmaker as observer and ultimately against society and the state that watches the misery of others without helping. The violence of this scene is ultimately an invitation to act but also the suggestion that acting is a fruitless enterprise (Rivera-Cordero, 2006: 315). Yet, as the French semiologist Christian Metz once affirmed paraphrasing Roland Barthes: ‘We know that there is always something distinctly subversive in the activity of a metalanguage, which offends the ordinary “transitivity” of discourse’ (Metz, 1974b: 182). In this sense, such a gesture disrupts the continuous flow of the narration and undermines

the overall verisimilitude of the fictional universe by imposing a disturbing act that invades our own consciousness and oversteps the canonical laws of how a filmic scene should be linguistically exposed. Finally, this notion relaunched Agamben's idea that 'cinema has its center in the gesture and not in the image, it belongs essentially to the realm of ethics and politics (and not simply to that of aesthetics)' (2000: 55).

However, I believe it is quite complicated to locate the "look into the camera" in one of the aforementioned categories, but I also maintain that such particular forms of expression recall at least two of them. As a matter of fact, this metacinematic procedure deals with the conceptual and practical implications raised by the presence of the camera for the character's gaze is exactly directed towards the objective lens and, therefore, abruptly materializes the artifice, showing the probable presence of a camera, an operator and an entire film crew. Thus, it would expose, as a logical but non-necessary consequence - at least within spectators' imagination - the entire cinematic apparatus in action during the shooting.

Here, the point is that, in spite of the different spectators' reactions - according to different knowledge backgrounds or degrees of receptiveness towards this metalinguistic procedure - I might assert that the "look into the camera" also deals with an over-exposition of the cinematic machinery. Contextually, this metacinematic gesture is proposed by means of free associations which are often marginal within the narrative economy of the whole film, but rather as single, even multiple, but disjointed excerpts scattered throughout the unfolding of the plot. In general, these "glances" emerge as sudden, often not persistent reactions to what happens during the story. In this sense, such an encounter of gazes between the character and the spectator might be read as an unforeseen "wake up call" which triggers an estrangement effect around the exposure of the material presence of the camera in a dreamlike fashion.

That is exactly the reason why I am strongly tempted to posit "the look into the camera" in an imaginary space located halfway between the *realist* and the *surrealist* metacinematic categories. Given that, one might contend whether it would be worthwhile or not to devise a category for a metacinematic gesture located halfway within two different ones. The most important reason is that the inclusion of a category without boundaries precisely aims at putting in evidence the flexible character of the whole classification. Indeed, the boundaries of each category should be seen as adaptable and malleable as the veritable substance of cinematic language is in its nature prone to be receptive to change.

So, rather than dealing with a rigid taxonomy, I am proposing this loose classification in the guise of a grid of intelligibility with the intention of making it useful to orient the reader through the various types of metacinematic gestures. Finally, the second justification supporting the creation of a category for the look into the camera is that the apparent encounter of gazes between a character who is part of the filmic diegesis and the spectator is one of the most widespread metacinematic gestures. Or better, it is the stratagem through which cinema most often addresses us as spectators and challenges our escapist dreams.

#### **4.5. Experimental Metacinema**

After having examined the flexible nature of the “look into the camera”, as a metacinematic gesture which stands halfway between realist and surrealist categories, I will briefly outline another category, the *Experimental Metacinema*. First of all, it should be clarified that every category presented in this grid of intelligibility is “experimental” to a certain extent.

The reason lies in the fact that these segments experimentally disrupt and subvert the order setup by the illusionistic apparatus of classical cinema. So, we are obviously drawing on the same kind of linguistic and technical apparatus that constructs and convey the suspension of disbelief.

Having said that, I felt the urgency to gather some particular metacinematic gestures, or entire reflexive films, under the label of experimental metafilms on account of a series of particular characteristics. In my view, some metacinematic gestures should be called experimental inasmuch as they present some reflections over the structural and materialist nature of cinema. As presented by Takeda, “structural film” is a term coined by P. Adams Sitney (1979) to comment upon American experimental filmmakers, such as George Landow and Peter Kubelka, who worked on the material shape of movies unconcerned with the proposal of a narrative coherence. As we have already mentioned,

according to Takeda, the structural film highlights certain constitutive elements of filmic statements in order to let them access an enunciative reflexivity (Takeda, 1987).

But what for the Japanese semiologist expresses an enunciative reflexivity is definitely connected to the basic elements of structural cinema presented by Sitney. In fact, for him 'the structural film insists on its shape, and what content it has is minimal and subsidiary to the outline. Four characteristics of the structural film are its fixed camera position (fixed frame from the viewer perspective) the flicker effect, loop printing and rephotography off the screen' (Sitney, 1979: 348).

Such predominance of the structural shape at the expense of the narrative content of the images inevitably entices cinema to experimentally bend back on itself. For instance, Sitney draws on Andy Warhol works, insisting on the assumption that he was the very precursor of structural film. In *Sleep* (1963), where he shoots the American poet John Giorno sleeping for six hours, and *Eat* (1963), where a man eats a mushroom for forty-five minutes, we observe Warhol's most indelible pictorial style because the shots are assembled together in a serial composition. The visual configuration of these works recalls some Marcel Duchamp's works and provoke a reflection on the idea of stillness as movement and, vice-versa, on movement as stillness (Koch, 1985). In *Sleep*, Warhol has especially used half-dozen shots and elongated them till the duration of six hours. Actually, he managed to dilate these sequences by using loop printing, which is one of the material interventions effectuated on the actual celluloid, an action very typical of structural movies.

Another author, Peter Gidal (1976a), has given a definition which expands beyond the simple form of structural film, as outlined by Sitney, to the broader structural/materialist film. First of all, a structural/materialist film attempts to be non-illusionist because it is oriented towards the demystification of the filmic process. But, even more crucially, for Gidal the dialectic of the film is established in that space of tension between materialist flatness, grain, light, movement, and the supposed reality that is represented (Gidal, 1976b: 1).

In this sense, these films precisely analyse the production/process within the very materiality of the image. As Metz would have said, they refer more to the well-defined filmic world of techniques which directly imprint celluloid than to the wider cinematic fact which takes into account all the other mechanisms of production. In fact, Structural/Materialist films make experiments on the minutest textures of the film and on the peculiar relationship of space and time by pushing them to their aesthetic extremes.

In this sense this category appears to refer to the world of analog films whose materiality is manipulated by the experimental gesture of the author. One of the most illustrative films of this category is certainly *Wavelength* (Snow 1967).

As pointed out by the author, Michael Snow, making a film deals with stating issues about films (Mekas and Sitney, 1967). Elsewhere, he added that *Wavelength* is ‘a definitive statement of pure film space and time’ (Hartog, 1976: 36). In particular, *Wavelength* is filmically reflexive because it specifically plays with the tension generated by a fixed frame of a wide room. An apparent freeze-frame shot reveals to be a zoom exploring forward in the direction of the windows on the opposite side. To be precise, it is a very slow forty-five minutes forward zoom. A shot in which there are interruptions, few superimpositions, variations of colour and a consistent combination of different sound effects.

Perhaps, the complex and articulated construction of these audiovisual segments inspired Julia Kristeva when she commented on Michael Snow’s movie as ‘an infinite differentiation in chromatic wavelength (color to black and white, gradual return to color), focused on the same filmed object (a loft, a body)’ which, at the same time, plays on increasing, decreasing and abruptly stopping distorted sounds (Kristeva et al., 1977: 132). Once again the practical gestures effectuated on the materiality of the celluloid provoke an intensified phenomenological experience and an ontological reflection on film in the viewer (Legge, 2009).

Other examples, of structural/materialist works, as experimental metafilms, are *Berlin Horse* (Le Grice, 1970) with its superimposition of negative and positive prints of a horse moving in a courtyard or *Film in Which There Appear Edge Lettering, Sprocket Holes, Dirt Particles, Etc* (Land, 1966) which must be considered structural in the way it puts in evidence the material as material and a film as film (Recoder, 2007). In particular, this work represents a landmark for cinema in the way it overthrows the predominance of content over the materiality of film by presenting the imperfections of the celluloid which are normally suppressed during the post-production process. In fact, by using a brief loop of a Kodak colour test, Owen Land sheds light on the minutest waste material and upgrades the tangible flaws of celluloid to the status of meaningful structural elements of the film. One of the possible antecedents of this extreme, radical experimentation regarding the material and structural elements of cinema can certainly be the controversial *Arnulf Reiner* by Peter Kubelka (1960).

What makes this film paradoxically playing with the boundaries of perception is the quasi-epileptic montage of isolated white and black shots. As it has been pointed out elsewhere, some analogies and dissimilarities can be retraced in the successive *The Flicker* (1965), by Tony Conrad, in which ‘long sections of regularly alternating black and clear frames – flicker –are permuted step by step, primarily in order to stimulate a range of psychological reactions in the viewer’(Hamlyn, 2007: 251) .

Other illustrative interpreters of this category are Kenneth Anger, Stan Brakhage, George Landow, Hollis Frampton and also Derek Jarman, especially with his bewildering *Blue* (1993), a film consisting of a unique seventy-five minutes frame of blue colour. The intentional display of the monochrome structure of this film purports to recall the inevitable reduction of sight experienced by Jarman during the terminal phase of his HIV disease. Yet, the voice-over is a combination of registrations recited by many actors including Jarman and the content refers to feelings such as melancholy or sadness and reflections over the concept of infinity.

However, the merit of Jarman’s work is that of committing the perceptual world of the spectator to a representation which is pushed to the extremes, as a monochrome, flat frame triggering an unusual sensorial regime. It is finally worthwhile to mention the work of an Italian filmmaker and photographer, Paolo Gioli. About him David Bordwell declared: ‘Within the golden section of the 16mm frame, many of his films expose and celebrate the vertical bias of the apparatus. In the process, he reminds us of a period of cinema history in which the technical standards were not yet fixed. In the course of these explorations he creates, through the slithering rhythm of the film strip, new images of space, time, and corporeality’ (Bordwell, 2009).

One of the reflections over the possible non-actualised evolution of cinema is *Film Stenopeico* or *Man Without a Movie Camera* (1973, 1981, 1989) in which Gioli uses a pin-hole camera, a 1½ foot-long rectangular tube whose entire length has been pierced with tiny apertures along the vertical side, such that multiple films of 16mm can be positioned through the tube in their correspondence. There is no optical lens and the shutter is only a hinged door which can just be opened manually to allow the exposure of the films to the light (Rumble, 2009). The result is an opaque superimposition of images that, when edited, produces the effect of a visual cascade reproducing a strange, subjective image. It almost seems that Gioli wanted to reproduce the sight or the point of view of an inorganic essence, a stone or a piece of wood. In fact, it can be argued that Gioli materialised in his films the particular cognitive scheme that led him to outline his series



of creative actions, the very mechanics of beginning-development-end of a knowledge process.

Finally, there are also examples of digital structuralist films where a certain materiality of the computer files is willingly manipulated through particular software and algorithm recoding (Enns, 2011) such as in Takeshi Murata's *Monster Movie* (2005), Cory Arcangel's *Data Diaries* (2003) and *Black Compressed* (2009) by Nick Briz. This last point is useful to understand how the category of experimental metacinema can also represent a bridge between the analogic and digital ontology of cinema. Of particular relevance in this regard is Guy Maddin's work that, mainly filmed with sixteen-millimetre or Super-8, purports to recreate the visual style of silent films, but also the musicality of the first sound films through both digital and analogic means.

So, after having outlined the main features of experimental metacinema, with the next category, I will outline the core category of this grid of intelligibility, namely the Productionist *Metacinema*. With the exposition and analysis of the characteristics of this category we are now entering into the specific metacinematic cross-section that will be investigated in-depth within this research.

#### **4.6. Productionist Metacinema**

*Productionist Metacinema* is the metacinematic gesture that will be discussed in the next chapters through the analysis of a particular selection of movies. In the first place it should be clarified that with the adjective productionist I do not mean to outline a particular metacinematic gesture with the idea of productionism or productivism, as a general doctrine outlining a commodity based economic production within a capitalist system (Marx, 1992).

That is to say, this category does not reflect exclusively the way social relationships involved in filmmaking productions can be seen as the product of commodified wage-labour, or at least not only, but first and foremost, as the result of

many other factors. In this sense, I rather label as productionist metafilms those works focusing on the particular role of authors who display their presence as the main agents of production from a creative, linguistic, technical and organisational standpoint. But this category also addresses authors whose agency dissolves within the complex folds of the filmmaking process among the coercive force of the other members of the film crew, the means of production, the budget, the size of the film crew, the environmental conditions and the narrative constraints of the screenplay.

In this sense, productionist metafilms expand from the relatively restricted filmic fact of experimental metafilms to the broader cinematic fact (Cohen-Séat, 1946; Metz, 1974a). Namely, the cinematic fact would thereby imply the whole complexity of sociological, economic and technological phenomena which influence the making-of along with possible accounts of the political and ideological impacts of the film on different publics or audiences. In this sense, this set of considerations would also imply an understanding of the crucial role of other professional collaborations and, in general, of all the possible variables influencing the production a film.

So, productionist metafilms, through their specific self-reflexive gestures, expand and reflect on the processual dimension of filmmaking to the extent that the frontstage of production might be said to coincide, or tend to coincide, with their own backstage. In fact, I propose that productionist metafilms might serve to simultaneously reveal and construct a self-reflexive form of authorial and directorial subjectivity through the matrix of the various strategic choices operated on the set. But, as it can be inferred, even when the authorial and directorial subjectivities are judged to have a substantial weight in ingrainning a final hallmark to the creative product, we cannot disregard the crucial and active contribution of other professional collaborators and other material conditions.

In fact, it should be restated that this category is perfectly attuned with the overall idea of metacinematic gesture as it has already been discussed in this thesis. That is to say, as a film segment which exhibits the mediality of cinema and opens up a discourse on its technical, linguistic and organisational patterns. Also, the idea of gesture should be intended as a combination and coexistence of authorial intentionality or unintentionality and that a metacinematic gesture is more specifically a combination of teleological and non-teleological elements which disclose or conceal such extent of authorial direction. In this sense, one of the aims of these investigations is oriented to specify whether in a particular productionist metafilm we encounter an author as gesture, where the director's signature prevails on other influences, or a gesture as author, where the unintentional,

non-teleological and contingent elements are captured and absorbed into other organisational and practical events that cannot be controlled by the director.

Yet, it should also be restated that the idea of a metacinematic gesture as an exhibition of cinematic mediality certainly opens up a wide array of unpredictable technical, linguistic and organisational implications. Once again, I would like to stress how the *unpredictability* is the very key word to summarise the way these films or filmic segments subvert and divert the classical narrative, linguistic, technical and organisational patterns by opening up *unpredictable* scenarios which urge to be dissected.

For the purpose of outlining the main peculiarities of productionist metacinema it should also be said that we are dealing with movies that elevate their own processual dimension as the most significant content to be conveyed. Or in another words, it might recall Mouren's idea of "poetic art" (2009) as a filmic subgenre that reveals the working methods of a given film director who interacts with the film crew, the actors or the participants during the process of production.

By way of example the processual dimension, present within the category of productionist metafilm, is particularly evident as in the *Cinema Vérité* example of *Chronique d'un Été* (Morin and Rouch, 1961) where, at first, the participants were simply asked the question "Are you happy?". Such an experiment thus involved a direct interaction between the author and the participants. That is why this case is evidently far from the purported sociological authenticity of the "fly on the wall" effect, but still gives intriguing results in terms of rendering an unpredictable and unprecedented sociological understanding of French culture. In fact, in this movie directors and camera operators have not attempted to conceal themselves in favour of an uncontaminated phenomenology of the social situation (like in the north American version of *Direct Cinema*) for they screened back the shots to the interviewees in order to produce knowledge through commentaries and improvisations (De Groof, 2013).

By another way of example, in Jean Luc Godard's *Histoire (s) du Cinema* (1998) we can observe the exposure of a processual dimension which emerges in the attempt to construct an original and personal genealogy of cinema. This film attempts to gain access to the focal points of cinematic history as conveyed through the wide use of superimpositions, flashing of images, slow motions, fading in and fading out. It actually deals with the exposure of the cinematic machinery as voluntarily exhibited by the author. Even the typewritten titles, which invade the frames with big capital letters, produce the meta-linguistic effect of stressing the act of enunciation rather than a set narratively

organised contents. This technical expedient enacted by Godard traverses the whole structure of the film. Namely, it can be recognized in every chapter of the movie where the contrast between typewritten titles, captions, rapid editing and Godard's voice over are omnipresent.

In particular, Godard's attempt to unravel the hidden folds of cinematic language results in the magnification of Italian cinema, within the chapter *La Monnaie de l'Absolu* – *The Coin of the Absolute*, as a "form that thinks": a form that, I would add, is truly shaped by a "thought" which dwells on the processual form of figurative art. The French director constructed this sophisticated maxim by posing a caption (*une pensée qui forme* – a thought that forms) over the photographic portrait of Pier Paolo Pasolini and then, subsequently, the reverse of the previous sentence (*une forme qui pense* – a form that thinks) as a caption overlapping the image of a woman's portrait from the Renaissance painting tradition. The use of sound is also important in this segment for Godard adopts the song by Riccardo Cocciante, *La nostra lingua Italiana* (Our Italian Language), which is used as the background music to better juxtapose the two images and to reinforce the overall stress of the project on the outline of a linguistic specificity of cinema.

Indeed, it has been suggested that within this film 'each image is transformed into a pure epiphany, a manifestation of the mystery of the cinematographic creation' (Williams, 1999: 312). Godard produced a history of film in which the unorthodox use of technical solutions is subjected to the creation of a subjective articulation of the cinematic language.

Actually, there are productionist metafilms that express their interest in the filmmaking process and cinematic organisation through the development of a fiction story and other works that show the attempt to convey a realist effect through documentary approaches. Analysing the degree of fictionalisation of different cinematic portrayals might be decisive in order to understand how to posit a particular film in a scale that goes from documentarism to fiction.

In point of fact, some films that contain self-reflexive insights are works dealing with a strong degree of fictionalisation while highlighting the productive dimension of filmmaking, such as *8½* (Fellini, 1963) or *Day for Night* (Truffaut 1973). Other self-reflexive films, on the contrary, employ a documentary approach while focusing on robust metacinematic reflections, such as *The Five Obstructions* (Von Trier 2003) and *Grizzly Man* (Herzog 2005).

On this basis, it would be interesting to analyse the extent to which productionist metafilms manage or fail to achieve the promise of rendering a credible depiction of the “real” conditions of cinema as organized work. This issue is related to how a rupture of the dramatic realism of Hollywood mainstream movies resonates into the tension emerging from the display of a new effect of constructed realism. Moreover, this research explores how cinematic authors deal with the effect of realism in terms of copying with the dichotomic polarizations between “cinematic image” and “reality”, “fiction and fact”.

As I indicated in the introduction, the movies that I will analyse in this research are, in chronological order: *Chronique d'un Été* (Morin and Rouch, 1961), *8½* (Fellini, 1963), *Le Mépris* (Godard, 1963), *La Ricotta – Ro.Go.Pa.G* (Pasolini, 1963), *La Nuit Américaine* (Truffaut, 1973), *American Movie* (Smith, 1999), *Grizzly Man* (Herzog, 2005), *The Five Obstructions* (Von Trier, 2003) and *The Act of Killing* (Oppenheimer, 2012). The investigation of such a range of movies aims to criticise a series of linguistic, technical and organisational models of filmmaking. Ultimately, the importance of these productionist metafilms resides in the fact that they represent interesting examples of what different authors wanted to disclose or conceal about the art of filmmaking. It is exactly with the problematisation of this dialectics of visibility/non-visibility, as present in those kinds of self-reflexive products, that it might be possible to illuminate the “shaded zone” of cinematic process.

#### **4.7. Multiple Categories within a Single Film**

Finally, I would like to mention the existence of some cases where most of the above listed metacinematic categories can be underpinned in a single filmmaking product. The most evident example is another Godard’s film: *Pierrot le Fou* (1965). In fact, the main characters, Jean Paul Belmondo and Anna Karina, while traveling around by car verbally address the spectators with gestures that open up a reflection upon the material presence of the camera (in between *realist* and *surrealist* metacinema).

They also plan to transform their existences as if they were characters of different films following scripts attuned to various genres - gangster movie, romantic comedy, and spy film - (*referential* metacinema). The referential side of this movie eventually results in the surrealist and clownish parody of American war films along with Karina and Belmondo's conversations about the peculiar narrative construction of different cinematic genres (*surrealist* and *productionist* metacinema). Moreover, the film is foremost *referential* in a transmedial sense for it directly quotes the work of important painters along with an outstanding use of the colour through photography. At the very beginning, Belmondo reads few lines from a book about Velazquez - as if Godard wanted to connect the figurative construction of the whole film to that of the Spanish painter - and other scenes frame natural landscapes recalling the iconography of Théodore Rousseau. On a different note, there are also many intertwined allusions to literature:

‘An amazing itinerary of language and images has taken place from the end of sequence 37 through sequence 38. The allusion to Lorca’s haunting poem becomes Godard’s signature through the allusive presence of Charles Baudelaire’s “Harmonie du soir”, a tonal poem of sixteen lines that associates the red sunset with the clotting of blood’ (Wills, 2000: 97).

As a matter of fact, the overall disjointed structure of the film, regardless of a linear narrative sense, straightforwardly alludes to the proposal of a surrealist rereading of the whole cinematic tradition, almost teasing on its classical patterns. These fine points might be said to reflect a nearly overarching spectrum of metacinematic gestures and therefore *Pierrot le Fou* represents a case in which all these different categories converge.

In this chapter I have elaborated a grid of intelligibility in order to classify various metacinematic gestures by gathering them in six different categories: *Referential*, *Realist*, *Surrealist*, *Look into the Camera*, *Experimental* and *Productionist*. Subsequently, I clarified how some metacinematic gestures, as the “look into the camera” might be located in between two categories - Realist and Surrealist - and that some films can include more than one or even nearly every metacinematic category, like *Pierrot le Fou*.

As we have seen, productionist metafilms are particularly relevant for they reflect upon themselves through the exposure of different procedures in act that strictly depend on the peculiar processual dimension of each movie. In fact, metacinematic films display different scenarios of production as the organisation of work depends on various factors:

the means of production, the budget, the aesthetic view of the author, the size of the film crew, the environmental conditions and the narrative constraints of the screenplay.

However, all the selected films reflect upon their productive dimension to the extent that the frontstage of what is screened in the final product might be said to coincide with its own backstage. In those cases where we are evidently dealing with fictional films the story is presented as a simulation of the work-in-progress so that they result to appear as “made-up” backstage while documentary approaches allow the spectator to access into the work of the film-crew. Nonetheless, this idea should not be taken at face value or as an uncontested assumption. Even though some films reveal the dimension of secrecy lying behind the scenes of a fiction film, it should be taken into account that what the author decides to describe or to omit is not always a matter of personal choice but also as a result of how the other *productionist* constraints deflect, contaminate or even, overturn his/her intentional purposes. Whereas, when a strong authorial signature is visible in the final product, what often appears to be the disclosure of some aspects and procedures might eventually be the result of a more perverse form of concealment of other forms omitted by the author.

Yet, we should pay attention to the construction of our theoretical hypothesis by taking into account that productionist metafilms are always the result of an overall combination of revelation and concealment that generate unpredictable scenarios. In fact, there are many analogies and contrasts which stress the common working procedures and the diverting points of each process of production.

Along these lines, the main interest of the next chapters will be to unveil the dimension of secrecy which is concealed behind the cinematic production, while paying attention to what sort of mechanisms and pressures have driven the author, or the whole cinematic apparatus, to show or conceal something. I will problematise the dialectics of disclosure/concealment as the tension between the “shaded zone” of the non-visible and what has been revealed as the visible manifestation of the cinematic tricks. These objectives will be achieved by highlighting the tension between the processual dimension and the finite product: two elements that overlap each other within self-reflexive films. In fact, it will not be unlikely to encounter films that truly deal with their own processual dimension ending up presenting it as their main expressive content. Finally, this investigation aims to pinpoint and analyse the disruptive and denaturalizing elements that are present in productionist metafilms in order to generate new forms of thought and action in the creative process.

## 5.0. The Fictional Dimension of Productionist Metafilms

In this chapter and the following two I will approach the analysis of a limited selection of films that can be comprised within the productionist category. As mentioned in the previous section, productionist metafilms reflect on the processual dimension of filmmaking to the extent that the frontstage of the production might be said to coincide, or tending to coincide, with its own backstage. In this first analytical chapter, I will expand on those productionist metafilms which manifest their interest in the mechanisms of production within the narrative construction of fiction stories. Yet, this kind of productionist metafilms can serve to simultaneously reveal and construct heterodox forms of authorial and directorial subjectivities through the matrix of the various strategic choices operated on the set. As, it can be easily inferred, in this section we will be dealing with films in which directors observe themselves, or their alter egos, inhabiting a cinematographic set which is specifically staged within the development of a fiction story. As pointed out by Elsaesser, who hinted on the “ironic” side of some products of the 1960’s Nouvelle Vague cinema: ‘film makers now tend to draw attention to their labor, their own intervention in the signifying and representational act’ (Elsaesser, 1973: 1).

In fact, few years later, Siska has also highlighted how metacinema, as represented by “estranging” films like *Day for Night* and *8½*, might be rather read as a “modern necessity” that distances itself from a traditional cinema which ‘does not expose the process of production to alienate us from the story that’s being told’ (Siska, 1979: 286). Along these lines, I have labelled as productionist metafilms those works focusing on the particular role of authors who display their presence as the main agents of production from a creative, linguistic, technical and organisational standpoint or disperse themselves within the coercive force expressed by other crucial aspects of filmmaking such as the active role of the film crew, the constraints of the production and the screenplay, the creative contribution of the actors and the environmental conditions. But, foremost, it should be said that, especially for what concerns fiction stories, modernist narratives such as *Day for Night* and *8½* do not limit themselves to show cameras, lights or technicians with the only aim of showing how the industry really works.

But, as we will observe, they rather attempt to undermine the empathic short-circuit generated by the suturing dispositif of the fictional illusion, breaking our



suspension of disbelief and allowing us to unmask the “behind the scenes” that forces us to confront with the filmmaker’s subjectivity and the material conditions of production. In this sense, such an estranging mechanism triggers an imaginary expansion from the limited filmic fact, to the broader cinematic fact.

Within the broad distinction between filmic and cinematic fact, devised by Gilbert Cohen-Séat (1946) and refined by Christian Metz (1974a), productionist metafilms would thereby expand beyond the relatively restricted filmic fact, that I associated with experimental metafilms, which limitedly involves the direct manipulation of the structural and material substance of the film. On the contrary, productionist metafilms access the wider universe of the cinematic fact and, hence, can imply a whole set of economic and sociological implications which influence the making-of a movie along with possible hints on the political and ideological impacts of the film on different publics or audiences.

In this sense, this set of considerations would also imply an understanding of the crucial role of other professional collaborations and, in general, of other possible variables influencing the making-of a film. Along the same lines, Withalm has outlined a category that resonates that of productionist metacinema, that is to say *Production: Filming the Filming*, a category that expands by far beyond the previous ones: “Look Behind the screen” or the “Focus on the Camera”, towards the unveiling of the dimension of secrecy of films as works in progress (Withalm, 1995).

So, it is proposed that productionist metafilms reveal and construct a self-reflexive form of authorial and directorial subjectivity through the matrix of the various strategic choices operated on the set. Nonetheless, the role of the other variables which influence the filmmaking process are crucial too. I will assess how some exhibitions of mediality tend to efface the authorial subjectivity of the director or allow it to fade into the processual flow of filmmaking under the influence of many other environmental factors, subjects and unpredictable occurrences.

Given that, I will try to demonstrate with the following analyses how these unpredictable occurrences, being allowed by such a recurring exposure of mediality, can veritably produce some significative scenarios and attendant unexpected visual articulations, yet casually revelatory of unprecedented aspects of the filmmaking process. Thus, I will attempt to shed light on the extent to which fictions describe the reality of cinema and to what extent they divert to visual solutions that belongs to the imaginary world of the authors and their characters. Therefore, the criteria of selection of those productionist metafilms are attuned to the parameters and characteristics expounded in

the homonym category within the chapter *A Grid of Intelligibility for Metacinema*. Thus, I am proposing an analysis of the following films: *8½* (Fellini, 1963), *Le Mépris* (Godard, 1963), *La Ricotta – Ro.Go.Pa.G* (Pasolini, 1963) and *La Nuit Americaine* (Truffaut 1973). Ultimately, it should be clarified that in this chapter my analytical endeavour will be supported by a critical problematisation of how these films have been theoretically received and discussed within Film Studies.

**5.1.**

**8½:** Italy/France, 1962, 1963, 138 min.

**Director:** Federico Fellini

**Producer:** Angelo Rizzoli

**Languages:** Italian, French, English, German

### **Synopsis**

Famed director Guido Anselmi (Marcello Mastroianni) is working on his latest movie, which is partly based on science fiction, partly on a theological discussion around Catholic dogmatism, but is mainly traversed by profound and tormented autobiographic anecdotes. Although Guido declares that this movie should be an easy one to make, he is having problems with his own artistic vision, specifically he is obsessed by the fear of being inauthentic. In the grip of psychological and physical distress, he has checked himself into a spa and finds himself harangued by producers, his wife Luisa, and his mistress Carla while he struggles to find the inspiration to finish his film. The stress plunges Guido into an interior world where fantasy and memory impinge on reality. As he works through these problems, he recalls his childhood and starts fantasising about his future hopes and the fulfilment of his most intimate, unconfessed desires. He materialises the ghosts of his dead parents and classmates, his catholic education and an imaginary harem containing all the women he had loved or wished to love throughout his life. Towards the end, the filmic scenario starts to blur the confines between internal and external world to the extent that the overall atmosphere becomes oneiric and surreal. One day he meets Claudia, a young actress who is the physical embodiment of the dream woman of his fantasies. When she turns out to be vain and stupid, the disillusioned Guido becomes even more paralyzed by apathy. At a press conference organised at the expensive rocket site constructed for his stalled film, he is assaulted by unsurmountable questions and decides to abandon the film entirely. But after a final fantasy in which he commits suicide, he feels relieved from his doubts. A circus band of clowns arrives led by the schoolboy Guido playing a flute. They are followed by all the people Guido has known in his life and everyone joins hands in a circle.

## Analysis – Guido's Maieutic Nihilism

At first, it is important to say that *8½* is one of the indisputable masterpieces of the history of cinema and that it has been quoted, commented, interpreted and analysed by so many scholars and film critics that it would be nearly impossible not to slip into already existing interpretive patterns. For instance, the valuable opinion of Christian Metz about the movie stresses the fact that it reflects a “double mirror construction”. Quoting his words: ‘It is not only a film about the cinema, it is a film about a film that is presumably about the cinema; it is not only a film about a director, but a film about a director who is reflecting himself onto his film’ (Metz, 1978: 131).

But, as it has been correctly pointed out by Fredericksen (1979), beyond the apparent similarity of expressive purposes and reflexive structures, *8½* is substantially distinct from Dziga Vertov's *Man with the Movie Camera*. In way of principle, I could not agree more, since I located the former within the productionist category and the latter within the realist on account of its peculiar critical reflection around the ontological status and constructive function of the camera, seen as a prominent character in the film.

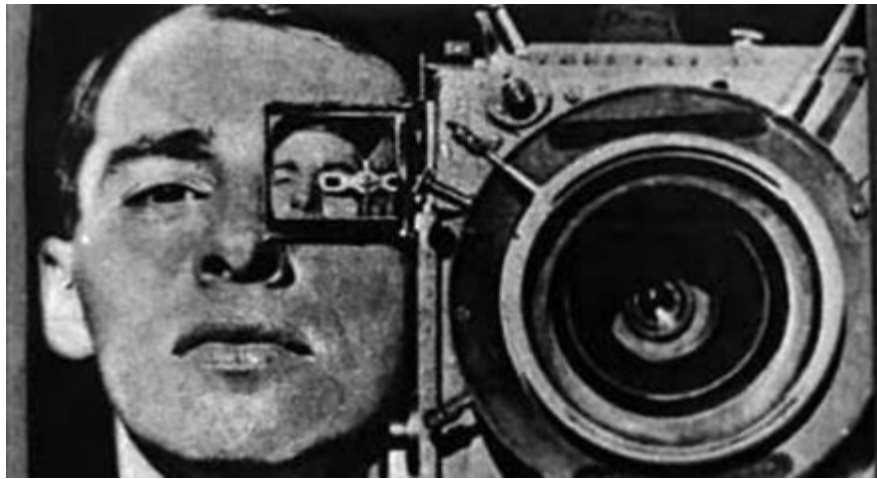
Moreover, Vertov's movie is certainly one of the most sophisticated, yet, early projects which exalts cinema for its sociological function of rendering a collective process of production oriented towards a virtuous political construction of reality. Yet, it lacks the wider breadth proposed by *8½* and *Contempt* (Godard, 1963) as the first examples of a more evolved and multi-layered reflection on the filmmaking process.

In that, Fredericksen (1979) appears to be not too far from this idea when he stresses how Vertov's movie is targeting the spectators, as physically present in the movie, with the didactic intent of educating them through the display of an unprecedented and sophisticated demystification of the filmmaking process. Whereas *8½* shows the complicated genetic process of artistic creation as surrounded by an opaque and fantastic aura.

Following this distinction, it can be argued that *The Man with a Movie Camera* is comprised within the prospect of a metacinematic realism which aspires to a wider *productionist* project which can be said to have been inaugurated and realised almost thirty-five years later by *8½* and *Contempt*. Therefore, I would add that Vertov's movie is only virtually productionist as for the technical constraints and the unripe filmic

language of 1929, even though highly experimental, could not favour a wider, multi-layered, dissection of the filmmaking process and its attendant implications. Nonetheless, the visionary aspiration and the creative spirit animated by Vertov's masterpiece will always characterise *Man with a Movie Camera* (Figure 5.1) as one of the earliest and most important landmarks of cinematic reflexivity, without which films like *8½* would have never come to light. Possibly, that is the reason why authors like Fredericksen felt the urgency to theoretically compare the different orientations of these fundamental reflexive movies, whose conceptual roots are indisputably common.

Figure 5.1



*Man with a Movie Camera* (Vertov, 1929)

Also Siska (1992) is one of the authors who attempted to clarify in what exactly resides the modernist character of *8½*'s reflexivity. In point of fact, he problematised it through the hinted confrontation with another inspirational movie, François Truffaut's *Day for Night*, by presenting a similar situational context. In this movie, the problems occurred during the fictional shooting have been faced through the work of film production, whereas in *8½* the conflicts are rather abstract and the obstructions are more imaginary as they are created, articulated and projected by Guido's consciousness. In fact, in *Day for Night* Truffaut, who plays the role of the film director himself, struggles to find practical solutions when he has to face budget restrictions or the psychological burnouts of cast members. Along similar lines, in *8½* Guido has certainly analogous problems, like the constant pressures of a rude producer and the pedant strokes of critic Daumier, worries

that are nevertheless insignificant when compared with the nearly metaphysical questions pestering his mind.

The initial situation presents a man who has an artistic block, a deep existential crisis, and presents the somatic symptoms of a sickly, but still fascinating physical appearance. These are the sort of questions he poses to himself: ‘Can I make the film I need? And if I can’t, should I continue?’ From the very beginning the diegesis evolves as a story which is narrated through an internal focalisation (Genette, 1983) for Guido’s centrality is evidently as the main source of images and sounds in the film.

In spite of that, the movie can be divided in two main parts: the first one in which the spectators can observe a clear-cut division between Guido’s oneiric or imaginary scenarios and the real world containing the cinematic apparatus that begs him to start the film production. Instead, in the second part of the movie, the whole set of existential, sentimental and creative questions overwhelming Guido’s thoughts, visually emerges within a context of undecidability between interior and external space. The whole emergence of internal and external problematics, and their solutions, thus merge in the guise of “eidetic-images”, or, in other words, as generated by the mental projections of the main character. In order to clarify how this translates in the visual grammar of the movie, as asserted by Paolo Bertetto in his attempt to outline this concept, the main feature of the eidetic-image as specifically cinematic, (from Greek *eidōs* “simulacrum”) is that the idea or the simulacral image cannot be distinguished from the other filmic images.

In fact, simulacral or eidetic images are rather uniformly depicted with the rest of the scenes which appear to be more exterior and realistic (Bertetto, 2007). Thus, we will discover how the film will gradually become to coincide with the eidetic projection of Guido as the plot unfolds. The fusion between the dreamlike and imaginary projection of Guido’s subjectivity and the external reality is made vague and indistinguishable by the use of surrealist visual expedients and by the narrative emergence of paradoxical circumstances that would be unlikely to take place. This is due to the incongruence through which the behavioural features of the characters are presented in the early sequences of the film.

By way of example, in the scene of the outdoor bar we observe how Luisa and Rossella are overtly bothered by the sight of Guido’s mistress sitting at another table not far from them. Luisa rebukes Guido for preferring that “whore” to her and for the fact she hates how he makes herself “play the part of the bourgeois wife who does not understand”. Then she jealously hints at an allegedly pleasing sexual life he might have with Carla

while a close-up frames Guido whispering “and yet...” He abruptly starts using his imagination while fantasy gradually invades reality.

It should be clarified that the spectators are asked to infer this passage from the “realistic” to the “oneiric” without the use of any specific cinematic sign naturally attributed to dreamlike sequences by traditional cinema. On the contrary, everything is presented seamlessly from one frame to another, as both facts belong to the same reality. However, the scene shows an unexpectedly friendly Luisa getting close to Guido’s mistress, praising her singing talent and her physical appearance. From this very moment on, reality will start to coincide with Guido’s eidetic projection that will fantastically amend the overall setting and the behaviour of the characters to his delightful intent.

However, the main trigger for the manifestation of the metaphysical questions and the fusion between the eidetic imagination and the reality resides on the looming pressure at the eve of the film shooting. Apart from that, these material preoccupations are overtly outweighed by those generated by the inward conscience of the main character. This aspect is put in evidence by contrast very early in one of the first scenes where Guido meets the film critic, Daumier. The latter was supposed to comment on the screenplay before the start of production. They meet near the spring of the spa where Guido is receiving treatment.

From the start (*Figure 5.2*), Daumier begins to argue that “the film lacks a problematic or a philosophical premise making the film a series of gratuitous episodes, perhaps amusing for the ambiguous realism. One wonders what the authors are trying to say...Are they trying to make us think? To scare us? From the start, the action reveals a poverty of poetic inspiration”.

**Figure 5.2**



Daumier criticises Guido's script

These considerations are bluntly expressed with an insolent tone and the intellectual and critique about narratologic imperfections of the screenplay are heard by Guido in the grip of an unexpected composure. Then, contrary to what one may think, Guido does not react as a narcissist intellectual whose artistic creature has been just despised. Instead, he welcomes the pungent criticisms by revealing that the comments will be of help for his further reflections. Yet, he suddenly attempts to explain to him what he intends with this film: “You see, the film...I really want to make this film. I postponed the shoot for two weeks because...” But he can’t manage to finish the sentence for he gets diverted by the off-screen view of someone or something that attracts his attention. In the following framing we discover it being his old friend, Mezzabotta, who is accompanied by a much younger English girl.

This diegetic segment is crucial for it underscores Guido’s initial hesitation in providing a thorough description of the precise scope and the overall meaning of his film. Among the metacinematic traits displayed by *8½*, this is the most frequent and establishes a key *leitmotiv* throughout the narration. Moreover, the fact Guido endorses Daumier’s negative comment is significative too, for it meta-linguistically sets how the narrative premise of *8½* will be eventually congruent with that of a film that situate itself as “a series of gratuitous episodes”. Along the same lines, Stam has pointed out how the film provides ‘a metacritical account of the cinema through Guido’s conversations with Daumier’ (Stam, 1992: 103). Yet, I would add that these gratuitous episodes are almost entirely generated by the projection of the eidetic imagination of Guido.

Therefore, through the stratagem of the continuous dialogue with the film critic, *8½* frames a metacinematic gesture which attempts to cast a glance over the challenges of directorial imagination, which is obviously Fellini’s one, as promptly transfigured by Guido’s carnivalesque inner world. Indeed, it has to be clarified that the initially cautious but still positive reception of Daumier’s blunt criticism is wiped away by a following sequence in which Guido is reading the critic’s notes and his stream of consciousness abruptly interrupts and he throws away the piece of paper in a contemptuous manner. But then, assaulted by the sense of guilt he picks it up again. The impossibility for the character to make a neat decision is thus metaphorically summarised by this rapid scene framed in a wide shot. Yet, precisely this ensuing atmosphere of hesitation and undecidability is the veritable springboard for the outburst of the carnivalesque imagination of Guido Anselmi.



In a nutshell, all the elements belonging to the initial situation, Guido's psychophysical condition, Daumier's criticism, yet the clash with an overall hostile ambience, Luisa and Rossella's constant disapproval and the French actress' hysteria, prepare the ground for the transformation of fictional reality into Guido's eidetic projection, in the desperate attempt to amend it as he pleases. Obviously, this is an interpretive path which has been extensively treated throughout Film Studies' literature. For instance, Ted Perry's accurate analysis is inspiring in this regard: 'In its subjectivity, *8½* goes beyond the use of such obvious dream images to use basic dream modes of narrative. It leaps from event to event according to internal principle and not external narrative convention, and it confounds the world of the dreamer with the dream he is dreaming' (Perry, 1975: 18).

**Figure 5.3**



Rossella's "ethereal" close-up

As a matter of fact, one of the crucial anticipations of the fusion between Guido's imagination and reality is located few minutes after the first half of the movie. In this sequence, Guido goes to check the construction of the spaceship prop in the company of some people, among which his wife Luisa and his friend Rossella.

At the moment when he lingers at the base of the spaceship with Rossella, he ironically starts to reflect on his artistic block aloud: "When did I go wrong? I have really nothing to say...but I want to say it anyway". The first line is expressed off-screen while Rossella is framed in a close-up while smoking a cigarette. It's night (*Figure 5.3*) and the ethereal atmosphere of the scene is accentuated by the image of some lamps framed out of focus in the background among the scaffolding props. This is a scene that precedes a dialogue between Luisa and Guido in which they finally comprehend how they cannot come to terms with their profound sense of incommunicability.

Then, reality is about to be thrown definitively into disorder in the following sequence at the outdoor bar where Guido fantasises about his wife and his mistress, by

visualising them making jokes as friends. As I have already clarified, this is the precise moment where the spectator can no longer draw a line between the external world and Guido's interiority. From now on, Guido's eidetic projection truly starts to "guide" the narrative. It is no coincidence that Fellini has successively inserted a thirteen-minute sequence in which Guido's desire emerges as the result of the imaginary materialisation of a harem which contains all the women of his life, including those who have somehow triggered his interest through the corridors of the spa. The location is the farmhouse in which he was raised during his childhood, already presented in one of the first oneiric scenes in which the spectator could still draw a line between reality and dream. But the space is now transfigured in order to contain all the women who now surprisingly appear to be very prone to fulfil every need of the man.

Here, the fantasy of the author, Fellini, utterly superimposes that of Guido. The tragedy of an impossible start for the film production, the existential crisis and the metaphysical questions are all elements which emphasised how Guido is no one else but an alter ego of the director Fellini. In the harem scene, the difficulties in dealing with the subject matter of the film, with no explicit meaning, are transfigured into a carnivalesque materialisation of a fantasy which is even more than a *divertissement* oriented to amend the reality, but foremost a desperate attempt to reconcile with Luisa and a relief from the distress generated by the pressure of the harassing producer. In fact, precisely after the harem sequence, we are pushed back in a theatre holding auditions for the acting role of the main characters. Guido is still immersed in his imaginary atmosphere, suddenly interrupted by the sense of guilt of not having yet managed to get in connection with Luisa, and then besieged by the oppressive critic Daumier who is relentlessly assaulting him with his severe comments. Jokingly, Guido sarcastically orders to the members of the film crew to hang him with a gesture of his hand, the execution taking place obviously in his fantasies. With that command carried out through that solemn and delicate movement of the hand, Fellini, delegates to Guido a metaphorical statement of purpose: that of being an "author in the guise of a gesture".

As it has been pointed out elsewhere: 'Visualizing Guido's fantasies serves Fellini as a visualization of the *sources* of all artistic creativity [...] They are primarily visual images, not ideas, and they may be triggered by any free association in the present – a tune, a picture, a word, anything that reminds the artist of something buried deeply in his or her psyche' (Bondanella, 2002: 105). Therefore, the narrative expedient of establishing a connection with Guido's imagination has the function to transmit a crucial

intentionality: that of communicating the difficulties and the pleasures of the creative process.

One of the demonstrations of how Guido is depicted, as constantly looking for a shelter into his own imaginary world, is through his peculiar *nonchalant* attitude during the auditions, not answering to the insistent requests of the producers' injunctions to hurry up and choose the actors for each role. According to Perry (1975), there is a precise correspondence between this narrative sequence and real facts because Fellini actually encountered many problems before the shooting, such as outlining the main elements of the storyline and casting an actress for the role of Carla. From that moment on, Fellini has often proved to be vague about the film's content with the members of the crew.

Nonetheless, he has admittedly being all the time in tight connection with Marcello Mastroianni throughout the whole duration of the production, for he was aware that the sketch of Guido's character was a key-factor around which a multi-layered depiction of the productive process and creative genesis had to be built. Thus, it is not too radical to assert that the film establishes mainly a twofold order of coextensive thematic lines around the connection between the main character and the director Fellini. That is to say, Fellini/Guido's intention to withdraw from the duties of film production and to intentionally amend the reality through the outburst of his eidetic projections is what continuously decomposes and recomposes the diegetic ambience and the characters' interactions. This is precisely where the *productionist* side of this complex metacinematic operation resides: a film about a withdrawal from the duty of filmmaking that, at once, situates itself as a profound reflection on the difficulties of being a film director. In that lies the fascinating intricacy of this movie, in the subtle balance reached by the juxtaposition of such a sentiment of incommunicability around the disclosure of the minutest aspects of filmmaking process and that of expressing by any available means the thorny issue of what it means to be an author at its fullest. Following Fellini's words:

Perhaps, this was the great lesson of *8½*: at some point I told myself, 'Get the engine started, get everybody on board, somebody will provide, force other people to make you do something'. So I did. I started the construction of the set, put the actors under contract, and the film took off. In the beginning, I didn't have a script, only some notes, a scene or two...(Fellini and Cardullo, 2006: 175)

In point of fact, when Fellini talked to his co-screenwriter, Ennio Flaiano, about the few confused traits of a vague storyline, his reaction was obviously sceptical. However, Fellini's merit lies in the ability of gaining advantage from the lack of a solid storyline

and by having adopted during the process a flexible approach towards the constraints of the screenplay that left room for the renowned clownish improvisation of many sequences. Exactly such leeway for the improvisation can be read as an evident and incontrovertible faith of the author into the maieutic potential generated by a constructive dialogue with the ambiguous and undefined passages of the script. Maieutics here is referred to the Socratic Method, drawn by Plato's dialectics, as a form of argumentative dialogue apt to elicit critical thinking and knowledge resulting from the confrontational effort between interlocutors. In the platonic dialogues of *Theaetetus* is metaphorised by the art of midwifery (Jowett, 2010) and basically presents philosophy, and the construction of an argumentation, as a communicative activity which can lead to either *aporia* (contradiction), *doxa* (mere opinion) or *episteme* (safe knowledge) (Hanke, 1990).

Through this conceptualisation I argue that Fellini established a profound dialogue with the loose script of 8½, being it his real interlocutor, in the attempt to give birth, as a midwife, to the whole set of creative and visionary solutions we see in the final product, precisely by interrogating the empty interstices left out among the lines of an approximately written text.

In spite of that, we should be cautious in judging such faith as a passive acceptance of a poetic meaning miraculously emerging from the shaded zone of the pre-production. But, rather it should be stressed how, in Fellini's case, the active role of the author/subject is consciously directed to interrogate such autobiographic and metacinematic indefiniteness. Even the title reflects a high level of reflexivity with the personal filmography of the author. In fact, 8½ was a provisional title and Fellini chose it for he already had shot six full-length features till that moment and other three “half” films, namely three short films that belong to collective works made in collaboration with other directors.

However, in another interview Fellini has disclosed an interesting operational detail that somehow challenges the apparently disorganised and barely planned atmosphere lying behind the production of the film. This is how he replied to the following question: ‘*But are you satisfied with the film, with your colleagues and cast?* Yes, why not? By now I’ve reached a perfect rapport with my production team. I feel towards the cast the same tenderness and affection that the puppeteer has for his puppets’ (Costantini and Fellini, 1995: 55). In that, Fellini wanted to clarify that, despite such a chaotic appearance, his relationship with the members of the cast and the film crew was rife with optimism for he was confident that his role of puppeteer would have functioned

even against all the substantial uncertainties revolving around the propaedeutic stages of production.

Thus, he was somehow confident about his role of director and on his capacity to instil a sort of automatic pilot to the filmmaking process. This combination between the obsession of control and the autonomous emergence of the events, both identifiable in the actual preparation of the film and reflected by the diegetic character of Guido, is highlighted by two exemplary organisational aspects of the production. By way of example, Fellini, on the one hand imposed to the actress Sandra Milo to gain fifteen pounds, while, on the other he had declared that 'it's better not to look at each scene as you shoot day after day. What you are doing won't come out how you dreamed it, and so if you look at what you've done, you might change direction' (Kezich, 2007: 245). This leitmotiv is also restated by the dialogue in which Guido asks the magician what is the secret behind the trick of thought transmission and the man replies: "Well, it's partly a trick but part of it is real, I don't know how, but it happens." Along these lines, Fellini's project seems to be attuned to the famous adage of Mao Zedong: 'Everything under heaven is in utter chaos; the situation is excellent' (Zedong, 2008).

Apart from this metaphorical parallelism, *8½*, represents the quintessence of how the teleological thrust of the author as gesture can also trigger a whole set of unintentional, unexpected and unpredictable scenarios which are endowed with a communicatively meaningful content. In point of fact, I am in agreement with Stam as he points out that: 'If in one sense the film concretizes the internal discourse of a protagonist who *happens to be* the filmmaker, in another it asserts a special affinity between cinema and the inner speech of voluntary and involuntary memory, of vision and the oneiric.' (Stam, 1992: 104) In this sense, this film, perhaps, represents one of the most radical philosophical essays on a metacinematic topic, to the extent that it almost aspires to elevate the nihilism of filmmaking impotence to the main source for new creative forms of thought. As Guido towards the end of the film confesses to Claudia, who is by far more than an engaged actress, but allegorically represents the angelic guide of his wandering and tormented poetic inspiration:

Claudia: "You're such a fake. So, there's no part in the film."

Guido: "You're right. There isn't. And there's no film. There's nothing anywhere. If it were up to me we would call it all off now."

Such correspondence between nothingness and creative completeness is also restated by the critic Daumier when advises Guido to destroy all the props and to renounce to the film production: “If we can’t have everything, true perfection is nothing”. The reflexive correspondence of this passage is also crucial because Fellini truly had to cope with a real setback during the production. In the midst of a carnivalesque ending in which all the characters of the movie disorderly appear in a metaphysical place located next to the spaceship’s props, Guido has his epiphany.

In the calm acceptance of the autonomous existence of every living being and the free collocation of every character within the story outline, his mind murmurs: “Everything's confused again, but that confusion is me; how I am, not how I'd like to be. And I'm not afraid to tell the truth now, what I don't know, what I'm seeking. Only like that do I feel alive and I can look into your loyal eyes without shame. Life is a celebration, let's live it together”. So, as accepted by the main character, both Fellini and the spectators, perhaps, comprehend the magic potential unleashed by renouncing the full control over the creative process, but rather to let it flow towards the materialisation of the most unpredictable meanings. That is the reason why I consider *8½* as the paradigmatic model or the founding basis of what productionist metafilms can truly aspire to reflect from a philosophical standpoint. To conclude, I would argue that the overall process of reflection upon the genesis and development of the creative and productive mechanism originates, in this movie, from a complex form of maieutic nihilism. Namely, it provides evidence of how the final acceptance of the creative indefiniteness, the casual organisation of the productive apparatus, or the nothingness, can be the foundation of creative imagery and poetic inspiration.

## 5.2.

**Le Mépris (Contempt):** Italy/France 1963, 101 min.

**Director:** Jean-Luc Godard

**Producers:** Georges de Beauregard, Joseph E. Levine, Carlo Ponti

**Language:** French, English, German, Italian

### Synopsis

*Contempt* is a faithful adaptation of homonym Alberto Moravia's story. A tyrannical American film producer and wealthy playboy, Jeremy Prokosch (Jack Palance) hires a renowned Austrian director, Fritz Lang (playing himself), to direct a film adaptation of Homer's *Odyssey*. Dissatisfied with Lang's treatment of the material as an art film, Prokosch hires Paul Javal (Michel Piccoli), a novelist and playwright, to rework the script. As the plot unfolds, a clash between artistic expression and commercial opportunity overlaps Paul's sudden estrangement from his wife Camille Javal (Brigitte Bardot). Camille grows uneasy, secretly doubting his integrity and suspecting that he is using her to cement his ties with Prokosch. The feelings of doubt are heightened when she sees him flirting ambiguously with Prokosch's secretary, Francesca. Back at their apartment Paul and Camille discuss the subtle uneasiness that has come between them in the first few hours of the project, and Camille suddenly announces to her bewildered husband that she no longer loves him. Hoping to reconquer her, Paul convinces Camille to accept Prokosch's invitation to join them for filming in Capri. Prokosch and Lang confront themselves about the correct interpretation of Homer's work, an impasse exacerbated by the difficulty of communication between the German director, French script writer, and American producer. When Paul agrees with Prokosch against Lang by arguing that Odysseus actually left Ithaca because of his wife's infidelity, Camille's suspicions of her husband's servility are confirmed. She deliberately allows him to find her kissing Prokosch and in the ensuing confrontation she declares that her respect for him has turned to contempt because he has bartered her to Prokosch. He refuses the accusation, offering to abandon his duties and leave Capri; but she will not withdraw her disdain and leaves for Rome with the producer. After an auto crash in which Camille and Prokosch are killed, Paul prepares to leave Capri and return to the theater. Lang continues to work on the film.

The estrangement between Paul and Camille reflect some aspects of Godard's life: while Paul, Camille, and Prokosch correspond to Ulysses, Penelope, and Poseidon. Respectively, they also correspond in some ways to Godard, his wife Anna Karina and Joseph E. Levine, the film's producer and distributor. In fact, at one point, Bardot wears a black wig which makes her resemble Godard's wife. Michel Piccoli also bears some resemblance to Brigitte Bardot's ex-husband, the filmmaker Roger Vadim. This remarkable detail gives proof of the deep involvement stemming from the performance enacted by the French actress. Also, notable in the film is a discussion of Dante, in particular Canto XXVI of *Inferno*, about Ulysses' last fatal journey beyond the Pillars of Hercules to the other side of the world and inspiring speculations on Friedrich Hölderlin's poem, "Dichterberuf" ("The Poet's Vocation").

### **Analysis – A Contemptuous Glance over the Commodification of Cinematic Art**

“C’est un film simple sur des choses compliquées” (It is a simple film about complicated ideas) - Jean-Luc Godard.

As already pointed out, *Contempt*, together with *8½*, is deemed to represent a modernist breakthrough in the way cinema self-reflexively turns back on its own processual dimension. What *8½* miraculously shares with *Contempt*, which was released in the same year as Fellini's movie, is the fact that they both describe the *unmaking* of a couple and the *making* of a film. In spite of the evident analogy of one of the main narrative lines, through this analysis I will attempt to outline the extent to which this film by Jean-Luc



Godard also allows the emergence of some insights revolving around the productionist side of metacinema, which slightly diverts from those showcased by *8½*. Firstly, the film can be divided in three main parts: the first one is in Rome's Cinecittà studios and at Prokosch's house. The middle thematic segment is set in Paul and Camille's apartment and the third part moves to Capri where the actual shootings take place.

As an evidence of the overall thematic orientation of the movie, from the very beginning, the film displays a more than original approach towards self-reflexivity. Indeed, the first framing is a long shot portraying a film crew slowly advancing from the background on tracking shot, over a visible rail road. These cinematic technicians are laterally following and recording the stroll of a girl while slowly advancing towards our point of view (*Figure 5.4*). In the meantime, we hear the voice-over of Jean-Luke Godard enunciating the film credits. The titles are therefore expressed by the film director himself. Then, the film crew approaches towards our point of view and the profilmic camera invades the space of the framing.

Then, it gradually loses interest in the previous subject and softly pans towards our standpoint and literally frames us (*Figure 5.5*). End of credits, Godard pronounces a citation falsely attributed to André Bazin, in fact the author of the quotation is the French film critic and playwright Michel Mourlet (De Baecque, 2003): 'the cinema substitutes for our gaze a world more in harmony with our desires' (Mourlet, 2008:34). Then Godard immediately clarifies that "*Contempt* is a history of that world" All these initial elements quite evidently reflect how the thematic approach is entirely dedicated to a metacinematic slant and this is presented through an explicit statement of purpose. In this sense, it can be argued that another film's incipit as much productionist as that proposed by *Contempt* does not exist. In fact, the high degree of productionist metacinematicity of this initial sequence can, perhaps, only be equated by few other works in the history of film such as *Trans-Europe Express* (Robbe-Grillet, 1966), *Day for Night* (Truffaut, 1973), *The State of Things* (Wenders, 1982) and *Living in Oblivion* (Di Cillo, 1996) for in all these works' openings we clearly observe film crews caught in the act of preparing or shooting a scene. Like *Contempt*, all these movies explicit a clear regime of productionist self-reflexivity by encouraging the spectators to explore a fictional film set from the beginning. But, what the abovementioned films do not cover though, with the exception of *Day for Night*, is an all-encompassing reflection about most of the material aspects and human agencies, translated into the diverse roles comprised within a film crew, contributing to the coordination of the machinery of production.

Figure 5.4



View of a tracking shot following a girl's stroll

Figure 5.5



The final moment in which the camera pans towards us

Or, we might argue that the whole scenario expounded by *Contempt* is rather an explicit essay oriented to dissect the productionist side of metacinema. In point of fact, the ambiguous falsification of Mourlet's quotation, erroneously attributed to Bazin, opens up a scenario of mystification, a regime of falsity that cannot be disregarded. It is not acknowledgeable whether Godard was aware of the fact that the sentence was not pronounced by Bazin, but the recent death of the French film critic allows the emergence of significant speculations around the presence of this fake quotation.

Firstly, it is important to stress how Godard has deliberately played with an Orson Welles' previous film when he makes use of the spoken credits, a solution already adopted by the American director for the opening of *The Magnificent Amberson* (1942) (Guarner, 1967). In turn, Welles will successively draw on Godard's self-reflexive insight about the mystifying power of filmic image, by using it ten years later as the main narrative expedient in *F for Fake* (Welles, 1973). In fact, Welles' film is exceptionally renowned for its sophisticated exaltation of the magic trickery and artistic plagiarism, as parameters

apt to generate a critical problematisation of the linguistic specificity and the ontological status of fictional cinema.

Along these lines, Godard's reflexive investigation of the productive nature of cinema lies in the cryptic, but strategic positioning of this fake quotation as liable to be interpreted as a probable wish fulfilment of the critic André Bazin. In fact, as it is well-known, Bazin was captivated by the research of illusionistic realism in filmmaking especially through the use of the depth of field and long take techniques. In that, Bazin would have probably not even considered the phrase Godard attributes to him, or, perhaps, it would have at most argued it only in a hypothetical or virtual scenario. Indeed, it is more likely that 'Godard presumably wishes Bazin had written them, or had lived to write them or perhaps had lived to deny that he had written them' (Smith, 2004: 101) . Beyond these overlapping hypotheses, the reality is that Bazin would have probably never said that. Instead, he would have rather argued that the substitution of the gaze operated by cinema in order to materialise "a world more in harmony with our desires" has not been actualised within *Contempt* for it rather exposes a realism founded on relational absences.

After all, we will see how such relational absences or impossible relationships are expressed by the main themes of the movie. In the first place, I am referring to Bazin's impossibility to disavow his own supposed quotation, as he had just passed away. The leitmotiv of the impossible relationship resonates with the gradual estrangement between Camille and Paul, the impossible reconciliation between a politically-laden counter-cinema, expressed by the *Nouvelle Vague* and Fritz Lang's role in the film, and the economic hegemony of the Hollywood Studio System, and, finally, I am also alluding to the impossible filmic adaptation of the *Odyssey* (Pethő, 2011).

In that, Godard has attempted to display an element that somehow traverses the whole Film history; namely, the frustrated wish fulfilment of Hollywood in embodying and, therefore, annihilating the products of avant-gardes and underground filmmaking. But he first and foremost meant to highlight, on the contrary, the insuperable difficulties faced by certain political counter-cinema in challenging the economic supremacy of Hollywood (Elsaesser, 1993). In a nutshell, Godard wished to summarise this entire set of impossible compromises and, therefore, has drawn attention to them through the exposure of a main dialectical leitmotiv bound to the idea of impotence. In that, I would like to restate how this leitmotiv is immediately anticipated and already recapped by the constitutive impracticability of what Bazin's misquotation heralds. From this point of

view and to sum up, *Contempt* is rather a film about the impossibility of producing images in harmony with our desires. Nonetheless, we should outline the way it, at least, attempts to produce a reflexive grasp on the productionist side of cinema.

The figure of Fritz Lang, playing himself, is already revelatory in the way it is moulded within the initial scenes. Namely, he is depicted as a free artist who resists to the stylistic homologation prompted by the Hollywood system and somehow represents a stance similar to that of the proponents of *Nouvelle Vague* and the critics of *Cahiers du Cinema*. In fact, we observe him in one of the first sequences explaining to Prokosch and Paul the core meaning around which the film revolves: “Each picture should have a definite point of view Jerry...here it's the fight of the individual against circumstances, the eternal problem of the old Greeks”. Here the “individual against the circumstances” is the author who wants to produce a film emancipated from the conformity of standardised production along with the idea of instilling new forms of thought around the creative process. As it has been already pointed out, *Contempt*, but also *8½* along similar lines, proposes itself as a modernist manifesto for an unprecedented self-reflexive filmmaking and, simultaneously, as the funerary monument of classical cinema. In that, both films do not only prove the digestion of Vertov's lesson, but also the overcoming of less contentious metafilms on Hollywood such as *Sunset Boulevard* (Wilder, 1950) and *Singing' in the Rain* (Donen, Kelly, 1952).

In point of fact, within such an ambitious project, Fritz Lang embodies the figure of the wise man (Aumont and Marie, 1988) who is supposed to provide the direction for this authorial and productive transformation of filmmaking. Indeed, the presentation of Fritz Lang, as an inspirational author, is obtained by superimposing his effective well-known reputation, as one of the main exponents of expressionist genre, to that of a tenacious avant-gardist who proposes a modernised conceptual reinterpretation of the Odyssey within the fictional universe. Obviously, the presence of the screenwriter, Paul, already stresses how the producer Prokosch is irritated by the result of the first shootings as being completely far from the expectations, namely, too intellectualised and detached from the original script.

In the same sequence in which Fritz Lang shows the first shootings and comments them with cautious self-satisfaction, we observe Prokosch standing up and slowly approaching a man who enters the screening room from behind the curtains bearing some film reels. Then, Prokosch suddenly hits them with a violent gesture as his probable intention is that of expressing a vehement disdain towards the work being done so far by

Fritz Lang. He promptly underscores the gesture with a pertinent cue: “That’s what I think about that stuff up there Fritz”. Then, the reverse-shot displays in the background, right below the projection screen, a banner written in Italian: “Il cinema é un’invenzione senza avvenire – Louis Lumière” (Cinema is an invention without any future).

The written banner is a strong signifier for it highlights the controversial relationship about the free authorial creativity and the constraints being imposed by the Studio System. Such detail already conveys the depiction of the main inconceivable relationship, that of the art film and the economic hegemony of Hollywood system, an impossible compromise that resonates in all the others expressed in the film. All the discrete parts of the film metonymically reflect the impossible making of the film as a whole. As a matter of fact, the problematisation of this aspect is also highlighted by the unusually big and almost Hollywoodian budget, (nearly \$1 million) for a Godard’s film (Burns, 2011). This financial datum is a significative evidence of how Godard, as director, wanted to directly confront with the possible contamination of the creative substance of the film by those stakeholders who had somehow exposed themselves to a certain economic risk in the film production.

Nonetheless, it should be clarified that the productionist side is not utterly central, but it is, narratively-wise, more belonging to a secondary story line if compared with the prevalent frequency of scenes related to Camille and Paul’s progressive crisis in the middle part of the plot. Furthermore, the productionist side is not even the only metacinematic nuance of the movie which, actually, contains many referential elements to the history of cinema, such as posters of Hawks’ *Hatari* (1962), Hitchcock’s *Psycho* (1960) or Rossellini’s *Viaggio in Italia* (1954) (Cohen, 2008), all films to which *Contempt* seems overtly inspired. In fact, Rossellini’s movie also presents the story of a couple facing a crisis in the same setting, the isle of Capri. As argued by Laura Mulvey, *Contempt* is a “fabric of quotations” which foretells the future interest of Godard into projects shaped as a “tissue of film quotation and reference” (Mulvey, 2011: 227) and that will result in the radically personal, philological reconstruction of cinematic historic and cultural evolution which is *Histoire(s) du Cinema* (1983). Then it contains a specific self-referential allusion made by Fritz Lang who explicitly admits his own favourite film is *M* (Lang, 1931).

However, the referential sequences and the indoor scenes displaying the drama of incommunicability between Camille and Paul, seemingly inspired to those depicted by Michelangelo Antonioni’s films, leave room to the second main sequence related to the

productionist side of metacinema tackled by *Contempt*. This passage is shot on location, on the isle of Capri. In the first *plan* Brigitte Bardot is framed with close-up wearing sunglasses. She seems to be captivated by what is off-screen in front of her while the saturated blue of the sea dominates the background. In the following counter-shot, two camera operators, also wearing sunglasses, are maneuvering a cumbersome camera which nearly fills up the whole framing, this time with the rocks of Capri in the background. The scene continues with a medium shot of Camille sitting on the side of a boat, Paul enters from the left repeatedly asking: “What are you doing?” Camille concisely answers: “Je regarde”, (I am watching).

With the juxtaposition of the image of a camera and that of Camille looking at the scene, the spectator is prompted to identify his/her own gaze with that of the girl. Suddenly, the purity and uniqueness of this identification gets obfuscated by Paul’s entrance. Yet, the two main characters, nonetheless extraneous to the fictional universe of the film being shot, are even more brusquely advised to get out of the frame by Godard’s himself, who makes a rapid but significant cameo. In fact, if the first two shots linguistically concentrate the attention on Camille’s gaze (*Figures 5.6, 5.7*) the third restates the theme of the couple in crisis and how the sense of contempt between them is increasing (*Figure 5.8*). Then, the last shot disperses the spectator’s gaze and the attendant mechanisms of identification into the anonymous and multiple presence of the rest of the film crew.

This dispersion is accentuated by the overall setting being framed in a wider long shot of the boat (*Figure 5.9*). This gradual detachment from the individual and relational drama, given by the gradual defocalisation of the narrative point of view, is obtained through a masterful inversion of the standard *découpage* which is widely used to communicate a meaningful and intelligible structure of the space to the spectator’s eye. That is to say, here Godard willingly overthrows the commonly accepted grammatical rule used to edit the shots which should present the setting and the disposition of the characters in the space for the first time; namely through the following order: establishing/long shot, medium shot, close-ups. In fact, the commonly accepted order of the shots is here voluntarily inverted to create a progressive, but sudden detachment from the focus on the main characters towards the more abstract, but still predominant drama of the production. The drama of an artistic compromise: that of Paul being subjugated by the economic slavery of Hollywood at the expense of his creative inclination to theatre

and the fact that it possibly represents the main source of Camille's contempt towards him.

Figure 5.6



Figure 5.7



Figure 5.8



Figure 5.9



The unusual *découpage* for the sequence shot in Capri (close-up, medium shots, establishing/long shot)

This sequence is therefore paradigmatic for it describes the gradual defocalisation of the narrative point of view from the couple's communicative impasse towards the dispersion into the emotional neutrality of the mechanics of production. In this regard, Robert Stam argues that 'the film itself seems to tell the story without mediation, without any characterised narrator. The first-person point of view of the novel becomes the 'no-person' point of view of the film' (Stam, 2004: 282). If Stam outlines how Godard's film does not manage to render the first-person point of view as the homonym Moravia's novel, indeed, it is thought-provoking for the way it problematises the role of the director as the main agent of the representation.

Whereas *8½* presents almost an utter internal focalisation for the narrative standpoint is mainly Guido's throughout the whole movie, in *Contempt* is nearly impossible to understand who the real puppeteer of the story is. Yet, *8½* elevated the vagueness and confusion of the author as the ultimate source of the roaring flame of artistic creativity. Namely, a creativity stemming from the interior world of an author who struggles between intentionality and non-intentionality, as the puppeteer who, at times, consciously becomes the puppet subjected to the whole creative, oneiric and productive

mechanism of filmmaking. In a nutshell, if in 8½ we are dealing more with a complex form of maieutic nihilism, with *Contempt* we witness the parable of a creative impossibility and a relational estrangement as directly stemming from a problem of materialistic nature. That is to say, the pain generated by self-betrayal, by the unbearable burden of an 'artistic prostitution' (Stam, 1992: 99). It is the story of an inevitable commodification of the author which provokes serious repercussions involving the emotional and relational sphere of all the characters. *Contempt* is mainly the story of such inevitability.

In that, the impossibility of the film adaptation of the *Odyssey* is certainly due to the arduous cooperation between Hollywood rules and cinematic avant-garde. Or, at least, this is what Godard wanted to express in accordance with the blossoming tenets of *Nouvelle Vague* in favour of a counter-cultural filmmaking project. So, the French author was actively reflecting the spirit of the time, as one of the main proponents of a filmmaking trend which was attempting to free itself from the marketing-oriented bonds of motion picture industry. '*Contempt* constitutes an auterist resentment against producers generally and against Carlo Ponti and Joseph Levine in particular' (Ibid.). Yet, Godard paradoxically enacts this critique through the making of an expensive film, thereby performing a metacritical account of such a challenging cooperation with a big production represented by individuals in flesh and bones.

Finally, as Viney points out about *Contempt*, 'its frequent display of the cinematic means of production shows how beginnings, middles and ends can be absorbed within a wider cultural and technological continuum' (Viney, 2011: 155). This may be exemplified by the ending of the movie. Before the final sequence, Camille escapes with Prokosch and we see them having a fatal car accident in which they both lose their lives. In that, the paradigm of impossibility is also translated in this impossible final elopement between the tyrannical producer and the morally betrayed wife. Thus, Paul decides to leave the set and goes to say goodbye to Lang, who has already refused Paul's psychoanalytical corrections of the script on behalf of his orientation towards a more classical exposure of man/nature conflict. When the two artists shake their hands, Paul asks Lang what he will do with the shooting. Then Lang replies: "I'll finish the film, you should always finish what you start."

Then, Godard appears again as assistant director: "We're ready, Mr Lang" The point of view of the camera tracks forward following the direction of the profilmic camera which is followed till it leaves the frame on the right. Now the two cameras basically coincide.



Our point of view pans with the camera towards the sea. The voice of Godard shouts out: “Silence!” FIN.

In spite of the artistic commodification imposed by the modern film industry, this movie has to be finished, Lang declares; a movie that presents all this set of impossible conciliations. One above of all, that of highlighting the ruins of a lost modernity, the Odyssey of an author constantly looking for the *nostos*, the return to an original creative purity which is nearly impossible to be screened through a twofold adaptation (both Moravia’s and Homer’s). However, through such complex overturning, Godard manages to affirm his intentions and he does it by basically contradicting the bottom line of the story. Drawing on Godard’s words: ‘The point of *Le Mépris* is that these are people who look at each other and judge each other, and then are in turn looked at and judged by the cinema – represented by Fritz Lang, who plays himself, or in effect the conscience of film, its honesty’ (Milne, 1972: 201). In that, there is no intention to disclose any dimension of secrecy about filmmaking, but only to show that the author can nearly disappear in the indefiniteness of the multiple points of view and power relations which intertwine themselves within the space of the film set.

That is the reason why the way the author deposes his subjectivity in favour of displaying a set of simple facts that guide the narration truly bends towards the exposure of an authorial stance which is gestural by nature. Namely, a gesture inclined to exhibit the mediality of the process in the attempt to withdraw the individuality of the author from the plot and from the mechanisms of production as much as possible. When Godard appears, he does it furtively, perhaps restating his incapability to exert a full control over every aspect of the productive process. In this sense, the degree of *unpredictability* stemming from the analysis of the multi-layered scenario of this productionist metafilm resides precisely in the display of the gradual emergence of such a set of unexpected hindrances, as potentially engendered by and embedded within the process of film production.

**5.3. La Ricotta, episode from Ro.Go.Pa.G.: Italy/France, 1963, 40m.**

**Director:** Pier Paolo Pasolini

**Producers:** Alfredo Bini, Angelo Rizzoli, Alberto Barsanti

## **Synopsis**

Pasolini's *La Ricotta* depicts a film set where the crew is involved in the shooting of a story of epic proportions: the Passion of Jesus Christ. However, it is also the story of another Passion; that of the main character, Stracci (Italian for "rags"), appointed for the role of the "Good Thief" and crucified next to Christ by the director of the film, played by Orson Welles. Stracci is an individual who belongs to the underclass, the sub-proletariat so beloved by the director Pasolini. He spends most of the time trying to steal food from other members of the film crew because he has already given his lunch pack to the poor family. For such continuous begging he is continually mocked and bullied by every member of the film crew. At a moment, in order to obtain food, he even disguises himself as a woman. The turning point of the story is when a reporter comes to the set and interviews the director, Orson Welles. At the end of the interview the reporter bumps into Stracci while he is caressing the dog that devoured his lunch pack. Then, the reporter buys the animal for a thousand lira. With the money Stracci gets some ricotta, but, before even tasting it, he is immediately summoned by the film crew and tied to the cross for the scene of the crucifixion. At the first interruption of the shooting he hurries to eat the ricotta and, surprised by the actors, he is also invited by them to feast with the remains of the banquet of the Last Supper while everybody scoffs at him. Thus, he gorges himself and finally dies of indigestion on the cross during the shooting process.

## **Analysis – Pasolini/Welles: The Artistic and Political Isolation of Film Directors**

Even though Godard and Pasolini have been overtly at odds with regards to the political debate of the late 1960's, mainly because the Italian intellectual had defended the policemen when attacked by the burning protest of students in the streets of Rome, their two films of 1963 had already shown more analogies than contrasts from both an aesthetic and political standpoint (Crippa, 2011). In fact, despite the two authors' initial disagreement, *La Ricotta* presents many similarities with *Contempt*, one above all, that of being a film which displays the making-of another film while communicating an unfavourable view of the cultural and economic hegemony of the film industry.

Furthermore, the collaboration to the collective project *Ro.Go.Pa.G.*, involving Godard with *Le Nouveau Monde* and Pasolini with *La Ricotta*, has crucially contributed to bridge their political and stylistic diffidence even though Pasolini declared: 'I didn't have any contact with Rossellini (who was involved with the short-film *Illibatezza* – "Chastity") or others at all, I just knew they were doing episodes too' (Pasolini and Stack 1969: 59). Yet, especially in accordance with the almost contemporary *Contempt*, Pasolini restates his critique of the film industry as being the main source of productions and distributions which advocate the hegemony of the ruling middle class with the purpose of strengthening the socio-political status-quo. Besides, Pasolini and Godard also tangibly attempted to demonstrate how the capitalist mode of production hits and transforms the lives of individuals in the way they conform their personal desires to the widespread consumerist behaviours.

In both their movies characters are depicted as the real, observable victims of economic subjugation. Some examples are present in Godard's films such as *Tout va Bien* (1972) and *Passion* (1982), but, foremost, in *Contempt* these aspects are also organisationally mirrored by the way through which the producer, Joseph E. Levine, imposed a nude scene with Brigitte Bardot at the beginning of the film (Gergely, 2008), which was later censored by the other producer, Carlo Ponti, for the Italian distribution.

This productionist detail, already emerging in the propaedeutic phase of production, traverses the phantasies of ongoing social and mediatic processes of spectacularisation, objectification and commodification orbiting around the French actress' body (Coates, 1998). In that, Godard's characters are especially tormented by irreconcilable tensions, divided between the fear of being commodified and the subtle desire of being part of the capitalist game. For instance, the desire manifesting through Paul's idealist thoughts of escape from the corrupted laws of a bourgeois life or Camille's

lascivious and secret wish to be part of the elitist side of society through her elopement with Prokosch are a case in point. Yet, it should not even be necessary to adopt a feminist or gender-oriented approach to evaluate Camille's gesture as directly triggered by Paul's negligence towards her constant requests of communication, to which he reacts with a resigned withdrawal into the coward misrecognition of his artistic prostitution.

However, in the best case these characters' stoic resistance to the integration into the logic of film industry narratively suggests that they will probably succumb to its power sooner or later. In this regard, it is fairly illustrative the moment in which Fritz Lang passionately declaims Brecht's poem against Hollywood, but that, at the end, confesses to Paul that he will finish the film of the *Odyssey* and that, therefore, will satisfy the requests of the despotic producer, Prokosch.

In this sense, if Godard's characters are already, or on the verge of being, commodified, conversely, Pasolini's plots illustrate the desolation of Roman suburbs whose inhabitants are, towards the end of the 1950's and at the beginning of the 1960's, physically and practically excluded from the industrial urbanisation, as creatures still alien to the nascent consumerist habits. Along these lines, the Italian director had already expounded such themes of social marginalisation through precedent films such as *Accattone* (1961) and *Mamma Roma* (1962), but it is with *La Ricotta* that he elevates them even to a more significative level. However, the main element emerging from the depiction of marginalised individuals, as similarly represented in Pasolini's movies, is that these characters are not only excluded, but also overtly reluctant to be integrated. It should be clarified that it is not clear whether Roman suburbs could be actually framed at the time as hotbeds of resistance against the integration into the blooming consumer society. But, what we can hypothesise, also on the score of numerous public interviews released by the Italian intellectual, is that these scenarios are the visualisation of a Pasolini's persistent utopic wish: that of desiring these individuals to be spared by the spreading behavioural and existential conformity of dawning consumer society.

The reasons why Pasolini was so haunted by the advent of consumer society mainly reside in its appalling inclination to flatten every behavioural difference into an amorphous and aseptic homologation, yet mainly due to the diffusion of middle class values and through the consumption of analogous commodities. But, I would like to emphasise why the salvation of the urban sub-proletariat, from being engulfed into the modern consumer society, was truly a utopic wish for Pasolini.

In point of fact, he was aware that the candid and naive resistance exerted by his fictional characters, more than realistic in the depiction of their miserable conditions, but no more than stylistically relevant for the religious and poetic attributions attached to them, was inexorably doomed to be absorbed by consumer society. According to Pasolini, these individuals would have never been able to ignore the glitters and the comfort offered by mass products, being advertised in the name of a rediscovered wellbeing after the long war period and as a symbolic seal of the Italian economic miracle. Or, in a nutshell, they would have never been able to contrast the outburst of the overwhelming forces of the so-called progress.

On this point, there is possibly no more accurate materialisation of such a utopic wish than the depiction of these characters' obstinate reluctance to be absorbed into the consumer society. Yet perhaps, no minutest reflection of this frustration as that depicted with the main character of *La Ricotta*, Stracci. Certainly, framed as an underclass, he appears in the first sequence while lying on the ground. Apparently sick, he is aching and measuring the temperature of his body with a thermometer. Suddenly an off-screen voice calls Stracci and we realise that two people are mocking him for his evident unhealthy conditions and provocatively forecasting he would have not been able to obtain some food that day.

Stracci reacts by saying, that if they had not paid attention to their own lunch packs he would have certainly stolen them. In reaction to this provocation, one of the two individuals grinning with arrogance launches himself towards Stracci who had just stood up and peremptorily kicks him from behind. Stracci, just knocked out, takes the joke and, in turn, smiles back to whom we discover to be the assistant operator of a film set. The poor man consciously and sarcastically accepts his condition when, still smiling, denounces his own hunger and the fact he has to feed his entire family with the food provided by the film crew. The power of his naïf and innocent reaction lies precisely in the total absence of political awareness, so peculiar of the whole sub-proletarian class. A social class which was historically on the verge of being subjected to the urban industrialisation and that, therefore, did not yet have to face the political struggles deriving from the awareness of capitalist exploitation which would have been mainly triggered by the protests of 1968 in Europe.

From an analytical standpoint, the appearance of the camera in the first sequence is still disjointed from any productionist connotation. Instead, it belongs to the domain of a realist metacinematicity. In fact, through such a metacinematic insert, we can certainly

underpin that a reflexive ontological status prevails within the regime of this representation. Furthermore, a clear refusal of Bazinian naturalism, or a rejection of mimetic illusionism, is certainly highlighted by the presence of the camera within the framing, but also by the unconventional coexistence of two narrative lines: the shooting of the Passion of Jesus Christ and the parable of Stracci, the glutton, whose inextinguishable hunger becomes the narrative engine of the film (Elduque, 2016).

However, the first passage revealing the presence of the camera becomes even more significant when other members of the cast are framed and offers a hint towards the productionist metacinematicity expressed by the film. So, together with the presentation of the members of the film crew, mainly actors on stage clothes, the overall set of elements presented in the first sequence introduces a reflexive ontology of the representation and also prepares the ground for further productionist reflections.

The very first productionist scene is that one preceding the static representation of Rosso Fiorentino's *Deposition from the Cross* (1521) in which the voice-over of the director asks for the arrival of the crown on the scene. His scream is immediately echoed by the assistant director and then, sarcastically, by other grinning members of the film crew. In that, the continuously frenetic, playful and mocking atmosphere generated by the behaviour of the members of the film crew is mainly expressed during the regular breaks, but it often encroaches on the production phases as a persistent and transversal sign of filmmaking self-parody (Syrimis, 2013). It has been pointed out that the parodic atmosphere traversing the whole movie nearly offers an aloof experience and, therefore, creates the space for the critical distance (Crippa 2011: 139). In fact, the initial imprinting of self-parody pervades the tone of the entire short film and crucially contributes to asseverate a critique of the consumer society which renders profane and grotesque even the most sacred imagery. But it also provides evidence of the main theme, which is the suffered exposure of the unbridgeable gap between the real and the represented (Greene, 1990). Illustrative of this is the stark contrast between the playful and childish attitude of the film crew and the inexpressive, yet serious, voice of the director, played by Orson Welles (*Figure 5.10*), who is so isolated on his chair from the core of the set and from the overall stillness of the scenes reproducing Rosso Fiorentino and Pontormo's paintings (*Figure 5.11*).

**Figure 5.10**



Orson Welles isolated on the edge of the set

In this regard, a detail of the production of these scenes, so attentive to the mannerist elements, is interestingly problematised by the simultaneous research of such static compositions and their actual chaotic realisation in the fiction. The presentation of a motionless director, Orson Welles, and the static representation of the Italian paintings being constructed for the film within the film, masterfully conceal the truly meticulous and frantic work made by Pasolini and his collaborators in producing props and costumes.

As declared by the costume designer, Danilo Donati, his team made a huge effort to render the faded colours of Pontormo's *The Deposition from the Cross* (1526-1528). This is what he had disclosed around the making of Rosso Fiorentino's painting: 'I had to do *The Crucifixion*, which is only apparently simple. Instead, it was crazy! It was super difficult, because it is not usual to reproduce a painting for the screen. Especially that kind: incredible problems in dealing with the forms, the volumes. It implicates a whole

**Figure 5.11**



The frames reproducing Rosso Fiorentino's *Deposition from the Cross* (1521) and Pontormo's *The Deposition from the Cross* (1528)

set of things' (Bertini 1979: 195, 196).

Naturally, the way these two scenes are presented is particularly significant for they were the only ones being shot in Technicolor, while the “real passion” of the marginalised Stracci has been shot in black and white. In this sense, as pointed out by Bertini, the use of variable focal lens length (zoom), Pan-Cinor, guaranteed a substantial reduction of three-dimensionality and the consequent flattening of the image used for the polychromatic pictorial reproductions.

The reason why Pasolini proposes this stylistic exercise is that of metaphorically retrieving a discourse on the mannerist representation that cinema often makes of reality. In this sense, such a flattened and static, even if highly chromatic, rendition of Mannerist paintings describing Christ’s deposition serves to shift the focus on the real passion, that of Stracci, a ruthlessly mocked and isolated person who struggles to survive (Ibid.: 23, 24). So, the pictorial representation of these famous depositions only thematically resonates into the everyday passion of the sub-proletariat but not in the materiality of their figuration. In fact, the tangible drama of Stracci is foregrounded through black and white (*Figure 5.12*) and gains importance at the expense of the rigid and formalised depiction of the Mannerist paintings which, in turn, opens up space for the self-parodic tone traversing the whole film. Yet, overall, the juxtaposition of the brutal reality that Stracci represents and its pictorial formalisation, culturally and historically sedimented in the iconography of the Passion of Christ, becomes dialectically oriented to compose what Pasolini calls “Cinema of Poetry” (Pasolini and Barnett, 1988). It should be clarified that Cinema of Poetry is certainly a stylistic and moral objective of Pasolini’s works but also, and foremost, mirrors his pondered attempt to elevate cinema to the status of a unique language with its own specificity, whose “im-signs” (image-signs) are its essential lexemes, or its peculiar minimum expressive units (Ibid.).

‘A “cinema of poetry depends more on the power of images rather than on that of spoken words. Directors focus on the language of the images, concrete because they reproduce the real, but at the same time irrational because they come from the infinite world of possibilities showing the subjective points of view of characters or authors’ (Carlorosi, 2009: 257).





The Passion of Stracci

The Cinema of Poetry of Pasolini is thus entirely anti-naturalistic and it is overtly at odds with Bazinian realism, for, as Godard's works foremost mirror, it juxtaposes a form of realism, which worships the underclass and elevates it to its spiritual essence, along with a study on the semantic analogies and contrasts between filmic specificity and pictorial mannerism. In this regard, I argue that precisely the lyrical potentiality of Pasolini's Cinema of Poetry, or cinepoiesis, finds with *La Ricotta* its most efficient linguistic orientation: namely towards the exposure of a discourse over the productionist metacinematicity. As pointed out by Crippa (2011), *La Ricotta* establishes a tight connection between the idea of gesture in Agamben, which, in turn, I embedded within my theoretical conception of metacinematic gesture, and it matches it with Walter Benjamin's idea of *gestus* (Benjamin, 2003).

By referring it to Brecht's epic theatre, Benjamin underlines that a property of gestures is that of being frame-like, as interrupting actions that break the illusionistic flow of mimetic naturalism which is expounded by traditional drama. What makes this gestural theatre reflexive is precisely the supreme dialectics to which all the others are subordinated: namely that between recognition and education. Therefore, what Benjamin suggests, and can be applied also to metacinematic gestures, is that the recognition of these interrupting actions, gestures with a definable beginning and a definable end, is already educational, didactic and, from my point of view, in *La Ricotta* they exquisitely stimulate a reflection upon the process of production.

This consciousness enables epic theatre, but also cinema, to treat elements of reality as though 'it were setting up an experiment' (Benjamin 2003: 4). Precisely treating the

elements of reality as an experiment is a key factor. Yet, the overall reading of Brecht gestural theatre reflects the powerful and disruptive potential of these interrupting actions, gestures that act as *deixis*, pointing towards themselves (Crippa 2011: 143). It is therefore not surprising if the parodic gestures of juxtaposing the process of construction of the scenes of the Passion of Christ with the parable of the underclass Stracci have resulted in legal problems for Pasolini. In fact, it must have been perceived as culturally and politically unacceptable to visually match the depositions of Christ with scenes of actors picking their noses, clumsily falling, vulgarly laughing, making blunders and playing the wrong soundtrack vinyl during the shooting. Yet, the comic fast motion shot of Stracci rushing to buy some ricotta is paradigmatic in the way it designs a ridiculous atmosphere around the delicate presentation of a sacred theme such as the Passion of Christ. The irreverent way these themes have been matched altogether was considered a taboo and initially judged criminal in the catholic Italian society of the 1960's.

'I was given four months suspended sentence under a fascist law, which is still in force because the magistrates here have never been purged. [...] In the fascist code there are a number of crimes of public defamation – including against the nation, the flag and religion. The trial was a kind of farce, and then the sentence was quashed on appeal. I still can't say exactly why they tried me at all, but it was a terrible period for me. [...] It was banned for a while after the trial and the film was confiscated, then I was able to bring it out with a few small cuts like somebody shouting "away with the crosses" (when the director in the film wanted to shoot another scene): this was considered anti-Catholic' (Pasolini and Stack 1969: 63, 64).

As Naomi Greene has pointed out, the unsettling note of irony introduced by Pasolini is due to the fact that he puts the Passion of Christ and the Passion of Stracci on the same level, by thematically constructing a scenario which is both tragic and comic (Greene 1990: 62), although drawing a line between two different formal and chromatic stylisations. Here the parodic, self-reflexive gesture pushes the domain of fiction towards that of an experimental reality which insightfully dissects both the productionist side of cinema and the socio-political condition of the subjects participating in the filmmaking process.

In that, *La Ricotta* echoes Benjamin words once again: 'The gesture demonstrates the social significance and applicability of dialectics. It tests relations on men. The production difficulties which the producer meets while rehearsing the play cannot - even if they

originate in the search for "effect" - be separated any longer from concrete insights into the life of society' (Benjamin 2003: 24, 25). Furthermore, Benjamin's words seem also to resonate into the scene wherein the assistant director incites Stracci, while he is nailed to the cross, to recite the line of the Good Thief in front of the Roman bourgeoisie just arrived on the set: "Hey Stracci! Do you remember the line then? Don't be a fool! There's the entire Roman press, the producer, politicians, actors, actresses..."

Then, Stracci humbly recites the line, but when the director, Orson Welles, calls the action, at the very moment he has to play it in front of the bourgeois society, death knocks on his door. The final words of the director reveal a certain emotional proximity, but also the unbridgeable gap between the imaginary caress of the director to the subproletarian class which in the reality dissolves into the mist of a conformist social potpourri: "Poor Stracci, he has to die, it was his only way of telling us he was alive". On top of that, Stracci's death on the set occurred before the expected fictional death of his character, the Good Thief: the last act of a completely disorganised and shallow film production.

About Orson Welles, Pasolini wanted him at all costs. No one better than the "myth" Welles could express and represent "the director". Welles accepted the role only for economic reasons and used to arrive on the set completely unprepared, often ignoring the lines, despite his good Italian, and claiming the autocue for every scene (Bertini 1979: 182). In this sense, Pasolini must have appreciated Welles' disinclination in playing the role, for it would have influenced the other actors and the film crew in rendering the chaotic and disinterested atmosphere which reigns in *La Ricotta*. Moreover, as Pasolini claimed: 'I choose actors for what they really are; I chose Welles for what he is: a director, an intellectual, a man with something of the character which comes out in *La Ricotta*' (Pasolini and Stack: 1969: 62). But Pasolini also wanted to pay homage to a director whose 'artistic vocation was always thwarted by commercial restraint' (Greene 1990: 62).

At some point in the film, Welles is interviewed by a vulgar, average man, who poses him some basic, superficial questions. Welles declares that the film represents his own profound, inmost Catholicism and to the question "What do you think of Italian society?" he answers that Italy has "the most illiterate masses, the most ignorant bourgeoisie in Europe." Yet, to the question about death he concisely replies: "As a Marxist, it is a fact which I do not take into consideration". Then, all of sudden he starts declaiming a poem written by an author who "has described a series of ancient ruins whose story and style nobody understands anymore and, conversely, some others

horrendous modern constructions that everyone comprehends". After having read the lyrical composition, Welles asks the vulgar journalist what he had understood of it.

As a reaction to the hesitant and superficial answer of the journalist Welles bursts out: "You haven't understood anything because you're an average man, do you know what an average man is?...He's a monster, a dangerous delinquent, a racist, a colonialist, a slaveholder, a political cynic." The journalist sarcastically takes notes of these insults. Later, Welles continues with his demonstration of scorn by saying that it is a pity the journalist does not have a heart condition for he could die on the set and, thus, better advertise the film launch. Ironically, this allusion anticipates the final death of Stracci.

Welles concludes by saying: "You don't exist anyway. Capital acknowledges the existence of labour only insofar as it serves production. And the producer of my film is the owner of your newspaper as well. Good-bye". Then, repulsed by such a vulgar spectacle, he turns over the director's chair along with his back while the journalist carelessly leaves the scene. This passage is particularly significant for it does not only draw a line between Welles' erudite, sophisticated linguistic register, emphasised by the artistic and poetic references, and the journalist superficiality belonging to the average man's world. But, it also denotes an abyssal gap with the animalesque and instinctual Stracci (Brunetta, 2016), both from a behavioural and linguistic standpoint and, thus, contributes to better outline an anthropological figure destined to vanish during the process of social gentrification.

That is the reason why, the materiality of Pasolini's gesture revolves around a subtle entanglement between secrecy and disclosure. Pasolini is aware that Stracci is doomed to disappear, together with the whole subproletarian class. Thus, the only way to represent it is by the making-of a mannerist, stylised film, although enacted by a vulgar and disorganised crew and directed by a self-declared Marxist director who thinks to beat the conformism of the "average man" through elitist and intellectual means.

By framing Welles as entirely separated from the society he purports to criticise, being him always positioned far away from the centre of the set, Pasolini reflects on the condition of the intellectual, perhaps himself too, who often behaves even more aristocratically than the bureaucrats who lay the foundations of the hatred consumer society. Therefore, Pasolini's film restates all these abyssal gaps based on ideological, but also material contradictions. But also, the impossibility for modern politicised artists to neither portray some anthropological categories of the past, as Neorealism had already successfully done after the war, nor to come to terms with the despised socio-cultural

values of the new bourgeois society. Such a withdrawal or impossibility of action also precociously forecasted the future gradual estrangement of Italian left-wing politicians and intellectuals from the common people. A political drift which twenty years later would have resulted in Craxi and Berlusconi's hegemony and in the ensuing cultural impoverishment of Italian society.

Perhaps, these reasons can also help to decipher the meaningful gesture through which Orson Welles turns his back on the journalist, the filmmaking process and all its attendant commodification, as the ultimate, and perhaps useless, act of refusal of the director. Here below follows the lines of the poem that Pasolini makes Welles recite:

I am a force of the Past.  
My love lies only in tradition.  
I come from the ruins, the churches,  
the altarpieces, the villages  
abandoned in the Apennines or foothills  
of the Alps where my brothers once lived.  
I wander like a madman down the Tuscolana,  
down the Appia like a dog without a master.  
Or I see the twilight, the mornings  
over Rome, the Ciociaria, the world,  
as the first acts of Posthistory  
to which I bear witness, for the privilege  
of recording them from the outer edge  
of some buried age. Monstrous is the man  
born of a dead woman's womb.  
And I, a foetus now grown, roam about  
more modern than any modern man,  
in search of brothers no longer alive.<sup>1</sup>  
English version translated by Stephen Sartarelli (2014: 311,312)

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<sup>1</sup> Io sono una forza del Passato. / Solo nella tradizione è il mio amore. / Vengo dai ruderi, dalle chiese, / dalle pale d'altare, dai borghi / abbandonati sugli Appennini o le Prealpi, / dove sono vissuti i fratelli. / Giro per la Tuscolana come un pazzo, / per l'Appia come un cane senza padrone. / O guardo i crepuscoli, le mattine / su Roma, sulla Ciociaria, sul mondo, / come i primi atti della Dopostoria / cui io assisto, per privilegio d'anagrafe, / dall'orlo estremo di qualche età / sepolta. Mostruoso è chi è nato / dalle viscere di una donna morta. / E io, feto adulto, mi aggiro / più moderno di ogni moderno / a cercare fratelli che non sono più. Pasolini, P. P. (1976). *Poesia in forma di rosa* (1961-1964). Milano, Garzanti.

Nothing better than these verses can resume the whole meaning of *La Ricotta*, so much focused on the sense of isolation and frustration expressed by Pasolini as a bridled film director, but even more widely as an intellectual trapped in his sense of impotence. The film therefore restates the awareness of Pasolini's disheartening preclusion from exerting the role of political lighthouse for a society already drifting towards the flattening values of a bourgeois society supported by the allure of consumerist, deceitful dreams. It is quite significant that Pasolini makes Welles recite this disillusioned poem by operating an empowering juxtaposition between an external and internal authorial function. Such an operation is exquisitely gestural in the sense echoed by Deleuze and Guattari: 'Benjamin introduced the important notion of gesture. He may have borrowed the notion from Brecht, but for him it referred above all to a space where the subject of the statement and the subject of enunciation can no longer be separated' (Deleuze and Guattari, 1986: xii).

#### 5.4

**La Nuit Americaine (Day for Night):** France, 1973, 40 min.

**Director:** François Truffaut

**Producer:** Marcel Berbert

**Language:** French

## Synopsis

The title refers to the technique used to simulate a night scene in the daylight. It tells the story of the making-of *Je vous Presente Pamela* (Meet Pamela), a film about the tragedy that follows when a young French man introduces his parents to his new British wife. Unlike the film-within-the -film, *Day for Night* does not have a real storyline, instead, during the unfolding of the plot we observe all the phases of production: script writing, production, direction, acting, shooting, lighting, audio recording, editing and soundtrack. Yet, simultaneously we can observe what happens off-screen: the everyday life of actors and workers, the events that hamper the shooting schedule or impose amendments to the script, from the most futile caprices of the people involved in the project till the death of one of the stars. For instance, one of the main actresses, Severine (Valentina Cortese), appears constantly drunk because of the affliction caused by family problems, Julie (Jacqueline Bisset) has to deal with the consequences of a previous nervous breakdown and Alphonse (Jean-Pierre Léaud) is prone to emotional instability because of his intermittent liaison with the script-girl, Liliane. Towards the end, once all the economic and operative obstacles have been overcome, the film crew manages to conclude *Meet Pamela* on schedule. Finally, the actors, the director Ferrand (played by real director François Truffaut) and the technicians say goodbye, ready to embark on other projects.

## Analysis – Truffaut: a “Romantic” Problem Solver

The main theme of *Day for Night* is love, but not intended much as a sentiment connecting people together, despite heterosexuality and homosexuality are substantially treated within the plot. The film rather pays special attention to the love for cinema. The focus on the filmmaking process certainly derives from the considerable amount of sequences dedicated to the exposure of the different phases of production, but it is mainly reflected by the profound and intricate web of human relationships taking place on the set. To reinforce such a slant, the director François Truffaut has declared that ideas are always less fascinating than people. Yet, his renowned reluctance to treat philosophical, political or religious themes prompted him to construct his films starting from the characters, their feelings and their relationships (Ingram and Duncan, 2004). In this sense *Day for Night* celebrates the wandering and intense existence of the actors and the film crew who participate in the making-of *Meet Pamela*.

Yet, the main key factor guiding the narration of these private existences is tightly related to the phases of film production, but it is also evident how these private spheres actually contribute to mould the final output. This entanglement is significative in many scenes, for instance, where Alphonse is locked in his hotel room, desperate for the continuous sentimental dispute with the script girl, Liliane. In that, the director Ferrand, (François Truffaut) tries to motivate Alphonse by saying that everyone's individual experience is problematic and, therefore, he should focus on work. "Noone's private life runs smoothly. That only happens in the movies. Films are more harmonious than life, Alphonse. There are no traffic jams in films, there is no dead time. Films move forward like trains, you understand, like trains in the night. And as you know, people like you and me are only meant to be happy in our work, in our cinematic work."<sup>2</sup> With this famous quotation, Truffaut, as the author, deliberately establishes a direct connection between the productive process and the empirical experience of the characters. Or, better, Truffaut prioritises the filmmaking process as the only aspect that really matters and, therefore, *Day for Night* actually proposes that the making-of is the veritable narrative engine of the characters' intersubjective relationships. Indeed, the filmmaking process takes the shape of a creative engine from which the characters' evolutions derive and into which they resonate back.

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<sup>2</sup> "Je sais, il y a la vie privée, mais la vie privée, elle est boîteuse pour tout le monde. Les films sont plus harmonieux que la vie, Alphonse. Il n'y a pas d'embouteillage dans les films, il n'y a pas de temps morts. Les films avancent comme des trains, tu comprends, comme des trains dans la nuit. Les gens comme toi, comme moi, tu le sais bien, on est fait pour être heureux dans le travail ... dans notre travail de cinéma."



Yet, according to Truffaut, the idea that the screenwriters are the real authors of the film should be refused, whereas the final product of the filmmaking process should be rather intended as the result of the complex interaction of the film crew, which is composed of director, screenwriters, technicians, director of photography, actors and editors like Martine Barraqué and Yann Dedet, collaborators with whom Truffaut had already worked and that also appear in *Day for Night* as the fictional editors of *Meet Pamela*.

Furthermore, in the 1950's Truffaut had already declared, together with the other critics and directors of *Cahiers du Cinéma*, among which Bazin, Godard, Rivette and Rohmer, what he intended with *la politique des auteurs* (author policy). For him the author policy was essentially revolving around the assumption that is the director who coordinates and supervises the other collaborators' work and actively participates to all the stages of production. In this way, it is inevitable that the author somehow imposes to the final product his vision of the world. Likewise Jacques Becker, the director who imprinted his signature on the film *Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves*, had confirmed in 1954 that the policy of the authors theorised by the group of critics and directors of *Les Cahiers du Cinema* could find its own illustrative examples. (Truffaut, 1955).

In fact, nearly twenty years later, Truffaut appears to be still attached to the *politique des auteurs* when he positions himself as the intentional author that, slightly differently from Fellini in *8½*, sees himself as a puppeteer who does not exploit the vacuum provided by existential nihilism as the main creative inspiration, but he rather locates himself at the core of the set, as the main agent of the cinematic representation. Yet, differently from an isolated Orson Welles or Godard's meagre appearance in the fictional universe of *Contempt*, conversely Truffaut discloses what he purports to compose with the camera and overtly shows confidence in managing his collaborators to achieve it, despite the whole set of obstructions happening on the set.

Although with the analyses of other productionist metafilms I have retraced the existence of a certain economy of the exposure of secrecy related to the different phases of filmmaking process, quite differently, *Day for Night* appears to intentionally remove all the opacifying filters which conceal or mystify the productionist side. In fact, there are continuous meaningful indicators that suggest how the regime of fictional representation mainly addresses the typical context of a film production. Following these allusions, the spectator is constantly aware that he/she is observing an exhibited attempt to provide some minute operational details of what making a film precisely means. As it might seem

evident, these details being exposed are promptly overlaid by some relevant information about the individual and collective implications deriving from the complex network of inter-subjective relationships emerging on the set.

So, in this sense, *Day for Night* is not confined to shed light on a certain degree of productionist metacinematicity, but it also matches a network of professional roles with a network of private individualities, by highlighting how these networks intersect one another and divert from each other. Yet, the few opacifying filters which can be underpinned in the movie are not directed to cover or mystify the productionist side, but they are rather enacted by the linguistic signs which belong to the specific construction of any fictional domain.

By way of example, from the very first sequence, we observe the sudden breakage of the most superficial level of fiction which, in this case, depicts a chaotic Parisian underground entrance populated by a dense crowd. Almost immediately, the camera awakes from its indistinct wandering through the coloured urban atmosphere and starts following a man suited up marching on the sidewalk. The camera tightens on him while, abruptly, another figure enters the framing from the left side and rapidly slaps the unfortunate man. Thus, the sudden close-up frames a man who screams “Coupé!” (Cut) and reveals the overall nature of the artificial construction. A dolly shot confirms the first impression by foregrounding a light technician before the crowd of walk-ons which is successively framed in a wide establishing shot picturing the moment they are summoned by the assistant director for few choreographic suggestions (*Figures 5.13, 5.14*).

The following shot seizes the director Truffaut rehearsing the “slap scene” (*Figure 5.15*) with the actors playing the role of Alphonse (Jean-Pierre Léaud) and Alexandre (Jean-Pierre Aumont). So, overall, the unfolding of the first sequence leaves no room for misinterpretation. In fact, one becomes immediately aware of how the fictional context directly addresses the internal dynamics of a film set also on account of the next sequence. It contains consecutively edited images showing camera operators, producers and other members of the film crew discussing with animosity. Therefore, it does not take much time for the spectator to ascertain how the diegetic scenario of *Day for Night* aspires to construct a quasi-documentary romance of the filmmaking process, masterfully guided by the personal memories of an already experienced and acclaimed director like Truffaut.

**Figure 5.13**



**Figure 5.14**



Two frames of the dolly shot presenting the film set of *Meet Pamela*

What contributes to highlight the self-referential character of the film, so focused on the productive process and on the crucial role of the director in dealing with the manifold implications occurring within the film set, is that Truffaut's character wears a hearing aid to recall his real auditive problems caused by the noise of cannons during his former military service (De Baecque, 2003).

**Figure 5.15**



The rehearsal of the slap scene

In fact, he decided to adopt this particular device for the role of Ferrand precisely to establish a direct connection between the fictional character and the actor, who is also the director of both movies (*Day for Night* and the film-within-the-film *Meet Pamela*). Certainly, one of the immediate, tangible conclusions deriving from the view of this autobiographical detail is that Truffaut purports to depict the world of cinema going beyond the simple declaration of love, but also drawing elements from his own experience

of filmmaker with the aim of providing an illustration of how this specific workplace functions. By doing so, he produces a representation of filmmaking which aspires to be as truthful as possible within the limits of the fiction story. In this sense, as argued by Allen, the film avoids eclecticism, but punctually represents a cross-section of humanity enmeshed in a specific professional context. Somehow, it recalls the blend of humour and tenderness of *Tirez sur le Pianiste* (1960) and *Baisers Volés* (1968), but what is so peculiar of *Day For Night* resides in the impossibility to draw a line between the actors' life and their work as the image of Ferrand is literally indiscernible from that emanating from Truffaut's personality in the real life (Allen, 1974).

'Why a film about cinema? Because I had it in mind since a long time. [...] During the war I asked to an adult "How long does it take to shoot a film?" he replied: "Three months". Therefore I understood that two hours of screen projection were shot in three months. But, what happens in these three months is a mystery. To be fair, every time I shot a film, I thought how interesting would be making a movie about cinema, for the simple reason that, during the production phase astonishing, curious, amusing and interesting things always happen, but the audience will not enjoy them for they take place outside the framing' (Gillain 2005: 191).

In point of fact, *Day for Night* is a *unicum* within Truffaut's filmography for it is certainly the only movie which focuses on "cinema at work". In this original and relaxed confrontation with the intimate nature of the seventh art, Truffaut was comprehensibly seeking a breakthrough after the partial fiascos from *Baiser Volés* onwards, except for the good critical reception of *L'Enfant Sauvage* (1970). On this matter, it cannot be said that he failed the intention to revamp his directorial image in the eyes of the public. The Academy Award for Best Foreign Language Film represents an undeniable sign of his success, not only for the film echoes Fellini's main theme of *8½*, but even because *Day for Night* shows the actual shooting, whereas *8½* interrupts the narration before the actual shooting begins. In this sense, according to Truffaut himself, *Day for Night* is a less interior film, which perhaps inscribes itself in the Hollywoodian genealogy of movies about film productions such as *Singin in the Rain* (Donen 1952) and *The Bad and the Beautiful* (Minnelli 1952). Along these lines, *Day for Night* is deliberately pursuing and meeting the Hollywoodian dream, perhaps, because the revolutionary myth of the French *Nouvelle Vague* became, ten years later, too feeble to be still praised (Malanga, 1996). An author like Jean-Luc Godard, whose artistic purpose was directed more towards the

critical destruction of Hollywoodian system and clearly against the imposition of its sedimented communicative language and economic strategies, was utterly at odds with Truffaut's movie. In particular, he was absolutely shocked at the degree of falsification the movie proposed about the filmmaking process.

'Yesterday I saw *La Nuit Americaine*. Probably no one else will call you a liar, so I will... You say: films are trains that pass in the night, but who takes the train, in what class, and who is driving it with an "informer" from the management standing at his side?...'(Jacob and Givray, 1998:479).

Godard was bluntly alluding to how Truffaut self-produced the film, the budget coming from his own company *Les Films du Carrosse*. It must have thought that this simple fact could have fostered an edulcorated, if not uncritical depiction of the relationship between authors and producers, and yet compelled Truffaut to conceal most of the real "behind the scenes" occurring on the film set. Actually, there is a consideration made by an interviewer who was asking Truffaut clarifications around the fact he had shown how cinema can be brutally cynical in order to achieve its final outputs. And therefore, 'everything has to be subjected to budget and deadlines'. Following this, Truffaut's response was quite compliant: 'That's no contradiction. It's the end result which has to have charm. And anyway, I think the shooting of the film is fairly good-humoured and not at all cruel' (Bergan, 2008: 91). It is not easy to evaluate the extent to which the atmosphere of relaxed workplace depicted by Truffaut depended on the fact the film was self-produced, however Godard's point surely aimed to prevent any spectator from interpreting the disclosures of *Day for Night* as a set of insightful revelations about the filmmaking process.

Yet, if it is legitimate to argue that *Day for Night* is less critical or less gestural, also in the didactic and estranging sense Benjamin attaches to the disconnecting or politically imbued nature of gesture, it also emerges that the strong criticism made by Jean-Luc Godard, causing an irreparable fracture between the two *enfants terribles* of French New Wave, was unjustifiably thick of rage. In fact, the world of cynicism and alienation of *Contempt*, so politically ridden, suited more Godard than anyone else. Moreover, Truffaut's complex political stance hardly concealed his renowned reluctance to declare any firm ideological commitment going beyond the intellectual and creative justifications of his aesthetic choices. In this sense, from a political standpoint Truffaut's cinematic view was radically different from Godard's since the very beginning. Thus, the

sour accusation against Truffaut's movie, based on having constructed a huge lie about the real nature of cinema, reveals a personal bitterness, matured over the years, which must have impeded the formulation of a constructive and objective criticism.

In spite of that, from a theoretical standpoint, it can at least be argued that the gestural side of Truffaut's movie is directed to expose a certain glance upon the "exhibition of mediality" in the sense maintained by Agamben. Therefore, *Day for Night* provides a valuable interpretation of productionist metacinematicity, even if framed within a more integrated or less counter-cultural vision, compared to Godard's one. Self-admittedly, Truffaut was partially abandoning the atmosphere of political protest of the previous years and he was surely avoiding the radicalism of *Dziga Vertov Group* founded by Godard that culminated in a controversial metafilm: the leftist spaghetti western *Le Vent de l'Est* (1970). As he firmly declared about the kind of idea of film production he wanted to give: 'I think *Day for Night* owes a lot to American films, because I wanted to show people who are working in the same profession; American films do this very well, much better than in Europe' (Ibid.: 93). In this sense, Truffaut's film was years light away from Godard's *Contempt* in which the clash between the author and the Hollywood Studio System was fundamental for the main story line.

By way of example, the long take which frames Truffaut/Ferrand with a preceding tracking shot shows the kind of communicative approach a film director should enact. He firstly talks with a production manager about the car to be used for Pamela's accident, moving on to scenographers and props-makers. He also discusses with the main producers about the shooting schedule. About Truffaut's demeanour, what impresses is his fairly democratic attitude. In fact, he indiscriminately approaches all these collaborators in the same sensitive way. Yet, whereas this gives proof of his very democratic attitude in interacting with the film crew, despite the actual strong power relations usually present within film productions, Truffaut also demonstrates how his placid indulgence towards the production managers is constant.

Undoubtedly, the whole scene does not convey the image of a subversive or contesting director, but more that of an *auteur* who purports to keep control and still behave as a serene, yet firm, moderator. Perhaps, the only contesting moment is right after the scene in which part of the film crew is observing the first dailies. Apart from the ironic gag regarding Alphonse (Jean-Pierre Lead) who repeats his own cues at the moment he sees himself on the screen; what follows is a long sequence where we come to know Severine's psychological problems (Valentina Cortese) who literally bursts into a

hysterical crisis for she cannot remember her lines. Before this moment, Ferrand/Truffaut is informed by an assistant producer that a cop, whose authorisation allowed them to shoot in the public streets, was a witness to the shooting beside the producer. Then, Ferrand only seems to be mildly perturbed by the presence of a law enforcement officer. Indeed, he comments upon it with a joke: “That is nice! Do I watch him work? Do I watch him when he interrogates people?”

Here, the grin on the face of Ferrand’s assistant demonstrates that we are dealing more with a feeble gag than a strong protest. This intentional act, expressed by the author in the guise of actor/director, must have probably hurt Godard’s political sensibility. However, such a feeble complaint was enacted to ironically support an otherwise highly melodramatic sequence: that of the infinite series of discarded cuts in which the actress, Severine, manifests her first signs of crisis. At first, she tries to mask the emergence of her mental breakdown by suggesting Ferrand that she should have said numbers instead of lines to avoid mistakes, a trick that she used to do beforehand with Federico Fellini. But Ferrand jokingly forbids it: “In France we have to say the lines! See? We’re recording direct sound. We’ll find another solution.” In that, Truffaut wants to convey the image of a non-despotic director who appears to be in harmony with even the most awkward events or behaviours. That is the reason why, he uses a soft tone even when he purports to criticise another style of production, by alluding to the overused dubbing made by Italian film industry.

During the unfolding of the plot, we increasingly notice productionist scenes that display the making-of *Meet Pamela* and the figure of the placid, politically correct director is stressed by Ferrand’s behaviour, so attentive neither to offend anyone nor to disrupt the natural flow of the work-in-progress. For instance, Ferrand allows on the set the presence of the nagging wife of the assistant producer. He tolerates the most infantile reactions of Alphonse, who is in perpetual sentimental clash with the script-girl, and generally attempts to meet everyone’s exigencies. But the issue is slightly more complex than that. At some point, Ferrand shows his assertiveness by imposing to one of the actresses, Stacey, to wear a swimsuit and get into a pool for the scene (*Figure 5.16*). The background is that she did not want to remove her clothes for she was trying to conceal a secret pregnancy. She knew that the production would have replaced her because in the script the fictional character was not supposed to wait for a baby. However, Ferrand manages to convince her with his assistant’s help, but they both realise the actress’ belly is a bit swollen and proceed to put pressure on the producer to look for another one. But,

later, Ferrand's assertiveness dissolves under the influence of his producer (*Figure 5.17*) and he finally opts to shoot the scene again with a stratagem: they decide to cover the actress' belly with a bath towel (*Figure 5.18*). Apparently, Stacey has an ironclad contract and, therefore, Ferrand has to succumb to the producer's request and arranges this solution to sort out the case.

**Figure 5.16**



The pool scene where Stacey tries to conceal her pregnancy

**Figure 5.17**



Ferrand reluctantly accepts his producer's advice

**Figure 5.18**





This image taken from the editing process shows Stacey receiving the towel to cover her stomach

Thus, Truffaut insists on displaying how the whole materiality of directing a film implies that, to make it work, the cinematic machinery has to be mastered by an attentive and tentacular director who acts in the guise of a problem solver. In the end, Truffaut agrees with the assumption made by the producer: “Life is made of power relations”<sup>3</sup>. To sum up, it is not too radical to assert that through the depiction of Ferrand’s character, Truffaut envisages in the directorial role the psychological and practical possibility of transforming a non-teleological gesture into a teleological one. Or, in another words, Truffaut suggests that the main competence of a film director is possibly that of transforming an unpredictable contingency into a justified necessity in accordance with the technical, linguistic and organisational dynamics of film production. In this sense, Truffaut’s film does not imply the subversive and contesting gesturality of *Contempt* and *La Ricotta*, yet not even can it be said to comprise the interrupting and dialectical properties pertaining to Benjamin’s idea of gesture. However, the productionist metacinematicity of *Day for Night* rather confirms the crucial gestural property which is so distinctive for Agamben.

Namely, a property which stresses how gestures mainly exhibit the mediality but that also operationalises a certain transformative quality of its internal elements, consisting of a combination of teleological and non-teleological elements. Through this lens, *Day for Night* depicts how the director and the entire film crew are capable of moulding unexpected events and unpredictable contingencies into desired technical, linguistic and organisational adjustments which promptly encounter the exigencies of production. Yet, the film production welcomes these occurrences and adjusts to them at

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<sup>3</sup> “La vie n'est malheureusement faite que par ces rapports de force”. The producer refers to the fact the actress is protected by influential people and, therefore, she cannot be substituted.

the expense of any thoughtful political or moral reflection. This pattern is taken to the extreme when one of the main characters of *Meet Pamela*, Alexander, dies in a car accident. The production, once in agreement with the British insurance company, peremptorily replaces him with a stand-in for the last scene. Through this lens, these decisions appear to be less cynical than they actually are for the tempered way decisions are made reflects a serene acceptance by every member of the film crew. Namely, each of them is compelled to act as the perfect cog of a delicate mechanism, no matter how morally serious the events obstructing the filmmaking process can be. However, midway through the film, the spectator attends to its pivotal sequence. In two minutes of a no-dialogue sequence dominated by background instrumental music we observe different phases of film production edited with a considerably dynamic pace. The professional aspects are coupled with playful moments of intimate relationship in which the human side of such a bizarre category of workers comes out.

Yet, with this film Truffaut shows how the human side pervading these workers' everydayness as caught during their interactions is not only evident during the shooting, but it appears to be even artistically functional during the phases of scriptwriting. Like the fictional director of *Day for Night*, Truffaut had the habit to write dialogues the night before the scene to be shot. For him, the expressivity of the actors should be as attuned as possible to the emotional tone and the overall atmosphere they would sense just before the shooting (Crittenden, 1998). For Truffaut, the emotional and personal dimension of each individual working in the film indelibly marks the final output.

On account of this, it is the exclusive task of the director to intercept these intimate contributions and make them naturally merge with the logistical procedures required by the cinematic apparatus and the unexpected problems to be faced during the process. There is really no more time left for other issues, Truffaut seems to hint at. That is the reason why, at some point in the movie, he timidly reveals how the sense of frustration stemming from the impossibility to control every single aspect on the set, should instead be smartly overthrown into an advantage. After all, "what is a film director? Someone who's asked questions about everything. Sometimes he knows the answers, but not all the time."<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> "Qu'est-ce qu'un metteur en scène? Un metteur en scène, c'est quelqu'un à qui l'on pose sans arrêt des questions. Des questions à propos de tout. Quelques fois il a les réponses, mais pas toujours." Ferrand's voice over commenting on the sequence when he discusses with his various collaborators on the film set.

## 5.5. Unforeseen Conclusions

These set of productionist metafilms deal with fictional scenarios depicting the cinematic apparatuses and the workers/artists embedded within them as the result of different linguistic, technical and organisational combinations. I have shown how the analyses of the metacinematic segments of these fictional films is definitely apt to generate a set of analogies, contrasts and unpredictable meanings. In that the exhibition of linguistic, technical and, tangentially, organisational solutions is fictionally constructed and therefore it has to be digested through the filter of narrative diegesis. Thus, it has to be pointed out here, that the self-reflexive segments being analysed are mirrored by thematic elements which mainly emerge through technical and linguistic solutions. In fact, given the semiotic peculiarity of fictional films, as the illusionist character prevails in the most part of the diegesis, the organisational solutions can either be inferred secondarily from technical and linguistic elements or directly from the statements of crew members present in interviews. As it can be easily understood, the analytical validity of the first deductions needed to be confirmed through the comparison with the disclosures made in the interviews. It resulted that in all these films the directors had a crucial specific weight in depicting their main fictional characters in the direction of a diegetic construction apt to exhibit their own personal philosophy about filmmaking.

With regards to *8½*, the reflection upon the creative genesis of the film director Guido/Fellini ends up in a complex articulation of maieutic nihilism in which the ideas erupt from the vacuum of nothingness. The springboard is the dialogue with the film critic Daumier. It frames a metacinematic gesture which attempts to cast a glance over the challenges of directorial imagination, which is obviously Fellini's one, as promptly transfigured by Guido's carnivalesque inner world. With regards to *Contempt*'s thematic reflexivity, Godard focuses more on the individual corruption of the people involved in the film industry and how the economic straightjacket invariably commodifies their lives and affects the aesthetic products ensuing from their actual contribution on the set. From such a pessimistic reflexive standpoint, any film production born under the auspices of the Hollywood Studio System is bound to embody the visible traces of a violent process of commodification.

On a similar note, Pasolini reflects on how the cultural impoverishment of the Italian bourgeoisie has provoked the isolation and disintegration of the subproletarian class, while confining intellectuals within their solipsistic mannerism. But, whereas the previous two films have provided a political critique to the capitalist mode of production and its attendant consumerist rituals, the more integrated standpoint offered by Truffaut with *Day for Night* is a tribute to cinema which indiscriminately praises all its contradictory aspects and mitigates the previous harsh positions of Nouvelle Vague. In that, Truffaut has certainly pictured himself as a problem solver, a kind of enchanted management guru whose love for cinema makes him override the straightjacket of capitalist profit lying at the core of film industry. May the reader reject the idea that such an assertion holds the motive of fostering the germ of disrespect towards an inestimable figure of the history of film. On the contrary, it genuinely aims at transmitting how the character of Ferrand reaches in *Day for Night* a considerably wide spectrum of possible readings.

My idea is that the figure of Ferrand/Truffaut romantically seals the end of an epoch, ranging from the first artistic avant-gardes of the 1920's until the last roars of 1968's Cultural Revolution, in which intellectuals and artists have persisted to locate themselves into a dissenting position towards the establishment. At the time when *Day for Night* was shot, in 1973, authors like Truffaut, unlike Godard, have begun to deal more compliantly with public and private institutions, acting as their trusted executors while acting as indulgent leaders towards their subordinate collaborators.

But, aside from proposing a thorough criticism of different authorial approaches, in terms of different appreciations of human resources management strategies or political economy, it is rather crucial, at this stage, to stress that all these socio-political and aesthetic reflections have been generated and strengthened by means of the analysed set of metacinematic gestures. In fact, we have seen the importance of clarifying the actual orientation of the directors' intentions before and during the shooting process, but also the significance of those moments in which these same intentions dissolve among the manifold material conditions of production.

This is one of the main achievement this chapter has aspired to convey. Yet, I have demonstrated how the direct act of showing the process of production have reached a wide array of technical, linguistic but also tangentially, organisational solutions among the examined authors: Fellini, Godard, Pasolini and Truffaut. Finally, I have discussed how these self-reflexive fictional gestures are apt to generate unpredictable emergences,

not only upon the creative genesis of an aesthetic product, but also upon the material conditions of cinema as organised work. In the next chapter I will tackle three examples of films which develop their productionist reflexivity by means of documentary approaches.

## 6.0 The Documentary Approach of Productionist Metafilms

In the following chapter I will analyse the productionist metafilms which approach the mechanics of production and the exposure of the technical, linguistic and organisational patterns from a documentary standpoint. Similarly to the productionist metafilms which unfold fictional plots, they do not limit their contribution to a thorough understanding of the linguistic and technical specificity of cinema, but they increasingly open up a consistent reflection upon the organisational aspects of filmmaking. In that, the following films blur the difference between fiction and fact, or, in other words, they appear to reflect less on either the fictional or authentic status of their representation. Instead, they employ a self-reflexive approach with the aim of unravelling a *tranche de vie*, namely a set of creative, professional or, simply, human interactions occurring during the film production. By way of example, *Chronique d'un été* (1961) positions itself within the context of *Cinema Vérité* precisely through the overcoming of the fundamental opposition between fictional and documentary cinema (Morin, 2003). *American Movie* (1999) is the backstage of an amateur horror movie which comically addresses the struggles deriving from shooting a film and the difficulties to raise funds for future productions. Finally, *Grizzly Man* (2005) reports the last months of the life and work of naturalist and documentary filmmaker Timothy Treadwell amongst a group of wild bears in Alaska.

In these analyses, the difference between fact and fiction will gradually acquire less importance and more relevance will be conversely attributed to the various ways in which cinema intersects life in all its different actualisations. Indeed, the self-reflexive patterns exhibited in the following movies move close to exhibiting the organisation, the logistic arrangements and the overall coordination of a film production. Therefore, these movies begin to show themselves as a tendential simulation of their own process of production. The direct consequence of this practical disposition is the emergence of movies whose backstage of production is intentionally showcased into the final output to be screened.

**6.1**                      **Chronique d'un Été (Chronicle of a Summer):** France, 1961, 86 min.

**Directors:** Jean Rouch and Edgar Morin

**Producer:** Anatole Dauman

**Language:** French

### **Synopsis**

*Chronique d'un Été* (Chronicle of a Summer) is a documentary film made by the anthropologist and filmmaker Jean Rouch and the sociologist Edgar Morin. At the beginning, while we observe some images of Paris in 1961, a voice-over informs us that “this film was made without actors, but lived by men and women who devoted some of their time to a novel experiment of ‘film-truth (Cinema Vérité)’”. Successively, a discussion between Rouch, Morin and the participant Marceline takes place. The authors debate on whether or not it is possible to act sincerely in front of a camera. A cast of real-life individuals are then introduced, they are led by the filmmakers to discuss their personal experience of French society and to declare their opinions about general themes such as happiness, loneliness, coupledness, alcoholism, social integration and working-class problems. At the beginning the authors certainly trigger the experiment, but following the incipit the participants start conducting the discussions in an autonomous way and continue throughout the entire duration of the documentary which is enriched by the intermittent presence of the directors. *Chronique d'un Été* closes with a thought-provoking scene in which some of the participants are gathered to view the result of their conversations as caught by the camera. They begin arguing about the authenticity and the artificiality of their performances and about the moral implications generated by the view of either indecently real or dishonestly constructed attitudes. In particular, the fact that they mostly seem to be playing roles highlights the difficulty of addressing the issue of what it means to be truthful on camera. With their final walk-and-talk, Rouch and Morin attempt to answer to questions emerging from the results of the experiment. Ostensibly these questions remain open to further investigation.

## Analysis – An Experiment of Interaction beyond Fact and Fiction

In the case of *Chronique d'un Été* it seems evident from the beginning that we are assisting in an experiment which is slightly different from the research of sociological authenticity regarding the “fly on the wall” effect. In fact, what Morin and Rouch have sought to obtain was substantially more proactive than the practical and theoretical approach introduced by the exponents of North American *Direct Cinema*: Michel Brault, Robert Drew and David Maysles. In particular the “fly on the wall” effect” of *Direct Cinema* attempted to reach the documentary authenticity through the confidence that the presence of the camerapersons would have not hurt or disrupted what is going on in front of them (Verano, 2016). The authors of *Chronique d'un Été* certainly belonged to a similar filmmaking background. For instance, Jean Rouch had initially drawn his practical and theoretical expedients from *Direct Cinema* for his first short films in Africa. But, later, with documentaries such as *Jaguar* (1954), *Les Maîtres Fous* (1955), *La Chasse au Lion à l'Arc* (1957), and, foremost, *La Pyramide Humaine* (1959) Rouch was gradually changing his ethnographic style of filmmaking. While shooting *Les Maîtres Fous* he became increasingly convinced that the camera operators would have not disrupted the authentic flow of the rituals for the participants were too involved in enacting their roles during their performances. On the contrary, with his active and visible presence, the director would have contributed to creation of another genre of truth which sought to capture a certain sociological value. ‘Provoking, catalyzing, questioning, and filming are simply strategies for unleashing that revealing process. Rouch insisted that the presence of the camera, like the presence of the ethnographer, stimulates, modifies, accelerates, catalyses, opens a window (phrases he has used over the years); people respond by revealing themselves, and meanings emerge in that revelation (Rouch, 2003: 16).

As highlighted by Di Iorio (2007), Rouch and Morin attempted to move from concrete situations to broader abstractions, owing their methodological debt to phenomenology and to André Bazin’s advice to bind cinema with reality. In that, although Bazin’s articulation was utterly inspirational from a philosophical standpoint, the actual film was less attuned to his precepts in the way it was technically shot. In this sense, *Chronique d'un Été* provides very intriguing results for it depicts an unprecedented picture of French culture, but without following the regime of forbidden montage so dear to Bazin and only partially employing the technique of the depth of field.



However, directors and camera operators have not attempted to conceal themselves, to capture an uncontaminated phenomenology of the social situation (like in the North American version of *Direct Cinema*). Instead, they have decided to screen back the shots to the interviewees in order to produce knowledge through commentaries and improvisations (De Groof 2013). In this sense, the film director and theorist Edgar Morin had already clarified the essence of filmmaking as a potential research instrument for the study of the “phenomena of nature” (Morin 1956). But if *Direct Cinema* was more attuned to positivist epistemology, by advocating the non-intervention of the author in order to fulfil the, perhaps, utopian dream of rendering a pure, value-free anthropological understanding of a given social fact, on the contrary, *Cinema Vérité* insisted on the possible active participation of the camera and the filmmaker. Yet, even if one might argue that these moments, or different approaches are blurred within Jean Rouch filmography, one can still distinguish those earlier works in which *Direct Cinema* style prevails over the more recent ones in which the French director has developed his personal style of *Cinema Vérité*.

The latter case more complexly aligns to what Rouch has said about his own films as being an attempt to combine the personal and participatory concerns of Robert Flaherty with an interest in process derived from Vertov (Ruby, 2005: 7). Thus, I am referring to those films in which the French author, convinced of the necessity of recognizing the influence of the filmmaker’s presence, opted to produce reality as opposed to permitting it to passively unfurl before his very eyes. With this in mind, Rouch flouts the fallacy of invisibility offered by the narrative voice and actively participates in the social rituals captured by the camera.

In fact, as a visual anthropologist, he started to spend a considerable amount of time before the actual shooting among the inhabitants of the towns or the members of the tribes he purported to investigate. This is precisely the innovative factor of *Cinema Vérité* as a filmmaking style. From that moment on, Rouch’s documentaries begin to convey the effects of these previous interactions between the filmmaker/researcher and the social actors being researched. Also, it should be noted that the absence of the camera from the frame was firstly intended by Rouch as an attempt to subtract the machinery from the space of representation and to limit its possible contamination of the social rites in order to realise the almost utopian objectivity of *Direct Cinema*. In his first documentaries individuals do not look into the camera, there is no sign of interaction with the camera operator and no discourses about the making-of are made by the voice-over Rouch. Later,

from *Moi un Noir* (1958) onwards, Rouch realises that it was not necessary to hide the camera in order to reduce authorial intrusion and, therefore, he decides to assign a more interactive role to the camera and to himself, as a researcher.

Then, I argue that the work of Jean Rouch can be divided in two different phases. In the first period, with *Les Fils de l'Eau* (1941), *Circoncision* (1948) and *Bataille sur le Grand Fleuve* (1952), he attempted to adopt the approach of *Direct Cinema* that produced works much more influenced by self-reflexive observations around the material presence or absence of the camera. This is the reason why I am tempted to count these first experiments in the camp of Realist metacinema, for the domain of self-reflexivity was limited to uncovering the filmmaker as the organising consciousness and thus, exposing the possible contamination of the social environment.

Whereas, in the second period he explored the emergence of a new reality, as a synthesis resulting from the tight interaction between the researcher and the researched and paved the way for the creation of *Cinema Vérité*, as an unprecedented, if not revolutionary, approach to ethnographic film. It is at this point that Rouch embraced a fully conscious processual and productionist mode of filmmaking. As an indisputably precious landmark for visual anthropology, Rouch and Morin's work has also been awarded with the International Critics Prize at Cannes Film Festival, 1961. Adding his voice to the critics' choir of approval, Dumont has expressed how the movie struck the desired strings of his personal and cultural being. Indeed, this may have proved a major factor in the unexpected commercial success of the ethnographic movie (Dumont, 1978).

Overall, it can be argued that *Chronique d'un Été* represents the experimental evolution or the Parisian version of *La Pyramide Humaine*, a fundamental essay on inter-ethnic exchanges in Abidjan, Ivory Coast, for it actually contains many analogies with the methods of interaction developed with the participants. For instance, Rouch imported from *La Pyramide Humaine* the technique of "psychodrama", namely the strategy to encourage participants to disclose their most intimate feelings in front of the camera (Henley, 2009). Indeed, it is with *La Pyramide Humaine* that the participants begin to be observed as the actors of their own life and the propaedeutic interaction between themselves and the authors becomes essential to outline the anthropological and aesthetic value of the final product. In a nutshell, one of the key factors of this analysis is to understand how these interactive moments, between the authors and the participants and between the participants themselves precisely coincides with the productionist side of a gestural metacinematicity within this film. In this case, these gestures are particularly

concentrated at the beginning, when the authors explain the purpose of the film, and at the end, when the participants comment on the results of their interactions as captured by the camera. However, what we see depicted as a placid confrontation, a matter of teamwork or a mutual collaboration was ‘more a violent game where disagreement is the only role’ (Ibid.: 146). For instance, Morin was firmly against shooting in St Tropez for it would have damaged the credibility of the whole documentary. But, in the end, Rouch managed to convince him. Yet, it could be argued that this oscillation between dispute and reconciliation acted to fire the productive engines of the film. ‘There’s the crucial point! We are in conflict, Edgar and I, a temporary and fruitful conflict, I hope’ (Morin: 2003, 251).

While largely disagreeing on the logistics, Morin and Rouch found consensus on the underpinning principle of the film. Namely, to ‘make a film that is totally authentic, as true as a documentary, but with the same concepts as fictional film, that is, the contents of subjective life, of people’s existence’ (Ibid.: 252). In addition, Rouch found himself constrained by the concerns of the producer Anatole Dauman, the head of Argos Film, who certainly moderated the quarrels between the two authors, but also affected the production with his obsession to finish on time and in budget (Henley, 2009: 147). As illustrated in the opening titles of the version I have analysed, restored by the Italian laboratory *L’Immagine Ritrovata* in 2011, the film has been shot in 16mm reversal film and partially on 35mm camera with lightweight equipment, while the restoration of the soundtrack was based on a sound positive generated from an optical soundtrack and an incomplete magnetic 35mm. From a productionist perspective, the role of lightweight, manageable cameras and handheld portable synchronous-sound equipment was crucial to follow the participants in the streets, keeping up with the natural flow of their actions and thoughts, hence, generating an overall sense of authenticity and spontaneity. The so-called “walking camera” (*Figure 6.1*) allowed the operator to minimise the shakes while simultaneously maximising the depth of field (Ibid.: 157).

The very first productionist moment, comes right after the first edited images of Paris, when Morin, Rouch and one of the participants, Marceline, are conversing together about the nature of the project (*Figure 6.2*). Jean Rouch begins: “You see, Morin, getting people to talk is an excellent idea. But I don’t know if we can succeed in recording as

natural a conversation as we would without a camera present. For example, I don't know if Marceline can relax and talk normally.”<sup>5</sup>

**Figure 6.1**



The “walking camera”, an ingenious precursor of the Steadicam

**Figure 6.2**



Edgar, Marceline and Jean discuss about the nature of the project

Then, Marceline declares that it will not be easy for her and that she feels slightly nervous because one has to be prepared for it and she may not be. But what is interesting about this initial interaction is that, at the very moment Marceline expresses her uneasiness,

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<sup>5</sup> “Tu vois Morin, l’idée de réunir des gens autour d’une table est une excellente idée, seulement je ne sais pas si nous arriverons à enregistrer une conversation aussi normale qu’elle le serait s’il n’y avait pas de caméra. Par exemple je ne sais pas si Marceline arrivera à se décontracter, si elle parlera absolument normalement.”

Rouch immediately reassures her by saying that the authors would intervene and cut the undesired answers from the final editing and that, therefore, she should be freed of anxiety. Following Rouch's comforting words, Marceline purports to have reached a state of relaxation. Nevertheless, the two glances she sneaks at the camera seem to contradict her cheerful approval of the basic methodological parameters of the investigation, as if she were following a loose script.

Leaving aside for a moment the possibility that Marceline's character could have been constructed from the beginning, it has been pointed out that 'Ultimately, the necessity of the film derives from its contingency. [...] From the outset Morin and Rouch know what their method will be, but not what it will lead them to' (Dumont, 1978: 1021).

In line with my theorisation of metacinematic gestures, the two authors are contingent to the project but never necessary in order to make visible the materiality of the productionist gesture within the film. In fact, they establish the central question of the investigation to be "How do you live?" But after the communication of such a general question, they retreat from the spotlight and return only at some sporadic moments to moderate the discussions in the guise of equal level participants. Through such an innovative operation, Rouch and Morin dethrone their directorial figure from that of the main agents of representation; to become themselves, just other subjects involved in the sociological experiment, with no aspiration of authorial supremacy.

Their purpose is rather that of arranging the organisational, technical and linguistic presuppositions to allow the emergence of such a complex degree of interaction. It follows that the production and the construction of sense within this film are tightly bound to the multifaceted nature of the ongoing intersubjective relationships which occur during its creation. In this sense, it is not really important if Jean Pierre's feelings of frustration are authentic, or if Jacques and his wife's assessment of their own "almost happiness" is contaminated by the presence of the camera, or even if Marilou is exhibiting her depression or not, but it is rather crucial to witness how the interactive genesis of these self-descriptions emerges. Yet, it is even more thought-provoking to observe how the participants can pass from the role of interviewees to that of interviewers, as Marceline is firstly asked to describe her life but, later, she is asked to interview other people one of which is Jean Pierre, her ex-boyfriend.

Furthermore, it is worth mentioning that we are dealing with a rather prolonged genesis. Indeed, Rouch and Morin filmed their subjects for more than six months, accumulating over twenty-four hours of raw material which was edited into a ninety-

minute feature (Di Iorio, 2007). From a stylistic standpoint, these sequences are mainly organized around close-ups in order to enhance the intimate character of the interviews, even when they deal with themes of socio-political interest, such as the Algerian war or the possibility for interethnic sentimental relationships. As shown by the close-ups of the couple Henri and Maddie (*Figure 6.3*) and Marilou (*Figure 6.4*), in *Chronique d'un Été* faces fill up the screen and even the smallest tics and most subtle movements are made visible (Ibid.: 27).

**Figure 6.3**



**Figure 6.4**



**Figure 6.5**



**Figure 6.6**



Moments of interaction among the participants in *Chronique d'un Été*

Of particular relevance are also the scenes in which Rouch and Morin gather some of the participants to moderate discussions about themes of socio-political interest (*Figure 6.5*). The way these themes are treated is secondary in the context of the current analysis for they strictly pertain to the sociological value of the film. Instead, from a productionist standpoint it is interesting how Rouch and Morin had previously organised the interviews by locating themselves behind the camera or even by delegating their enactment to other participants. Then, in the case of these collective discussions they actively participate in

them, not in the guise of authors, but as common individuals, totally indiscernible from the rest of the crew.

Finally, the very last productionist moment of the film, the truly revolutionary implementation of this experimental film, is undoubtedly the end, when Morin and Rouch coordinate a screening of a preliminary assembly of the rushes in which the participants have the possibility to see themselves and evaluate their interactions during the experiment (*Figure 6.6*). As a resultant interpretation of the participants' conclusive opinions, Morin and Rouch argue that most of the comments have revolved around the blame expressed by the participants for the supposed degree of authenticity or mystification of their respective performances. For instance, Maxie accuses Marilou of having been indecent, to have stripped bare her intimacy too much. In response, Marilou self-referentially declares that the only spark of truth emerged from the interview of someone who is on the verge of a mental breakdown (like herself). But Marceline claims that, while reliving the intense set of emotions as a former Nazi concentration camp inmate, she was not experiencing a mental collapse and that, therefore, her performance during the stroll in Place de la Concorde was as authentic as Marilou's (*Figure 6.7*). On a different note, Jacques accuses Landry and Angelo of producing an exhaustive list of generalisations. In his defence, Angelo maintains that he has been natural throughout the whole experiment and that the impression given by the film is that him and Landry completely forgot the presence of the camera and therefore, acted instinctively.

**Figure 6.7**



Marceline remembers her time as a Nazi camp inmate while walking by Place de la Concorde

As Morin and Rouch have declared at the end of the movie, it is not really important to stress the extent to which these people were performing their answers or not. From this standpoint, *Chronique d'un Été* went far beyond this. Morin's perspective is particularly enlightening on this matter: "This film, unlike standard cinema, places us back into life. People react to the film as they do in life. They're not being guided, we don't direct the audience. We don't say, this one's nice, this one's not, this one's bright. These are people the audience could meet."<sup>6</sup>

However, to set the record straight in this, during the discussion with the participants Morin expresses a strong judgement against Maxie's opinion about the indecency of Marilou's revelations. He contends that what Maxie says is monstrous and that such reactions block the emergence of truth in life and in relationships. Evidently, for a sociologist of the 1960's, Maxie's conformist thinking needs to be contrasted. Indeed, Morin does not conceal the fact that he has been moved by both Marilou's and Marceline's disclosures. Unsurprisingly, after the shooting Marceline admitted that she had been influenced by Marilou when she saw her interview in the dailies and that from that moment on she changed her attitude and theatricalised her interpretation. She shaped it to resemble the melancholic tone of a film that she had just watched and that had deeply impressed her: *Hiroshima Mon Amour* (1958) by Alain Resnais (Sadoul, 1963). Marceline's revelation is certainly evidence of how the participants profoundly influenced their respective performances during the process of production and that this film is primarily a record of these heterogeneous, continuous interactions. In this sense, *Chronique d'un Été* is a perfect paradigm of the extent to which making a film is essentially the result of a process of intersubjective interactions. Furthermore, it specifically provides evidence of the degree of unpredictability that can emerge from a movie in which the directors dethrone themselves from the status of main agents of the production, deciding instead to work within a loose framework without imposing any rigid constraint to the process.

As aforementioned, the authors of French extraction have fell victim to complication previously unforeseen. These complications are a measure of the intensity of the revelations that they believed this experiment of *Cinema Vérité* had the potential

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<sup>6</sup> "C'est-à-dire que ce film à la différence du cinéma habituel, nous réintroduit dans la vie. Les gens sont devant le film comme dans la vie de tous les jours c'est-à-dire qu'ils ne sont pas guidés, parce que nous n'avons pas guidé le spectateur – nous ne lui avons pas dit tel est gentil – un tel est méchant – un tel est sympathique – un tel est intelligent, et alors devant ces gens là qu'ils pourraient rencontrer dans la vie" Morin's reflects with Rouch walking through the galleries of the Musée de l'Homme in Paris.



to unearth (Ungar, 2003). *Chronique d'un été* can be hence read as a pure gesture of expressive and productive freedom that lays claim to the reconstruction of an unprejudiced global community which may consciously reevaluate the constructive measure of individual expression and collective interaction. Still, it first and foremost sends a strong signal to forthcoming cinema, a message that will significantly affect the contemporary development of *Nouvelle Vague* in France: namely, the invitation to assimilate these assumptions into its experimental and self-reflexive projectuality.

## 6.2.

**American Movie:** USA, 1999, 107 min.

**Director:** Chris Smith

**Producers:** Sarah Price, Chris Smith, Michael Stipe, Jim McKay

**Language:** English

## Synopsis

In suburban Milwaukee, Mark Borchardt is chasing his American dream. Aged 30, Borchardt has three young children from a failed relationship. He is a great fan of George Romero's movies and, like many aspiring filmmakers across the world, he wants to make a feature film. After many attempts during his adolescence, he embarks upon the project of *Northwestern*; a slice-of-life film about "drinking". But the main problem is economic, Borchardt does not have the financial resources to complete the project but, most crucially, as consistent with his past he seems to be chronically incapable of accomplishing any filmmaking project he starts. Besides the money, he is unable to

overcome his organisational deficiencies. In the same poorly coordinated fashion, he decides to finish a 35 minute horror film, *Coven*, which he had already started a few years before. The plan is to sell at least 3,000 copies to cover the costs of production for *Northwestern*. So, he embarks on a low-budget quest to complete the movie together with an ill-assorted collection of friends, relatives and hired actors, with his 82-year old uncle in the guise of a reluctant executive director.

### **Analysis – The Chronicle of a Disorganised Factotum**

A car goes through a crepuscular suburban landscape while a voice-over describes the latest hijinks among beers and filmmaking projects. From the very beginning Borchardt presents himself as a pursuer of the American dream and we immediately understand that he is highly motivated in realising his artistic vision. “This time, I’m not gonna fail. This time is most important not to fail, just to drink and dream, but rather, to create and complete”. After this premise it is nearly impossible not to relate the protagonist of *American Movie* to the penniless, but resolute director interpreted by Steve Buscemi in *Living in Oblivion* (Di Cillo, 1995) a comical reconstruction of the unforeseeable setbacks occurred to a disorganised film crew operating in Manhattan. Yet, it is hard not to see Borchardt as a real-life materialisation of one of the subsequent screwball comedy’s characters of *Wayne’s World* (Spheeris, 1992) whose story revolves around suburban geeks undertaking their ludicrous projects with semi-serious intents and comical results. However, it strictly depends on the sensibility of the spectator whether Mark’s plans should be taken seriously or not. However, what appears irrefutable is his strong sense of abnegation and the degree to which his dream of a “second chance” is desperate and affected by economic issues. At the time of its release, a commentator maintained that *Blair Witch Project* (Myrick and Sanchez, 1999) beat Borchardt’s *Coven* (1997) to the punch and that if he only had been more astute at career-building or in advertising his

short-film, he could have been world famous too (Romney, 2000). In fact, *Coven*'s takings were barely enough to cover the costs of production bankrolled by Mark's uncle, whereas, thanks to a great pre-launch advertisement that falsely claimed it as a real documentary about a mysterious students' disappearance in the woods, *Blair Witch Project* collected 248.6 million dollars.

However, the story of *Coven* is radically different. At the time of the shooting of *American Movie*, Borchardt was struggling with the initial stages of production for *Northwestern*. The director, Chris Smith constructs the first scenes depicting the turmoil involved in the making-of *Northwestern* through a brief presentation of the main character, Mark. He is driving his car while casting his mind back to the day he was recording screams for his horror film: "I was smoking dope and drinking beer and it really struck me. I was no longer paying attention to the actresses and the performances". Indeed, he describes how, despite the stilted nature of the performances parading before his eyes, he was cast as a passive viewer in his inability to rectify the situation. The images of the car interior are alternated to that of the recordings and Mark's face swiftly appears in the midst of a drunken stupor. Therefore, the *mise en scène* appears to situate Mark's character within an impossible realm, one caught between the rambling attitude of a layabout and the undeterred motivation of the most passionate cinemagoer.

It follows a plethora of interviews with relatives and collaborators which serve to outline the sketch of the man on the spotlight. Among the others, we see Mark's mother, Monica and his brothers. They all confirm that Mark's passion for cinema dates back to the time when he was 14 and he came into possession of an 8mm camera. Indeed, the discovery of cinematic art inspired him to shoot a series of horror stories like *The More the Scariest* (1980), an amateur short-film about a mysterious killer who butchers a group of adolescents during an alcoholic fuelled rave in a cemetery. His childhood friend, Mike, a hard rock fan and former drug addict, declares: "He asked me to come over and help him!" In this sense, Mike is the exact prototype of the informal helper, as all the other people orbiting around Borchardt appear to be, with the exception of a few real free-lance professionals who, inexplicably attracted by Mark's zeal, awkwardly agree to embark on the project. Actually, we observe Mike's presence during the "*Northwestern* production meetings". He is constantly on the set (*Figure 6.8*), despite the fact that his role in the organisation is shrouded in mystery. Within the first ten minutes of *American Movie*, Borchardt presents *Northwestern* as a regular feature film shot on black and white negative, but the specific plot is not inferable from Mark's clarifications during the

production meetings (Figure 6.9). Dean Allen, responsible of the props and special effects for *Northwestern*, discloses the intimate reason which pushed him to collaborate with Mark: “Oh, my God, this is his whole life, making this one film!” Such a deliberate endorsement for the project is certainly due to a kind of sympathy for Mark’s strong devotion to accomplishing it. That certainly goes beyond a declaration of professional esteem, if it ever had been one. On the contrary, it must be acknowledged that all those who consciously contribute to realizing Mark’s vision appear to be motivated more by a sense of personal empathy for Mark the man, than an authentic reverence for Mark the director. But what is even more remarkable is that one of the impressions given by the first scenes and interviews edited by the director, Chris Smith, is that *American Movie* flows beyond the documentary presentation of a film production.

Figure 6.8



Mark shooting with his omnipresent friend Mike

Figure 6.9



Mark’s fanciful clarifications during the first production meeting for *Northwestern*

In fact, the film does not only present a dissection of the crucial organisational aspects for the production of *Northwestern* and *Coven*, but it also intertwines the material conditions of the cinematic work with the most intimate core of Mark Borchardt’s private life. In this sense, Smith’s film parallels other making-of documentaries such as *Burden of Dreams* (Les Blank, 1982) and *Heart of Darkness, A Filmmaker’s Apocalypse* (Bahr and Hickenlooper, 1991) which respectively report an accurate backstage of Werner Herzog’s *Fitzcarraldo* (1982) and Francis Ford Coppola’s *Apocalypse Now* (1979). Despite the blatant disparity between these authors’ prestige and Mark Borchardt’s anonymity, these documentaries are remarkably similar for they frame the degree to which shooting a film can be an exhausting experience. This is to say, they depict how film productions face unpredictable obstacles, such as adverse weather conditions, the actors and collaborators’

psychological or health problems and, also, how the possible economic complications can affect the practical organisation and jeopardise the quality of the intersubjective interactions on the set. For instance, in *Burden of Dreams*, Les Blank describes the unbearable conditions during which *Fitzcarraldo* was shot, from the struggle to lift a huge ferry up on a hill through rudimentary technical means, to the depiction of the continuous disputes between Herzog and his fetish actor, Klaus Kinski. Another significant example is the backstage of Francis Ford Coppola's intense and long-lasting process of production that documents how difficulties taking place in the jungle compelled him to risk almost the entirety of his financial resources in order to accomplish the shooting of *Apocalypse Now*.

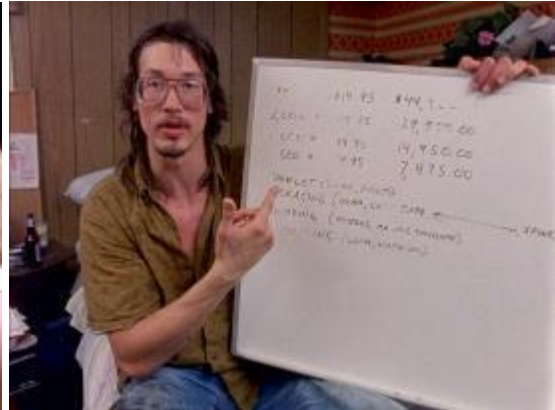
On a similar note, the formula of *American Movie*, somewhat precedes the experience of the renowned Italian screenwriter, Tonino Guerra, and one of the most influential directors in the history of cinema, Andrej Tarkovskij. The fascinating documentary which results from their location scouting in Italy in preparation of the film *Nostalghia* (Tarkovskij, 1983) is *Voyage in Time* (Guerra and Tarkovskij, 1983): an inspiring series of confrontations between two authors who discuss several aspects of filmmaking seen as part of an aesthetic research which profoundly intersects life. But what is lacking from all these documentaries is a kind of comical or parodistic side. And precisely here lies the original contribution of *American Movie* in documenting a group of semi-professionals at work on a film set. The figure of Mark Borchardt is framed in all his ambiguous behaviour, as continuously oscillating between antagonism towards, and complicity with his collaborators. Thus, coterminous with the auditions for *Northwestern*, the ensuing effect is comical. The aspiring actors are making their best efforts to play the lines at the auditions for parts, but the scene is immediately interrupted by another one in which Mark reveals his thoughts to his friend Mike: "They're making a mockery out of my words. This whole thing is turning into a theatrical mockery. Understand?" Then, back at the auditions, he decides to show them how the lines are supposed to be performed and he obviously exaggerates by giving a raging, improbable performance (*Figure 6.10*). Moreover, even though, in this case, Borchardt formally showcases an adaptability which is worthy of a professional film director, he also substantially reveals an ego-maniac character and a centralising behaviour when managing the situation in that way. But the whole project starts to fall apart when we see only two people, Mark included, attending the fourth *Northwestern* Production Meeting.

**Figure 6.10**



The exaggerated performance of Mark during the auditioning process

**Figure 6.11**



Mark showing his implausible self-funding strategy

Therefore, a caption explains that, due to the lack of funding, Mark has decided to finish *Coven*, a short film he had started two years before. In the following scene, acting as a producer, Mark displays a whiteboard scribbled with his approximate calculation about an alleged self-funding strategy (*Figure 6.11*): he purports to sell three thousand copies of *Coven* in order to raise forty-five thousand dollars, the sum required to shoot *Northwestern*. So, eventually Borchardt's project veers towards this thirty-five minute direct-market thriller shot on 16mm in black and white reversal. The story revolves around a writer with problems of inspiration who descends into a pattern of chronic alcohol abuse and then attempts to defeat his addiction by affiliating with a support group. The turning point of the plot occurs when the support group reveals its satanic purposes.

From the very start of the actual shooting every aspect seems rather disorganised. For instance, Mark has to convince his old uncle Bill (*Figure 6.12*) to provide the required fifty thousand dollars for the production of the movie, but, as he is initially very reluctant, his nephew is compelled to wield his powers of persuasion in order to obtain the money.

**Figure 6.12**



The producer, uncle Bill, and Mark's mother in action.

**Figure 6.13**





Figure 6.14



Figure 6.15



Images taken from the making-of *Coven* showing Mark's organisational deficiencies

During the process of production, Mark is the real *factotum* of the situation with only Mike and, rarely, his mother (Figure 6.13) assisting him during the shooting on location. Almost every aspect is approximate and poorly organised. From the Satanist group's costumes (Figure 6.14) until an excerpt in which we see a kid rolling the camera during the production (Figure 6.15). But, Mark is the real superhero of the making-of *Coven*. Beyond directing, we see him acting, recording the sound, editing and even attempting to psychoanalyse himself by using the camera (Figures 6.16-6.19). An interesting aspect revolves around the possible parallelism between Chris Smith and Mark Borchardt. During an interview, to the question "How was the relationship with the co-director Sarah Price?" Chris Smith replied: "It gets confusing. You have all these film terms of "director," "producer," and "co-producers," and everything else. And I think that those lines are blurry when you get to independent filmmaking, especially on the ultra-low-budget productions. Like, if you look at Mark's film, he was shooting stuff, setting up the recorder, and doing sound effects. We were doing the same things all the time" (Baumgartner, 1999).

Figure 6.16



Figure 6.17



Mark as the film "factotum": he acts and records the sound

Figure 6.18



Figure 6.19



Mark editing the dailies with his mother and using the camera to psychoanalyse himself

The mixture of these elements certainly confers an ironic tone upon the overall atmosphere which never appears to be highly professional. This aspect undermines the seriousness of the project which Mark so fervently sought to transmit when he answered the questions murmured by Chris Smith, which, however, are not even entirely audible for the lack of microphones. In fact Mark's self-declared aspiration to produce a good movie and his ideal pursuit of the American dream are constantly denied by his grotesque demeanour on the film set and the complete lack of means of production. So, we are constantly conditioned to suspect that there is a certain degree of self-mockery in Mark's behaviour which is, after all, indistinguishable from his controversial exhibitionism. His apparent boldness is perhaps enhanced by the "honour" of being followed by another filmmaker during his endeavour. Conversely, Smith's editing surely acts to minimise Mark's work. Indeed, the way this making-of is presented does not exalt either its aesthetic or organisational value in any way. Yet, *American Movie* does not intend to pontificate on the rewards of participating in an independent filmmaking project.

The first reason is that, in a sense Smith sees Borchardt as his alter ego. Indeed, Smith's first feature, *American Job* (1995) was shot on 16mm for the cost of fifteen thousand dollars. Already this aspect reveals more than an analogy with Mark's endeavour. So, Smith's intention is to immerse himself into Mark's world and to present the process of film production in a mutually enhancing dance of mutual connection (Arthur, 1999). He does not want to exalt Mark's project and in the same way he does not intend to praise his own. Rather he is fascinated by the idea of documenting the struggles incurred during the process of production. Smith and Borchardt are connected to each other and this is promptly revealed by the many quick glances of complicity that Mark directs at the camera. Indeed, Mark steals glances at the camera in a manner reminiscent



of David Brent, who was constantly winking and smiling at the operator who followed his jokes in the brilliant mockumentary *The Office* (Gervais and Merchant, 2001).

The second reason which accounts for the lack of sensationalism in Smith's depiction of Borchardt's work is that it frames a wretched provincial environment, within which the American Dream rhetoric can only ideally find fertile ground. It certainly cannot harbour the dream in the same way it is presented by many examples of classical Hollywoodian cinema, through the glorification of the myth of the self-made man who climbs the social ladder through sheer strength of motivation alone. In that, Smith's movie, by overthrowing the assumptions that the national ethos is predicated upon, performs a sophisticated semantic operation. Namely, by way of contrast, *American Movie* exalts how the aggregating spirit of collective artistic projects can be more socially edifying, at any level and through any means, than the practices originating from the individualist Anglo-Saxon ideology. On the contrary, one could claim that they feed into mindsets and behaviours which are characterised by a hermetically sealed form of cultural isolationism.

In this sense, the film demonstrates that Mark's individualist ideas, whose intrinsic nuances and contradictions are overtly declared to be mistaken by Mark himself, are conversely denied by the embracement of a socialist conception of production. A collective projectuality which suggests the aim of creating an artwork whose fruits should be primarily enjoyed at a communitarian level. In general, the film thrives on the continuous opposition between Mark's convictions of his actions but also on the delusive contents or the false perspectives given by Independent filmmaking when it encounters the American dream: 'Again, there's this idea that independent filmmaking has become sort of a lottery where if you can put the right 90 minutes of film together you can be the next Kevin Smith or Rick Linklater' Chris Smith declared (Ibid.). In that, Mark's spirit and his approximate organisation are certainly illustrative of a counter-cultural imagery, but foremost they document an extraordinarily typical personality.

'I thought it was just so great. It totally made me realize who Mark was and that he does things his own way. And I think that's why the film succeeded' (Ibid.). Moreover, it was the emergence of these elements in some of the first rushes that attracted two prestigious producers such as Michael Stipe (REM music group frontman), and Jim McKay, film director and producer. Undoubtedly, the combination of these aspects of note provided a major impetus for the recognition of Smith's work, represented in the award for Best Film at the Sundance Film Festival 1999.

Apart from the unexpected success of *American Movie*, Smith's film is also reminiscent of other theoretical Academic debates within the field of Critical Management Studies. In fact, I argue that *American Movie* represents a praise of disorganisation as an externality of order and that eventually confers a certain order to an organisational context. For instance, Cooper maintained that 'organisation and disorganisation are mutually constituting forces. Among other things, this means that human agents are necessarily "open", they need disorder and unpredictability' (Cooper 2016b: 55).

Besides the evident analogies with the notion of metacinematic gesture in regard to its propensity to generate unpredictable circumstances related to the linguistic, technical and organisational aspects of filmmaking, it can be argued that *American Movie* is particularly crucial in exploring the disorganised side of filmmaking production. Principally, following Cooper's words: 'seen in this way, the mutuality of the organization-disorganization opposition becomes a central issue in the analysis of social organization and social action' but also that 'in its most fundamental sense, organization is the appropriation of order out of disorder' (Cooper, 2016c: 103) . Through this lens 'organisation and order are also dependent on disorganisation and disorder' (Cooper, 2016a: 137).

The articulation of Cooper's concept can be thus summarised in a kind of construction of a primacy of disorder. Such primacy of disorder is intended within a system as capable to generate unpredictable information, novelty and newness, and, consequently, it becomes a measure of organisation or order (Ibid.). This theoretical framework influenced many other scholars, including Munro who maintains that such disorganisation can even be a potent strategy for managers once the multiplicity of orders circulating within institutions is better understood (Munro, 2001). I already mentioned the absolute urgency for this thesis to employ the concept of metacinematic gesture in order to shed light on the organisational side of film production. So, it can be argued that the focus of *American Movie* on the idea of disorganisation is crucial. In fact, improvisation is vital for cinema in order to generate innovation. So, I claim that the considerable degree of self-reflexivity within the self-reflexive gestures of *American Movie*, creates the premises for a disorganised improvisation apt to generate unpredictable scenarios endowed with a remarkable proportion of organisational, technical and linguistic experimentation.

As for the case of *American Movie*, these three gestural elements are framed in a multi-faceted composition which is revelatory of a high level of productionist information

revolving around the idea of disorganisation. For instance, the superimposition of Smith/Borchardt's experience surfaces a kind of reflexive *mise en abyme* which is *organisational*: like the day Borchardt told Smith he had nothing relevant to do and that, thus, the film crew should have not followed him. But, eventually the crew discovered that Borchardt had gone to uncle Bill's house in order to ask him for three thousand dollars for the production. One might say that it was an important fact to document in the making-of *Coven* and that it should have been filmed. This is what Chris Smith declared after the discovery of Mark's visit to his uncle for production reasons: 'After that we checked in with Mark every morning and kept really close tabs on him and, by the end, we were basically just going over to his house every morning and tagging along for the whole day' (Baumgartner 1999). So we see how the initial, but also continuous, exhibited disorganisation contributed to foster organisational adjustments during the shooting.

But the reflexive elements revolving around disorganisation had also *technical* consequences. At the end of the shooting which lasted for two years Chris Smith had four hours of shooting that had to be accurately selected and edited for the final product. This feed into the editing difficulties that Mark Borchardt incurred because some film parts of *Coven* were missing and finding a solution to this problem required a collective effort during the post-production phase. Furthermore, as already mentioned, the whole project reflects a *linguistic* specular doubling between Chris Smith's film production and Mark Borchardt's one. Also, Mark's crew roles are blurred on the film set as well as Chris and Sara's ones to the extent that, through an attentive viewing of *American Movie*, it can be inferred that its film production is as disorganised as that of *Coven*.

Towards the end of the film we see Mark working again on *Northwestern*'s script and we discover that the local reception of *Coven* was unexpectedly good after the premiere. In *American Movie* we see a selection of *Coven*'s scenes projected at the movie premiere along with the moment when a very pleased Mark thanks everyone on the stage declaring how much he enjoyed doing the film. Finally, we come to know that the uncle and producer Bill passed away a few months after the production of *Coven* and that, despite his reluctance to wholeheartedly help Mark with his projects, he eventually bequeathed to him fifty thousand dollars for the production of *Northwestern*. But, clearly, this set of propitiatory events is not sufficient to push Mark to accomplish the original project. In fact, *Northwestern* is still in production. When the director interviews Mark's children he asks them: "You guys want to make films when you get older?" (*Figure 6.20*). They look quite amused, but also undecided, we vaguely hear: "Yeah/no!" and Smith

asks: “Why?” Then they firmly reply: “Because you gotta buy some stuff and it takes so much money, so much time”. Another kid finally declares: “And you gotta work a hundred years!” In hindsight, such naïve declarations sound like a prophecy for their father will never accomplish the original project of *Northwestern*.

**Figure 6.20**



Mark's children interviewed by the director Chris Smith

To conclude, *American Movie* is probably the only example of productionist metafilm that documentarily presents the specular doubling of two films, the one which documents and the one being documented. The purposes of Borchardt and Smith are eventually overwhelmed by the complex metacinematic gesturality of the film. *American Movie* achieves this effect by presenting a self-reflexive and multi-layered depiction of disorganisation which reveals and connects linguistic, technical and organisational aspects of both productions. Finally, it promotes the social edifying character of a disorganised factotum, but it also ironically, yet quite respectfully presents Borchardt's methods as a viable model, if not inconclusive in the long run, for independent filmmaking.

**6.3.**

**Grizzly Man:** USA, 2005, 104 min.

**Director:** Werner Herzog

**Producers:** Kevin Beggs, Billy Campbell, Phil Fairclough,

Andrea Meditch, Erik Nelson, Tom

Ortenberg, Jewel Palovak

**Language:** English

### **Synopsis**

Werner Herzog recalls the story of Timothy Treadwell with the use of sequences extracted from more than 100 hours of video footage shot by the American naturalist and documentary filmmaker during the last five years of his life. Starting in 1990, Treadwell spent as much time as possible each year camping out near a grizzly bear habitat. Despite Treadwell's declarations of identification with, and love for, bears, he had only an informal knowledge of their behaviour and, while attempting to study and protect them, he would walk within a few meters of these wild animals with a video camera in hand. We see him taking extraordinarily high risks approaching and touching the bears or even taking baths with them. In October 2003, Treadwell's remains, along with those of his girlfriend, Amie Huguenard, who occasionally camped with him, were discovered near their campsite in Alaska's Katmai National Park and Reserve. They have been mauled and devoured by a grizzly and figure as the first known victims of a bear attack in the park. Before long, the same bear was declared dead by the park officials. In this documentary Herzog conducts and films interviews with Treadwell's relatives, friends and nature experts. Park rangers and zoologists comment on Treadwell's statements and actions, such as his repeated claims that he was defending the bears from poachers. They note that there had never been a recorded incident of poaching at Katmai national park.

## Analysis – The Self-Productive Nature of Treadwell's Footage

Similarly, to the established relationship between Chris Smith and Mark Borchardt in *American Movie*, the connection between Herzog and Treadwell traces an ideal link between two documentarists sharing the same passion for wild nature. But, whereas Smith and Borchardt meet during the shooting in a dance of mutual connection, the German director encounters the American naturalist only through the editing of his footage. In this sense, *Grizzly Man* represents the virtual space of an impossible encounter. Namely, the filmic space becomes the veritable protagonist of the story, a space which links two different subjects, who have an aesthetic and emotional affinity, but who belong to different temporalities. Herzog is the active subject of such an impossible interaction for we come to know from the very beginning that Timothy has been killed and devoured by the same bears he wanted to protect. Thus, the only possibility of connection lies in the physical interaction with his footage and in the reflections deriving from their dissection and recomposition. At the beginning of *Grizzly Man*, Herzog, the voice-over, describes his fascination with Treadwell's story: "Having myself filmed in the wilderness of jungles, I found that beyond the wildlife film, in his material lay dormant a story of astonishing beauty and depth. I discovered a film of human ecstasies and darkest inner turmoil. As if there was a desire in him to leave the confinements of his humanness and bond with the bears Treadwell reached seeking a primordial encounter. But, in doing so, he crossed an invisible borderline".

So, Herzog casts himself as a spectator, becoming the editor of Treadwell's work in the second instance. His high sense of spectatorship is important to understand how he posits himself during the elaboration of *Grizzly Man*. As he argued: 'I elevate the spectator. [...] And I, the author of the film, do not let him descend from this height until it is over. Only in this state of sublimity [Erhabenheit] does something deeper become possible, a kind of truth that is the enemy of the merely factual. Ecstatic truth, I call it' (Herzog, 2010: 1). Even though many of Herzog's films can be purported to reach such ecstatic truth, a pertinent example is to be found at the end of *My Best Fiend* (Herzog, 1999) where the raging fury of the actor Klaus Kinski, with whom Herzog shot five

movies, dissolves in a tender instance of playful empathy with a butterfly flying around his head and body (*Figure 6.21*).

**Figure 6.21**



The ecstatic truth of Klaus Kinski playing with a butterfly

Here the use of the concept of ekstasis acquires its relevance: ‘a person's stepping out of himself into an elevated state - where we can raise ourselves over our own nature’ (Ibid.: 10). In the case of Klaus Kinski such ecstatic truth emerges in sharp contrast with the previous explosions of rage and violence against Herzog occurred throughout the shooting of *Fitzcarraldo* (1982). But this aspect becomes crucial for the analysis of *Grizzly Man* only if we are capable of observing Treadwell’s sequences in a receptive way through the support of Herzog’s narrative voice. ‘What we can do in the cinema is show images that are pure fantasy, that lie dormant deep inside us—images we awaken with a camera and we can also awaken in the spectators’ (Ames, 2014: 116). Along similar lines, it has been pointed out elsewhere that Herzog, both in documentaries and fiction stories, does not only delegate to his characters the status of observers, but also lends some agency to nature and landscapes themselves. He trusts in the capability of nature and things to self-construct into aesthetically meaningful scenarios (Gandy, 2012). Yet, Herzog’s belief that nature, landscape and in general every uncontrollable aspect of life, as opposed to merely representing reality through the filmic image, constructs and moulds images to create a facet of ecstatic truth.



For instance, the scene where Timothy is on the foreground introducing the bear, Mr Chocolate, is illustrative of Herzog's creed (*Figure 6.22*). The environmentalist has just finished his time in the Sanctuary, an esplanade where he observes bears from June to late August, and he is about to move to the Grizzly Maze, another area of the park where he directs himself towards the end of summer. So, he says goodbye to Mr Chocolate in front of the camera, but suddenly Herzog's voice over points out a very important reading of it: "Now the scene seems to be over. But as a filmmaker, sometimes things fall into your lap which you couldn't expect, never dream of. There is something like an inexplicable magic of cinema." It is precisely at that moment that we see Spirit, the fox, entering the frame followed by some of its pups (*Figure 6.23*). The sudden convergence of these different individuals, bear, man and foxes within the same framing confers a mystical aura to the scene. What we see before our eyes is the rare communion between different living beings within the same habitat, an environment not yet submerged by anthropic structures, but so dense of an entirely different prospect of civilisation. Moreover, by doing so, Treadwell demonstrates that the camera is not only an instrument apt to explore the wilderness around him, but also an invaluable tool for airing his innermost feelings, including his ghosts.

**Figure 6.22**



**Figure 6.23**



Timothy introducing Mr Chocolate while a fox abruptly invades the frame

With regards to this, Herzog discussed the extent to which Treadwell set forth through his footage a process of self-invention (Ames 2014). In fact, behind the apparent aleatory nature of some shots, Herzog disclosed that they could have been the result of ten or even fifteen takes of the same scene. In fact, he was a professional filmmaker and therefore wished to perform well before the camera. Here lies the reason as to why his work in



Alaska was impeccably shot and selected. But, despite the unveiling of such a rational process of shooting and selection, which also reveals a degree of narcissism in Treadwell's personality, Herzog's strength rests in his ability to recognise those moments of cathartic magic in which the ecstatic truth arises. Leaving aside the mechanism of anthropomorphisation that leads Treadwell to treat bears as if they were human beings it is worth turning our attention to how the camera has been applied by Treadwell to explore his own subjectivity. At first glance *Grizzly Man* is focused on documenting Treadwell's bizarre relationship with the animals, but as the plot unfurls an unprecedented journey of self-investigation is revealed in its wake.

In this sense, the film entirely cancels the distance. The figure of Treadwell dissolves and he becomes a bear, but through such an improbable transformation we can observe the innermost truth of the human being concealed behind his clumsy attempt to look identify as an animal. In this way, Treadwell violates the norms of the indigenes Aleuts, as declared by the Kodiak museum curator in the movie. For him, Treadwell's behaviour represented the ultimate form of disrespect towards the bears. He commented that "Timothy Treadwell crossed a boundary that we have lived with for seven thousand years". As it has been pointed out by the Italian critic, Enrico Ghezzi, the distance here is the minimum which is permitted to be in a movie, but it is already unbearable (Ghezzi, 2007). The scene in which he takes a bath with the bear is particularly illustrative of this point (*Figure 6.24*). Treadwell is not a hero of mankind, he is a hero of cinema, a bear which is playing with cinema. But he is first and foremost a man with a movie camera, paraphrasing Dziga Vertov.

So, the genality of Herzog's recomposition of Treadwell's work is that of highlighting the imaginary connection between the subject and his footage. 'Treadwell's reluctance to leave the frame implies anxiety about relinquishing the sense of identity the camera confers' (Peucker, 2012:49). So, the production of such an interminable set of shots means to open a gateway to his own self, laying down the foundations to construct an identity which had struggled to find any semblance of stability and balance until those extreme moments of intimate revelation in the midst of wild nature. As Ghezzi argues, Treadwell films himself as if he were already on the other side of the camera, watching himself on the screen (*Figure 6.25*). Therefore, Treadwell's self-perception is engendered by his intimate symbiosis with the camera as a prosthetic tool. He lives in complete harmony with it to the point that the camera becomes a powerful instrument of mediation to interact with bears. This overall impression, in addition to the knowledge of the copious

number of takes he made for each scene, confers to his footage a remarkable productionist content.

**Figure 6.24**



Treadwell taking a bath with a bear

**Figure 6.25**



Treadwell's high perception of his own figure within the profilmic space

The productionist self-reflexivity of Treadwell's work is twofold. The first concern is related to the exhibited willingness to protect and document the life of bears within their own habitat and, therefore, to produce a valuable documentary suitable for didactic purposes. In fact, it should be remembered that Treadwell participated in numerous educational programmes in order to foster children's awareness to the cause of bears. This is one reason why it is possible to underpin Treadwell's inclination to a certain degree of perfectionism among the footage selected by Herzog and his collaborators. This aspect can be inferred from his general behaviour, his micro expressions, but also from the heavy demands he placed on himself in a project for which he had invested thirteen years. I have previously alluded to the second aspect related to the productionist self-reflexivity of his footage and it should be added that it is apparently less voluntary than the previous one. It relates to the use of filmmaking as a means to construct and mould his own identity as a filmmaker, by allowing and enhancing a deeper connection with the natural along with its living and inanimate components.

On this matter, in an interesting article it has been argued that the camera in Treadwell's footages represents a "technology of self-recognition" (Pettman, 2008) through which the American environmentalist explores his self and from which he unravels the unsolved and remote sides of his own identity. According to the article's author, such an interesting mechanism would occur unintentionally as operationalised through what Thomas Elsaesser calls "autoscopia" (Elsaesser, 1989). That is to say 'a modern form of introspection, highly mediated by cinematic images, whether the subject

is actively engaged in producing these images or not' (Pettman, 2008:154). As highlighted by Herzog himself, there is a moment in Treadwell's footage where we can see him jumping in and out the frame and posing like John Rambo. He literally emerges from the bushes and disappears behind them the moment after while frantically wielding another camera with the self-confidence of someone who is self-consciously thrilled to experiment a revolutionary form of filmmaking. And he truly achieves it, but unwittingly, through a magic form of autoscopic epiphany which illustrates the essence of the nature captured in the frame. Following the evocative voice-over of Werner Herzog:

In his action movie mode, Treadwell probably didn't realise that seemingly empty moments had a strange secret beauty. Sometimes images themselves develop their own life, their own mysterious stardom. Beyond his posings, the camera was his only present companion. It was his instrument to explore the wilderness around him, but increasingly it became something more. He started to scrutinise his innermost being, his demons, his exhilarations. Facing the lens of a camera took on the quality of the confessional" (*Figure 6.26*).

**Figure 6.26**



The strange, secret beauty of Treadwell's "empty" frames are alternately filled up with his wandering figure

In light of this, I argue that the productionist self-reflexivity of Herzog's editing lies chiefly in his skill in highlighting Treadwell's spiritual form of filmmaking as an autoscopic introspection which is capable of revealing the ecstatic truth in its purest aesthetic form. Herzog exalts Treadwell's gesture of "being there with a camera", involving a combination of intentional and non-intentional elements. This is the reason why those moments in which he suddenly disappears precisely coincide with those in which we can admire, by subtraction, an image of the nature of an unprecedented poignancy. Captured in its essential function of subtraction, the author Treadwell is thereby dethroned from his privileged enunciative position, but his blazing passion is certainly not. Moreover, Treadwell's cumbersome presence, within an otherwise undiscovered landscape, is essential to strengthen the points of divergence between him and the wilderness.

Herzog, for his part, wittingly plays with the strength of other oppositional categories and presents an even more caricatural portrayal of Timothy Treadwell through the exaggeration of some histrionic interviews conducted with his friends and relatives. Here the German director shows the importance of eliciting the right reaction in order to obtain an enhanced effect. The result is that in *Grizzly Man* those who love Timothy are truly inclined to manifest it and, conversely, we see those who are sceptical about his methods in the grip of vibrant antagonistic performances. It is the realm of counterpoint and it involves a certain degree of manipulation from Herzog. In fact, the active engagement of the German director proved more decisive to the final image of Treadwell than that of the malicious words of his detractors or his flamboyant displays of narcissism. In this sense, Herzog's fondness for Treadwell has truly contributed to the construction of a positive image of the American documentarist even though some commentators have strongly criticised his distance from Treadwell's harmonious conception of nature (Alex 2014, Adams and Craine 2016).

Furthermore, Ghezzi (2007) supports this idea that the interviews are fake on account of the high degree of mystification of the interviewees' statements due to the pervasiveness of the camera. In this sense *Grizzly Man* resumes the investigation of *Chronique d'un Été* for it studies the camera as an instrument of emotion elicitation in the context of a character's presentation on the screen. Although this point leaves room for further speculation regarding the more or less voluntary manipulation of the interviewees' appearance operated by directors, the point of *Chronique d'un Été* applies also to *Grizzly*

*Man*. Even though these films cannot function as empirical evidence for psychological and physiological studies on emotion eliciting films such as: (Fernández *et al.*, 2012; Schaefer *et al.*, 2010; Uhrig *et al.*, 2016), they can nonetheless provide some complementary knowledge to the topic. More crucially, the alleged manipulation of these interviews is certainly directed to generate some altered or enhanced personal confessions, which are not less authentic or revelatory than those elicited without the presence of a camera.

However, it is worthwhile to remark that the presence of the camera elicits a very specific or even *sui generis* kind of interviewees' performance which deserves further investigation. With regards to this, Herzog is a master, his ability to induce strong emotional responses with the use of camera is evident in many of his movies, among which the documentary *Gasherbrum* (1985) stands out. In this film Herzog interviews the Italian alpinist Reinhold Messner about the unfortunate expedition up on the arduous faces of Nanga Parbat where his brother, Gunther, lost his life. At some point the German director reveals the eliciting power of the camera when combined with a sharp question. Indeed, Herzog asks Messner about the aftermath of his brother death: "And how did you then stand before your mother?" Abruptly, Messner bursts into tears for the question is blunt and direct to the point. Thus, Herzog's provocation unearths deep-seated emotions rooted in the past.

Yet, it is possible to underpin these kind of elicitations and reactions even in the interviews conducted with Treadwell's relatives, friends and acquaintances. Such aspects become an important operational leitmotiv, a trademark of Herzog's cinematography, but also inheritor of the tradition of certain documentarism: *Direct Cinema* and *Cinema Vérité* above all. For instance, the graphic reconstruction of Timothy and Amy's death, is heartbrokenly performed by the coroner, Franc, whose histrionic performance ties in with the disposition of the camera which frames him into solemn close-ups (*Figures 6.27, 6.28*). The presentation of Timothy's parents is also remarkable on account of their powerful, visual and verbal exhibition of the typical American bourgeois values. During the interview Timothy's mother emblematically, and grotesquely, holds her son's favourite teddy bear (*Figure 6.29*).

In general, Herzog facilitates the personal expression and supports the emergence of larger-than-life characters. From a functional standpoint, it is essential for Herzog to contrast the grotesque and hyperbolic demeanour of the protagonist with a set of interviews in which some bizarre portrayals can even outdo that of the protagonist. Such



expediency minimises the grotesque effect of Timothy's character, it creates an internal consistency within the diegesis and humanises his position if compared with the moralistic stance of his detractors.

Figure 6.27



Coroner Frank's close-ups

Figure 6.28



Figure 6.29



Timothy's parents in their living room. The mother holds her son's teddy bear

Among many, Treadwell's ex-girlfriend Jewel Palovak, is probably the key figure being interviewed. She is also crucial for a productionist point of view because she supervised Herzog's treatment of Timothy's footage throughout the process of production.

In this sense, she behaved as a sort of ethical guardian of her deceased friend's material. The episode of the audio track of the bear mauling Amy and Timothy represents the "limit" of the film. Herzog does not want Jewel to hear, he even advises her to destroy the recording because "it will be the white elephant in the room all her life". This is an extraordinary moment of fragility within the film. In the scene, we see Jewel Palovak, with a camera and Herzog in the foreground with his back to the viewer (*Figure 6.30*).

His voice-over declares that during the massacre Amy had grabbed the camera without having the possibility to remove the lens cap. The result is that the images of the bear attack are not available. However, Jewel allows Herzog to listen to the violent assault, an audio she intends to abstain from engaging with. Therefore, Herzog decides to frame her so that the spectators can observe her reaction to his facial expressions while he listens to the disturbing audio recording. ‘The final turn in this scene, of course, and the most important one is that this is a sound divorced not only from image but from sound itself. It is a sound that does not exist, at least within the world of the film, since we never actually hear it, and yet its absence echoes the absence of both Treadwell and Huguenard’ (Johnson, 2008: 80).

**Figure 6.30**



Jewel Palovak watches Herzog's reception of the audio tape

As one of the most revelatory sequences of the movie, it stands out for the way it operationalises a complex articulation through the use of an inaudible and invisible synaesthesia. In fact, the audio and the video of the double killing are neither hearable nor watchable, the first because it is inaccessible, the second because it is inexistent, but they both pervade the scene as a result of the intersubjective exchange between the individuals connected within the framing. So, a crucial moment of productionist self-reflexivity in *Grizzly Man* hinges on the display of the construction of such mutual acknowledgement, between Werner and Jewel; while she can read in his eyes, which are excluded from our sight, the same desperation she would experience if she had to listen to the audio track.

As a journey for the gaze, such framing speculatively resumes a representational enigma which reminds the constructive pattern of Velazquez's *Las Meninas*. Apparently, Herzog was aware that the gesture of including this scene in the movie would have

generated a unique processual short-circuit. It foremost created a network of empathic synergy that we participate as spectators, between Herzog, Jewel, Timothy and Amy. In my opinion, through this scene we establish an emotional proximity towards the subjects on screen.

Moreover, this film explores the perverse allure of assembling found footage, as an *objet trouvé* (Steetskamp, 2008). But, from Herzog's side, it is also a perversion bound to a certain degree of self-referentiality. What the voice-over of the German director reveals about Treadwell is self-reflexive, for he projects his personal aspiration to seek ecstatic truth as filmmaker into Treadwell's work. Moreover, he submerges us into an oneiric world, because, paradoxically, in his cinema the more the images are truthful and documentary, the more we can claim to be in the grip of fiction and dream. *Grizzly Man* is the dream of a self-destructive character and Herzog has extensively proved to be fascinated by these kinds of figures. It suffices to think about the volcanic character of Klaus Kinski with whom he shot five movies contributing to depict some unforgettable characters like those in *Aguirre, Wrath of God* (1972) and *Fitzcarraldo* (1982).

Treadwell is certainly one of them. From his words in the movie: "Most of the times I am a fly on the wall, observing, non-committal, non-invasive in any way. Occasionally I am challenged and in that case the kind warrior must become a samurai". From his part, Herzog acts as a warrior too, especially when he courageously listens to the horrifying audio recording. But foremost, when he decides to deal with a hundred hours of footage, to select it and to re-edit it in a meaningful fashion in order to make a film that might confer dignity to the figure of Treadwell. At the beginning of the movie his voice-over stands in defence of Treadwell's work against many detractors who considered him to be a wacko environmentalist: "He captured such glorious improvised moments the likes of which the studio directors with their union crews can never dream of". Elsewhere, the value of Treadwell's footage has been pointed out: 'Even if I gave you \$50 million of Hollywood money, you could never achieve what he did with a little video camera. And I believe the best of the best is in the film' (Ames, 2014: 158).

This explains why the film was shot so quickly. The production took twenty-nine days from the first day of shooting, in Alaska, Florida and Los Angeles, to the delivery of the final film (Cronin, 2014). All these elements are evidence of the unquestionable faith Herzog gave to Treadwell's material. But also a valuable justification for Herzog's exaltation of its self-productive property in terms of generating the kind of ecstatic truth he was looking for as a filmmaker. Finally, he included the processual dimension through



which Treadwell's cinematic confessional acquires its strength alongside the individuals who had crossed his existential path.

#### **6.4. The Eulogium of Arbitrariness**

In this chapter I analysed three movies which expound radically different characteristics, despite the fact they are chiefly connected through the rationale of a common documentary approach. However, we have seen that, as productionist metafilms, they surface thought-provoking set of analogies and contrasts among themselves. With *Chronique d'un Été*, Rouch and Morin dethroned their directorial figure from the role of the main agents of representation, to behave just as other participants involved in the sociological experiment. Their purpose was rather that of arranging the organisational, technical and linguistic presuppositions of the documentary in order to allow the emergence of a complex degree of intersubjective interaction worthwhile of sociological interest. In this sense it is fundamental how they organised the interviews by locating themselves behind the camera or even by delegating their enactment to other participants.

Paraphrasing what Morin and Rouch have declared at the end of the movie: it is not important to stress the extent to which these people were mystifying their answers or not, but rather how they react to the film as they do in life. By doing so, the emergence of these intersubjective relationships within the exposed metacinematic gestures also provides evidence of the genesis of the film itself, which does not only frames the way the characters influence one another but also how every single agency actively contributes to the actual making-of. Through this lens, *Chronique d'un été* is a perfect paradigm of the extent to which making a film is essentially the result of a process of unpredictable intersubjective interactions.

The peculiarity of Chris Smith's *American Movie* resides in how the film intertwines a presentation of the main organisational aspects to produce the short-films *Northwestern* and *Coven* with significative details of their director's private life. The

original contribution of *American Movie* lies in reporting the work of a group of semi-professionals at work on a film set by framing the whole scenario from a comical or parodistic standpoint. On a superficial level the film gives the impression that the director, Borchardt, is the head of the operations while he is constantly overwhelmed by economic and material obstructions which are eventually rectified through the informal help of friends and relatives. Without being caught in the pitfall of apologia of it, *American Movie* produces a reflection on a plausible disorganised side of filmmaking in proposing its linguistic, technical and organisational solutions. It also presents a filmmaking scenario which could not be farther from the shining glitters of Hollywood and that, therefore, produces a counter-cultural critique of the ideological narrative ingrained within the American myth of the “self-made man”. Finally, *American Movie* is probably the only example of productionist metafilm that documentarily presents the specular doubling of two films, the one which documents and the one being documented. In fact, it presents a self-reflexive and multi-layered depiction of disorganisation which reveals and connects the linguistic, technical and organisational aspects of both productions rolled into one.

*Grizzly Man* also connects two different directorial stances, but this time situated in the virtual space of an impossible encounter. It is the filmic space to become the veritable protagonist of the story, a space which links two different subjects, Treadwell and Herzog, who have some aesthetic and emotional affinity, but who belong to different temporalities. The productionist self-reflexivity of Treadwell’s work is twofold. One is related to the exhibited willingness to protect and document the life of bears within their own habitat and the other relates to the use of filmmaking as a means to construct and mould his own identity as a filmmaker and as a man, by allowing a deeper connection with the natural environment along with its living and inanimate components.

In light of this, I have argued that the productionist self-reflexivity of Herzog’s scene selection is that of highlighting Treadwell’s spiritual form of filmmaking as an autoscopic introspection which is capable of revealing the ecstatic truth in its purest aesthetic form. In fact Herzog exalts Treadwell’s gesture of “being there” with a camera, presenting his intentional choices but foremost exalting those moments in which the cinematic magic springs from unintentional occurrences.

As for Morin and Rouch, yet more indirectly in Borchardt’s case, the author Treadwell is dethroned from his privileged enunciative position. In light of this, all three films manifest a distinctive attitude towards the same productive arbitrariness. Herzog’s praise of Treadwell’s work largely hinges on the fortuity in achieving the ecstatic truth

he seeks through cinema. So, it can be argued that the focus on the idea of disorganisation, or productive arbitrariness is crucial and that these films promote improvisation as vital in order to generate innovation for cinematic art. Also, I claim that the remarkable degree of productionist self-reflexivity within the metacinematic gestures of these three films creates the premises for a disorganised improvisation apt to generate unpredictable scenarios endowed with a remarkable proportion of organisational, technical and linguistic experimentation. In comparison with the fictional productionist metafilms these documentary approaches start to present a credible depiction of the organisational side of filmmaking, being them supported by the effect of realism given by their *cinema vérité* approach. Nonetheless it should be also taken into account that in these films the exhibition of the processual dimension of filmmaking is still a consequence of the exploration of other main themes rather than part of their constitutive foundations.

Finally, as previously underlined, all of them restate a remarkable interest in intersubjective relationships through the exhibition of metacinematic gestures. Herzog also establishes a profound connection with Treadwell's ex-girlfriend, Jewel Palovak, mainly because she supervised his treatment of Timothy's footage throughout the process of production. So, beyond their eulogium of arbitrariness, these documentaries' focus on intersubjective relationships which become the excuse to open up an accessible threshold towards the unveiling of the dimension of secrecy of cinematic productions. In the next chapter I intend to further explore how these interactions unravel additional interpretive layers to the possibility of exhibiting the process of filmmaking production.

## 7.0. Organising the Exhibition of the Filmmaking Process

In this final chapter of the thesis, I will analyse two significant experiments which will foster a critical analysis of productionist metafilms expounding their own organisational process: *The Five Obstructions* (Von Trier, 2003) and *The Act of Killing* (Oppenheimer, 2012). If the middle chapters of my thesis have mainly revolved around a confrontation between the analysis of a set of productionist metafilms (fictional films and documentaries) mainly framed within Film Studies, the last chapter will also problematise them abovementioned movies by connecting them with some hints belonging to the field of analysis of Organisation Studies and Critical Management Studies. In that, the project follows this path in order to unlock its broader potential contribution beyond the domain of Film Studies.

Nonetheless, I have started such expansion in the section related to productionist documentaries which expose the filmmaking process in order to highlight further sociological or aesthetic insights. In fact, I have problematised the theme of disorganisation as paradigmatic for *American Movie*. But this overflow beyond Film Studies has also emerged from the subtexts of *Chronique d'un Été* and *Grizzly Man* for what concerns the productionist arbitrariness engendered by unpredictable intersubjective connections and autoscopic constructions. But, what the films I am going to tackle add to the already explored patterns of self-reflexive filmmaking is related to a peculiar convergence of different aspects. In fact, *The Five Obstructions* and *The Act of Killing* precisely offer a model of self-reflexive filmmaking which mainly rests on a prevailing productionist attitude. This is to say that the productionist side is basically overarching, with all the linguistic, technical and organisational patterns of these films converging within the same constructive means, the exhibition of productive process. In that, the process of production does not only represent the strategic orientation of the film but also the privileged vehicle of its final content.

This aspect does not occur with the already explored productionist metafilms which expose fictions and documentaries. They do not make the productionist side entirely coincide with the whole set of strategic choices made during the production. As I attempted to demonstrate with the analysis of self-reflexive fictions, there the

productionist side mainly emerges at a linguistic and technical level. Namely, with films like *Le Mépris* or *La Nuit Américaine* what we see on the screen reflects our expectations of how a film set would look like, but only from a diegetic standpoint framed within a fictional context. Instead, we know that the organisational construction of these films is quite congruous to other fiction stories produced by classical Hollywood and European cinema.

Conversely, with self-reflexive documentaries, the productionist side prevails at a technical and organisational level while the linguistic and semantic orientation is also directed towards other contexts radically exceeding the world of filmmaking. By way of example, when the productionist side is focused on the organisational construction of *Chronique d'un Été*, it represents the springboard to access and connect the isolated existences of Paris' inhabitants. Namely, it relates to a socio-cultural context which exceeds the filmic or the cinematic specificity.

Or, as for the case of *Grizzly Man*, the selection of Treadwell's found footage flows beyond its eminent metacinematic spirit, it becomes a means to explore the inner nature of the American naturalist and reaches to explore some deep anthropological and ethological issues. *American Movie*, from his part, somewhat bridges the productionist partiality of the previous movies with those I am going to explore in this chapter.

In fact, even though, Chris Smith's movie displays a subtle stratagem with the aim of investigating Mark Borchardt's life, it can also be argued that all the self-reflexive elements somehow converge from and towards the dissection of the filmmaking process. Moreover, the specular doubling between the two filmmakers, Smith and Borchardt, somehow resonates with the artistic confrontation between Lars von Trier and Jørgen Leth in *The Five Obstructions*. We will see how the interplay between the two filmmakers has been enacted in a mutually participative fashion which outruns that between Borchardt and Smith.

In point of fact, the directors of *American Movie* are effectively situated in two different "cinematic spaces", we never see Chris Smith in his movie, while Trier and Leth operate at the same diegetic level for we often see them together in the same frame. Besides, in *The Five Obstructions* the spectator experiences a radical, experimental creation which elevates the tactic of the exposure of the productive machinery to its own organisational model. Subsequently, *The Act of Killing* explores the thorny issue of where the ethical boundaries of what can be shown on screen should confine the horizon of our filmmaking choices. The film mainly relates to the propaedeutic phases and development

of the fictional restaging of an infamous massacre operated by paramilitary groups in the Indonesia of 1980's against Communists. Both films, reflect the omni-comprehensive spectrum of productionist internal categories: linguistic, technical and organisational, making them subservient to the cause of showing the process.

A core objective of the analysis would be to dissect the extent to which such a high dose of cinematic reflexivity can either enrich the knowledge around the filmmaking process and its collateral effects over the participants or, conversely, enhance the level of mystification engendered by the highly constructed reflexive premises of the films. In fact, it would be an unforgivable mistake to treat this movies as unconditional vessels of authentic secrets about filmmaking. A reflexive analyst should always take into account if the author, more or less overtly, intended to bring the spectators into a delusive context, where things are not in reality deemed to be what they seem. That is to say, there is always the slight possibility that the authorial stance may attempt to throw spectators off-track, to deceive and lead them towards paradoxical conclusions or insuperable moral impasses. So, another objective of these analyses is, thus, to intercept those moments in which the exposure of the filmmaking process becomes significative in the way it manifests the possible diverse purposes of its own usage in a given sequence. But it mainly aims at highlighting those metacinematic gestures which exploit their productionist force in order to promote new forms of organisational models for filmmaking.

**7.1. De Fem Benspænd (The Five Obstructions):** Denmark, 2003, 90 min.

**Directors:** Lars von Trier, Jørgen Leth

**Producers:** Peter Aalbæk Jensen, Vibeke Windeløv

**Languages:** Danish, English, French, Spanish

### Synopsis

The *Five Obstructions* is the first documentary approach undertaken by Lars von Trier. Together with Danish documentary film veteran Jørgen Leth, Trier takes on the task of challenging conventional ways of documentary and film production. Both directors share the fascination to get at the core of what it means to approach the process of filmmaking. In 1967 Jørgen Leth made a 12-minutes short film called *The Perfect Human*, a document on human behavior containing the familiar Leth themes, a film which Trier admires greatly and claims to have seen more than twenty times. In the year 2000, Lars von Trier challenged Jørgen Leth to make five remakes of this film, but each time Trier will put forward obstructions, constraining Leth to re-think the story and the characters of the original film from 1967. Playing the naive anthropologist, Leth attempts to embrace the cunning challenges set forth by the comically authoritative Trier. Five times Leth will have to deal with the limitations, commands and prohibitions made by his colleague. It is a game full of traps and vicious turns. The film setting has two spaces, the filmic space of Leth's films and the realistic space of the meetings between the two film makers. On screen we see edited together the constructed and natural spaces in which the audience experience the journey of what is behind the scenes, the 'obstructions' of Lars von Trier and how Leth expressed it through film. At the end, *The Five Obstructions* turns out to be a fascinating and unprecedented experiment about a filmmaker who not only revises, but also recreates one of his first films under the supervision of another colleague. Eventually these two very different filmmakers reach equilibrium and illumination where both filmmakers reach some understanding of each other through creative means.

## 7.2. Reapproaching the Human in a Mist of Freedom and Constraint

Approaching the last analyses of this research, I propose to outline how the productionist side presented by the metacinematic gestures of *The Five Obstructions* eminently focuses on the exposure of the linguistic, technical and, foremost, organisational domain of film reflexivity. I decided to start this analysis with the inclusion of the e-mail correspondence between Lars von Trier and Jørgen Leth as the documents circulated during the preliminary stages of production have been judged significantly relevant on a productionist level. More generally, this exchange has been judged to be a notable source attesting the development of the idea prior to the conception of the film.

Dear Jørgen,

The challenge/The Film you are supposed to solve/make is called: The five obstructions. As a starting point I would like you to show me a 10-minute film, you have made – The Perfect Human. We will watch the movie together and talk about it – then I will set up limitations, commands or prohibitions, which means you have to do the film all over again. This we will do five times – of this the title. I would find it natural if our conversations became a part of the final movie – with the six small films, of course. [...] Let me know how you feel about this. Please write.

Best regards,

Lars. (Hjort, 2008: xv-xvi; Leth, 2009: 259-260)

Dear Lars,

I find the assignment tempting. I can see an interesting development between film one and six, the route around the obstacles, the conversations. I'm sure we'll get a lot out of this. It is exciting. I look forward to your obstructions. I really like the idea of having to change, adjust, and reduce according to given conditions in the process.

Best regards,

Jørgen. (Hjort, 2008: xv-xvi; Leth, 2009: 259-260)



In the history of cinema there are only few examples which accurately reflect accurately upon the relationship between the commissioner of a certain product (a painting, photo-reportage, novel, opera, documentary, or film) and the artist who is asked to create it by following the rules which are prescribed to him. Those which might immediately spring to mind are, the already analysed *8½* (Fellini 1963), *The Agony and the Ecstasy* (Reed 1965), *Day for Night* (Truffaut 1973), *Passion* (Godard 1982), *The Draughtsman's Contract* (Greenaway 1982), *Amadeus* (Forman 1984), *Shakespeare in Love* (Madden 1998) and *The Act of Killing* (Oppenheimer 2012). However, most of the aforementioned movies employ the theme of the professional interplay between commissioners and artists as a secondary story plot which represents no more than a complementary subtext to the overall fiction story.

From a slightly different perspective, other works have tried to highlight the primary importance of close, nearly symbiotic relationships on the film set. Valuable examples are *Voyage in Time* (Guerra, Tarkovskij 1983), *My Best Fiend* (Herzog, 1999) and the inspiring *Hitchcock/Truffaut* (Jones, 2015) reporting on and expanding from the thought-provoking interview conducted by an enamoured Truffaut to his cinematic idol. What these revered directors' encounter provokes is an entire set of reflections about filmmaking that involves the participation, through interviews, of other eminent film practitioners. It results a unique experiment which nonetheless focuses on the cinematic past, what it has been shot and, even, what it has to be shot in the future and even how it should be practically done. However, the main point is that the documentary situates the conversation in a sort of spatial limbo, a brainstorming session which is kept separate from the factual cinematic process, those aspects being relegated within distinct temporalities.

This last point precisely accounts for the unique peculiarity of the documentary I am going to analyse in this section. Namely, *The Five Obstructions* takes shape from a precise theoretical formulation. It expounds a set of linguistic, technical and organisational rules deriving from the renowned Dogma 95 Manifesto. Or, to be exact, from one of its prosthetic branches whose name is Dogumentary. If Dogma 95 was intended as a "Vow of Chastity", a guidebook for filmmakers containing a series of linguistic, technical and organisational rules, e.g.: "shooting must be done on location" or "the camera must be hand-held" (Von Trier and Vinterberg, 2000), Dogumentary was its analogous counterpart dedicated, in fact, to documentaries. As it has been subsequently commented, the rationale through which a film can or cannot be included in Dogma 95

‘is to be sought at the level of authorial intentions and conditions of productions. A film, after all, is a Dogma film by virtue of its having been intentionally made in accordance with the ten rules specified in the manifesto’s Vow of Chastity’. (Hjort, 2003: 31). The first two examples of this new “technically impoverished”, but more enmeshed with life way of approaching filmmaking, are *Festen* (Vintenbergs 1998) and Lars von Trier’s *Idioterne* (1998).

Along similar lines, in 2000, Trier launched the Dogumentary Manifesto or “the Dogumentary code for documentarism” which prescribed some of The Dogma 95 dictates within nine filmmaking rules among which: ‘all the locations in the film must be revealed’ and ‘the beginning of the film must outline the goals and ideas of the director’ (Stevenson, 2002: 199). This last point is, definitely, the main constructive tenet of Dogumentary, to the extent that, in the course of the making-of Trier heralds *The Five Obstructions* to be a “Help Jørgen Leth project”. So, as it can be easily inferred, the main objective or the core of Lars von Trier’s intentions are made clear in the movie. This aspect has been also remarked by Claire Perkins who has expanded on the alleged psychotherapeutic nature of the project. She highlights that Trier posed himself as a deliberate auteur in the attempt to break Leth’s minimalist or mannerist style of *The Perfect Human* (Figure 7.1), by allowing the emergence of his inner truth. Leth points at this target by exerting a very authoritative style which instils an atmosphere of instability and unpredictability which eventually provides a set of intimate revelations about both of them (Perkins, 2010).

**Figure 7.1**



The main of characters of *The Perfect Human* as laid bare to the their own essentiality

I personally agree the psychotherapeutic perspective to be one of the lenses through which the ideas and final effects of *The Five of Obstructions* can be interpreted and I am also tempted to endorse and build on another passage made by Perkins. At some point of the analysis she underscores how Jørgen Leth hands-off, observational methodology, so clear in *The Perfect Human*, is contrasted by Trier's manipulative, hyper-controlling approach (Ibid.: 153). From a management perspective, Leth's laissez-faire managerial approach is contrasted by a kind of more convoluted, "diabolical" approach, as it is also mentioned in the film. In fact, Trier's authoritarian approach presents characteristics of both transactional and transformational leadership, with regards to Bernard Bass' theorisation. In that, Lars von Trier appears to embrace some aspects related to transformational leadership.

In point of fact, a clearly defined objective of the movie can be summarised with the "Help Jørgen Leth project", but the overall atmosphere is also tinged with mischievous sarcasm, for Lars even declares to hope that Jørgen will eventually produce "crap" from his attempts of remake. However, what is more pertinent is that Trier performs the role of the charismatic leader who should inspire the right motivation by producing a noteworthy intellectual stimulation. All these aspects happen to reflect the characteristics of Bass' idea of transformational leadership (Perkins, 2010). But even more interesting is how these transformational features are entangled with less evident "transactional" qualities, having Bass distinguished these two categories in a quite separated manner (Bass and Bass, 2009). Indeed, Trier appears in many scenes as operating a certain discursive approach related to a rhetoric and a practice of punishment and reward.

Or better, Lars announces the imminent punishment when he gets disappointed for the violation of one of his obstructions during the production of remakes or, even more simply, on account of casual, moody reasons. This is the peculiar moment when Lars starts to diabolically and unpredictably assert his authority towards Leth (*Figure 7.2*). He even appears to perform the characteristics outlined within the idea of "Management by Exception" (Bass and Bass, 2009: 624) related to transactional leadership. The Management by Exception has to be intended here as a "corrective transaction" directed to punish or discipline a subordinate's behaviour or operation.

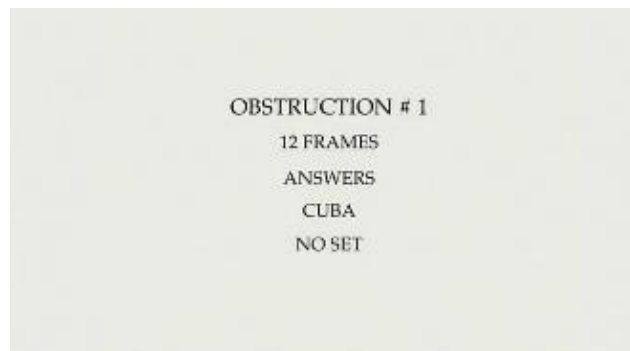
**Figure 7.2**



This is how a tyrannical commissioner looks like

The main strategy exerted by Trier would be that of using such rationale as a subtle weapon to disturb Leth's incipient creative initiatives during the discussions prior to the beginning of one of the remakes' production. But in the film it can also extend to the blunt exposition of the obscene, hidden supplement of the transactional rhetoric. In point of fact, Lars ends up intervening with obstructions, impediments and reproaches precisely when Leth shows to have gained confidence about the project and starts sharing his ideas with less vacillation. Therefore, we observe Trier behaving in the same way as an envious, mischievous manager. By way of example, when they are discussing the first remake to be shot in Cuba, Jørgen starts to disclose how he intends to operate. Thus, Leth informs Lars that he purports to construct a set, perhaps using panels, etc. At this precise moment, Lars abruptly interrupts and prevents him from achieving his purpose by imposing the last technical hindrance, "NO SET", along with the other set of rules sketched for the first obstruction/remake: (*Figure 7.3*).

**Figure 7.3**



The rules for the first obstruction to be shot in Cuba

In a thought-provoking article about the possible intersections between *The Five Obstructions* and Critical Management Studies it has been argued that Trier and Leth's efforts are only apparently focused on exposing the machinery of production. On the contrary, the film restrictively, yet brilliantly, explores how the managerial obstructions and a general downplay of organisation would spring up creativity (Hatch, 2011). And the author continues by arguing that, even though during the course of the film we mainly observe the heated debates between Leth and Trier: 'Somebody had to book those tickets, determine the sequence of shots, cast and schedule actors, rehearse and dress them, direct, set up cameras and lighting, shoot and develop the film, edit, get the finished product into distribution, and so on' (Ibid.:205). All these people are apparently not shown in *The Five Obstructions*. However, I partially comply with this overall interpretation for, even though the master/slave dynamic and the convergence between extreme authority and creative stimulus are clear-cut, I nonetheless observe that there is more organisation that Hatch might assert.

On the one hand, it is understandable that the lack of details about the logistics and minute aspects of the remakes' shooting schedules does not pay the promise of rendering an overarching exposure of the productive machinery. But, on the other hand, the focus on the directors' interplay is absolutely straightforward and it essentially allows the emergence of an authorial dialogue over filmmaking which shows an unprecedented form of psychotherapeutic transference by means of filmmaking practice. Already such an aspect, immediately gets into perspective the absence of other technicians and members of the film crew. How else would we 'see' work happening, without the impressions of the bodies performing it? Undoubtedly, the absence of these technicians' contribution and other logistic details signals a shaded zone in which the seekers of traces of falsification might encounter a fertile ground. Instead, the possible analysis of what we get to see can orient the researcher towards a more detailed economy of the exposure of the productive materiality which attests what has been intentionally valorised among the unintentional, unpredictable contribution of the authors within the final product's effect.

On a different note, what Hatch reminds us, stressing the supposedly disorganised and authoritarian regime through which creativity emerges, seems to be a valuable linkage with a certain experimental cinema which reflects on itself as an epistemological tool in direction of enhancing a collaborative, intersubjective domain. The focus on this continuous and script-less interaction would *per se* generate intersubjective relationships

entering a plane of confrontation which acquires some unpredictable productionist relevance (*Figure 7.4*).

Moreover, *The Five Obstructions* opens up an intertextual dialogue between different films, about the nature of remakes as aesthetic extensions, or about the existence of productionist lines of flight deriving from a matrix/film. This aspect would already reveal more details about filmmaking organisation and productive machinery than *Hatch* is prone to acknowledge. In spite of that, her merit is to shed light on a quite provoking problematisation of an authoritarian form of management as still capable to spark creativity into a subordinate's mind. Another intriguing commentary recalls the fact that *The Five Obstructions* is not an entirely unprecedented experiment, but that it conversely has its eminent precursor in one of the films analysed in the last chapter: *Chronique d'un Été*.

In point of fact, Trevor Ponech underpinned some features shared by those films. Above all, he has underscored the fact that both Morin with Rouch and Trier with Leth purported to conduct an experiment that might bring them to “mingle with the subjects” (Ponech, 2008).

**Figure 7.4**



The continuous confrontation between Lars von Trier and Jørgen Leth

As I already pointed out, the sociological value of *Chronique d'un Été* resides in the exposure of a process of social construction which captures itself and actively reflects on their participants' behaviour. But, according to Ponech, it also possesses a therapeutic aim. Namely, that of diving into a plurality of solitudes in order to unravel the layers of self-censorship dictated by the normative power of civil society, but also that of allowing

the spontaneous interconnection between these individuals in the context of an experiment in overt struggle against social atomisation (Ibid.:86).

In a way, it can also be said that, beyond the therapeutic intent, even *The Five Obstructions* acquires a sociological value, in terms of proposing a notable methodological pattern based on how social interactions can aim at triggering alternative possibilities of artistic collaboration. What it differs from the French movie is that, even if complying with the assumption that making a film is essentially the result of an intersubjective encounter, Trier's work does not share the procedural dethronement of the author. In fact, whereas Morin and Rouch attempt to extricate themselves from the position of the main agents of the social experiment. On the contrary, Trier and Leth both actively play their roles within the tight dynamics of artistic subordination which radicalises a top-down hierarchy exerted by an authoritarian employer, or the exigent and impatient commissioner of an artwork. Nonetheless, it has been pointed out elsewhere that, from an ethical standpoint, the agentive participation of the subordinate Leth, minimises the charge of exploitation, it depicts Trier's image in a more sarcastic guise and, consequently, smooths his initial arrogance (Dwyer, 2008).

So, if we are to abide by the aforementioned interpretations, *The Five Obstructions* can already be acknowledged as a multi-faceted psychoanalytical, managerial and sociological experiment. Yet, in my opinion, these perspectival connotations are precisely obtained through the high degree of productionist metacinematicity which traverses the whole movie. From an operational standpoint, the production of remarkable insights pertaining these different theoretical domains is also due to the critical distance imposed to Leth in order to see himself more clearly (Ibid.: 7). In this sense, Trier exhibits a marked Brechtian attitude in fostering the emergence of the alleged Leth's artistic authenticity by obstructing, misdirecting and tripping him at any moment. Recalling the renowned commentary on Brecht made by Walter Benjamin. 'The more frequently we interrupt someone engaged in an action, the more gestures we obtain. Hence the interrupting of action is one of the principal concerns of epic theatre' (Benjamin, 2003: 3). Even though the main effect produced by Trier's constraints is that of interrupting Leth's artistic pace and his stylistic mannerism, it should also be stated that the obstructing process is the result of a declared scope for the whole film. Namely, that of refocusing on the human side or to go beyond Leth as an intellectual artist.

Furthermore, Mette Hjort, who edited a collection of insightful articles around the film, maintained that the Leth's supposed creative problems are assumed to be solved

‘through a therapeutic process aimed at bringing some of the tacit or unconscious dimensions of individual style to conscious awareness’ (Hjort, 2008b: 24). Yet, the emergence of this therapeutic domain is also clearly expressed by Trier: “It’s similar to therapy...Why go, if you don’t give the therapist the cards? My plan is to proceed from the perfect to the human. That’s my agenda. I wish to ‘banalise’ you. By finding things that hurt. The soft spots”. So, it is crucial to underscore how the path from the general austerity and composure of *The Perfect Human* towards a more individualised and bare form of cinematic expression is for Lars von Trier intrinsic to the process of Leth’s humanisation. However, Leth has said that he does not like that much the word “therapy”, it is rather an issue to put oneself at risk, to take chances and to try to explore the possibilities within the question (Lin, 2010).

In an interview conducted by Mette Hjort, Leth also clarifies in what terms this refocus on his own human side has been engendered by a precise element surfaced by the interactive process with Trier. ‘He knows that I like to work in a place that lies somewhere in between constraint and freedom. He knows that I often wish to let go and lose control in the middle of a film shoot. That is part of my practice. I like to see what happens when I do that sort of thing, when I invite chance to play a role in the process’ (Hjort, 2008a: 142).

Following Leth’s word, we get to know how self-admittedly he had accepted the inspiring role of chance and unpredictability in the process but also that he took the excessively performed Lars’ authoritarianism as an acknowledgment of his older colleague’s own predilection to work under a blurred regime of freedom and constraint. To a certain degree, one might read it as going even beyond a statement of recognised love transference towards his therapist. However, Leth’s words reveal the mental trigger, immediately translated into actions, which functioned as motivational boost in leading the process towards the achievement of Lars von Trier’s tasks. Thus, now it is the time to unfold the productionist metacinematicity expounded by these remakes, so thickly replete of significative exchanges between Jørgen Leth and Lars von Trier.



### 7.3. Unfolding the Obstructions

From a technical standpoint, *The Five Obstructions* used two types of shooting formats: Arriflex Super-16 for the conversations and location shooting and DV Cam for the actual "obstructions". In that, the expedient of mixing video and film through different cameras gives the finished film "a different texture," Leth says (Lewis, 2003). So, the hand-made nature of the shots effectuated with the Arriflex Super-16 provides images of a nearly amateur quality, while the remakes made by Leth are evidently more the result of professional and technical expertise. The contrast between these two different regimes of visibility is definitely one of the elements which foremost convey metacinematic gestures or Brechtian interruptions in comparison to an otherwise classical editing presenting an audiovisual coherence from the beginning to end.

But in order to better understand the thematic nature of *The Five Obstructions*, I have to shed light on the matrix-film which is, on the one hand the object of Lars von Trier's desire and, on the other, the object of discussion being it the constructive model for the remakes. In 1967, Leth made a short film called *The Perfect Human*, a document on human behaviour very much admired by Trier. It is basically an elementary tale where we observe a suited-up man whose actions are alternated with other images displaying a woman still involved in simple everyday gestures. Both subjects are captured in the fragments of their ordinary life and the figures are mostly framed in a full shot, although the camera often tightens on the visages with close-ups and sometimes approaches more to reveal details of the face such as eyes, ears, hands and noses.

There is no set but a white background and a seamless white floor which gives the illusion of floating subjects and compels the onlooker to concentrate the gaze on the physical bodies. In addition, a male voice-over exerts the function of describing all the elements on the screen in the guise of an accurate caption: "We're going to investigate what the perfect human looks like and what he can do". Then, the voice-over also poses some general questions: "Who is he? What does he want? Why is he moving like that?" Such questions seemingly establish the foundations of a peculiar ontological investigation related to address the issue "What does it mean to be a perfect human? What are its skills and its possibilities of agency?" (*Figure 7.5*).

Figure 7.5



A series of essential gestures performed by “perfect humans”

Everything is constructed in the form of a pure visual description of human beings whose “perfect” micro-gestures are reduced to their barest level. We rather see the interaction of these gestures with the necessary objects of every-day life in an empty and aseptic space. Clothes, cutlery, pipes, razors and stockings are the only objects which allow the connection with an otherwise empty surrounding space. At first glance this film might seem an overrated avant-garde artwork, an intellectual problematisation of the social and practical requirements demanded to individuals, a laid bare set of codes of conduct or perhaps, as Trier intimately thinks, a self-referential expression of the anxiety and uneasiness of the author towards his deepest metal impasses.

According to Leth himself, his movie is a critique to the Danish traditional social documentarism. In that, *The Perfect Human* would represent a sort of recall of the TV commercials of the time which conveyed the injunction towards perfectionism, to adhere to the standardised idea of the perfect consumer. Therefore, *The Perfect Human* might be read as a unique critique of the standardised behaviours generated by modern consumerism and to the conformism prompted by Danish popular culture. Leaving aside these super-structural elements for a moment, such as the critique of cultural conformism

and its socio-constructed values, we immediately perceive Lars von Trier's willingness, in the guise of the commissioner, to unearth the hidden underside of Leth's film in order to unmask its imperfections and suppressed themes.

Or better, what he is about to dig up are all the personal and intimate levels of psychological and affective participation that Leth attempted to bury under the apparently impersonal and shallow visual solutions of his precious gem. A precious gem Lars is about to ruin. So, Trier decides to challenge Leth with five remakes of his own film, with the only condition of arbitrarily imposing a set of technical obstructions, as a producer or a manager would perhaps do. But from the first images of *The Five Obstructions*, when we see the heated confrontation between the two authors, a kind of playful atmosphere seems to emerge as Trier enacts the role of the disturber and Leth that of the almost passive and consensual recipient of an artistic rape. So, in a sense it is quite evident that the two contenders are agreeing in establishing a sort of authoritarian and classical hierarchal relationship, at the same time putting in place a masquerade that is occasionally unveiled by their ironic attitudes.

In the first obstruction, for instance, Leth must deal with some very unusual requests: no shot has to last more than twelve frames, the questions posed by the voice-over in *The Perfect Human* have to be answered and the remake must take place in Cuba with no artificial set apart from the original environment. As already said, during the setting of the obstructions for the first remake, I pinpointed how every attempt by Leth to establish a friendly and constructive dialogue ends up with Trier imposing an obstruction that cues directly from Leth's disclosures. For example, when Leth expresses the idea to set up the staging in a particular manner, Trier abruptly reacts with "No set then!" Here the disclosure of Leth's preferences, while looking for technical solutions, is not accepted by Trier as a constructive suggestion but rather like an attempt to undermine his authority.

Here the hidden message is: "You have the right to remain silent. Anything you say can and will be used against you in a court of law." As suggested by Raffnsøe (2009), Trier's obstructions might represent a breakthrough for it showcases the possibilities, challenges, the obstructions, and the pitfalls of self-management. I would add, that the primary condition of self-management to correctly operate is to go through a painful, if not struggling, experience. It is not radical to assert that Trier plays the role of a severe Virgil along this Dantesque journey, while Leth has to take the responsibility of the strict productive side of the project entirely on himself. So, the only way for Leth to elevate himself up to the highest aspirations of the project is to finally acknowledge that his

productive and fervid creativity has to override his previous intellectual sophistications and moral alibies.

Needless to say, the hardest challenge faced by Leth was that no shot should have been longer than 12 frames. The combination of the exotic location and the injunction for the voice-over to provide answers to the questions posed in *The Perfect Human*, resulted in a frantic but well-paced exposition of some themes of the original film transposed in the Cuban atmosphere. In the first scenes of preparation we attest the selection of the actors: a beautiful dancer, a “true Cuban man” and another woman with a particularly expressive face. The location is an antique building which shows the signs of time and provides and a textural grain coherent with the rest of the images (*Figure 7.6*).

**Figure 7.6**



Few frames of the “perfect humans” transfigured in the Cuban remake

It has been argued that the first remake instils reflections on the gendered issues involved in the filmmaking choices and reflects upon the contaminating intrusion of an authorial stance, European in this case, during the investigation of a particular geographical context, like Cuba (Koutsourakis, 2015). But, I believe that Leth’s cameo within this first short movie is more playful than meta-critical of the abovementioned themes. This is due to the evidence of scenes regarding the location scouting and actors’ recruitment when we observe Leth seemingly absorbed with the Cuban dancer’s beauty. That is why, he probably self-ironically included himself next to the Cuban dancer within some of the 12 frames shots. However, the sequences showing the preparation before the shooting should be read dialectically with the corpus of images specifically pertaining the first remake.

In point of fact, this first remake already presents a remarkable degree of productionist metacinematicity towards which organisational, technical and linguistic aspects punctually converge. The organisational, propaedeutic scenes, namely location scouting and actors' recruitment are not only present in the final editing of *The Five Obstructions* but also resonate within the short-film shot in Cuba (*Figures 7.7, 7.8*). The linguistic side, is transparently mirrored by the voice-over answering the questions of *The Perfect Human* and by some explicit, visual references to Cuba and the matrix film, in Spanish, “El Hombre Perfecto” (*Figure 7.9*). Whereas the technical productionist self-reflexivity is represented by the 12 frames shots constraint. In that, this pervasive technical aspect functioned as the constructive foundation which embedded all the others. But, crucially, all these self-reflexive elements of cinematic construction appear to disclose a significative aspect of the process of production and strictly, almost redundantly, refer to the expressive need: “This is how we made the first remake based in Cuba”.

**Figure 7.7**



Some organisational details of the Cuban remake offered by the final editing of *The Five Obstructions*

**Figure 7.8**



**Figure 7.9**



Other descriptive captions referring to the first obstruction

Leth declared that he had plenty of time before the shooting, a half a year to prepare it and only one week to shoot it. There were 1200 cuts at the end of the working days (Kaufman, 2004). The Cuban episode is definitely the remake preferred by Lars: “It was like watching an old Leth’s film” he confesses. But then he continues with the next step



of his project leading Leth “from the Perfect to the Human” and proposes a second obstruction. Here it will be Leth’s ethics to be put to test. During the discussion Lars affirms that he wants to get rid of the ethical distance employed by Leth in his works as an observer. He will have to shoot a remake in the “most miserable place on earth”. So, they both start to problematise the ethical repercussions of what should be filmed and what should not. Leth, for instance, states that it would be perverted to shoot a dying child in a refugee camp. But Trier replies that there is also a certain degree of perversion in the distance of any observer at such.

So, the process of Leth’s “humanization” continues by commanding Leth to shoot the perfect human’s gourmet meal in Bombay. This time he will be the actor, the suited-up man eating his sumptuous dinner in the midst of poverty. The main obstruction is not to show it, so Trier’s suggestion is to provoke an emotional reaction without really seeing what caused it. As Leth declared: “We wanted to minimize the distance between the perfect and the human”. Thus, once there, he got deeply involved with the people of the Bombay suburbs and appeared factually disturbed by the blatant contradiction of wearing a suit and consuming a lavish meal in such a miserable place. So, he envisaged to bring to the surface his feelings by putting a transparent screen behind the meal scene, to partially show the people's poor conditions by contrast (*Figures 7.10, 7.11*)

**Figure 7.10**



**Figure 7.11**



Leth acts, jumps, shaves and consumes his sumptuous meal whilst being observed by casual bystanders

In the final effect, the transparent screen mainly functions as a diaphragm between his elegance and an overwhelming, spectral poverty. What is striking about the short-film in Bombay is Leth's emotional reaction prior to the actual shooting. In the location scouting scene we see a woman with her baby approaching Leth's car to ask some money (*Figure 7.12*). The moment is particularly cathartic because the camera lingers on Leth for a substantially long time, highlighting the sense of distress generated by the woman's demands and the sense of guilt supposedly experienced by a wealthy white European man before the blunt appearance of poverty.

Figure 7.12



A woman begging for money triggers a strong emotional response in Leth

The very act of handing few rupiahs to the woman, who asks for more while Leth replies “I don’t have”, is counterweighted by the self-reflexive gesture of the film with him standing in an aseptic, yet wealthy atmosphere, opaquely divided by the screen from the poverty of Bombay. On this matter, it has been commented that the Bombay obstruction, gets at the heart of postcolonial models of observation and winks at the most urgent ethical tasks of documentary. The focus on ethics is here intended both from the responsibility and responsiveness of the directorial but also spectatorial standpoint (Lynes, 2010). In the following scene, we observe Leth unwinding his deep feelings, the tears falling from his eyes in the middle of a discussion with a collaborator. What these preceding scenes mainly account for is how the short-film in Bombay echoes an inner turmoil provoked by the overall situation whose contrasts and empathic moments are punctually recorded by the camera (*Figure 7.13*). Furthermore, even with this second obstruction we observe on screen how the convergence of linguistic, technical and organisational solutions are constructed to punctually render a high degree of productionist metacinematicity.

Figure 7.13



An Indian woman sympathising with Leth

But, Trier did not seem to have appreciated the sophisticated game operated by Leth and condemns him to a third obstruction. The punishment will be either to come back to Bombay and put a white screen between him and the people or to make a film with no rules, a kind of new version of *The Perfect Human* in 2002. In fact, when Trier sees the result of the experiment abruptly bursts out: “You always try to be too good! This is therapy, not a film competition with yourself”.

Then, Leth is severely rebuked for having overlooked one of the obstructions: “Don’t show it”. Indeed he was bound to the strict condition of not displaying anything of that miserable place, for Trier just wanted to see the visible effects of Leth’s awareness but not the cause that had generated them. So, the punishment consisted in shooting a new remake without obstructions, with no constraints binding him this time. One can only imagine how destabilizing this new imperative order could have been.

Here we recognise the quintessence of the hegemonic ideology of modern management. The overload of ethical responsibility that weighs on employee’s shoulders is concealed behind a permissive, fair approach put forward as a front. So, as it has been argued elsewhere we might encounter the same problematisation: “how is it possible to manage yourself and others productively if freedom and the transcendence of limitations and rules have become the rule?” (Raffnsøe 2009: 117). Around this topic, many scholars have deepened their theoretical speculations in the direction of the relationship between self-management, disciplinary power, and panoptical modes of surveillance (Jackson, Gharavi and Klobas, 2006; McKinlay and Starkey, 1998).

Along these lines, I reckon that *The Five Obstructions* does not only challenge the accepted and received implications of self-management, but also releases a thorough criticism of the over-abused concepts of Corporate Social Responsibility and business



ethics. With the process of making Leth hyper-responsible of both his creative solutions and his inner psychological reflections, we encounter a fertile ground that opens up an authentic exchange, nearly deprived of rhetoric, between individuals who genuinely discuss the concepts of responsibility, work ethics and creativity. Leth's great assumption of responsibility usually lead him towards the best possible output issuing from Lars von Trier's commands. Yet, his efforts are mostly brutalised by his severe judge/regulator, like in the Bombay case.

From now on, the spectators cannot stick anymore to the idea that Trier is a provoking, yet friendly, manager that allows Leth's free-flowing creativity to spring up through an informal mode of supervision. Now, he rather appears as an authoritative boss who imposes tight rules and chastens his subordinate at any false step. Indeed, such intrusive and chastising behaviour is exactly the key-factor in the project. Trier continually encroaches on Leth's private sphere by pushing him to overcome his comfort zone, to leave aside his concern for confidentiality. In point of fact, Trier wants to demolish Leth's psychological balance precisely by fostering him to take a deep look into the cracks of his own expressive coherence. And he does it by highlighting the weak points of his intellectual discourse. Through this lens, *The Five Obstructions* sounds like a sheer overthrowing of the ideological, moral and practical presuppositions of *The Perfect Human*.

Hence, the outcome of the third obstruction is brilliant too. Jørgen takes advantage of his initial suspicion around the free task assigned by Lars and conceives a new set from scratch, devising a love story between two mysterious wealthy people in Bruxelles. For the most part of the short-film, the shots display a split screen with two different kind of sequences. The synthesis of these pairs of images looks like an enigma to be deciphered, for these diptychs are semantically attuned, they tell a story or instil a tension between internal and external spaces (*Figure 7.14*). In general, the questions triggered by the images are also reinforced by the allusions made by the voice-over: "Who is this man? What does he want?" or "Here's the woman, what is she doing? Who is she?"

The technical and visual results are absolutely original and Trier applauds his pupil. "The trouble is you're so clever that whatever I say inspires you". While he concurrently admits his real aim: "I'd like to achieve that feeling of a tortoise on its back". That is to say, he would love to reach the point of Leth's maximum destabilisation to immobilise him and make him unable to make a single move to develop the instructions of the next brief.

Figure 7.14



A selection of split screen frames for the obstruction shot in Bruxelles

But, what really strikes me is Trier's failure in inducing him to produce crap. It seems clear that the positive achievement of the obstructions-free remake is due to the preliminary experiences faced by Leth. In fact, learning how to cope with the obstructions of the first movies, with the time passing by, had already influenced the enhancement of Leth's creative skills. As any effective learning process would guarantee, the experience of *The Five Obstructions* has gradually and significantly modified his way to produce thoughts and make decisions to the extent of radically changing and refining his own directorial praxis. That would validate *The Five Obstructions* as a convincing didactic process even beyond Trier's therapeutic intent and its major character of aesthetic experimentation.

Even though, a considerable amount of sequences are dedicated to report the propaedeutic phases before the shooting, the most relevant organisational detail consists in the moment when we see Leth, standing in a hotel corridor listening to the sound emitted by two people having sexual intercourse. While seeing the final film, we get to know, through a retrospective process that the episode might have influenced Leth's inspiration in setting the explicit sexual atmosphere of the short-film. But for the rest, we only see Leth briefly talking to the main character, the protagonist of Eric Rohmer's *La Collectionneuse* (1967), Patrick Bauchau, and having concise conversations with other members of the film crew about the props and script dialogues. So, marginally, the phases

of pre-production of the third remake are somehow lacking or not paying the promise of rendering an overarching report of the organisational and technical practices being implemented. As an analyst I can only infer them from the overall theme being explored by the actual short-film and by the linguistic solutions employed to convey it. In this regard, the Bruxelles film is a soft spot in illuminating the other technical and organisational aspects.

With the last brief Trier makes his desperate attempt to induce Leth to create an awful product. “I hope this will be crap”. Indeed, the fourth obstruction will be the production of a cartoon of *The Perfect Human*. In the preliminary phases, they both agree about their complete disinterest towards this visual solution. “I’ve never seen one I like!” Leth confesses to one of his collaborators. Being completely unprepared to face such a peculiar technical solution, Leth recurs to Bob Sabiston, a cartoon specialist living in Texas. He visits him and together they start to make a selection of the visual solutions for the animated film (*Figure 7.15*)

Despite his reluctance about making animated films and his entire lack of interest towards them, Leth somehow admits to having enjoyed the creative process, even though the selection of the pictures is the only propaedeutic scene we get to see. For instance, not much space has been dedicated to clarifying how the animation technique of rotoscoping works and how it has been applied to reuse the images of the previous obstructions. However, Leth has declared that the lack of control at the core of the cartoon experiment and the utter distrust towards it as a genre have not prevented him and his collaborators from instinctively intervening during the process and be eventually satisfied of the final output. As a result, this fourth movie is a combination of Jørgen’s first three remakes, plus the original perfect human.

**Figure 7.15**



Leth examining pictures for the preparation of the animated film with a cartoon specialist

It has been punctually commented that, like in *mise en abyme*, the intertextual reference between the remakes of *The Five Obstructions* becomes more and more self-referential with the cartoon obstruction (Esposito, 1991). The themes recall even parts of the conversations prior to the actual productions. For instance when Lars says: “I’d like to achieve that feeling of a tortoise on its back”. Leth punctually answers with a sequence displaying himself shaving along with a turtle slowly getting into the frame (*Figure 7.16*).

**Figure 7.16**



Leth includes the image of a turtle slowly marching towards the edge of the frame

Here Leth seems to ironically allude to the fact, that, even though Leth discovered his weaknesses and imperfections along the process, they have not been enough pervasive to knock him over and leave him unarmed. The final result of the whole cartoon is indeed riveting. What it comes out is a stunning aesthetic product, dense of poetic connotations, which unfolds all the multiple layers of signification underlying the aseptic atmosphere of the original movie (*Figure 7.17*). With this set of images, the peculiar nature of metacinematic gestures explored during the movie are recapped. The result is an intentional combination of aesthetic, stylistic and thematic patterns that have been willingly or casually employed by Leth in the previous remakes and other allusions to the conversations between him and Trier. In this sense, the animated cartoon functions as a sort of meta-commentary of the overall film and stresses the importance of how it is enmeshed with a combination of teleological and non-teleological solutions which are in turn the fruit of sophisticated plans or the result of unpredictable emergences. The voice-over comments both in Danish and in English, for in the previous remakes both languages have been separately employed.

Figure 7.17



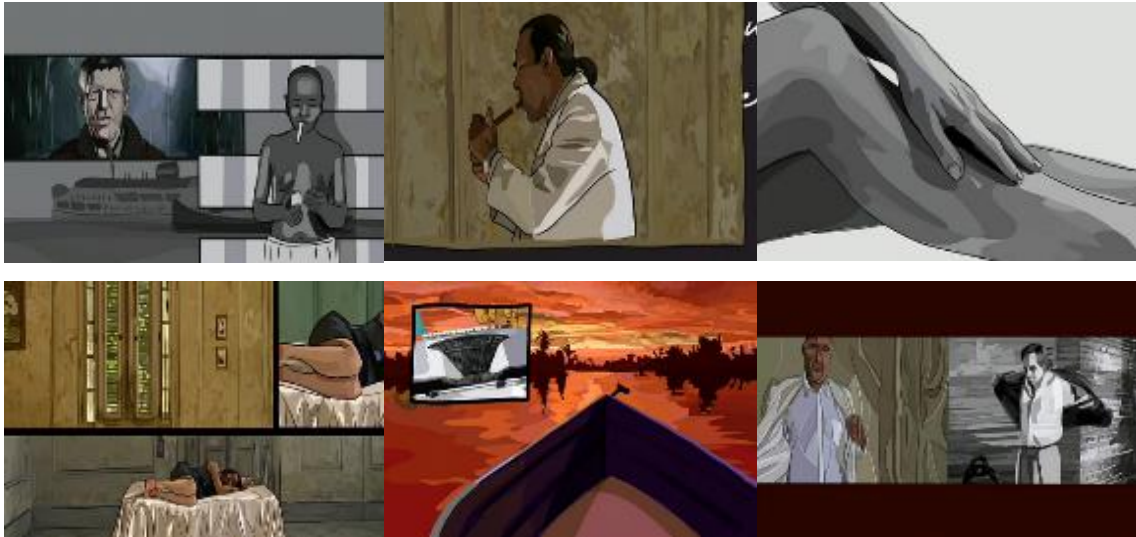
Motifs and forms of the animated film recall *The Five Obstructions* but also the other remakes made by Leth

In general, there is an attempt to converge together the main themes explored by the preceding films, but also the visual, linguistic solutions used to present them, this time reframed in the peculiar effect of rotoscoping animated technique. Yet, by presenting a series of casual elements, like the stylisation *à la* Francis Bacon, split screens surfaced by indecipherable themes (*Figure 7.18*), or the allusion to gangster films, the animated cartoon reminds the spectators that the very essence of creative inspiration lies in the presence of an author who is, most of the times, besieged by a series of uncontrollable elements which eventually cannot be excluded by the final product.

The unpredictable nature of metacinematic practices is hence made visible to restate that where the author does not intentionally reuse or resemantise pre-existent audiovisual patterns, he is inevitably a fortuitous prey of unintentional inputs, mainly generated by the material conditions of production but also by other unquantifiable psychological and environmental factors. Furthermore, the obstructions function as “endless means”, or better, as means which contain their ends in themselves and, thereby, recall Agamben’s idea of pure gestuality (Agamben, 2000). In this sense, the set of linguistic, technical and organisational obstructions set by Trier are metacinematic gestures at their purest. But, what, the productionist side of the film allows is the enmeshment of the directorial domain with the development of psychoanalytical, sociological and managerial insights. So, the gestuality expressed by the different set of

obstructions, as pure means, is also the instrument available to the authorial intentions to experiment on filmmaking practices and expand over other human fields of interest.

**Figure 7.18**



Another selection of frames from the animated film. In the lower right corner a visual reference to Francis Bacon

A subtle mechanism that certainly might represent the paradigm for novel forms of expression leading to possible filmmaking experimentations.

After the screening of the cartoon, Trier can only certify the success of the project and move beyond towards the last obstruction. In the last run, Leth will do absolutely nothing apart from being credited as the director while reading, as voice-over, a script written by Trier but enunciated in first-person by Leth himself. The visual materials will be taken from the backstage of *The Five Obstructions*, through which Trier hopefully “captured something human”. Trier’s script is a final compound of considerations around the philosophical and therapeutic outcomes of the project. With this hazardous overturning and overlapping of the roles ‘the last obstruction really scrambles the rules governing the experiment and subverts the metaphor of therapy with all its attendant notions of dependency and hierarchy’ (Hjort 2008: 35). It also introduces a moment of ambiguity that generates a critical distance which is functional to understand the nature of such an unusual therapeutic process. Yet, exactly through this weird procedure the real nature of the project can be highlighted, as Trier later confirms: “It has been a help Jørgen Leth project”.

The text ironically emphasises that Trier’s attempt to psychoanalyse Leth just failed and that nothing emerged from the obsessed investigation of his private sphere. So,



the content of the script is about Leth reproaching Trier for having been arrogant during the conception of the constraints. But, while hearing these words, we observe a series of images that contradict the voice-over. They show Leth struggling with the deep emotions experienced during the shooting of the five remakes. We see his tears dropping on the sidewalks of Bombay, his intense satisfaction for the success of the animation movie, his awry facial expressions when overwhelmed by doubts and uncertainties, all his fallings and resurgences. So the contents of the words expressed by the voice-over results at odds with the displayed images, generating a contrast which uncloses the ultimate poetic statement of the movie. Eventually, Leth could not avoid to deeply expose himself to another gaze, no matter how much he fought to prevent it from happening. The bottom line of *The Five Obstructions* is that we need others to understand ourselves even though sometimes it means to dive into a psychological abyss of co-participated self-reflexivity. That is the reason why it can also be summarized by these cryptic, final sentences: “How does the perfect human falls? This is how the perfect human falls” (Figure 7.19).

**Figure 7.19**



This is how the perfect human falls

#### **7.4. Sketches for a Critique of Leadership and Self-Management**

From a standpoint which dialogues with Critical Management Studies, I have the perception that during the process of production of *The Five Obstructions*, the authoritarian mark prevailed over the ironic simulation during the process of production.

This aspect already provides a counter-hegemonic idea of the process of managing if compared to the widespread conception of democratisation of organisational arrangements in which managers have to pretend to be sensitive to the personal exigencies of their subordinates. In this sense, the movie seems to reveal the actual reality underlying the rhetoric of the benevolent superior by unearthing its obscure, authoritarian backstage. Through this lens, as we have seen, *The Five Obstructions* can be read in the first place as a complex metacinematic reflection, which expands on psychoanalytical and sociological insights but first and foremost as the generator of a disruptive effect over a whole set of taken for granted management strategies.

Strictly in this sense *The Five Obstructions* challenges not only the received rules of filmmaking (Raffnsøe 2009) and our digested conceptions of how creativity should be promoted purely from an artistic standpoint, but it also bears witness of alternative ways to engender productivity by facilitating individual creativity within organisational contexts. For instance, by overturning the relationship commissioner/artist and questioning who is the real beneficiary of the advantages which are supposed to emerge from the execution of a given task. Indeed, in this experiment it is apparently not anymore the commissioner to gain the benefits of the final result, as the owner of the final product or, as the promoter of an experimental cinematic experience, but rather the other way around. It is allegedly Leth to take advantage at the end of the process, a pleasure that secondarily, but crucially, contaminates his authoritarian commissioner too.

Along these lines, *The Five Obstructions* aims firstly at dispelling the myth of the passive employee/executor by refocusing on his/her human side through a proactive, affirmative participation, still maintaining the idea that the relationship could be based upon a hierarchal or authoritarian level which requalifies a productive discourse on the function of leadership. Thus, the movie reaches this disruptive effect by resisting to embrace the rhetoric of equality promoted by hegemonic discourses circulating around horizontal supervision and flat management. On the contrary, it exalts differentiation and shows a different approach towards ethical responsibility and self-management, as directed towards a more direct appreciation of the real nature of hierarchal roles, beyond the hypocritical and deceiving cultures of equality set by contemporary organisational scenarios.



**7.5.           The Act of Killing:** Norway, Denmark, United Kingdom, 2012, 159 min.

**Director:** Joshua Oppenheimer

**Co-directors:** Christine Cynn, Anonymous

**Producer:** Signe Byrge Sørensen

**Language:** Indonesian

### **Synopsis**

In this chilling and inventive documentary, executive produced by Errol Morris (*The Fog of War*) and Werner Herzog (*Grizzly Man*), the filmmakers examine a country where death squad leaders are celebrated as heroes, challenging them to re-enact their real-life mass-killings. The opening sequences present a superimposed text: “In 1965 the Indonesian government was overthrown by the military. Anybody opposed to the military dictatorship could be accused of being a Communist: union members, landless farmers, intellectuals and the ethnic Chinese. In less than a year, and with the direct aid of western governments, over one million ‘Communists’ were murdered.” Desperate to understand the rationale behind the mass killings of Communists in Indonesia during the 1960s, directors Oppenheimer and Cynn introduce former Indonesian death squad leader Anwar Congo with a unique opportunity, restage his savage crimes for the camera in the style of his favourite Hollywood films, and allow him the opportunity to speak candidly about his memories and motivations for committing mass murder. Later, as Congo recalls, the various methods he and his followers used to intimidate and slaughter scores of Communists, the reality of his heinous transgressions begins to set in, and vivid nightmares fill his nights with unspeakable terror. Overall, the hallucinatory result of *The Act of Killing* is similar to a cinematic fever dream, an unsettling journey deep into the imaginations of mass-murderers and the shockingly banal regime of corruption and impunity they inhabit.

## 7.6. Self-Reflexive Transfigurations towards Delusive Expiations

As a documentary, *The Act of Killing* presents a very unusual dramaturgical method. It frames the perpetrators of the massacres against communists and political dissidents in 1965 by staging what stories or fantasies they told themselves or imagined by recalling these atrocious acts. The film thus opens up to a domain of impunity, but also to an imaginary world of escapism or denial, because these murderers are asked to show the killings and tortures through a series of constructed representations. In this sense, some analogies with *The Five Obstructions* can be underpinned for Lars von Trier's aim was to unpack Jørgen Leth's denial or self-censorship, or better, he wanted to unfold all the implicit meaning enclosed within the mannerism of *The Perfect Human* through the five remakes he compels him to shoot.

Following the project of unpacking this individual, but also collective denial of past atrocities, it should be noted that Joshua Oppenheimer, later embarked in a new project, *The Look of Silence* (2014), this time without the assistance of Christine Cynn and their anonymous, Indonesian collaborator.<sup>7</sup> At first, I am tempted to argue that *The Act of Killing*, *The Look of Silence* can be deemed to reflect the kind of epistemological approach to filmmaking being developed since *Chronique d'un Été*. In that, the way all these films orbit around the use of cameras to foster and analyse intersubjective relationships, yet exposing some valuable socio-political underpinnings. Obviously, among the analysed movies, I can also include *Grizzly Man* and *The Five Obstructions* within such ensemble of analogous experimental strategies, but in these cases the reflection over the intersubjective relationships is more directed to reflect on the tight

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<sup>7</sup> The second documentary opts for a more confrontational attitude. In fact, it poses a family who survived the genocide before the men who killed one of their members. So it can be said that *The Look of Silence* acts as a companion piece to the earlier documentary. Both films are to be intended as part of a representational diptych in which *The Act of Killing* deals in make-believe and provides a wilful distortion and *The Look of Silence* sharply puts a spotlight on the killers by bringing them under the scrutiny of one of their victims (Schenkel, 2015). Instead, the main co-director of *The Act of Killing*, Christine Cynn, from her side has successively developed another self-reflexive project, mainly interested in capturing the process of filmmaking, *Shooting Ourselves* (2016). In the film, thirteen individuals somewhat affected by arms trade in their lifetime meet in an empty warehouse in Berlin to establish some connection. They have been gathered to stage their own life experiences for "Situation Rooms", a multiplayer video piece in which the participants record the space and cross themselves during their wanderings. This whole concatenation of arbitrary and unpredictable exchanges allow the participants to enter the other point of view and develop an emotional and critical reaction.

interplay between filmmakers. So, through this lens, I argue that such relational or intersubjective patterns can be situated within an evident genealogy throughout the history of cinema which holds *Chronique d'un Été* as its initiator. But it is in particular *The Act of Killing*, as a documentary, that winks at fiction and refreshes the kind of docu-fiction film set constructions of Robert Flaherty's *Nanook of the North* (1922), Luchino Visconti's *La Terra Trema* (1948) or Abbas Kiarostami's *Close-Up* (1990) in which social actors are assisted by the director and a loose script to better reproduce the mechanisms of their own life experience. What these films have traditionally established is also the possibility to rationalise the space in order to encounter the exigencies of camera positioning, in connection with an enhancing of photographic experimentation and a major focus on actors' blocking. It is still illustrative the case of Robert Flaherty when he constructed a three walls igloo, through the removal of a lateral section, in order to allow his cumbersome camera to fit in the icy, Eskimo house and gain lightness for a better photographic rendition.

Flaherty was a pioneer in managing his Eskimo actors and making them express their customs and social habits in a very effective way. From an actors' management perspective, Joshua Oppenheimer certainly had to enter into a similar intimate connection with the perpetrators, but conversely attempted to subtract himself from the construction of the characters and, therefore, facilitated the self-expression of the participants' fantasies. In fact, for him it was rather a matter of allowing the participants to depict and represent themselves, their dreams and the transfiguration of their past roles as murderers. What Oppenheimer had in mind was to create a new form of documentary that combines re-enactment with its preparation as a way of showing what these events mean from an individual and sociological standpoint; a kind of documentary of the imagination rather than a documentary of everyday life. So, from this standpoint, the operational strategy is more attuned to that explored by *Chronique d'un Été* in which Morin and Rouch subtracted or dethroned themselves from a central authorial position, leaving space to the proactive formation of intersubjective relations.

Yet, the delegation conceded to the Indonesian perpetrators, resulted in a whole set of fantastic images created from within and that, therefore, like some images at the opening of the film show, completely transfigure the spectators' expectations around the murderers' exterior aspect. In this sense, *The Act of Killing* presents a scene construction more attuned to the aforementioned examples of docu-fiction. But the difference lies in the fact that the process of fictionalisation is endogenous or created from within by the

actors/participants. In that the main role of the director at this stage is to favour the materialisation of these dreams (Figures 7.20, 7.21). Indeed, the playful props and costumes provided by the film crew are selected in order to help them concoct their visions. These sequences are immediately shown at the beginning of the film; an action which suggests a clear imprinting for the spectators.

**Figure 7.20**



**Figure 7.21**



The perpetrators materialise their dreams by wearing bizarre costumes and setting up fantastic scenarios

Various aspects of Anwar Congo, the very protagonist of the documentary, along with his friends' restaging efforts are shown, but as the story begins to dramatize Anwar's own experiences, the fictional scenes begin to take over the film's form. That is why Oppenheimer has hinted at the final result as "a documentary of the imagination" (Bradshaw, 2017).

In this regard, it has been argued that *The Act of Killing* is overall a 'fantasy that provides a path out of the repetition, compulsion and dissociation, and that reconnects the film's subjects to the reality of their present predicament, to one another, and to their victims and fellow survivors' (King, 2013: 32). As Oppenheimer points out, it is a film that plays with both sentiments of attraction and repulsion, empathy for their state of human beings and disdain for the copious number of murders inflicted by them. What the film is really concerned with is how human beings, both the spectators and the murderers, deal with the sense of guilt (Lusztig, 2013). For instance, the sense of guilt is perceived by murderers in spatial terms and this is fairly evident from the sequence in which Joshua Oppenheimer, Anwar, a camera person and a sound recordist access a roof in which the killings were enacted in the past. Joshua reported that Anwar leaned against the wall and declared 'the terrace belongs to the dead, that's not our space' (Ibid.: 51). Such a statement can be interlaced with the idea that crimes have been primarily committed within spaces

more than in any other psychic territory. And even though the film focuses more on the perpetrators than the survivors, it also situates them in the position of traumatised witnesses. Spectators of numerous murderers of which they also happen to be the executors and that had to struggle to individually negotiate the unbearable consequences of their acts on a psychological level (*Figures 7.22, 7.23*).

Figure 7.22



Figure 7.23



Anwar demonstrates before the camera how the killings were enacted on the roof

What is truly innovative about *The Act of Killing*, is therefore how it displays the different approaches through which the murderers psychologically negotiate and sustain a tolerable fantasy apt to prettify these violent images indelibly weighing on their minds. In that, the relationship commissioner/artist already explored by Trier and Leth with *The Five Obstructions* is here pushed to its ethical extremes. Oppenheimer asks the murderers to restage their past atrocities in order to trigger some emotional responses but also leaving space to some unpredictable occurrences than can be analysed retrospectively. For instance, it is immediately perceivable that the metacinematic slant of the film is productionist for it aims to expound the film as its own backstage. The very first productionist scene concerns Anwar Congo and Herman Koto, gangsters and paramilitary leaders, caught in the act of scouting possible actors to play the persecuted Communists for their restages. The scene ends up with a simulation of these incursions in the Communists' houses, with the paramilitary leaders threatening to kill everyone and the people of the neighbourhood desperately screaming and running for their lives. After the reconstruction enacted in the streets of Medan, we see Anwar and Koto in a room discussing the intention to tell the story of what they committed when they were young. So, from an enunciative standpoint, the main characters present themselves as the proponents of the restaging project while we know that the overall project was utterly

orchestrated by Joshua Oppenheimer. Through the narrative approach of internal focalisation, the director subtly subtracts himself from the position of the main agent of the representation, like Morin and Rouch in *Chronique d'un Été*, but with the difference that Oppenheimer actually remained concealed throughout almost the whole duration of the film leaving complete space to his participants to materialise their mystifications and their demons. So, as external observers, we can only apprehend through interviews, articles and documents related to the process of production that these reconstructions have been somewhat promoted and organised by the director and technically assisted by a film crew of contained size. Nonetheless, the whole film prolongs the approach directed to expose the processual dimension of the film production as its own main constructive landmark. This exhibition of such a processual dimension is so peculiar that the whole set of staged actions and theatrical pantomimes represented by the perpetrators is shown during the stages of pre-production in many of their phases: make-up, props, costumes and shows some of the discussions being made prior to the actual shooting process.

With regards to Anwar Congo, the director declared: 'I asked him to dramatize whatever he wished'(Sperling, 2013). In fact, Oppenheimer's assumption was that acting probably represented an effective way for murderers to distance themselves from the very act of killing and performed what assailed their imagination through the filter of popular culture, audiovisual products and cinema. "I try to forget these things by listening to good music, dancing", Anwar declares on the roof right after he has shown how these killings were actually committed. He often makes use of alcohol and drugs in order to keep the very core of guilt under control. Oppenheimer found Anwar Congo during the shooting of the material that eventually converged into *The Globalisation Tapes* (2003), a visual document on Indonesian plantation workers who were struggling to unionise. So, he asked one of these participants to introduce him to every killer he knew and then came across these unpunished perpetrators who apparently boasted about their "heroic" past exploits.

But Anwar's admission of having experienced a significant degree of distress while coming to terms with the suppressed core of violence opened up a different procedural pathway for Oppenheimer and veered the whole process towards a precise interpretive scenario. Are killers simply boasting about the massacres or are there any ruptures between their exposed prides? As a corollary, are these ruptures potentially revelatory of subconscious or half-aware sources of pain? As commented *a posteriori* by Oppenheimer: 'And I started to intuit that all this boasting, which seems to be a sign of

pride, may in fact not be a sign of pride; it may be the opposite'(Roosa, 2014: 415). In this sense the enunciative standpoint of the film is attuned to the nature of an internal focalisation which is subservient to dive into the perpetrators' psyche. Thus, the director gives voice to the killers in order to dissect how they elaborate their sense of guilt and negotiate the fantastic scenarios in order to tolerate the committed atrocities.

Nonetheless, Oppenheimer dedicates a certain number of scenes to this scenario of self-gratification. The governor of North Sumatra, Syamsul Arifin, boasts about the great success of the mass slaughter of communists with Congo, while pontificating on an alleged etymology of the word "gangsters" as directly related to the idea of freemen. The degree of falsification and construction attached to the moral elevation of past massacres is revelatory of the impunity and it gets reinforced by the following scene. Congo and Koto describe how, getting out of the cinema, they were bringing the fantastic scenarios just watched on the screen right into the near paramilitary office in which interrogations, tortures and killings were enacted: "It was like we were killing happily", Congo declares. So, this is the subtle mechanism through which the degree of self-celebration related to the tortures and murders, have borrowed its phantasmatic scenarios from the fictional world of cinematic genres.

As the shot/countershot displayed in the *Figures 7.24* and *7.25*, the very first productionist moment lies when Koto and Congo watch their own restages on the screen in a way which recalls the procedure exerted by Rouch and Morin with the participants of *Chronique d'un Été*. The comments made by Congo are directed to assess the materiality of his gestures and whether or not his ideal murderer's behaviour matches with his outfit and external appearance

**Figure 7.24**



**Figure 7.25**



Shot reverse shot of Hermann, Anwar and their relatives watching the dailies in which they restage the killings

“My acting has to be violent, and maybe I should dye my hair black”, he comments. Then, Congo and Koto start speculating on how they would configure a better restage of the killings and explain to the camera: “We watched so many sadistic movies. We were influenced by them [...] I was influenced by films starring Marlon Brando and Al Pacino...these were my favourite stars, or John Wayne, in westerns”.

As it has been commented elsewhere, Anwar ‘looks at the footage as if he can just fix the scene aesthetically, maybe he can make it better for himself morally too’ (Swimmer, 2014: 61). Here the aesthetic revamp of the killer’s outfit does not only configure an imagination engaged to materialise the ideal profile during the restage but mainly an attempt to mitigate the unbearable trauma of being the perpetrators of the murders in first-person. This aesthetic decoration is therefore enacted as a semi-conscious form of expiation or therapeutic strategy through the accurate restaging of the violenceedulcorated by gangsters’ costumes, caricatural behaviours and theatrical restages. Such an operational and psychoanalytical trademark recalls the “Help Jørgen Leth’s project” of *The Five Obstructions*, with the only difference being that the remakes are not intended to unravel the implicit creative insights of a reticent director, but they subconsciously aspire to a self-redemption sought through the means of an imaginary aestheticisation of the acts of killing.

### **7.7. Self-awareness - “They Knew They Were Being Killed”**

The very core practice enabling this subtle mechanism is perfectly visible in the scenes in which the killers dress up like gangsters, as in Hollywood movies, and prepare themselves to shoot a fictional restage of the interrogation to Communist prisoners (*Figures 7.26 - 7.28*). The scenes in which the killers select the appropriate costumes for the visual reconstructions recalls the later film: *The Wolfpack* (Moselle, 2015), the story of an atypical group of children being locked for years in a tiny Manhattan apartment by their sociopath father. Hollywood movies were the sole means of contact with the world.



So, they have opted to restage their favourite ones by using them as a gateway towards the external world. The ironic distance guaranteed by their fictional reconstructions fulfil the desires of escapism to the extent that the children experience the simulation of a tangible real life through the playful activity of camouflage and remake. Similarly, the perpetrators of *The Act of Killing*, perform their violent restages as a playful activity through the materialisation of phantasmatic scenarios. The ensuing ironic distance of the camouflage results in a gradual disconnection from their individual narratives of denial to the extent that the playful group activity actually destabilises them and enables an immediate experience of the moral and emotional core of those violent acts.

Figure 7.26



Figure 7.27



Figure 7.28



Drawing inspiration from Hollywood films the murderers restage their interrogations disguised as gangsters

This is the reason why, it is already possible to observe a certain degree of discomfort in Anwar Congo's face. Indeed, he immediately attempts to reconstruct a narrative of denial in order to shield himself from the emergence of unpleasant sensations. In specific, he starts claiming his own disregard towards Human Rights and the historico-political processes leading to it. Then he proudly asserts: "I'm a gangster. A free man. [...] Everywhere in the world there are people like me". Oppenheimer sneakily decides to tighten the frame on him with a zoom shot, aware of the preciousness of such intimate disclosure.

Furthermore, the sequence in which the restage is performed in front of the population highlights such ironic distance precisely because we can distinctively hear the noisy laughs of the children surrounding the film set. Later, when the common people get actively engaged within the farce we see children crying and shouting in the foreground gripped by the intensity of their acting performance and other people giggling in the background (*Figure 7.29*).

**Figure 7.29**



Above, we observe the participants adopting the role of victims while the crowd responds with laughter in the background

On a similar note, it has been argued that *The Act of Killing* provides an attempt to phantasmatically mediate between the aftermath of terror and the ongoing survivors'

trauma (Crichlow, 2013). Yet, in order to reach a valuable balance between a plausible rendition of what really happened and the distorted version of it provided by the perpetrators, there has to be a first adaptive moment in which the participants are allowed to expose their narratives of self-denial. That is the reason why, after the first scenes of re-enactment, Oppenheimer fosters them to talk about the uniqueness of the metacinematic experiment they are taking part in.

During his metacinematic reflection, Anwar states that spectators obviously watch James Bond movies to see action and films about Nazis to see power and sadism, but he also insists on the fact that they can make something even more sadistic because it is not fiction, they truly did it in real life. This awareness of the self-reflexive nature of Oppenheimer's documentary does not only provide an aura of control over the participants' behaviour, but it is also and mainly a reinforcement of their status as generators of the phantasmatic distortions of denial. As Oppenheimer declared during a video conference in Karlsruhe, most of the fantasies being exposed were the fruit of Anwar's mind and their aim, as directors, was only that of facilitating the audio-visual transposition of these phantasmatic stories (ZKM, 2016). So, the metacinematic gesture of this film lies precisely in the way the filmmakers facilitate these perpetrators to construct their cinematic distortions of the violent acts and to expose themselves to the organisational and psychological degree of unpredictability spawning from them. The author's gesture is therefore to renounce to his/her own privileged status of main agent and to be, consequently, subservient to the morally ambiguous participants' creative desire. Through such an operation, the directors definitely delegate to the specific means provided by the filmmaking practice the duty to serve as a vehicle for the fantasies of the perpetrators.

Here the re-enactments truly exhaust the documentary potentiality of rewriting the reality following the materialisation of Anwar's dreams. However, the main impression is that the fact of re-enacting his own fantasies somewhat makes him gradually detach from them toward the exposition of his own bare frailty. But, the restages also affect the awareness of the other perpetrators like Herman and Adi. If the former is asked by Anwar to play the role of a pregnant woman being chastised and beaten by the persecutors (*Figure 7.30*), during a make-up session in preparation of one of the scenes we observe the latter laughing with Anwar about some anecdotes of their friendship (*Figure 7.31*). Then the persecutors are exceptionally asked to play the role of the victims. Yet, in the midst of a pause from the actual shooting, Adi provides one of the most in-depth critique

of their past acts when he is ready to admit that “the Communists were not more cruel than us. We were the cruel ones!” A clear sign of how the detachment from the phantasmatic negotiations was already in act is definitely attested by the disconnecting power of these initial re-enactments performed by Adi. Indeed, the degree of awareness rises further when Adi overtly talks to Anwar about the real possible consequences deriving from the diffusion of their restages as triggering an overthrowing of the historical truth diffused till that moment in Indonesia.

**Figure 7.30**



Hermann Koto disguised as a pregnant woman while being chased by his persecutors

**Figure 7.31**



Adi and Anwar toying with each other while receiving the make-up

Namely, the ideas that the Communists are not the cruel ones, they, as perpetrators, are the evil side of this dispute. But when, Hermann Koto contends that it would be right to tell the truth since they know it, Adi replies that “not everything true should be public”. With such an assertion, he probably hints that the viewing of the movie they are shooting would probably jeopardise their privileged social status, mainly obtained through the execution of the abominable acts successively glorified by state apparatuses and public opinion.

It is precisely at this moment that Oppenheimer understands that Adi is not “haunted like Anwar” and asks him in the car whether he believed in Geneva Conventions and whether their norms could be applied to his previous actions. Adi, in the grip of an intriguing dose of critical spirit, argues that he does not necessarily agree with international courts and that most probably such institutionalised rationale applies more to the changes of morality subservient to the political discursive strategies which are dominant in each different historical period.

He then alludes to the USA endorsement of Saddam Hussein’s regime and to his subsequent violent dismissal in the Iraq War. He obviously stresses the turncoat character

of the instrumental ideology exerted by USA through their mastery of foreign policy. Yet, he continues “War crimes are defined by the winners. I am a winner, so I can make my own definition”. Here, Adi suggests that the acceptability of their violent actions have not only been negotiated psychologically by the single perpetrators, but it has also been socially constructed in order to transmit a public image of respectability which promoted large support among the Indonesian population. Furthermore, this assertion opens up a reflection of how the domain of truth gets widely constructed on a socio-political level and shapes the hegemonic accounts and discourses circulating around the historic facts related to the Communists’ genocides. Such a correlation is also retrospectively bolstered by the reinterpretation of Hollywood gangster movies restaged by the perpetrators.

Thus, I argue that the figure of Adi is crucial in the way it addresses how the exhibition of the technical, linguistic and, foremost, organisational means through which these restages have been shot engender a sort of critical epiphany in the mind of the perpetrators. The very act of showing this processual dimension and the continuous, looping feedbacks the perpetrators absorb through the viewing of the dailies are therefore gradually changing their perception of the socio-political scenario of which they have been active protagonists, detaching them from the fantasies of denial expressed in their reconstructions.

More broadly, Oppenheimer has argued that his film aims at unmasking such a domain of acceptable truth being established in Indonesia around these facts, but also expands his criticism towards the moral vacuum of boasting about tortures perpetrated by Americans in Iraq, flagging up the worldwide scandal of Abu Ghraib above all (Ibid.). Yet, the film also hints at the indirect responsibility of Americans for having diffused Anti-Communist ideologies and supported economic and bellicose actions against the supporters of Socialism throughout the world, having thereby contributed to build up this scenario of impunity. In this sense, even the whole western genre might be judged to be a massive boasting act on the basis of the massacre perpetrated to the detriment of Native Americans. In that, the reflexive productionism of *The Act of Killing* truly facilitates the emergence of such theoretical, political and ideological implications.

The productionist self-reflexivity of another sequence frames Herman Koto while he performs possible disguises for imaginary political campaigns directed to his future candidature to the Indonesian Parliament completes the picture. The critical scenario spawned by the conversation between Adi and Oppenheimer finds its completion



precisely when we see Herman Koto posing in a room where a television shows the image of USA former president Barack Obama (*Figure 7.32*).

In the course of the film, several images have been edited in order to restate how the murderers have truly taken agency during the restage of their killings (*Figure 7.33*). This aspect is particularly relevant in positioning them as the main protagonists of the metacinematic gestures created within *The Act of Killing*. Here the domain of unpredictability lies in the fact that the teleological element of these restages, in the way it materialises the fantasies intended by the perpetrators, in reality opens up a whole set of behavioural and psychological reactions performed by the main characters.

**Figure 7.32**



Herman Koto posing in a room where a television shows the image of USA former president Barack Obama

**Figure 7.33**



Above, a selection of frames in which the perpetrators actively participate in the phases of production

Indeed, Oppenheimer highlights this apotropaic or therapeutic function attached to the material distinctiveness of the metacinematic process taking place during the shooting and, thus, decides to focus on the peculiar reaction of Anwar, the participant that he knows better than anybody else. As matter of fact, the focus on Anwar' condition assists the emergence of a metanarrative which presents the cinematic device as an imaginary instrument of self-examination (Sinnerbrink, 2015).

Anwar and Oppenheimer became very close to the extent that the American filmmaker declared that they are still in touch. He stated that after the early stages of production he decided to approach Anwar Congo as a human being even if, of course he still condemns the horror that he has done (ZKM, 2016). Obviously, the assumption of such empathic humanisation is the main presupposition directed to the interpretation of boasting as a defensive attitude inscribed within a narrative of denial. The relationship with Anwar continued to the extent that, during the phase of post-production, Oppenheimer showed him the final cut of the film and the protagonist was satisfied with it. So, this provides evidence of a certain degree of coherence in the way Anwar must have perceived the tones and discourses surfaced during the production and the way they have been edited with other inserts and backstage sequences.

Moreover, the participants were informed throughout the process that Oppenheimer was only filming the making-of their imaginary movies. In that, Anwar's endorsement of the final cut provides an evidence that the alleged accusations of manipulation of documentary subjects cannot be charged on the film. Yet, this aspect also demonstrated that a certain dimension of loyalty was truly in act during the production and it has been preserved intact within the aspect of the final product. But, how this dimension of loyalty established between Oppenheimer and Anwar explain the dramatic climax of the film? Approaching the end of the film, a sequence shows the destruction of an entire village of Communists and Anwar, for the first time, expresses some pitiful feelings towards the children they made orphans of their parents. The emerging sense of guilt is somehow catalysed through the successive moment in which Anwar is watching a scene which presents him as the victim being tortured by the perpetrators. In the grip of an exhibitionist drive, or an expiatory need, he summons his grandchildren in order to show them how he gets beaten up and humiliated by his persecutors stressing the fact that what they are watching on the screen is just fictional and they should not be scared (*Figure 7.34*).

Then, the children flee and Anwar asks to himself and to the camera: “Did the people I tortured feel the way I feel here?” Precisely at this critical moment, Anwar desperately demands for a psychological relief or some reassurance and Oppenheimer, in the guise of the ethical subject, suddenly replies in Indonesian. As an off-screen voice embodying the plausible indignation of the audience he replies: “Actually, the people you tortured felt far worse because you know it’s only a film. They knew they were being killed”

**Figure 7.34**



Anwar watches a restaging of himself being tortured with his grandchildren

Anwar reacts with a sincere act of contrition to the blunt imaginary vision of the innumerable people he executed. He begins to cry, accusing himself to be a sinner and wondering whether the fate would ever retaliate against himself. Oppenheimer has later declared how in that precise moment the view of such a powerful human reaction almost pushed him to give Anwar a comforting word. This sequence demonstrates how the whole process has definitely contributed to awaken Anwar’s sense of guilt and his suppressed ghosts. Yet, the profound reflection involving guilt, evil and humanity acquires some problematic connotations at this stage. It is evident that Anwar’s sense of guilt can be experienced only partially because, on the one hand, it is mitigated by the gratification of having achieved a duty and having been praised by the population throughout the years, and on the other, a full sense of guilt would have been impossible to tolerate for his overloaded psyche. In this scene, we participate in the production of a sentiment assisted by the concomitant exposure of one of the restages being made.

In fact, Anwar’s emotional reaction appears while he is watching himself being tortured. Therefore, the mechanism of identification with one of his victims triggered a short-circuit which prepared the emergence of painful emotions. This subtle domain of



psychological turmoil reaches its climax when Anwar goes back to the roof which he already presented as one of the selected places for the executions. This time, though, Anwar does not appear to be at ease like the first time. It is night, and he seems more absent-minded than usual. He stresses the fact that he knew it was wrong to torture and murder these people but that he “had to do it”. Then, the camera follows his hesitant steps over the roof. Unexpectedly, he starts retching, approaches one of the fences and bends down in the attempt to vomit out all his anguish (*Figure 7.35*) The problem is that we can only hear the noise of it, but the main impression is that he does not manage to exorcise his pain and guilt, probably, because he has never been able, or he just could not face it in its entirety for reasons of self-preservation.

**Figure 7.35**



Anwar painfully retches in the darkest corner of the “roof of murder”

Several commentators and reviewers have contended that the film presents a lack of historical-political context, it neglects the standpoint of the victims (which will be explored by the sequel: *The Look of Silence*), displays an unethical use of the documentary process (Fraser, 2014) or a manipulation of the participants (Cribb, 2014). With this analysis, I contextually purported to address some of these critical points, even though it will probably not be probably possible to ever know the extent to which Anwar’s final “retching scene” has been staged or not.

Here, the unravelling of the whole process acquires a meaningful connotation in the way the medium and its particular contingent fluxes contributed in outstripping this narrative of denial, precisely through the staging of these mystifying fantasies. In fact, as the intensification of these recorded performances accrued, the degree of self-reflexivity

reached by the cinematic medium enhanced an authentic degree of self-awareness in the perpetrators' minds. In that, restaging their performances enabled a detachment and the consequent exposure of their bare fragility. That is why when Anwar Congo enters this space once deprived of his shielding narratives we can access a glimmer of his deep inner turmoil. The trigger is the second access to the "roof of murders", whose matter, angles and interstices, so replete of the enduring memories of the past atrocities, have abruptly penetrated the weakened barriers of Anwar's mind, allowing us to witness the very core of this interiorised horror.

What seems evident from this final scene, and retrospectively attributable to the whole film, is how mostly every technical, linguistic and organisational pattern expounded by *The Act of Killing* converges towards the exposure of its productionist dimension. At the very core of this process lies the emergence of a revolutionary organisational model of filmmaking which situates the critical focus of the analysed findings within a well-delimited system of signification. That is to say, Anwar and his peers' psychological and ethical evolution are precisely activated through these processes of reconstruction whose nature is eminently metacinematic.

As the film overall shows, along the way, during a period spanning from 2005 to 2010, Anwar has deeply explored his nightmares. At the end of the shooting process Oppenheimer and his collaborators had to deal with 1200 hours of footage through which they tried to excavate the layers of material (Swimmer, 2014). Oppenheimer had to work on the footage from two different continents and the post-production costs obliged him to finance the project drawing on the money of a Ph.D he was developing through Central Saint Martin's College of Arts and Design in London, till the moment a Danish producer, Signe Byrge Sorensen, came in and raised funds from European Film Institutes, NGO's and other broadcasters. But it was mainly at the time when two giants of documentarism like Werner Herzog and Errol Morris got involved into the project that the film was brought to worldwide attention for the way it pushed the ethical boundaries of what it is right to be shown on a cinematic screen.

*The Act of Killing* has earned dozens of eulogies among which a Nomination for an Academy Award while the hyper-critical reception in Indonesia and the suspicion of public opinion triggered some controversial reactions. In a way, the film dismantles the explanations provided by Indonesian cultural industry, as it normalised and made tolerable the whole set of sickening operations enacted at the time of the massacres. However, the film unexpectedly displays a kind of respect to the normalising effort being

foisted on and reproduced from an entire population. It relaunched a critical, but unobtrusive spirit, and proceed smoothly through this unravelling process, among the mystifying coils which have been ingrained within the collective imagination. By the same token, *The Act of Killing* sensitively tackles these thorny issues with an outstanding sobriety, which, nonetheless, does not renounce to its serious appeal. Nothing but the phantasmagorical big fish of the opening sequence, which recurs from time to time throughout the film, can reminds us better how this whole cinematic operation intended to cautiously approach such a complex degree of mystification, as pretending to walk on eggshells. Thus, unlike the accusations of documentary unfairness have hinted at, one can interpret this visual metaphor as a tribute to the mitigating factor of the overall extreme edulcoration traversing *The Act of Killing*, which is eventually overshadowed by the abundant richness of what, in return, we are allowed to see.

## **7.8. Towards Exceeding Models of Filmmaking**

The critical reflections of this chapter have been directed to promote a further problematisation of the intricate domain of metacinematic gestures. In particular, they have attempted to theoretically demonstrate, by means of the empirical analysis, how linguistic, technical and organisational patterns presented in the metacinematic gestures embodied within these two films mainly converge towards the productionist expressive domain. Unlike, the preceding fictional and documentary experiments, I have framed both *The Five Obstructions* and *The Act of Killing* as two representatives of productionist metacinematicity for their unique capability to employ the exhibition of the productive process as the main agent of the representation in all its constitutive material aspects.

In fact, they differ from the other productionist metafilms for they expose the cinematic machinery either exalting its strategic property to focus on the intersubjective

relation within two film directors (*The Five Obstructions*), or relying on how its processes of reconstruction of individual and collective fantasies may engender some psychological evolutions and ethical repercussions in those participants involved within it (*The Act of Killing*). Indistinctly from what these films contribute to expound, they both create well-delimited systems of signification within which these material occurrences arise. Along these lines, I wished to transmit the idea that this exhibition of mediality is precisely the reflexive vessel within which the representational means get to coincide with their ends. Thus, in both films the *telos* or end is precisely intrinsic to the metacinematic expressive domain. This coincidence between the gestural means and the gestural ends congruently bridges the theoretical framework constructed around the idea of metacinematic gesture with its materialisation in real audio-visual products.

We have seen how *The Five Obstructions* sets the focus on the directors' interplay as essential to allow the emergence of an authorial dialogue over filmmaking which shows an unprecedented form of psychotherapeutic transference by means of filmmaking practice. The spotlight is on such a continuous and script-less interaction, as capable of allowing the directors to enter a plane of confrontation which acquires some unpredictable productionist relevance. Yet, *The Five Obstructions* opens up an intertextual dialogue between different films, about the nature of remakes as aesthetic extensions, or about the possible existence of productionist lines of flight deriving from a matrix/film.

Thus, such a well-delimited system of signification becomes the vehicle to make *The Five Obstructions* resemble a multi-faceted psychoanalytical, managerial and sociological experiment. The dialectics of constraint-freedom to which Leth is submitted triggers further reflections on the role of leadership, self-management, disorganisation and even authoritarianism within the organisational process of film production. Yet, the intrusive and chastising behaviour is exactly the key-factor in the project. Trier continually encroaches on Leth's private sphere by pushing him to overcome his comfort zone, to leave aside his concern for confidentiality. Or better, what Trier wanted to dig up were all the personal and intimate levels of psychological and affective participation that Leth attempted to bury under the apparently impersonal and shallow visual solutions of *The Perfect Human*.

Observed in this way, the obstructions guiding the remakes function as "endless means", or better, as means which contain their ends in themselves and, thereby, recall Agamben's idea of pure gesturality (Agamben, 2000). In this sense, the set of linguistic,

technical and organisational obstructions set by Trier are metacinematic gestures at their purest.

In the second analysis, I have discussed how *The Act of Killing* can be deemed to reflect the kind of epistemological approach to filmmaking being developed by *Chronique d'un Été*. In particular, I have outlined how all these films orbit around the use of the process of production expounded by the cinematic apparatus to promote and analyse intersubjective relationships in order to surface socio-political underpinnings. In the course of my investigation I have underscored how *The Act of Killing*, displays the different approaches through which the murderers psychologically negotiate and sustain tolerable fantasies apt to prettify the violent images indelibly weighing on their minds. I have also endorsed the theories which frame these fantasies within a narrative of denial. The narratives of denial have been outlined in the sense of a psychological defence apt to safeguard the perpetrators' psychological balance and to shield themselves from the emergence of any sense of guilt.

This operational and psychoanalytical trademark recalls the "Help Jørgen Leth's project" of *The Five Obstructions* with the only difference that the remakes are not directed to unfold the implicit creative insights of a reticent director but they rather, perhaps unwillingly, aspire to realise a self-redemption sought through the means of an imaginative aestheticisation of the acts of killing.

In this sense, Oppenheimer's film mainly stressed how the ensuing ironic distance residing in the disguises of the perpetrators' reconstructions involuntary triggered a gradual disconnection from their individual narratives of denial. So, the production of these murderous restages, set as playful group activities, actually destabilised them and enabled the appearance of an immediate experience of the moral and emotional core due to the past execution of those violent acts. The metacinematic gesture of this film lies precisely in the way the filmmakers facilitate these perpetrators to construct their cinematic distortions and to expose themselves to the organisational and psychological degree of unpredictability spawning from their productive interaction.

What seems evident from this final scene, and retrospectively attributable to the whole film, is how mostly every technical, linguistic and organisational pattern expounded by *The Act of Killing* converges towards the exposure of its productionist dimension. Similarly to *The Five Obstructions*, at the very core of this process lies the emergence of a revolutionary organisational model of filmmaking which situates the critical focus of the emerging interpretations within a well-delimited system of

signification. That is to say, Anwar and his peers' psychological and ethical evolution are precisely activated through these processes of reconstruction whose nature is eminently metacinematic.

Therefore, all the thematic elements underpinned in both films, enabled however through an evident process of humanisation of the figures of Jørgen Leth and Anwar Congo, is exclusively possible through the expositions of these precise mechanisms of self-reflexive productivity. Yet, the directorial standpoints of these two films significantly differ because Lars von Trier's authoritarian, hands-on attitude set the authorial subjectivity within a proactive, generative position. On the contrary, Joshua Oppenheimer dethrones himself from the role of the pervasive author, rather promoting himself as a facilitator who makes the material conditions of production subservient to the expression of its participants.

These films open up a crack in the shaded zones that they explore. In doing so, the metacinematic gesture, empowered by its productionist side, provides an actual organisational model of filmmaking which exceeds the canonical representations of mainstream cinema. Although its exceeding character is undeniable, it may also be said to cause an artistic shock which breaches within the domain of mainstream film production, as the possible source for the future multiplication of provocative and challenging experimentation around filmmaking practices. The degree of unpredictability of this alleged influence is, thus, still unimaginable, but beyond any reasonable doubt, certainly alluring.

In the final chapter I will recap the main theoretical findings of my investigation along with reflections around the challenges encountered throughout the writing process, the limitations of my research and its openings towards further horizons.

## 8.0. Conclusions

In the course of the writing process, the structure of this research has started to recall that of a Dantesque Inferno. In fact, I have gradually opted to proceed starting from the most generic and broad circles of the subterranean realm represented by figurative art and cinematic reflexivity till the most narrowed down and profound caves explored in the last chapters. The infernal metaphor surely epitomises the breadth of such an endeavour, yet unavoidable for those who prepare to reflect upon the topic of metacinema. But it certainly does not convey the intense degree of gratification derived from the precious discoveries which have permeated the whole writing process. From a general standpoint, the main contribution of this research resides in a new theorisation of self-reflexivity in films with particular focus on the productionist aspect of metacinema.

In the first chapter I have tackled the argument of self-reflexivity from a broader perspective by engaging with the representational enigmas of some reflexive paintings like *Las Meninas* by Velazquez. Indeed, I have clarified how some reflexive patterns already present in the visual language of painting have been remediated (Bolter and Grusin, 2000) by other medias like photography and cinema. In this regard, I have illustrated the example of the “look into the camera”. Then, it has been proposed how the wide objective of this thesis would have been to provide an interpretation to some filmic enigmas by accessing the shaded zone of the representation (Comolli, 2004) or their metacinematic core.

Then, I have outlined the elements present in the first self-reflexive films of the history and clarified how they are permeated by the same disruptive elements analysed in the former paintings, yet capable to exert the estranging function of Brechtian epic theatre (Stam 1992). The presence of the *ostranenie*, in the language of Russian formalists (Boym, 1996), or estrangement effect, has been judged to draw a line between those cinematic products which contain self-reflexive patterns, breaking the fourth wall and arresting the suspension of disbelief, and those pertaining to the broader sphere of illusionistic cinema, which instead keep the suspension of disbelief operative. These considerations have laid the foundations for an attentive analysis of secondary literature about metacinema and has allowed a systematisation of the most relevant sources. The

idea was to create a compendium of the main theoretical accounts about metacinema and to compare or create meaningful threads between otherwise disjointed and fairly isolated standpoints.

In that, the chapter dedicated to the literature review has not only been useful to identify the core of the debate about metacinema as expounded by authors like Bazin (2004), Metz (1974a, b, 1978, 1991) and Comolli (1980, 1986, 2004), or Elsaesser (1973) and Stam (1992, 2004), but it has also pointed out a certain vagueness with regards to the provision of a generic definition for metacinematic moves. Yet, my literature review has also outlined the substantial vacuum, or the lack of existence of a consistent and reliable categorisation for metacinematic patterns. The study of a plausible definition for the metacinematic gesture and the systematisation of its internal distinctive nuances through a navigable grid of intelligibility is the first contribution of my research.

This last point has reflected the urgency to define the theoretical boundaries of metacinema and, even more crucially, the exigency to systematise a loose categorisation with the aim of making it available as an epistemological tool, an instrument for the analysis of cinematic self-reflexivity. So, I have sketched a definition of metacinematic gesture as *a film segment which exhibits the mediality of cinema and opens up a discourse on its technical, linguistic and organisational patterns*. The theoretical framework I have employed to define metacinema is imbued with the notion of gesture. I have employed this concept referring to Benjamin's discussion around the didactic and political effects of Brechtian epic theatre (Benjamin, 2003). Here, the gestures of epic theatre have been applied to metacinema as interrupting actions which break the continuity of illusion established by the narratologic and linguistic instruments employed by illusionistic cinema.

Then, I have matched the main cornerstone of Benjamin's account with Agamben's idea of gesture as the exhibition of mediality or the process of making a means visible (Agamben, 2000). In that, I concurred with the Italian philosopher around the idea that gesture is the basic expressive element of cinema in the way it shows language as pure communicability (Ten Bos, 2005). Simultaneously, I proposed a partial rereading of the notion of gesture by challenging the incontestable absence of any *telos* in the ontological construction of the gestural which excluded its possible entanglement of intentional and teleological elements within metacinematic gestures. In fact, I theorised that these interrupting segments within the flow of the film can also comprise a certain intentionality spawning from an authorial or directorial subjectivity.



In a nutshell, I announced that a certain authorial specific weight can be perceived within the folds of a metacinematic gesture as caught in a relationship of contingency rather than in one of necessity. Such a partial rehabilitation of the *telos* enabled the possibility for metacinematic gestures to be employed as an epistemological tool which could give relevance to documents, declarations or statements which contain traces of the influence of an authorial intention, but that should also be considered as the result of complex interactions with the members of the film-crew and the material conditions of production.

In that, the peculiar nature of metacinematic gesture would be that of shedding light on the shaded zone of the representation, by highlighting those aspects usually concealed behind the illusionistic veil. Indeed, I clarified that particular relevance should also be attributed to those aspects that films did not show, which belong to the realm of the unsaid. With that, I was thus strongly tempted to integrate more complex forms of non-intentionality. Namely, those exhibitions of mediality which tends to efface the authorial subjectivity of the director or allow it to fade into the processual flow of filmmaking among its complex material and practical components. Furthermore, the prevalence of authorial intentionality or unintentionality within metacinematic gestures is strictly bound to the fact that, in the first case, we will be prompted to talk about authors that make gestures, in the second about gestures that make authors.

Here, the latter would represent all these metacinematic gestures which are apparently influenced by a complex set of variables belonging to the various aspects of the process of production. That is to say, a metacinematic gesture could be influenced by the employed means of production, the budget, the particular intervention of the director of photography, the influential behaviour of other members of the film crew, the environmental conditions or the narrative constraints of the screenplay. The articulation of metacinematic gestures as vulnerable to so many dynamics thus opened up a context of unpredictability which allow these films to produce unexpected audiovisual configurations operated through unorthodox procedures.

Next, I outlined six different metacinematic gestures in order to isolate the category I purported to analyse within this investigation: referential, realist, surrealist, experimental, the look into the camera and the productionist. The referential attribute is related to those works which recall visual and technical solutions employed by other movies. The surrealist category refers to those films whereby a sudden, unforeseen metacinematic expression emerges in a dreamlike fashion to disrupt the linear narrative flow of the story. The “look into the camera” has been labelled as a “category without

boundaries” being it located between the realist and surrealist, as reflecting some elements stemming from both of them. Experimental metacinema is a category that mainly summarises the work of authors which deal with structural, materialist films.

Finally, the productionist side of metacinema addresses those works focusing on the particular role of authors as the agents of production, while also taking into account how other aspects of the filmmaking, such as the means of production, the budget, the size of the film crew, the environmental conditions and the limits set by the screenplay, can determine the overall shape of a metacinematic gesture. But what truly distinguishes a productionist metafilm from the other categories is that in the former the frontstage of production might be said to coincide, or tend to coincide, with its own backstage. Therefore, all the selected films abide by this rationale.

My investigation has attempted to prove whether productionist metafilms managed or failed to achieve the promise of rendering a credible depiction of the “real” conditions of cinema as organized work. A problematic issue was related to assess whether the rupture of the dramatic realism of Hollywood mainstream movies in some cases has been translated in a new effect of constructed realism. Namely, how cinematic constructions cope with the dichotomic polarizations or division between “cinematic image” and “reality”, “fiction and fact”.

Above all, I have attempted to display the existence of an objective materiality of the metacinematic gesture. And more specifically an objective materiality which eschews any unilateral interpretation but which is distinctively embedded in gestures contained within productionist films.

In the analysis of the fictional dimension of productionist metafilms I have suggested the following. First, I have pointed out how the self-reflexive segments being analysed are mirrored by thematic elements which mainly emerge through technical and linguistic solutions. With regards to *8½*, the reflection upon the creative genesis of the film director Guido/Fellini ended up in a complex articulation of maieutic nihilism in which the ideas erupted from the vacuum of nothingness.

The film frames a metacinematic gesture which attempts to cast a glance over the challenges of Fellini’s directorial imagination as promptly transfigured into the fictional character of Guido and his carnivalesque inner world. With regards to *Contempt*’s thematic reflexivity, Godard has surfaced the individual corruption of the people involved in the film industry and how the economic straightjacket invariably commodifies their existences and affects the aesthetic products ensuing from their actual contribution on the

set. Following Godard's reflexive standpoint, any film production born under the auspices of the Hollywood Studio System is bound to embody the visible traces of such a violent process of commodification.

On a similar note, I have framed Pasolini's reflection of *La Ricotta* over the cultural impoverishment of the Italian bourgeoisie in the way it has provoked the isolation and disintegration of the subproletarian class, while confining intellectuals within their solipsistic mannerism. But, whereas the previous two films have provided a political critique to the capitalist mode of production and its attendant consumerist rituals, the more integrated standpoint offered by the "romantic problem solver" Truffaut, with *Day for Night*, turns out to be a tribute to cinema which indiscriminately praises all its contradictory aspects and mitigates the previous harsh positions of Nouvelle Vague.

In the course of the analysis it has been crucial to clarify the actual orientation of the directors' intentions before and during the shooting process, but also the significance of those moments in which these same intentions have dissolved among the manifold material conditions of production. This is one of the main achievement this chapter has aspired to convey. Yet, I have demonstrated how the direct act of showing the process of production through a fiction story have echoed a wide array of technical, linguistic and organisational solutions proposed by the directors Fellini, Godard, Pasolini and Truffaut. It resulted that in all these films the directors had a crucial specific weight in depicting their main fictional characters in the direction of a diegetic construction apt to exhibit their own personal philosophy about filmmaking. Finally, I have discussed how these self-reflexive fictional gestures are still prey of unpredictable emergences, foremost uncontrollable by the directors.

This analytical contribution has been confirmed and expanded by the chapter related to the documentary dimension of productionist metafilms. With *Chronique d'un Été* Rouch and Morin dethroned their directorial figures from the role of the main agents of representation, to behave just as other participants involved in the sociological experiment. Their purpose was rather that of arranging the organisational, technical and linguistic presuppositions of the documentary in order to allow the emergence of a complex degree of intersubjective interactions worthwhile of sociological interest. By doing so, the emergence of these intersubjective relationships provided evidence of the genesis and construction of the film itself, which did not only frame the way the characters influenced each other but also how every single agency actively contributed to the actual making-of. Through this lens, *Chronique d'un Été* is a perfect paradigm of the extent to

which making a film is essentially the result of a process made of unpredictable intersubjective interactions.

On a different note, the successive film, *American Movie*, revolved around the production of the short-films *Northwestern* and *Coven* with significant details of their director's private life. The analysis of the film has demonstrated how Mark Borchardt was only apparently the head of the operations while he was constantly overwhelmed by economic and material obstructions which were eventually sorted out through the informal and casual help of friends and relatives. *American Movie* is probably the only example of productionist metafilm that documentarily presents the specular doubling of two films, the one which documents, directed by Chris Smith, and the one being documented, directed by the disorganised factotum, Borchardt. In fact, the film tests Cooper's (2016c) idea of organisation and disorganisation as mutually constituting forces which reveals and connects the linguistic, technical and organisational aspects of both productions rolled into one.

*Grizzly Man* also connects two different directorial stances, by this time situated in the virtual space of an impossible encounter. Here is the filmic space to become the veritable protagonist of the story, a space which links two different subjects, Treadwell and Herzog, who have some aesthetic and emotional affinities, but who belongs to different temporalities. The productionist self-reflexivity of Treadwell's work is twofold. One is related to the exhibited willingness to protect and document the life of bears within their own habitat and the other relates to the use of filmmaking as a means to construct and mould his own identity as a filmmaker and as a man, by allowing a deeper connection with the natural environment along with its living and inanimate components.

With this in mind, I have argued that the productionist self-reflexivity of Herzog's scenes selection is that of highlighting Treadwell's spiritual form of filmmaking as an autoscopic introspection which is capable of revealing the ecstatic truth of cinema in its purest aesthetic form. From his part, Herzog exalts Treadwell's gesture of "being there with a camera", presenting his intentional choices but foremost exalting those moments in which the metacinematic reflections spring from unintentional occurrences. As for Morin and Rouch in *Chronique d'un Été*, yet more indirectly for Borchardt's case, the author Treadwell is dethroned from his privileged enunciative position, but emerges only through Herzog's recomposition of his footage. In light of this, all three films, manifests a distinctive attitude towards the same productive arbitrariness. Thus, it has been argued

how the focus on the idea of disorganisation, or productive arbitrariness has been crucial for those films in outlining their metacinematic underpinnings.

It has also to be clarified that, even though these three documentary approaches exhibit the mediality of cinema through the exposure of technical and linguistic elements, they also start to open up a discourse on a credible depiction of the organisational dimension of filmmaking. But it should be also taken into account that the exhibition of the processual dimension of filmmaking is still a consequence of the exploration of other main themes rather than part of their constitutive foundations.

In the direction of investigating works which further explore those constructive elements in a more constitutive fashion, in the last chapter I have analysed two particularly significant works: *The Five Obstructions* and *The Act of Killing*. In that, I have shown how they differ from other productionist metafilms for they expose the cinematic machinery either exalting its strategic property to focus on the intersubjective relation within two film directors (*The Five Obstructions*), or relying on how its processes of reconstruction of individual and collective fantasies may engender some psychological evolutions and ethical repercussions in those participants involved within it (*The Act of Killing*).

As a contribution to Critical Management Studies, my analysis has exposed how *The Five Obstructions* provides a counter-hegemonic idea of the process of managing. It also focuses on the proactive, affirmative participation, still maintaining the idea that the relationship could be based upon a hierarchal or authoritarian level. The movie reaches such a disruptive effect through the rejection of the rhetoric of equality promoted by hegemonic discourses circulating around horizontal supervision and flat management. On the contrary, it shows a different approach towards ethical responsibility and self-management, as directed towards a more direct appreciation of the real nature of hierarchal roles, beyond the hypocritical and deceiving cultures of equality set by contemporary organisational scenarios.

Despite what their finite products express, both *The Five Obstructions* and *The Act of Killing* create a well-delimited system of signification within which this productionist material distinctiveness arises. As highlighted by interviews, documents and other statements, those films had in their original intentions the objective to experiment around cinematic reflexivity rather than anything else. Along these lines, I wished to transmit the idea that the resulting exhibitions of mediality are precisely the reflexive vessels within which the representational means get to coincide with their ends.

Thus, in both films the *telos* or end is precisely intrinsic to the metacinematic expressive domain. This coincidence between the gestural means and the gestural ends bridges the theoretical framework constructed around the idea of metacinematic gesture with its materialisation in real audio-visual products. Or, in other words, it tests and confirms the validity of the theoretical framework employed as an epistemological tool for the current investigation.

Observed in this way, the five obstructions guiding the remakes in Trier and Leth's film function as "endless means", or better, as means which contain their ends in themselves and, thereby, recall Agamben's idea of pure gesturality (Agamben, 2000). In this sense, the set of linguistic, technical and organisational obstructions set by Trier are metacinematic gestures at their purest.

I have also underscored how *The Act of Killing* displays the different approaches through which the murderers psychologically negotiate and sustain tolerable fantasies apt to prettify the violent images indelibly weighing on their minds. The metacinematic gesture of this film lies precisely in the way the filmmakers facilitate these perpetrators to construct their cinematic distortions and to expose themselves to the organisational and psychological degree of unpredictability emerging from their productive interaction. These two examples are thus slightly differently from the previous documentary approaches for every technical, linguistic and organisational pattern embedded in them is subservient to the exposure of their productionist dimension. Finally I wished to transmit the idea that such a particular exhibition of mediality is precisely the reflexive vessel within which the gestural means truly coincide with the gestural ends of these metacinematic representations.

To conclude, the selection of movies is certainly not exhaustive, for many other examples mentioned throughout the analyses can account for high degrees of productionist metacinematicity. But those selected for the analytical part of this investigation have been judged to represent productionist metacinematicity to a higher gestural degree than others.

Even if different degrees of linguistic, technical and organisational patterns have been unveiled throughout this research, there are many aspects which have not been revealed and continue to insist below the surface of knowable phenomena. What this research has attempted to highlight is that there are different layers of secrecy hidden within the folds of metacinematic gestures. This set of analyses have been conducted with the aim of unveiling some of them. In this sense, I have underpinned the existence of an

economy of exposure of secrecy. In fact, my efforts have been oriented towards the outline of this complex entanglement between secrecy and disclosure, concealment and revelation and attempted to unearth different degrees of strategic mystification apt to transmit a particular theme or topic at the expense of another. In this sense, the main contribution of this thesis has been that of shedding light on the shaded zone or the blind spot of metacinematic representations.

Further research could be directed towards the examination of how these films have been perceived by the audience or how they have been received within different cultural contexts. In parallel, it would be interesting to investigate how the spirit expressed by metacinematic works has contaminated other products of the cultural industry such as television programmes and TV-series.

A major limitation of my analytical method is represented by the epistemological boundaries offered by a subjective interpretation. For this reason, the whole theoretical and analytical construction is far from reflecting a universal, undisputable set of objective findings. I want to clarify that, as a researcher, I have been constantly aware of the subjective nature of such a reflexive approach. Nonetheless, I have also noticed how the writing process has represented in itself an illuminating method of enquiry, a productive form which has unexpectedly led the hermeneutic process underlying this research towards its final discovery. That of narrowing down two distinctive productionist metafilms whose gestural means entirely coincide with their gestural ends.

Also, the whole thesis expanded beyond the way Organisation Studies focused on how work and management are represented in literature and popular culture while reflecting on the way the art of filmmaking expounds cinematic production as a form of organised work.

It has been proposed that metacinematic gestures treat films as experiments. Along the same lines, paraphrasing a famous maxim by Fernando Pessoa, the writing process which gave birth to this set of reflections has been constantly perceived as ‘an experimental journey undertaken involuntarily’ (2010: 74)<sup>8</sup>.

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<sup>8</sup> ‘Life is an experimental journey undertaken involuntarily. It is a journey of the spirit through the material world and, since it is the spirit that travels, it is the spirit that is experienced.’ Pessoa, F. (2010) *The book of disquiet*. Trans. Costa, M.J. New York: Serpent’s tail.

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