

Recursive Reflections: Types, Modes and Forms of Cinematic Reflexivity (forthcoming in *Metacinema: The Form and Content of Filmic Reference and Reflexivity*. David LaRocca ed., Oxford University Press, 2022)

** Selected Pre-Proofed Excerpts Only*

...reflection on reflexiveness, like the topic itself,
can be a labyrinthian experience for both writer and reader

Don Fredericksen

There is considerable consensus concerning cinematic reflexivity in broad terms. Few, if any, critics and theorists are likely to dispute that *The Man with the Movie Camera*, *Breathless*, and *Mulholland Drive* are highly reflexive films; that the film within the film and breaking the proverbial ‘fourth wall’ are conventional reflexive devices; and that there are substantial differences (whether of kind or degree) between reflexive and non-reflexive films, styles, and their experiences. Beyond such general characterizations, however, one finds a marked diversity of views on the detailed workings of reflexivity as a form of signification, communication, and artistic expression. These include its specific effects on viewers; its historical and stylistic evolution; its relation to cinematic realism and illusionism; and the political and social critical dimensions of reflexivity.

Over a number of decades film theorists have addressed these and related issues through the creation of more or less detailed typologies of reflexivity rooted in various, often implicit, ideas and assumptions concerning it. As one would expect, together with reflecting shifting movements in the tectonics of film theory, these schemes have mirrored changes in reflexive practice in cinema and allied forms of moving-image representation. Recognizing, like David Bordwell, that “in any discussion of reflexivity as a theoretical concept, a great many distinctions have to be made” literary and media theorists, narratologists, and semioticians have also provided typologies of reflexivity, self-reference, and “metareference” in works and media.

¹ Some of these explicitly encompass cinema and others are applicable to it.

This chapter offers a critical overview of certain of these classifications of types of cinematic reflexivity, under the headings of which fall a number of reflexive devices. As is typical of all classificatory enterprises, what these frameworks leave out is in some cases as instructive as what they include; and the points where they overlap are as illuminating as

where they diverge. Divided here, for the purpose of analysis, into three general categories – focused on reflexivity’s *referential content, communicative structures and functions*, and *intended effects* on viewers – together these typologies highlight recurring tendencies in its theorization, including certain lacunae with respect to some of reflexivity’s under-analyzed features and effects. In the interest of beginning to fill in a few of these theoretical gaps, and as one step towards a more comprehensive account of cinematic reflexivity, I will also sketch the outlines of a new, transmedial typology.² This is centered on reflexive ‘forms,’ as distinct from specific devices and general modes. So as to not put the conceptual cart before the horse, however, it is best to begin with some general definitions and distinctions concerning reflexivity and related processes. As it is only once we have a clear handle on what cinematic reflexivity actually is, and what connects it with, and differentiates from, other features of films, that we may begin to better understand its diverse manifestations.

Thankfully, differences amongst reflexivity in general and often related features of films are somewhat more straightforward. Although here, again, one finds a number of contrasting concepts and definitions.

Metafiction

Some literary texts address their own fictional status. Frequently termed *metafiction*, as, most basically, “fiction about fiction,” this is widely considered to be a defining feature of “postmodern” literature.³ Exemplified by Nabokov’s *Pale Fire*, Calvino’s *If on a Winter’s Night a Traveler*, and John Barthes’s “Lost in the Funhouse,” among other novels and stories, Patricia Waugh maintains that metafiction is a sustained exploration of the “relationship between the world *of* the fiction and the world *outside* of the fiction,” which necessitates a higher-order level of discourse within works on the model of meta-language, as language used to speak about language.⁴

Numerous films foreground aspects of their own narration and fiction, and fictionality and storytelling, more generally. This sometimes extends to generic, stylistic, and technological factors germane to constructing and experiencing film and television narratives and story-worlds, as seen in the metafictional play of Crichton’s *Westworld* (1973) and Nolan’s and Joy’s large-budget television remake of it (2016 -). In both cases, the conspicuously hi-tech narrative world-making represented *within* the fictional stories – which provides characters in the eponymous fantasy theme-park with a genre cinema-like, yet three dimensionally immersive and interactive experience – closely parallels the high-tech (for the respective times) moving image world-making *of* the productions and their stories.⁵ While

here and elsewhere cinematic metafiction has a clear reflexive aspect, not all, or even most, reflexivity in films is metafictional. Since works also foreground medial, formal, stylistic, or contextual features that do not turn on fictional reference making and storytelling.⁶ Clearly, it is to these other aspects of filmmaking/viewing that reflexivity in *non-fiction* cinema, both documentary and experimental, is focused. Thus, metafictional reference, where present, is best thought of as a particular sort of cinematic reflexivity, broadly construed.

While some writers employ the term *metacinema* as shorthand for cinematic metafiction, other ‘meta-’ descriptions of films with different, if sometimes related, meanings have been put forward.⁷ These include Marc Cerisuello’s understanding of a “metafilm” as one that “deals *explicitly* with cinema through representing those responsible for production” [my italics]; and Metz’s diametrically contrasting employment of “metafilmic” to refer instead to a film’s *implicit* evocation of cinema, e.g. through visual *myse en abyme* figurations (see below).⁸

Metalepsis

Citing Marx Brothers comedies, Woody Allen’s *The Purple Rose of Cairo*, and Altman’s *The Player*, among other films, the widely influential French narratologist and literary theorist Gérard Genette (2014) extends his concept of narrative *metalepsis* to cinema.⁹ Subsequently modified in various ways by other writers, in Genette’s original formulation *metalepsis* is a “paradoxical...transgression between the world of the telling and the world of the told”¹⁰ resulting from “any intrusion by the extradiegetic narrator or narratee into the diegetic universe (or by diegetic characters into a metadiegetic universe, etc.), or the inverse [...]”¹¹ As John Pier, Marie Laure Ryan, and Werner Wolf, among others, point out, *metalepsis* is a highly transmedial narrative device. It is found in some plays, films, television shows, graphic novels and comics, and video and computer games. Like metafiction, *metalepsis* is particularly prevalent in postmodern fiction and drama, although as modern and modernist novels and plays like Sterne’s *Tristram Shandy* (adapted, with reflexive cinematic equivalents for its *metaleptic* conceits, in Winterbottom’s *A Cock and Bull Story*), Gide’s *The Counterfeiters*, and Pirandello’s *Six Characters in Search of an Author*, demonstrate, it is by no means confined to it.

Metalepsis is undoubtedly a useful concept in theorizing the reflexive structure and content of films where there is such direct and specifically “paradoxical” movement between ontological and narrative levels, on the part of a narrator, characters, or the narration itself.¹² Extended (as in Genette’s analysis) to certain occasions of actors stepping out of their roles and real people appearing as themselves in films, *metalepsis* is still too restrictive a concept

and occurs relatively too infrequently in film practice, to be the basis for a general theory or classification of cinematic reflexivity. Which, as already mentioned, also takes many other and quite different forms.

Self-Consciousness

Since the 19th century, it has been common to refer to reflexivity in an artwork as figuratively evidencing *self-consciousness*, or *self-awareness*, analogous to the reflexive capacities of human thought and consciousness; a relation between art and mind influentially elaborated by Hegel and Friedrich Schiller. In film theory and criticism, however, and with an analogue in literary studies, self-consciousness has another, more precise sense, referring to styles and techniques that draw particular attention to themselves. Thus, frequent descriptions of Max Ophüls' and Stanley Kubrick's self-conscious camera movements, the self-conscious, tableau-like compositions of Peter Greenaway's and Wes Anderson's films, and so on. Film theorists have associated such formal and stylistic self-consciousness, which varies widely in degree, intent, and effects, with cinematic modernism (versus classicism), formalism (versus realism), and contemporary, "post-classical" Hollywood cinema (e.g., in contrast to the so-called invisible style of classical Hollywood productions).

Some scholars, including Stam, consider such self-consciousness to be a general type of reflexivity. If so, it represents a low grade (or what Metz calls "weak") reflexivity. Consider the relevant differences between the equally unconventional and attention-drawing, long-take traveling shots that open Welles's *Touch of Evil* and the aforementioned *The Player*. In keeping with Stam's notion of films' variable "coefficient of reflexivity," as a matter of degree, the latter is considerably more reflexive, quantitatively and qualitatively (i.e. experientially), than the former. Since *The Player*'s traveling shot also depicts a film studio, occurs in a film explicitly about filmmaking, and includes characters discussing the length and intricacy of *Touch of Evil*'s opening shot.

When self-conscious presentation is pervasive throughout a film it may translate into what Bill Nichols identifies as "stylistic reflexivity" as a category in its own right. Disrupting "received conventions" through "gaps, reversals, and unexpected turns that draw attention to the work of style as such," like Stam, Nichols contrasts this with the overall less visible workings of style typical of more conventionally illusionistic, plot and story-centered, cinematic practices.¹³ Nevertheless, in their basic forms, the primary difference between reflexivity, and stylistic and narrative self-consciousness, is that the latter, as pertaining to the *way in which* a film presents what it does, and tells a story, is contentless, in this sense.

Whereas, in broadly semiotic, cognitive, and functional terms, reflexivity not only has but *is* referential content, in being a symbol of the film, or a part of it, as a film.¹⁴

Mise en Abyme

From the French for “put into [the] abyss,” the term *mise en abyme* traditionally denotes (a) images embedded within the same or similar images, as in some heraldic emblems; or (b) stories within stories. In cinema, by extension, it pertains visually, to images, screens, and frames contained within the film’s image and frame, and the screen on which it is viewed; or narratively, to nested sequences and stories, and attendant narrative framing devices. Films such as Weine’s *The Cabinet of Doctor Caligari*, Has’s *The Saragossa Manuscript*, Buñuel’s *The Discrete Charm of the Bourgeoisie*, and Tarantino’s *Pulp Fiction*, indicate the wide range of innovative ways in which filmmakers have employed the latter.

Whether or not all visual *mise en abyme* structures in films – such as the multiple mirrored images of central characters in Welles’s *Citizen Kane* and *The Lady from Shanghai* – are necessarily reflexive, or if this meaning depends on the narrative and thematic context in which they occur, hinges on how cinematic *mise en abyme* and reflexivity are more specifically theorized. Beyond a mere duplication and mirroring of elements, some writers, like Stam, build a strong microcosmic aspect into the very definition of *mise en abyme* (“by which a passage, a section, or sequence *plays out in miniature the processes of the text as a whole*” [my italics]). This entails that at a minimum such features always amount to self-reference on the part of the films that contain them, regardless of whether and how they are further foregrounded.¹⁵ If, however, one places emphasis on the spatial-temporal and narrative situation of the *mise en abyme* compositions in the two films mentioned above, for instance, and their range of possible (non-reflexive) diegetic and thematic meanings – and works with the general definition of cinematic reflexivity I have suggested – in these and other cases it represents yet another relatively weak form of it.¹⁶ One that is closer to instances of what Metz analyses as form-centered “metacinematographic enunciation.” Wherein an element of a film’s *mise en scène* ‘merely’ duplicates perceptual characteristics of the cinematic image itself (e.g., its rectilinear framing; the rectangularity of the screen on which it is viewed), amounting to a “semi-involuntary witnessing of the cinematic mechanism”.¹⁷ Most of the images of the doorway of the Edwards’ homestead in Ford’s *The Searchers*, framing the view outside it, are examples of what Metz seems to have in mind. This stands in contrast to what he terms “*metafilmic*” *mise en abyme*, including some “secondary screen” configurations.¹⁸ These generate much stronger, if still figurative, reflexive associations with cinema, and with the film as a whole, through aspects of

represented content, and the narrative and thematic context in which they appear, along with their visual form. The final appearance of the doorway, and the image-within-the-image it frames in silhouette, in the last shot of *The Searchers*, before the door ceremoniously closes in the film's equivalent of a final curtain, clearly belongs to this latter category.

In actual critical practice, historical, stylistic, and interpretative context often has the last word, if there is one, on the matter in more borderline, or open, cases (a point which Francois Jost stresses repeatedly).¹⁹ Nonetheless, while too large a topic to be adequately addressed here, and while *all* reflexivity (as referential) involves a contextual interpretation of what appears on screen and on the soundtrack, such ambiguity – if seldom outright indeterminacy – indicates the need to try to distinguish in principle features and devices in films which, to borrow an Aristotelian distinction, are *intrinsically* reflexive and those that are *instrumentally*, i.e. contingently and contextually, reflexive.²⁰ And also, and more generally, to acknowledge the difference between reflexive elements that are relatively more or less significant with respect to a film's experience, intentions, and interpretation, as a whole.

Allusion/Intertextuality

Whether characterized as *allusion* or *intertextuality*, a film's reference to another film, e.g. *Touch of Evil* in *The Player*, is *ipso facto* reflexive on the general definition I have offered. This may or may not be the case, however, in relation to a film's reference, or direct incorporation, of works in other media and art forms, or representation of those media/forms more generally. The test here, again, is whether such allusion or intermedial incorporation on the part of a film involves significant self-and-cinema-related meaning, even if implicit, and a corresponding viewer awareness of it. Bearing this in mind, Stam is right to maintain that together with drawing attention to their "production," "authorship," "reception," and "textual procedures," reflexive films often foreground their "intertextual influences."²¹ This may center on adaptation, as he points out with reference to Godard's *Contempt*, in relation to its film-within-the-film's adaptation of Homer's *Odyssey*, and Reisz's *The French Lieutenant's Woman*, scripted by Harold Pinter, in which Fowles's eponymous novel is presented as a film in the process of being made.²² Also at work in these films, and highly significant both theoretically and historically, are what may be termed *intermedial* and *trans-art* reflexivity. These reflexive forms, to which I will return, operate through the representation of other art forms and media in films as vehicles for reflection on cinema from at least one ontological remove.

Proceeding from these basic definitions and distinctions to more detailed classifications of reflexivity, these may be divided for analytical purposes into three main areas of focus: the objects of reflexive reference in films, or its *content*, in this sense; its effects on viewers, or *reception*; and the *communicative functions* of reflexivity, understood in terms borrowed from linguistic semantics and pragmatics. Just as these working, higher-order categories unavoidably overlap, so to do the specific typologies I have placed under these headings. This is not surprising, given that past theorists have tended to repeatedly classify, and re-classify, many of the same reflexive phenomena, including in some of the same films, often making relatively minor but none-the-less significant conceptual and descriptive modifications.

Reflexivity as Communication

Discussions of reflexivity's intended effects on viewers highlights that like other forms of cinematic meaning it is, at base, a communication – albeit of a very particular kind – from the work and its makers to audiences. Semiotic theory, as the analysis of communication through material signs, together with allied linguistic, narratological, and rhetorical concepts and categories, is thus *prima facie* well suited to provide means of classifying reflexive constructions. Metz, in his last major work, critically (re)appropriates Roman Jakobson's, Émile Benveniste's, and Genette's shared, aforementioned concept of "enunciation." Meaning, the act of "utterance" from the "enunciator" to the "addressee," as a relation of two subjectivities, e.g. the 'you' and the 'I'.²³ In light of Bordwell's, Edward Brannigan's and other theorist's objections to previous applications of enunciative frameworks to cinematic narration (criticisms which Metz largely endorses), he argues that cinema instead involves "acts" of "*impersonal* enunciation" on the part of the filmic "text" itself. Embedded in the work during its creation (and reflecting back upon it), the acts in question are foregrounded as such. Avoiding appeals to implied narrators and other such projections of subjectivity onto films (the anthropomorphic "humanoid enunciation" approach to cinema Metz rejects), this self-referential address is a one-way stream of communication from film work to spectator. Encompassing reflexivity, as traditionally understood, it operates either through a film's fictional story world, or outside of it (i.e., non-diegetically), but always by way of conventional, historically evolved semiotic devices. These include voice-over narration, inter-titles, direct address, and several varieties of the film-within-the-film, the use of which Metz traces from early cinema to the time of his writing in the early 1990s.²⁴

Predating Metz’s account, in theorizing cinematic reflexivity Don Fredericksen also draws on Jakobson’s work, which synthesizes aspects of C.S. Peirce’s and Ferdinand de Saussure’s foundational *semiotics* and language-based *semiology*, respectively. Unlike Saussure, who famously brackets the actual speech act and its pragmatic contexts, instead focusing on the historically unchanging, ‘synchronic’ structures of language (*langue* rather than *parole*) – but in common with Peirce – Jakobson was concerned with its concrete uses. Fredericksen transposes Jakobson’s posited six basic communicative functions of language to suggested functions of reflexivity. Although both Bordwell and Stam single out the resulting “six-fold categorization of reflexive modes” in cinema (**Fig. 1**) for its fundamental approach to the subject, and in the main it remains highly relevant, it has not received the attention it deserves.²⁵

To briefly summarize each of the modes in question, in “emotive” speech acts, the emphasis of the message is on the expressed state of the speaker; that is, his or her feeling

Linguistic function	Emphasis of the speech act	Reflexive cinema equivalent
Emotive	Expressed attitude of speaker	Irony
Conative	The addressee (e.g., request for response/action)	Direct Address and Voice-over
Referential/Denotative	Factual context of speech act	Foregrounded ontology of medium and/or fiction
Phatic	Speaker/addressee social relation	Attention on the film/viewer relationship

Metalingual	Linguistic codes	Reference to cinematic signs/codes
Poetic	Expressive form/materiality of language	Foregrounded formal/material features (spatial, temporal, rhythmic, graphic, auditory)

Fig. 1: Fredericksen’s Six Reflexive Modes (from Jakobson’s Semantic Functions of Language).

or attitude. Fredericksen takes this to correspond to the “attitude” of a film, as reflecting that of the filmmaker, and expressed through its “tone.”²⁶ Following Elsaesser’s characterizations of the “indirect” reflexivity of a good deal of post-New Wave art cinema, he regards the tone in question as reflexive if it is ironic, understood as creating a perceived distance between the filmmaker, or narrator, and what appears on screen.²⁷ As is also discussed by Nichols, in relation to documentary cinema, such self-referential irony implicitly raises “the question of the author’s own attitudinal relation to his or her subject matter.”²⁸ Taking many different, more or less reflexive forms, this expressed authorial distance has increased markedly since Fredericksen’s classification. It is now widely regarded as a characteristic trait of postmodern cinema, with its tendency to place story and narration in figurative quotation marks.

Jakobson’s “conative” function of language is the opposite of the emotive in that it is the listener who is the object of the message, as in a command or a question requiring response. Fredericksen identifies this function with a character’s/actor’s address of the camera and with voice-over narration. In both instances, the cinematic fiction is bypassed in favor of a more direct communication between film and audience. He links Jakobson’s third category, the ubiquitous “referential” (or “denotative”) function of language – where focus is on the empirical and practical situation in which the speech act occurs and to which it specifically refers – with a film’s drawing attention to the ontology of the cinematic image and of fictional characters and events. In other words, a film’s probing of “existence relations” between cinematic representation and fiction, on the one hand, and extra-work reality and standards of truth (as correspondence with this reality), on the other hand.²⁹ In common with a good deal of modern film theory, this reflexive mode is concerned with the “psychological and ideological” ramifications of these relations. For Fredericksen it is

frequently overtly political and often involves Brechtian-style alienation (*Verfremdungseffekt*) devices.³⁰

The social relationship between speaker and hearer, and the channel of communication itself, is the object of Jakobson's "phatic" function (similar to the conative one, yet less direct). Fredericksen associates it with various ways that films acknowledge the audience as engaged in an active relationship with them, and with cinema, more generally. This includes characters watching films (within the film) and other represented situations that circularly mirror the activity of the viewer. Here we may add that some films foreground their dynamic relationship with spectators in a highly confrontational way: less a figurative conversation than an all-out assault on the audience's senses and beliefs. Such is the case in Michael Haneke's *Funny Games*, both the original German-language film and Haneke's own Hollywood remake, whose aggressive reflexivity is centered on its depiction of graphic, senseless violence as a means of exploring the fraught ethics of film spectatorship. Under the phatic heading, Fredericksen also aptly singles out a film's invitation, or demand, as it were, for more active viewer participation than is otherwise common, thereby placing the viewer in the position of a virtual co-creator.³¹ This strategy has a special relevance for what has been more recently analyzed as the contemporary (i.e., post-1990) "puzzle" and "mind game" film.³² The reflexivity quotient of the cognitively challenging narratives of Lynch's *Lost Highway*, Nolan's *Memento* and *The Prestige*, Villeneuve's *Arrival*, and other works that have been placed in these categories, may be usefully understood in such participatory and ludic terms.

Like other semioticians and linguists, Jakobson identifies a specific "metalingual function" whereby a sentence, for instance, reflexively refers both to itself and to the codes of language it instantiates. In common with Metz, Barthes, and other theorists, Fredericksen sees a cinematic equivalent in reflexive films that foreground their semiotic structures of signs and codes or, contrastively, those of conventional illusionist cinema. Unlike the ontological nature of the "referential" reflexivity mentioned above, this mode, which notably overlaps with others, is cast as largely epistemological, concerned with knowledge and meaning relations. Given meta-language's demonstrated subversive capacities, such reflexivity is also frequently critical-political, and may involve the previously noted audio-visual deconstruction of the connotative codes of classical Hollywood cinema, which (on this view) shape the viewer's understanding of what is represented on screen and, thereby, the off-screen realities to which they refer.³³

Widely credited as a highly original and influential contribution to semiotic and semantic theory, Jakobson's last posited function – the “poetic” – applies to the specifically *aesthetic* use of language, or other system of communication. Here the signifier does not disappear in the signifying process, as a transparent pointer to the signified, but draws attention its own perceptual form and “materiality,” thereby deliberately rendering the signifying relation opaque.³⁴ Owing to its aesthetic emphasis, and stress on language's concrete materiality (e.g. read and spoken rhythms), in many respects this is the most directly applicable of Jakobson's categories to cinema. Fredericksen allies it with a film's drawing particular attention to the “material” aspects of the medium, including spatial, temporal, rhythmic, and graphic features, and, more literally, the celluloid film strip.³⁵ To his examples of early avant-garde films and parts of canonical New Wave works (*Persona*; *Breathless*) we may add the mature films of Ozu, which in this way, among others, famously diverge from the conventions of classical Hollywood-style cinema and the IMR;³⁶ together with formally experimental 21st-century narrative films, such as Caruth's *Upstream Color*, Glazer's *Under the Skin*, and Wheatley's *A Field in England* (to cite a few English-language cinema examples). Fredericksen associates such formal-poetic reflexivity with what the Russian Formalist critics, and Bordwell, applying their concepts to cinema, describe as defamiliarization (*ostranenie*). Meaning, a work's use of unconventional forms and techniques that disrupt habitual patterns of perception and provoke heightened awareness of the conventions it violates, as well as of the ordinary realities it thereby transforms.

Considering this schema as a whole, Fredericksen justly maintains that it is a mistake to confine reflexivity and “metacinema” to the “meta-discursive functions” alone.³⁷ That is to say, the *phatic*, *referential*, *metalingual* (and in a special sense, the *poetic*) modes, as the focus of most semiotic accounts, in contrast to the *conative* and *emotive* ones. Since clearly all six posited modes of cinematic communication may be the significant object of reflexivity. Along with this and other insights, Fredricksen's classification also usefully identifies a specifically “rhetorical” category of reflexivity – comprising the *conative* and *phatic* – alongside tonal, formal, ontological, and semiotic types.³⁸ As my supplementary examples in the foregoing indicate, all are very much present in contemporary fiction (and non-fiction) cinema, including in the complex, overlapping combinations that Fredericksen acknowledges. Some, such as ontological reflexivity, have gained added impetus and a new significance amidst the sea change from celluloid to digital filmmaking and viewing – including specific technologies like CGI, HD formats, and contemporary 3-D – and filmmaker's, as well as theorist's, explorations of constitutive properties of both of these

moving-image media and their experience. In this vein, Laura Mulvey analyzes the deliberately anachronistic use of celluloid rear-projection techniques in some contemporary films. These draw attention to conventional, psychologically and socially constructed relations amongst cinematic representation, stylistic realism, and three-dimensional reality, in the current digital era.³⁹

A chief merit of Fredericksen's account is its showing that the "reflexive film can address itself to all constitutive parts of the 'film event.'"⁴⁰ Like other semiotic-linguistic approaches to cinema, more generally, however, *his classification* does not, and cannot, address numerous perceptual, expressive, and affective aspects of the "film event." As many writers over the past decades have pointed out from their respective cognitivist, phenomenological, and Deleuzian perspectives (amongst others), linguistic semiology does not map directly onto the cinematic form: which in the first instance *shows* rather than *says*, with the crucial and much discussed differences this entails. (This being, ultimately, the crux of the debate concerning the applicability of enunciation theories to cinematic narration). Thus, it gains its value (as Metz, for instance, admits) only at the price of considerable omissions and a high degree of abstraction from any film's presentation and experience.

Although Fredericksen's identification of an emotive mode of reflexivity is salutary given theorists' under-emphasis of its multiple feeling dimensions, he unduly restricts it to tone and irony. In both mainstream and art cinema, however, reflexive forms and devices sometimes generate, or are entangled with, a wide range of viewer emotions. Closer to tone, but not identical with it, reflexivity may be a major contributor to non-object specific constellations of *affect*, as Shaviro suggests with respect to some 21st century "post-cinema" works. But it may also generate feeling specifically towards, and about, the represented worlds of films. As Torben Grodal has argued with an emphasis on interlinked processes of cognition and emotion, V.F. Perkins has shown in relation to film style and fictional worldhood, and is also supported by some empirical research, reflexive forms and devices may sometimes result in greater emotional "intimacy" with a film's characters and drama, and a consequent psychic immersion in its diegetic reality.⁴¹ Instead of, or alternating with, that is, the proverbial critical distance, detachment, and forced removal from the fictional diegesis, with which reflexivity is often associated. Although an accurate extrapolation of Jakobson's definition of the emotive mode of communication as pertaining to the feelings of the *speaker*, hence figuratively the filmmaker, rather than the *listener* – on this model, the spectator – the restrictiveness of this function in the context of cinematic reflexivity is indicative of a larger methodological issue. Cherry picking only those aspects of films that

somehow match up with Jakobson's general semantic categories, this scheme is also straightjacketed by them. His careful qualifications aside, any attempt such as that of Fredericksen to fit all cinematic reflexivity into the prefabricated mold of a theory of largely practical communication in another medium, especially discursive language, seems bound to entail considerable conceptual tensions. In terms, that is, of the numerous points at which cinema and language, artistic and non-artistic representation, and reflexive and non-reflexive communication, sharply diverge. For these reasons, although along with Metz's typology of enunciative devices, Fredericksen's remains the most detailed and systematic classification of cinematic reflexivity yet offered, it presents an at once admirably broad (in strictly communicative terms) and problematically narrow, picture of the phenomenon *in toto*.

Reflexive Forms: A New Typology

A differently oriented understanding of cinematic reflexivity involves positing recurrent types, which, although they frequently feature in the analysis of individual films, are not identified explicitly in any of the classificatory schemes that have been surveyed. As we have seen, theorists have largely written about reflexivity as if there is nothing in-between, so to speak, conventional reflexive *devices*, on the one hand, and highly general functional *modes*, on the other. A familiar and oft-remarked example may suffice to show the plausibility and usefulness of a mid-level classification that is neither inappropriately abstract nor limited to work-, or creator-, specific forms and meanings.

One widely suggested function of the multilayered reflexivity of Antonioni's *Blow-up* is to probe and problematize the nature of perception as affording access to objective truth and reality. As in Fredericksen's referential and semiotic-epistemic reflexive modes, this questioning notably extends to the perception of art, cinema, and the film itself. Building upon elements present in Julio Cortázar's eponymous short story upon which the film is loosely based, Antonioni and his collaborators employ a number of conventional reflexive devices to achieve this aim. These include physical objects within the *mise-en-scene* figuratively signifying cinema and its technological apparatus; numerous images-within-the-image and frames-within-the-frame; and highly self-conscious staging, camera movement, and editing. The last of these culminates in the iconic final sequence, in which harkening back to the trick effects of Georges Méliès, Thomas, the photographer protagonist, disappears from a field of grass (i.e. the 'visual field') via a slow dissolve and is replaced by the film's end title – a dramatic instance of extra-diegetic enunciation as theorized by Metz.

Additionally, however, *Blow-up* features a markedly *reflexive use* of (a) space,

location, and ambiance, e.g. the photographer's studio and dark room with connotations of film studio, editing suite, and viewing space; the London park and adjacent tennis courts, as circumscribed spaces of voyeurism and performance, including in front of Thomas's camera; (b) other art forms and media (still photography; abstract painting) explicitly and implicitly contrasted with the photographic and cinematographic image; and (c) various mystery and suspense film conventions, which recall the mystery-based reflexivity of Feuillade's *A Tragic Error* (1912) and Marston's and Thanhouser's *The Evidence of the Film* (1913), made some fifty years earlier, as much as they anticipate that of Coppola's *The Conversation* (1974) and De Palma's *Blow Out* (1981).⁴² As in Antonioni's *L'Aventura* and *The Passenger*, *Blow-Up* self-consciously subverts familiar elements of these genres to consistently undermine viewer expectations. The film also includes (d) a surrogate directorial figure (Thomas) involved in proto-cinematic creation and a filmmaking-like manipulation of sequential images; and who, like other characters in the film, shares certain known interests and traits with Antonioni; and (e) various acts of self-aware performance and role-play on the part of the protagonists and other characters, including the student mime troop, reflecting and refracting cinematic performance.

Beyond their specific operations in *Blow-Up*, these aspects correspond to certain reflexive formations that are familiar across a broad range of films. Based on their characteristics, and with reference to the above, they may be correspondingly termed:

- (a) *environmental*
- (b) *'trans-art' and intermedial*
- (c) *generic*
- (d) *creator-centered*
- (e) *performance-based*

Each of these forms, which are also notably transmedial, have, in turn, a number of distinct, classifiable sub-types.⁴³ *Creator-centered* reflexivity, for instance, ranges from directors' major roles and cameo appearances in their own films and others, to their acting as voice-over or on-screen narrators; from actors playing filmmakers (or characters metaphorically representing them) to the most reflexive pole of films' use of "free indirect" narration;⁴⁴ amongst other forms of reference to the lives, personae and works of creators and collaborators.

Reflexive 'formations' or simply 'forms' are here understood as complex configurations of elements – representational, formal, thematic – rather than structures lacking content. Structurally, at least, they are therefore more akin to literary *tropes*, as found

in numerous guises across a number of works, genres, and styles, than to *modes*. As means and manifestations of reflexive meaning in films, these forms are likewise distinct from specific reflexive *devices*, including those through which these forms work and which the latter may modify.

The first point to notice is that different devices may be parts of the same reflexive forms in their instantiations in specific films. Second, with reference back to the typologies we have surveyed and their principle foci, and as the terms ‘form’ and ‘formation’ are also intended to suggest, the species-level types proposed differ from reflexive modes defined primarily in terms of their intended *functions*, as in Stam’s and Fredericksen’s reception and communication-centered classifications. Thus, in different films a given form may be utilized to different purposes – e.g., formal’ or political, intended to foreground ontological or ethical features, generate humor or irony, comment upon conventional cinematic practices, etc., - with different resultant effects. Lastly, while some of the forms that I wish to draw attention to specify the actual content, i.e., objects, of reflexive reference, such as a particular genre, or other films, they also implicate themes, styles, and inter- and transmedial aspects of works. Typically, these reflexive forms are integrated with conventional devices (e.g., the film-within-the-film; direct address), and those other reflexive, or sometimes reflexive, features discussed earlier (such as allusion and self-conscious presentation), to form complex referential wholes. A few relevant examples illustrate these relations.

The familiar film-within-the-film figuration is instantiated in all of the forms identified. With respect to *intermedial* and *trans-art* reflexivity, it often takes the alternative guise of a television broadcast or internet stream within the film (*The Truman Show*; *Demonlover*); the play-within-the-film (*Opening Night*; *Marat/Sade*); the novel or screenplay within the film (*Providence*; *Adaptation*), and so on.⁴⁵ In *creator-centered* reflexivity, the film-within-the-film telescopes connections between it, the host work containing it, and the filmmaker’s (or maker’s) life and/or other works. Thus in Fellini’s fictionalized cinematic autobiography *Intervista* (1987), framed as a documentary being made on the director, one of the multiple (fictional) films shown in the process of being made at Rome’s Cinecetta studios is a magical realist account of the young Fellini’s first experiences of the film industry; while the projection of sequences of his *La Dolce Vita* (1960) on a makeshift screen in Anita Ekberg’s villa brings ‘the maestro’s’ earlier and later style and career into the same experiential field for both the audience, and *Intervista*’s motley crew of fictional and real-life characters, watching it.

In reflexivity’s *performance-based* manifestations, the film-within-the-film draws

special attention to diegetic and non-diegetic roles, casting, and performances. In Tarnantino's *Once Upon a Time in Hollywood* and its partial inspiration, Rush's *The Stuntman*, the witnessed making of a Hollywood television series and a film, respectively, affords the opportunity to explore the curious relationship between actors and their stand-ins and stunt-doubles, within the narratives and in real-life practice. In *Intervista*, the primary narrative focus of *La Dolce Vita*'s above-mentioned screening is its stars, Ekberg and Marcello Mastroianni, here playing versions of themselves, nostalgically watching their younger selves. Like other reflexive devices, along with whatever ideas and feelings a film-within-the-film (or its structural equivalent) may generate, its meaning and experience in given works is also shaped by the higher-order forms of reflexivity enumerated, which (shades of Plato's forms and their copies) films partake in concretely actualizing.

As *Intervista* and *Once Upon a Time in Hollywood* also demonstrate, the forms of reflexivity that I have specified, and likely some others that might be identified, are frequently combined in films and even in individual sequences. And their conjunctions may create conceptually and experientially powerful reflexive dynamics. The epiphanic conclusion of Scorsese's *Raging Bull* is a clear instance of overlapping, or in contemporary parlance, networked, *creator-centered*, *performance-based*, and *intertextual* reflexivity, as perceptually conveyed through a secondary screen device, also with echoes of a film within the film.

Near the end of his method-acting tour-de-force performance as Jake La Motta, Robert De Niro sits in front of a mirror in which former boxer La Motta is rehearsing a set-piece for his one-man nightclub act prior to going on stage. To his own reflection, captured in a medium-close shot, La Motta/De Niro enacts former boxer Terry's (Marlon Brando's) half of the back-seat conversation with his brother Charlie in Kazin's *On the Waterfront*, one of the most celebrated sequences, and method-inspired performances, in American cinema. De Niro here plays both La Motta and La Motta-as-Brando. Through association, the pair of physically and emotionally wounded (former) boxer characters (La Motta and Terry), the real Jake La Motta, whose story *Raging Bull* tells, and the two screen acting greats (De Niro and Brando) are brought together in a five-fold configuration of intertextual and performance-based reflexivity: occurring not only in the same extended sequence-shot and diegetic situation, but the same embedded image and 'screen,' i.e. the dressing room mirror, framing De Niro's/La Motta's face and voice. Into this bravura, audio-visual *myse-en-abyme* construction, the thematic implications of which are far too numerous to be detailed here, comes Scorsese, credited as the club's stagehand. Glimpsed in the mirror, and calling to mind

his haunting appearance with De Niro's Travis Bickle in *Taxi Driver*, he gives La Motta a five-minute warning that the show is about to start, just as the film, and its portrayal of La Motta, is about to end: with a dramatic fade to black, a titled quotation from the Gospel of John, and a dedication to Scorsese's film teacher. In an instance of creator-centered reflexivity, the auteur, as an "intercessor," in Deleuze's terms, within his own cinematic world, metaphorically announces the conclusion to his film. And, thereby, further underscores its intensely personal nature, as manifestly informed by Scorsese's customary themes, professed religious beliefs, and so on.

On the whole a far more reflexive film than *Raging Bull*, the number of reflexive forms and sub-forms at play and their conjunctions are as numerous and complex in *Intervista* – "an almost unequaled source for enunciative moves and reflexive fireworks" – as in any previous feature film, and it was exceptional, if not wholly unprecedented, in this respect.⁴⁶ Today, however, a dense, global, and often deliberately bewildering, abundance of reflexive forms, modes, and devices throughout films, both comic and dramatic, is increasingly common. Indeed, together with emphasis on the affective valences of reflexivity, this is one of the defining features of the trans-generic phenomena I have elsewhere labelled 21st century "hyper-reflexivity."⁴⁷

The forms of reflexivity I have mentioned work through formal, representational, medial, narrative, and dramatic features and capacities of cinema. While not inherently reflexive, all have a powerful latent potential in this direction that some films actualize. Although more specific in their empirical reference than the theoretical postulation of general reflexive modes, again like literary tropes these forms resist the degree of systematization and (in-principle) complete inventory that conventional and more concrete reflexive devices are amenable to on Metz's analysis, for instance. Nonetheless, there is much more to be said about them in theoretical terms and as exemplified in particular films and bodies of work. Moreover, mapping the mutable dynamics between such forms and reflexive functions, devices, and objects of reference, including those recognized in existing classifications, may significantly aid in the analysis and interpretation of reflexive films. Finally, as appearing in works in other art forms and media, these types provide clear focal points for comparing reflexivity in cinema with that found in novels, plays, paintings, comic books, new media productions, and so on. And, in affording common variables by which to gauge differences, may thereby also help to pinpoint possible cinema, and moving-image, specific, reflexive properties and effects.

In sum, despite its greater utility in these respects, for the reasons indicated this

classification, which requires further elaboration, neither can nor should replace any of the typologies I have here briefly appraised. Rather, it is offered as one more systematic viewpoint from which the conspicuously multifaceted, and – in the face of perpetual stylistic and technological change in screen art and media – remarkably persistent phenomenon of cinematic reflexivity may be framed and contemplated.

¹ David Bordwell, *Making Meaning, Inference and Rhetoric in the Interpretation of Cinema* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989), 11.

² This chapter is part of a larger project devoted to rethinking the theory and practice of cinematic reflexivity as the subject of a forthcoming monograph.

³ Brian McHale, *Postmodernist Fiction* (London: Methuen, 1987), 27.

⁴ Patricia Waugh, *Metafiction: The Theory and Practice of Self-Conscious Fiction* (New York: Routledge, 1984), 3.

⁵ Long before the sophisticated CGI effects the *Westworld* limited television series showcases, Crichton's film holds the distinction of being the first feature film to contain entirely computer-generated images.

⁶ Based on these and similar considerations, some literary theorists also suggest a distinction between metafiction and “self-reflexive,” or “self-conscious,” fiction, which Stam extends to cinema. See Stam, *Reflexivity*, 73-74; 127-131.

⁷ Fernando Canet, for example, suggests that reflexivity is a defining feature of “metacinema,” as the larger category. Canet, “Metacinema as Cinematic Practice: A Proposal for Classification,” *L'Atalante* July-December 2014, 24

⁸ Quoted in David Roche, *Quentin Tarantino: Poetics and Politics of Cinematic Metafiction* (Jackson, Miss.: University of Mississippi Press, 2018), 8; Metz, *Impersonal Enunciation*, 55.

⁹ Gérard Genette, *Métalepse: de la figure à la fiction* (Paris: Seuil, 2014).

¹⁰ John Pier “Metalepsis” in *The Living Handbook of Narratology* (Hamburg: Hamburg University Press, 2011), <http://wikis.sub.uni-hamburg.de/lhn/index.php/Metalepsis>, no pagination.

¹¹ Gérard Genette, *Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method* (Ithaca: Cornell UP), 234-35, quoted in Pier “Metalepsis.”

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- ¹² See, for instance, *When Storyworlds Collide. Metalepsis in Popular Fiction, Film and Comics* (Studies in Intermediality 7) (Leiden/Boston: Brill-Rodopi, 2015); Dominic Lash, *The Cinema of Disorientation*, Edinburgh University Press, 2020.
- ¹³ Bill Nichols, *Representing Reality* (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1991), 70.
- ¹⁴ On this basis Metz distinguishes reflexivity from a film's narrative or stylistic "commentary". See *Impersonal Enunciation*, 133-134.
- ¹⁵ Stam, *Reflexivity*, xiv. On these points, see Werner Wolf, "Metareference across Media: The Concept, its Transmedial Potentials and Problems, Main Forms and Functions," in *Metareference Across Media*, Werner Wolf ed. (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2009), 60.
- ¹⁶ This is not to suggest that a given aspect of a film cannot have both significant reflexive and non-reflexive meaning. But, to the main point here concerning *mise en abyme*, Wolf helpfully points out that "it would be difficult to argue that *all* instances of this device are at the same time *metareferential*, that *all* reflections of (a part of) a work or performance are also reflections on its mediality, structure and so forth" (my emphasis). Wolf, *Metareference*, 60.
- ¹⁷ Metz, *Impersonal Enunciation*, 55.
- ¹⁸ *Ibid.*
- ¹⁹ In Francois Jost, "The Authorized Narrative," in *The Film Spectator: From Sign to Mind*, Warren Buckland ed. (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press).
- ²⁰ Metz's "strong" and "weak" reflexive dichotomy is a start in this direction.
- ²¹ Stam, *Film Theory: An Introduction* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000), 150; Stam, *Reflexivity*, xxi.
- ²² Stam, *Film Theory*, 27-32.
- ²³ Metz, *Impersonal Enunciation*, 1-24.
- ²⁴ See Metz, *Impersonal*; and Daniel Yacavone, "The Expressive Sign: Cinesemiotics, Enunciation and Screen Art," in *The Anthem Handbook of Screen Theory*, edited by Hunter Vaughn and Tom Conley (London: Anthem Press, 2018), 245-262
- ²⁵ Fredericksen, "Modes," 305; Bordwell, *Meaning*, 111 n.29.
- ²⁶ Fredericksen, "Modes," 308.
- ²⁷ *Ibid.*
- ²⁸ Nichols, *Representing*, 73.
- ²⁹ Fredericksen, "Modes," 309-310.
- ³⁰ *Ibid.*
- ³¹ Fredericksen, "Modes," 313.
- ³² See, for example, *Puzzle Films: Complex Storytelling in Contemporary Cinema*, Warren Buckland ed. (Oxford: Blackwell, 2008); and Miklós Kiss and Steven Willemsen *Impossible Puzzle Films: A Cognitive Approach to Contemporary Complex Cinema* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 2017).
- ³³ Fredericksen, "Modes" 307.

³⁴ Fredericksen, "Modes," 316.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ See Burch, *To the Distant Observer*, and Bordwell, *Narration*, 285-289.

³⁷ Fredericksen, "Modes," 305.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Laura Mulvey, "Rear Projection and the Paradoxes of Hollywood Realism," in *Theorising World Cinema*, Lucia Nagib ed. (IB Tauris: London), 2011.

⁴⁰ "Modes," 306.

⁴¹ V.F. Perkins, "Where is the World? The Horizon of Events in Motion Pictures," in *Style and Meaning: Studies in the Detailed Analysis of Film*, edited by John Gibbs and Douglas Pye (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2005), 36-38; 40, n. 6. See Plantinga, *Screen Stories*; Torben Grodal, *Moving Pictures: A New Theory of Film Genres, Feelings, and Cognition* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1999); and Schlütz, Possler, and Golombek, "'Is He Talking to Me?'"

⁴² My thanks to Livio Belloi for bringing these early films' similarities to *Blow-Up* to my attention through his presentation at the reflexivity and metafiction conference hosted by Université Blaise Pascal/ Université Clermont-Ferrand, in Auvergne, France, November 14, 2019.

⁴³ Elsewhere I discuss a number of distinct types of *creator-centered* and *trans-art/intermedial* reflexivity at work in Trier's and Leth's *The Five Obstructions* and Clouzot's *The Mystery of Picasso*. See Yacavone, "Doubled Visions: Reflexivity, Intermediality, and Co-Creation in *The Mystery of Picasso* and *The Five Obstructions*," *The New Review of Film and Television Studies*, 18:4, 2020 (forthcoming).

⁴⁴ See, e.g., Pier Paolo Pasolini, "The 'Cinema of Poetry'" in *Heretical Empiricism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1998), 167-178; and John Orr *Contemporary Cinema* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1998).

⁴⁵ See also Metz, *Impersonal Enunciation*, 85.

⁴⁶ Metz, *Impersonal Enunciation*, 82.

⁴⁷ Yacavone, "The Cognitive and Affective Dimensions of Cinematic Reflexivity."