

FRAME

‘As far as I know, I was the first to extract the painting from the frame by placing it in relief rather than inserting it into the frame. I had observed that a frameless painting works better than a framed painting’. We can start from this brief observation by Piet Mondrian to show how the frame, being a concrete object, is intimately linked to the existence of a picture. The frame starts to represent a theoretical question in the aesthetic reflection and in art criticism at the beginning of the 20th century, precisely when it gets deprived of its function and centrality in painting.

An essay by Georg Simmel, *The Picture Frame: An Aesthetic Study*, dates back to 1902. The essay recognizes the dignity of the frame as a philosophical problem and questions the frame from purely aesthetic perspectives: the question of limits, for example, and the separation that it marks between the work and the world that surrounds it, as a guarantee of the artistry of the former. By virtue of the separation which the frame guarantees, it becomes the bearer of an essential synthetic capacity, which consists in the internal connection of the elements that make up the work. The frame is the gesture of caesura that allows the concreteness of the real world to be opposed to the unreality of the artistic image. However, the frame is also the place where the contiguity between the artistic object and the environment in which it is placed can be shown: this is the reason why the frame has often been recognized as something hybrid and amphibious.

Janus-faced, just like the cinema, the frame allows to identify a long series of questions that this issue aims to address. One line of research, among others, is that precisely in coincidence with the loss of its centrality in painting, the frame becomes a central concern for the then nascent cinematographic art. Not by chance Rudolf Arnheim – author of the important volume *Film As Art* (written in the course of a decade, between 1930 and 1940) – has reflected upon essential questions of perception in relation to the existence of the frame: the relationship between the center and the periphery of the image, as well as that between the figure and the background. The presence – just like the disappearance – of the frame calls attention to another essential element for the understanding of all artistic phenomena and their use: the spectator, who is entrusted with the success of the overall functioning of the work.

The relationship between cinema and other arts. In the way we began to present it, the theoretical question that revolves around the frame is the occasion to go back to rethinking the relationship between cinema and other arts. First of all, as it is easy to think, between cinema and painting. In Eisenstein’s terms, the question here is considering the compositional principles proper to cinema (within the single frame, as well as in the bond that holds two different shots together) as the result of a development, made of permanences and innovations, which from the painting leads to the production of filmic images. A long series of studies – from *Sense and Non-sense* by Merleau-Ponty to Jacques Aumont’s *The Eye Endless* – dealt with such relationship. The technical possibilities of digital cinema have appeared, in the intentions of many directors, as the unmissable opportunity to trace the origin of the cinematographic image back to its pictorial matrix, even before the birth of photography. This is the thesis that animates Godard’s production of the last twenty years, following *Histoire(s) du cinéma*. This is also what films like *The Lady and the Duke*

(Rohmer, 2001) and *Nightwatching* (Greenaway, 2007) are about, albeit in a different form. Perhaps the same intention can be traced back to the numerous film projects that, even in recent years, have made the museum a place of undoubted cinematographic interest: just think of *Russian Ark* (Sokurov, 2001), *Une visite au Louvre* (Straub and Huillet, 2004) and *National Gallery* (Wiseman, 2014).

The limits of the frame and the off camera. In strictly cinematographic terms, the theme of the frame immediately recalls questions that have always contributed to defining the very status of the filmic representation. Thinking of the frame, in this sense, means questioning its limits problematically, as an unequivocal indication of the existence of a place – the off camera – that exceeds the space of the staging, inside or outside of it. All the surfaces that, inside the frame, identify, by isolating it, a further space precluded to the eye, which acts as an interrogation for the spectator, can be called frames. The *noir* is the cinematographic genre that perhaps, better than others, has made use of frames intended, in this broad sense, as figures of the in-camera. From *Lura* (Preminger, 1944) to *Vertigo* (Hitchcock, 1954), the exhibition of paintings and frames is a useful tool for the *mise en abyme* of cinematographic representation: a means to continue to reflect, even today, on the potential of the cinematic device, in the moment of its radical rethinking.

It is still the off camera – this time understood as the elsewhere that exceeds the framing limits and includes the space that is not (and cannot) be included within the frame itself – to place one of the most relevant theoretical questions linked to the frame: its complex relationship with the real, contiguous yet separated from the specific form of representation that each film builds up. If this is true, to speak of a frame means, once again, to speak of “realism”, even in its most recent and sophisticated forms, which refers to works of “fiction” or “documentary” style. The off camera that the existence of a frame indicates is, in any case, the space of life that continues, beyond the limits of what we can see. This is what happens, in an exemplary way, in all the films by Jean-Pierre and Luc Dardenne, as in those by Abbas Kiarostami. The new frontiers of contemporary documentary dramatize, in an original form, the nature of the frame through hybrid forms of representation: Stefano Savona’s latest film, *Samouni Road* (2018), frames, for example, long sequences of animation inside the genre of the documentary. Here, as elsewhere, the frame marks the passage and intersection of different regimes of cinematographic representation.

Screens, supports, formats. Along with the framing, the supports with which vision can take place serve as frames. Dealing with the issue of framing means therefore taking into consideration the evolution of the cinematic screen and its formats (from 4:3 to the cinemascope), up to the appearance of new luminous screens (from television, computers to tablets and smartphones) which today represent, in many cases, the device through which films are seen. Even in such technical/technological variation, the question of the frame poses important theoretical questions, as demonstrated by the flourishing of lines of study dedicated to this topic. Reflecting on the frame means, for example, focusing on the centrality of the support of the vision and its ability to modify, in an essential manner, the spectator’s experience. The cinema itself has long reflected on this specific meaning of the frame, understood here as a screen: from *Minority Report* (Spielberg, 2002) to *Artaud Double Bill*, Atom Egoyan’s short film contained in the collective work *Chacun*

son cinéma (2007), the apparition of new screens is the occasion for the cinema to create new strategies of narration and fruition.

Deadline for the submission of the abstract: July 7, 2019

Deadline for the submission of the essay: September 15, 2019

Essays should be expressly written for the journal and should strictly respect the following word limit:

***Focus*: Min 5000 Max 6000 words (including spaces and footnotes)**

***Rifrazioni*: Min 2000 Max 3000 words (including spaces and footnotes)**

Send to: redazionefatamorgana@gmail.com