



## Cinema: Not Frames But Veils

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### Abstract

The aim of this paper is to rethink the metaphors of the cinema as window and frame. The first one addresses the cinema as a transparent, open window that faithfully reproduces the world, taking the spectator's view beyond the screen guided by realism and indexicality. The second one takes the screen as a rectangular surface that focuses the audience's eye on the images that are produced inside its borders. In these pages I will revisit both notions, adding a third one inspired by the *passe-partout* of Derrida: the cinema as veil, also theorized as backdrop and decor. Ultimately, this approach explores the idea of simulacrum by analyzing two examples: *Blue* (Apichatpong Weerasethakul, 2018) and *Decor* (Ahmad Abdalla, 2014).

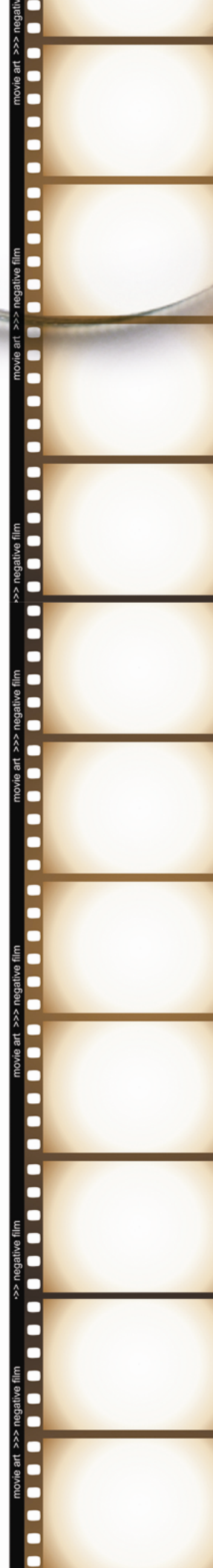
**Keywords:** Window; Frame; Passe-partout; Veil; Decor



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## Cinema: Not Frames But Veils

Maria del Carmen Molina Barea

### Window: The truth of reality

‘Viewed in this perspective, the cinema is objectivity in time.’

(Bazin, 1967: 15).

The idea of “cinema as window” serves as a common metaphor within film criticism. In order to explain its theoretical implications, Thomas Elsaesser and Malte Hagener (2015) mention Alfred Hitchcock’s *Rear Window* (1954) as an outstanding example of the cinematographic device in which the spectator represents the centrality of the gaze in front of a functional screen –a window, in this case. In this way, it is no coincidence that the ontology of cinema is illustrated by the regard of a photographer (James Stewart) confined to a wheel-chair. Serge Daney (1998) has described this procedure as the scopic drive of an immobilised *voyeur*. Such a consideration puts into play the basic definition of the cinema spectator, that is, the fetishistic looking comfortably hidden in the darkness of a movie theater. This dynamics has been revisited in the short film *The Neighbors’ Window* (M. Curry, 2019), which tells the story of a married couple with three little children whose only way to escape from their monotonous domestic life is the exciting entertainment of watching their young neighbors through the window –parties, sexual encounters,

illness and even death. To pursue their addictive habit they buy professional binoculars -which clearly reminds Hitchcock's photographer- and keep lights turned off, as if their living room were an improvised cinema.

Actually, voyeurism has been present in the history of cinema from the very beginning. An early example is *Par le trou de serrure* (F. Zecca, 1901), where an indiscreet keyhole echoes the spectator's eye. However, the cinema screen is much more than a keyhole: it is often said that it functions more properly as a window. According to this comparison, the cinema becomes a transparent medium characterized by its objectivity. It is well-known that André Bazin strongly defended transparency as a way of capturing reality in cinema. Rather than montage he preferred long takes and one-shot sequences so as to obtain naturalist images. By the same token he rejected the creative principles developed by Eisenstein and Pudovkin. Needless to say, since his favorite filmmakers were Renoir, Welles and Rossellini, Bazin was deeply influenced by Italian neo-realist cinema. In particular, he admired Vittorio de Sica due to the profound sense of reality that his films communicate. 'That is why the impression made on us by *Ladri di Biciclette* is unfailingly that of truth.' (Bazin, 1971: 58).

In fact, the Bazinian concept of realism is above all a question of truth. It is based on the conviction that the reality can be easily captured by the camera. In its simplest form, it suffices to

place the camera in front of the world and its mechanic eye takes it as such, in a veritable fragment. So in this view, the cinema is essentially defined by its contiguity with the real. There is no boundaries between the real world and what is watched on the screen. Elsaesser mentions the mesmerising effect of *Sherlock Jr.* (B. Keaton, 1924) and *The purple rose of Cairo* (W. Allen, 1985) when the characters walk on and off the screen, blurring the lines between the cinema and the outer world. In this line, the screen becomes a sort of window open to the reality. In the paper entitled *Le Rampe* (1996), Serge Daney distinguished three stages in the history of cinema: the first one, which corresponds with classic cinema, addresses the naive question “What has to be seen within an image?” that Daney interpreted precisely as the question about the cinematographic window open to the world.

Here, the cinema is mainly understood as an “encyclopedia of the world”, a *wunderkammer*, museum or atlas, which accumulates truthful images of the world. The underlying idea is that the reality exists by itself, lying in front of us, as it were, so the camera simply has to take it, thus obtaining a collection of images that constitute fragments of the real, pieces of the truth. Then, the cinema as window would primarily be a way of obtaining objective images, photographs of the world. Bazin insisted that the ontology of cinema implies a photographic nature: the physical contiguity between the image and the referent, a veritable luminous impression. ‘There is ontological identity between the object and its photographic image.’ (Bazin,

1971: 98). That is, an indexical procedure in which images are traces of the real. The realism of the cinema follows directly from its technological genesis, which captures the reality in time and space: ‘It makes a molding of the object as it exists in time and, furthermore, makes an imprint of the duration of the object.’ (Bazin, 1967: 97).

Thus considered, the cinema is then a photograph in motion. Bazinian realism is based mostly on such an indexical ontology, which has also been theorized by Peirce, Barthes and Kracauer. Similarly, they claim in favor of the objectivity of analog images inasmuch as the photographic technique entails emanations of the referent which are, in effect, analogies of the reality. Peirce explains this phenomenon in terms of physical coexistence which produces a luminic mold that, as Barthes would say, testifies *ça-a-été*: “that-has-been” (2010: 80). That is why Peter Wollen argues that the Bazinian definition of cinema heavily depends on indexicality: ‘Time and again Bazin speaks of photography in terms of a mould, a death-mask, a Veronica, the Holy Shroud of Turin, a relic, an imprint.’ (1972: 125). Therefore, the ontology of cinema as conceived by Bazin affirms its credibility by means of the revelation of the real based on a selection of mummified instants. From this perspective, the cinema is not actually the representation of the world, but its replication, its faithful reproduction. The cinema reproduces the reality as it is. In this sense, the cinema reveals the real. Its function is indeed that of an open window.

So, the cinema would be a question of appearing. In fact, it is about images that appear in the strip, images that have been taken from the reality and inscribed directly on the photosensitive material. The truth cannot escape from the cinematographic device, which captures every detail that is seen through the *window*, every aspect of that selected part of the world. ‘The camera cannot see everything at once but it makes sure not to lose any part of what it chooses to see.’ (Bazin, 1967: 27). The photographer played by David Hemmings in *Blow-Up* (M. Antonioni, 1966) would surely agree. So the reality reveals itself within the image, it gradually takes form and comes to light from the bottom of the white film. Likewise, the spectator instinctively waits for the image to appear on the white screen of Hiroshi Sugimoto’s photographs from the series *Theaters* (1975-2015), as well as José Luis Guerin, in his seventh filmed letter to Jonas Mekas (*Correspondencias*, 2011), waited in front of a white screen hoping to discover the nascent structure of the reality.



Figure 1. Film

still from *Correspondencias* (J. L. Guerin, 2011). <sup>1</sup>

Despite what has been said so far, a final explanation is required. Elsaesser (2015: 30) has noted that it would be a crucial mistake to locate Bazin within the realm of traditional realism. The radical identification of Bazin's theory with pure indexicality, often used as a synonym, may contribute to misread the complexity of his ideas and induce a simplistic representation of his conceptual model. Preconceived assumptions in this respect entail the risk of losing a critical view of the entire Bazinian corpus. Indeed, in Bazin's film theory, the cinema is not merely a faithful reproduction of the reality, it is rather a way of calling into question the foundations of the real in its ambivalent appearing (Lebedev, 2016: 194). It is not quite as black and white as one might think, therefore. It could be said that the metaphor of the window suggests new approaches that go beyond the paradigm of watching the world through a rectangular surface. This is precisely what will be excavated in these pages. Bazin himself was aware that the capture of the real by the camera is far from transparency. Actually, he declared that the issue of cinematic realism is ultimately an artifice, a contradictory illusion of reality, which means the rupture of the naturalist convention. After all, it is not so much a matter of veracity but rather of verisimilitude.

But realism in art can only be achieved in one way –through artifice. Every form of aesthetic must necessarily choose between what is worth preserving and what should be discarded, and what should not even be considered. But when this aesthetic

aims in essence at creating the illusion of reality, as does the cinema, this choice sets up a fundamental contradiction which is at once unacceptable and necessary: necessary because art can only exist when such a choice is made. Without it, supposing total cinema was here and now technically possible, we would go back purely to reality. Unacceptable because it would be done definitely at the expense of that reality which the cinema proposes to restore integrally. That is why it would be absurd to resist every new technical development aiming to add to the realism of cinema, namely sound, color, and stereoscopy. Actually the “art” of cinema lives off this contradiction. (Bazin, 1971: 26).

### **Frame: The production of reality**

‘There is a great deal lacking in the continuing claim to regard the cinema as being related to reality, to the world, or to life as it is lived.’ (Daney & Oudart, 1996: 115)

Following the previous comment by Bazin, the cinema might be defined, indeed, as an art, which is the same as saying that it is an elaborated product purposely created to fit with specific goals. Actually, what the spectator watches on the screen is the intended creation of a visual manufacture, so to speak. Even in the case of the most reliable documentary, it would eventually be a matter of artifice. In these circumstances, it becomes potentially problematic to equate the notions of cinema and window. It can be inferred that the cinema constitutes an artificial medium



which disrupts the idea of transparency. In short, the essence of cinema has nothing to do with displaying the real through images, but with creating images as such. Hence, it is not the reality what the cinema captures, quite the contrary, the cinema is first and foremost images in their own right. This leads us to believe that the ultimate aim of the cinema is not to reveal the real, but to *produce* it. So, instead of using the metaphor of the window to articulate the ontology of cinema it would be more accurate to say that it proceeds like a frame.

These concepts would appear to be opposites within film theory. Traditionally, the model of the window stems from the realist stance whereas the frame corresponds to formalist theories. Put bluntly, we have Bazin on the one hand and the Russian montage filmmakers on the other. The key to understand the fundamental differences between both terms, window and frame, is basically that the first one turns the spectator's eye to an outer reality already given beyond the screen, while the second one draws attention to the images displayed on the screen. That said, the window takes the screen as if it were the natural continuation of the world, whereas the frame deals with the visual event that takes place inside its borders. Thus, if the window served to illustrate the world, the frame produces its own world, a world which is purely cinematographic. So in order to summarize the distinguishable features of both systems, we could say that 'the difference may be the difference between finding a world and creating one [...].' (Elsaesser & Hagener, 2015: 18).

In such a scenario it can be stated that, properly speaking, there is not a preexisting reality to be captured by the camera, there is not an essential order to be revealed on the screen, but a reality which is produced inside the perimeter of the rectangular surface.

Even though both concepts meet in the compound “window frame”, the metaphors also suggest somewhat different qualities: one looks through a window, but one looks at a frame. The notion of the window implies that one loses sight of the framing rectangle as it denotes transparency, while the frame highlights the content of the (opaque) surface and its constructed nature, effectively implying composition and artificiality. While the window directs the viewer to something behind or beyond itself -ideally, the separating glass pane completely vanishes in the act of looking- the frame draws attention both to the status of the arrangement as artefact and to the image support itself: one only has to think of classical picture frames and their opulence and ornaments, their conspicuousness and ostentatious display. On the one hand, the window as a medium effaces itself completely and becomes invisible, and on the other, the frame exhibits the medium in its material specificity. (Elsaesser & Hagener, 2015: 15-16).

In this line, the window becomes an “open form” ruled by a centrifugal force: it is conceived as a continuum which creates a link between the inside and the outside of the screen. To that extent, the window treats the audience as a guest who develops faith in the impression of realism. On the

other hand, the frame is a “closed form” whose centripetal action keeps the inside and the outside in tension. In this case, Elsaesser argues that the audience is more like a victim dominated by the organization of the filmic material. Rudolf Arnheim, in his book *Film as Art* (1997), has widely remarked this creative side of the cinema, that is believed to produce new worlds beyond the so-called mimetic functions. In this context, the fact that the camera automatically registers a preexisting reality does not necessarily mean that it provides an impartial image of the real. On the contrary, the cinema always demands a creative engagement with the footage. As a consequence, the questioning of the model of the window makes us realize that the indexical requirement of transparency does not work anymore. This implies the disappearance of what Serge Daney has called the “myth of photology”:

The cinema is therefore connected to the Western metaphysical tradition, a tradition of seeing and sight for which it fulfils the photological vocation. What is photology and what indeed might the discourse of light be? A teleological discourse, undoubtedly, if it is true that teleology “consists of neutralizing duration and force in favour of the illusion of simultaneity and form” (Derrida). [...] Let us designate as “photological” that obstinate will to confuse vision and cognition [*connaissance*], making the latter the compensation of the former and the former the guarantee of the

latter, seeing in directness of vision the model of cognition. (Daney & Oudart, 1996: 116).

At this point, it becomes evident that the film screen has very little in common with the white screen of José Luis Guerin, a screen that tried to reveal a supposed truth. Conversely, the screen transforms itself into a frame capable of producing a new reality. Guerin himself seems to grasp this sense inasmuch as his screen serves as well as a potential frame that embraces passing people and actions occurring inside its borders. What is relevant here is that the frame registers the luminic trace but, contrary to the open window, this does not entail the faithful reproduction of the real. Stated briefly, the reality is born from the cinematographic labor. The real has to be produced. This would be like having two different realms of reality: the physical one that exists outside the screen, and the visual one which is generated inside. So, it is important to note that although the reality on the screen has external referents, it constitutes a reality by its own. The photographic mechanism is no more the source of the cinema. Its ontology is not to be found solely in the index. The frame is then related with the outside by means of physical coexistence but at the same time it is directed towards the inside where the cinematographic reality takes place.

According to Daney, the second stage in the history of cinema is precisely the moment in which the audience changes the naive look and realizes that the cinema is purely an art of images.

In Godard's famous dictum: "It is not a just image, it is just an image". Thus, the ingenuous glance of the spectator loses faith in realism. The cinema goes towards a new dimension focused on the properties of the medium. The cinema as encyclopedia of the world makes room for the cinema as cinema, which shows deliberately its ontological status as visual technique, as occurs for instance with the Nouvelle Vague. To take an example, consider the self-referential reflection on the art of making cinema of François Truffaut's *Day for Night* (*La Nuit américaine*, 1973). In this situation, the innocent gaze of the first spectator in the history of cinema, who believed that the Lumières' train was going to traverse the screen like an open window, has vanished. It is the same with the look of Ana, the little girl from Víctor Erice's *El espíritu de la colmena* (1973), and the boy from *La Morte Rouge* (V. Erice, 2006), both amazed and terrified at their first screening, convinced that the stories continued in the real world, as happened in *Sherlock Jr.* and *The purple rose of Cairo*.

The cinema spectator has grown up and his/her gaze has become skeptical. The cinema is not as it was in the childhood of the cinema audience: the transparent window is now broken, no one believes in the myth of photology. The metaphor of the spectator looking through the window does not work anymore, reversely, what is at stake here is a conversation between frames. Instead of Keaton jumping into the screen in *Sherlock Jr.*, it is more like the two-way dialogue at the end of the film: the projection booth becomes a frame for Buster and his girlfriend, while the cinema

screen, also transformed into a frame, guides him in his first steps into romance. At first glance, it may seem a mimetic window that reproduces life, however the instant in which the screen goes black, followed by the final scene of the couple with the babies, makes evident that what Buster is watching is not pure reality but an artefact, and it is precisely this intentional lack of visual information what reminds the spectator that the screen is not as transparent as one would hope. The window turns opaque. The cinema then becomes a device which works on the production of the real. Therefore, the reality is not *inscribed* in the footage, but *written*, that is, produced within the frame.



Figure 2. Film still from *Sherlock Jr* (B. Keaton, 1924).

These differences between frame and window take on a special relevance in the already mentioned project *Correspondencias* of Jonas Mekas and José Luis Guerin. In his second letter to Guerin, Mekas makes a short movie symmetrically divided. Firstly, the camera captures a tree in

bloom through the window. Thereafter the camera turns towards the editing room where Mekas shows his film editing set up, an old mechanism which works with the manual rotation of a wheel. This system allows to watch old takes inside a small frame which thus gives the impression of photographs in motion –a collection of fading images of people and places taken in different seasons. As Mekas repeats in the film: spring outside, winter in the editing room. After that, the camera returns to the window and, finally, goes out to film directly the tree in the street. Here the “window-frame” diatribe becomes significative enough: a selected reality is filmed through the window, then the editing machine makes clear the artificiality of the filmic material and the potential realities that live within the frame, and at the end, the camera abandons the window to capture the vivid reality face to face.

For his part, Guerin responds by following the same structure. As with a set of Russian dolls, his movie shows first of all an open window in front of an antique building. Later, the camera turns inwards and shows the computer screen where Guerin is editing some footage. Then it focuses the attention on the centrality of such material, which constitutes the main part of the film, and finally the camera comes back to the initial window. Guerin explains that, inspired by Mekas’ letter, he wanted to emulate a two windows dynamics: the one that looks outside and the other that looks inside. Taking into account what has been said earlier, I would contradict Guerin in order to argue

that this specific structure is not really a dialogue between two windows but actually between a window and a frame. Remember the distinction made by Elsaesser: the window is centrifugal, and the frame is centripetal. So, every window that looks inside is a frame by definition, a frame within which the cinema exists.

Perhaps the most illustrative example of this is Abbas Kiarostami's posthumous work *24 Frames* (2017), a beautifully composed project made by twenty-four short movies in which the static camera makes the scenes quite poetic and suggestive. In the frame number six the camera shows an open window. The spectator only has to wait for the reality to appear through it: tree leaves swishing in the wind, clouds wondering around, a couple of birds that stop to rest for a while, a plane that crosses the sky by the left corner. By contrast, in the last frame, the fixed camera shows a closed window. In front of it there is a computer screen where a movie is being edited. As the movie slowly unfolds, the day is dawning and the trees behind the window become visible. Also it can be distinguished a person asleep at the desk, in front of the editing monitor. Thus, the closed window on the one hand, and the sleeping spectator -who is supposed to be also the film editor- on the other, manifest the impossibility of transparency in the cinema and draw the attention to the illuminated screen where the cinematographic reality is happening. In addition, the film in the computer significantly reaches its end at the same time that Kiarostami's own film. All this



sums up the fundamental aspects already seen: the window, the frame, and now the computer monitor.

The semantics of the screen become even more complicated, once we consider the subtle but substantial differences between “screen” and “monitor” with respect to transparency and opacity, but also regarding the quality of the gaze that each type of screen solicits and supports. (Elsaesser & Hagener, 2015: 43).



*Figure 3.* Film still from *24 Frames* (A. Kiarostami, 2017).



Figure 4. Film still from *24 Frames* (A. Kiarostami, 2017).

Finally, I would like to compare the frame and the *parergon* analyzed by Jacques Derrida. Taken from Kant, this term recalls the frame and adornment of an artwork, like the golden frame of a painting or the vestment in a sculpture. In other words, elements that do not belong to the work itself (*ergon*) but only as an added value. However, to a certain extent they are also constitutive parts of the work, so to speak. The *parergon* is not simply the “outside-of-the-work”, a supplement or accessory. In fact, it is located beside the work, it affects the interior of the work from its borders. So the *parergon* delineates the limit inside which the work occurs. If we think about it, this definition fits well with the idea of the cinematographic frame. As was said, the frame is in tension between the inside and the outside of the screen. Not in vain, Elsaesser mentioned the decorative frame of classic paintings when he defined the frame in opposition to the window. Basically, the *parergon* intervenes in the inside of the work, as the frame intervenes in the inside of the screen.

They do so insofar as the interior is empty, so it can be stated that there is no artwork without the parergon, no cinematographic images without the frame. Ultimately, such an idea opposes Bazin's frame, which insists on the referentiality of the window. As also Elsaesser, Bazin said that the frame is centripetal, however this is so inasmuch as there is a true reality outside the frame:

Indeed, it is a mistake to see a picture frame as having merely a decorative or rhetorical function. The fact that it emphasizes the compositional quality of the painting is of secondary importance. The essential role of the frame is, if not to create at least to emphasize the difference between the microcosm of the picture and the macrocosm of the natural world in which the painting has come to take its place. This explains the baroque complexity of the traditional frame whose job it is to establish something that cannot be geometrically established -namely the discontinuity between the painting and the wall, that is to say between the painting and reality. [...] The picture frame polarizes space inwards. On the contrary, what the screen shows us seems to be part of something prolonged indefinitely into the universe. A frame is centripetal, the screen centrifugal. (Bazin, 1967: 165-166).

### **Veil: The simulation of reality**

'The internal edges of a passe-partout are often beveled.'

(Derrida, 1987: 13)

At this point it is worth clarifying that the frame is not just a fenced space where the production of new realities take place. If according to the above it resembles a parergon, now it would be convenient to add the notion of *passe-partout* in order to rethink the ontology of the screen and entirely grasp its full potential. Also coined by Derrida, the term *passe-partout* actually refers to a rectangular piece of cardboard located in between the frame and the picture. Derrida takes this as the example of a versatile structure that constitutes a hybrid of the inside and the outside of a flexible frame. In this sense, the *passe-partout* becomes the natural evolution of the parergon. 'To that extent, the *passe-partout* remains a structure with a movable base; but although it lets something appear, it does not form a frame in the strict sense, rather a frame within the frame.' (Derrida, 1987: 12). So the *passe-partout* is neither fully in line with the window nor the frame. Rather, it must be thought of as an ambivalent structure on the borderline between the two sides of the screen. How can we imagine such a device? Instead of the models of the window and the frame, I suggest the metaphor of the veil.

Thomas Elsaesser (2005: 208) already discussed the veil when he defined Van der Keuken's documentary style as a fine membrane between truth and fiction. This is precisely what needs to be explored in detail: the cinema as a porous structure, a thin layer between the images on the screen and the real world. Hence, the cinema is not a closed frame, much less a window that

transfers the real. It is more specifically a veil moved by the breeze. The cinema screen is then like a floating curtain that separates and unites what is inside and beyond itself, like the *passe-partout*, also a kind of veil that blurs the lines between both spheres. Therefore, it could be said that the veil, contrary to the window, does not *reveal*, but *unveils*. In this regard, it is known that Heidegger characterized his concept for truth, named *aletheia*, as unveiling insofar as it uncovered phenomena, thus allowing beings to show themselves. For Heidegger, truth meant the uncovering of beings, that is, disclosure, unconcealment. ‘As Heidegger interprets the Greek term for truth, *aletheia*, as having the etymological sense of “dis-closing”, “un-covering”, “dis-covering”, “revealing”, that is: “making manifest that which in some sense lies hidden” [...].’ (Koskela, 2012: 121). At first glance, Heidegger’s veil comes very close to the cinematographic window: a latent truth is brought to light in the very moment of being uncovered, in the same way as a preexisting reality is revealed in the instant of opening the window. Such a moment of disclosedness, that Heidegger calls *Dasein*, is of utmost importance given that the phenomenon shows itself solely in the *Dasein*: ‘Being-true as Being-uncovering, is a way of Being for *Dasein*.’ (Heidegger, 2001: 262).

If, as has been said, the truth manifests itself by means of disclosure, it must not be confused with other events like semblance or appearance. According to Heidegger, the first one consists of

showing that what is not, and the second one is an indication or announcement of what effectively exists, like the symptoms that are indicative of an illness. In this way, the appearance indicates a hidden phenomenon, so it should not be confused with the phenomenon itself. For this reason, Heidegger states that what appears does not show itself. ‘According to this, phenomena are never appearances, though on the other hand every appearance is dependent on phenomena.’ (Heidegger, 2001: 53). This being so, the phenomenon is never its appearance nor semblance, this last one considered a mistake by definition. All this establishes a reference-relationship between the phenomenon and the appearance/semblance that adequately/inadequately represents it. For its part, the phenomenon shows itself in itself just in the disclosure.

Both appearance and semblance are founded upon the phenomenon, though in different ways. The bewildering multiplicity of “phenomena” designated by the words “phenomenon”, “semblance”, “appearance”, “mere appearance”, cannot be disentangled unless the concept of the phenomenon is understood from the beginning as that which shows itself in itself. (Heidegger, 2001: 54)

It can be inferred that the uncovering, as well as the semblance and appearance, is strongly attached to the idea of a preexisting reality. The truth appears in the unveiling as it were a window, while in the case of the semblance and appearance it is represented like inside a frame. That is why

Heidegger is interested in the unconcealment in order to know the being itself. However, the alleged transparency of the disclosure is not what it seems. As it has been noted, the window is opaque. Remember from Kiarostami's final frame that the window is actually closed. In this point, Heidegger's interpretation of Dasein may open up a new dimension of truth that could be expanded towards the idea of performativity. The etymological meaning of Dasein, "there being", points out that such an event is immersed in the world through dynamic interactions, in such a way that the truth does not exist independent of Dasein, the truth is not separable from the entities of the world. 'The essence of Dasein lies in its existence.' (Heidegger, 2001: 67). Thus, ironically enough, it could be argued that the Dasein produces the truth that it uncovers. In other words, the truth occurs in the very process of the disclosure, in the sense that the truth is not already concluded, lying behind the veil. To draw back the veil does not mean to find the reality waiting to be discovered. The truth manifests itself in the Dasein, of course, but not as a finished product. In fact, it has to be generated as it is unveiled. That is the reason of the *passe-partout* as a sheer veil.

The result would then be a sort of synthesis of the window and the frame so as to constitute a combination which is neither the revelation of the truth nor its mere production. It is rather a *simulation*: the truth is simulated in the disclosure. How can this be possible? Basically, the unconcealment becomes a process in which the truth *presents itself in its representation*: the truth

exists in its presentation as it is represented in the Dasein. So, the presentation of the truth is only possible in its representation. This is called *simulacrum*, which is not fake, rather, it is true by definition. Conceptually speaking, simulacra are representations transformed into true realities, so they blur the limits between the true and the false. Returning to the veil, it becomes a simulacrum because it shows the phenomenon that manifests itself in its representation. The reality behind the veil is thus produced in its disclosure. To unveil is not to open a window. In “The Origin of the Work of Art” (1936), Heidegger explains that Van Gogh’s painting is the disclosure of what the pair of peasant shoes in truth is. ‘In the work, when there is a disclosure of the being as what and how it is, there is a happening of truth at work.’ (Heidegger, 2002: 16). It is Heidegger himself who, in the disclosure, makes the shoes to be what they actually are. He is simulating the truth, so he is contributing to create the essence which supposedly waited behind the veil to be discovered. If Heidegger said that the appearance was like a symptom that represented an illness, Jean Baudrillard states that, in the simulacrum, it is the symptom what gives birth to the real. He takes precisely the example of an hypochondriac:

Someone who simulates an illness produces in himself some of the symptoms. Thus, feigning or dissimulating leaves the reality principle intact: the difference is always clear, it is only masked; whereas simulation threatens the difference between



“true” and “false”, between “real” and “imaginary”. Since the simulator produces “true” symptoms, is he or she ill or not? (Baudrillard, 2001: 171).

Likewise, the *passe-partout* mixes up the inside and the outside, the reality and the image, the true and the false. Although it sounds like a paradox, the *passe-partout*, that is to say, the veil, which is the place for the *Dasein*, is at the same time the place for the simulacrum and the place for the truth, because the truth exists in its simulacrum. Consequently, the disclosure is far from revealing the world in an indexical way. In fact, what it actually promotes is the unveiling of the *aletheia* understood as a performative veil. In this sense, the screen reaches the truth not by unveiling the reality that appears through the window, but by tearing the *veil of Maya*. Following Schopenhauer, the true reality, the *noumenon*, is powerful will, whereas the phenomenal world is appearance. The *noumenon*, the thing in itself, exists regardless of the subject, but the *phenomenon* exists just because it is perceived. It exists only in the representation, so the world would be an object for its subject. *Esse est percipi*. Then, is it possible to know the *noumenon*? Is it possible to grasp the reality behind the veil of Maya? Influenced by Oriental philosophy and ascetic readings, Schopenhauer claimed that the veil of Maya could be drawn back only in acts of charity and aesthetic experiences because both of them liberate the subject from the will and the burden of the desiring ego.

The veil of *maya* has become transparent for this person, who is practiced in works of love, and the delusion of the *principium individuationis* has deserted him. He recognizes himself, his will, in every being, and so in suffering beings as well. [...] To be cured of this delusion and deception of *maya* and to perform works of love are one and the same. (Schopenhauer, 2010: 400).

That said, I would argue that the veil does not become transparent. The *parergon* has nothing to do with drawing back the veil in search of the noumenon. The only procedure admitted in this scenario is the labile flexibility of the *passe-partout*, not the transparency of the window. So what has to be done is not to move the veil, but to rip aside the veil. Instead of being drawn back, the veil of *Maya* has been torn and it did not find reality whatsoever lying behind. The noumenon and the phenomenon become one in the liminal space of the *passe-partout*, they dissolve into the floating veil. Thereby the noumenon exists in its phenomenon: the essence is born in its representation. This paradigm goes beyond -and synthesizes- the transparency of the open window and the opacity of the frame, giving birth to a light veil which is not a heavy curtain but a fluctuating plateau. As such, the *passe-partout* makes obvious that the veil functions only on condition that it is not transparent, otherwise it would have no purpose at all. ‘For example,

Cranach's *Lucretia* holds only a light band of transparent veil in front of her sex: where is the parergon?' (Derrida, 1987: 57).

### Ending notes: Backdrop and decor

'We no longer believe that truth remains truth when one pulls off the veil [...].'

(Nietzsche, 2008: 8)

As has been remarked, it is just by showing itself that the reality becomes real. This veil is the last stage I want to add in order to rethink the window and the frame: a moving passe-partout that creates the truth in the simulacrum. It is also my conviction that it could be properly named "backdrop" or "decor". A good example of this is found in Apichatpong Weerasethakul's short film *Blue* (2018), a project commissioned by the Paris Opera. The movie is about a woman who tries to sleep while the superimposed image of a fire suddenly appears on her blanket and starts to burn. These disturbing scenes alternate with shots of theatrical backdrops that unveil themselves, veil after veil, image after image, as Daney would say. This is, indeed, the very nature of cinema: it is not the truth revealed in the image, nor is it an image as such, but an image within an image and so on. We have certainly arrived at the extent that the cinema is neither a just image nor just

an image. In fact, it goes beyond both the window and the frame because what is found in the disclosure behind the veil is another veil. In this line, the theater in Apichatpong's movie is no longer that of the white screen photographed by Hiroshi Sugimoto. Conversely, the frame, now transformed into a veil, combines lots of images as the curtains descend and rise again, thus developing images that are halfway between the inside and the outside, they appear and disappear in the in-between of the *passe-partout*, in front of a transparent window which thus proves its complete uselessness.



Figure 5. Film still from *Blue* (A. Weerasethakul, 2018).

As a result, the decor of this oniric atmosphere works like the *passe-partout* that creates the real in the raising and lowering of the painted backdrops, so what is unveiled is not a preexisting reality, but its simulacrum, a polymorphic image in which the real takes place. Egyptian film director Ahmad Abdalla makes a similar point in the movie *Decor* (2014), where the limits

between the reality and the image are interwoven in such a way that the entire film becomes a reflection about the limits of the real, the cinema and the representation. The main character, Maha, who works as an artistic director, is in charge of building the decor of a movie. She is involved in this project when she starts to confuse the cinematographic reality and her real life. In this situation it is no coincidence that the decor that she has designed is identical to her own house's living room. It is relevant to point out that Maha was fascinated by the cinema since childhood and watched her favorite films over and over again. Now in her adult life, the world of these movies enter her own world to the extreme that she passes from one to the other without cut or mediation. In one of these realities she is an independent woman that works with her boyfriend in a movie studio, but in the other she is unhappily married with other man and is the mother of a girl. Even her appearance changes; her clothes, look and hair adopt a modern or traditional style depending on the case. So it could be inferred that she evades herself from a conventional life and takes refuge in the cinema.



Figure 6. Film still from *Decor* (A. Abdalla, 2014).

However, this is not like *The purple rose of Cairo*, as we may think. The open window that allowed the continuity with the real does not let Maha to jump inside, as did Buster Keaton. She cannot even perceive the ephemeral moment in which one world changes into the other, because they are connected as if they were one and the same. They flow and merge into the subtle unveiling of the simulacrum which interweaves both realms. Nonetheless, the window becomes a persistent element all over the film. The window built for the decor, which recreates a false reality behind, contrasts with Maha dazzled by the sun leaning out of the window at home. Later on, she looks through the window and observes the monotonous life of the women of the neighborhood. Then she turns round and her attention is caught by the screen in the front wall of the living room: she identifies herself with the woman in the movie, who also looks through the window, thus drawing a strong parallel. As in the case of Mekas and Guerin, we find again a window to the outside and a frame to the inside. However, the procedure in *Decor* goes a step further: properly speaking, there is neither outside nor inside. For Maha, there is no difference at all. They are the same in the simulacrum of the cinematographic terrain. The veil bends inwards and outwards.



Figure 7. Film still from *Decor* (A. Abdalla, 2014).



Figure 8. Film still from *Decor* (A. Abdalla, 2014).

This conclusion becomes clear when the camera -a substitute for Maha's view- flies out the window, reaches the opposite building, goes through a window, enters a room and finally comes face to face with a screen where a movie is being played. So we have come full circle: another *Rear Window* that goes beyond the opposite window, but this time what it sees is a movie screen. This is the sense of the cinema as decor: neither window nor frame, but simulacrum. The spectator

cannot elucidate the authentic reality lived by Maha because this is not the point, both realities are the same, folded and unfolded, veiled and unveiled in the in-between of the *passe-partout*. As the woman dreamt the veils of the reality in *Blue*, so does Maha in her hallucinations, simulating a decor for her existential hypochondria. Hence, such a decor is not the one of Bazin, understood as a frame in opposition to the window:

Because it is only part of the architecture of the stage, the decor of the theater is thus an area materially enclosed, limited, circumscribed, the only discoveries of which are those of our collusive imagination. Its appearances are turned inward facing the public and the footlights. It exists by virtue of its reverse side and its absence from anything beyond, as the painting exists by virtue of its frame. Just as the picture is not to be confounded with the scene it represents and is not a window in a wall. The stage and the decor where the action unfolds constitute an aesthetic microcosm inserted perforce into the universe but essentially distinct from the Nature which surrounds it. It is not the same with cinema, the basic principle of which is a denial of any frontiers to action. (Bazin, 1967: 104).

What is more, *Decor* ends by stressing that, after all, it is a movie. At the window, Maha looks her boyfriend and husband leaving the clinic where she tries to recover from her mental crisis. She draws the curtains and the title “The End” appears over. But then, surprisingly, the camera turns round and shows the audience in a movie theater. It is the premiere of the movie.



Maha, the two men, and the rest of the crew applaud the success. So, we realize that they are really the actors -and spectators- of the movie, and we cannot help but think about the end of Kiarostami's *Taste of Cherry* (1997). When they finally leave the cinema and go out in the street, the omnipresent black and white suddenly becomes colored for a second, which evokes that it is, indeed, a movie but inside another movie; a movie dealing with the reality. These are the many layers of the simulacrum of cinema. The decor, as a veil, gives form to the reality inside and outside the movie screen. Therefore, I am inclined to believe that 'It is no longer a question of a false representation of reality (ideology), but of concealing the fact that the real is no longer real, and thus saving the reality principle.' (Baudrillard, 2001: 175). In effect, it is no more a matter of ideology, because we no longer believe in the myth of photology. In these circumstances, we still have the responsibility of questioning *what is cinema*.

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## NOTES

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