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Scorsese, Por Art and Hyperrealism

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Scorsese, Por Art and Hyperrealism

Marcos Gabriel Faria Carrera

Abstract- We propose an investigation of celebrated filmmaker Martin Scorsese's *oeuvre* through the lens of painting and avant-garde. More specifically, we are interested in tracing connections between his work in the sixties and the Pop Art and Hyperrealism (or Nouveau Realism) movements from the period. We intend to demonstrate how many of the criticisms directed towards the director have also been pointed at these artistic movements. Therefore, we aim to understand the reasons for such by summarizing a brief history of the close-up — or more precisely, a few of the theorizations written about the technique. Lastly, we try to clarify some confusion that erupts from the use of "hyperrealism" as a category from contemporary scholars.

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I. Introduction

Among the most common angles from which Scorsese's career is approached are his religious verve, as well as the moral aspects of his cinema. Another line of analysis often explored concerns a certain history of the great capitalist institutions of the twentieth century, namely, the Mafia (*Goodfellas*, *The Irishman*, *Killers of the Flower Moon*), Wall Street (*The Wolf of Wall Street*), Las Vegas (*Casino*), not to mention the entrepreneurial figure of the visionary technocrat (*The Aviator*). Yet little is said about his cinema in dialogue with the visual arts. Nevertheless, it would not be difficult to find expressionist references articulated in films such as *After Hours* and *Bringing Out the Dead* (CARRERA, 2025), for instance. More than that, this article seeks to trace a continuity between some of the director's filmic procedures and the tendencies of pop art and hyperrealism.

Which filmic procedures are we referring to? Those that French critic Thierry Jousse classified as "intimidating tactics": more specifically, his "close-ups of fetishized objects" (JOUSSE, 1992, p. 60–61). In his text, the *Cahiers du Cinéma* critic condemns, on the occasion of the release of *Cape Fear* (1992), what he identifies as a "rhetorical brutality" (ibid.), a stylistic arsenal mobilized by the director to subjugate the audience with its overwhelming intensity. For Jousse, this would align the film within a reactionary canon, one that delights in wallowing in the punitive logic of its psychotic protagonist, Max Cady. Jousse, it seems to us, is mistaken. It should be noted that the critic belongs to the French tradition of the *politique des auteurs*, which, incidentally, leads him to prefer Cimino over Scorsese, since the latter "imposes himself" too much on the text (ibid., p. 61). Latent in Jousse's conception, therefore, seems to be a certain humanist inclination toward a centered and harmonious kind of spectatoriality (ELSAESSER; HAGENER, 2010, p. 17), one that dismisses any approaches tending toward shock, astonishment (GUNNING, 2006), or direct interpellation of the body and its affects (SOLANA; VACCAREZZA, 2020). Indeed, it would not be difficult to expand this critique in order to counter those guardians of "good cinema" who see in Scorsese supposedly "excessive" tendencies—a word they sometimes use to signal moral disapproval, and at other times to suggest that the director may have opted for a running time that deviates from the "appropriate" (CARRERA, 2025).

From this standpoint, we can link Scorsese's work to Gunning's conception of the cinema of attractions, where the "fetishized" close-ups come to be seen precisely as attractions—that is, astonishing visions intended to shock, interpellate, and captivate the spectator (GUNNING, 2006, p. 383–384). But what does it mean to think of the close-up in Scorsese in consonance with hyperrealism — and why take part in such an enterprise? Before answering that, it would be useful to outline what we mean when we speak of hyperrealism. We refer to a certain tendency in the visual arts that, beginning in the 1960s, moved away from the abstract expressionism of figures such as Pollock and De Kooning to find in the materiality of consumer goods its *raison d'être*. Thus emerged pop art, from which hyperrealism derives. It is important to note, with regard to pop art, that it would not be so simple to ascribe to the movement a character of absolute rupture with the avant-garde that preceded it. In actuality,

> If, at first, Pop Art seemed to challenge the supremacy of purely optical values, it was soon assimilated into the modernist stance through the scale of its canvases, the coldness of its pictorial treatment, the emphasis on surface, the flatness of form and emotion, and the use of pre-existing images (FABRIS, 2013, p. 235)[1].

And more: In regards to the "melting pot" from which what the author calls "new realism" first arrived, Fabris notes, and that is specially important to the preoccupations of this article, that

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[1] From the original in Portuguese: "Se, a princípio, a Pop Art pareceu um desafio à supremacia dos valores puramente ópticos, logo foi assimilada à postura modernista pela escala de suas telas, pela frieza do tratamento pictórico, pela ênfase dada à superfície, pela planaridade da forma e da emoção e pelo uso de imagens já existentes". Our translation.

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> The interest in the close-up, in the radical cut, and in the casual distribution of elements within the frame is traced by Nochlin to the television screen, while the refusal of an a priori order and of an a posteriori meaning is associated with the Nouveau Roman and the Nouvelle Vague. New Realism shares with avant-garde cinema an attitude of visual immediacy and emotional detachment; in both, the literalness of the image renders the object dense and opaque, far removed from any narrative meaning or psychological implication. The idea, upheld by purist criticism, that the existence of a theme necessarily results in a narrative or symbolic meaning is challenged both by filmmakers such as Andy Warhol and Jean-Luc Godard and by the new realists (Ibid., p. 236).

Still, according to Fabris (Ibid., 238), the term hyperrealism emerged in Europe as a secondary label for "New Realism." It is curious to note that the movement was harshly criticized and attacked for its supposed reactionary implications, although these seem to translate into something different from what Jousse identified in Scorsese: not a brutalization, but an ironic passivity, a disinterest which, in its mechanicism, would supplant the creative spirit (Ibid., pp. 237–239). In this sense, however, it would not be difficult to relate this tendency to what Rancière identifies as the aesthetic regime of art. In this regime—formulated by the philosopher as a way of encompassing modern art while at the same time avoiding the dead end of "postmodernism"—the distinctions between high and low collapse, and everything can belong to the domain of art. Hence the mechanistic "dream" of a Flaubert in literature, for example, or the idea of "mute signs" (RANCIÈRE, 2010, p. 181-182; RANCIÈRE, 2005, p. 15-17).

It is precisely in the collapse of the categories of high and low that Andy Warhol situates himself. The political difficulties posed by his work are summarized by Phil Coldiron:

> What the Factory sensibility shows is that unserious or, to use the more conventional word, ironic belief might still be ardent, and might even, in modern times and in strange ways, have the capacity to be *more* ardent [...] than its earnest counterparts [...] as opposed to the contemporary understanding of ironic appreciation as marked by an aloofness steeped in condescension, Andy's unserious "liking" collapses the most sophisticated taste into the least, until the two become indistinguishable. This may be both cynical and politically irresponsible. It is why attempts to read Warhol's work as critiques of mid-century consumer capitalism are, at best, fanciful. And it is why his work so often short-circuits attempts to read it through the moralizing lens of much criticism from the Left. It is also why writers of as markedly different sensibilities as Thierry de Duve and Steve Shaviro can reach for the same curious word to describe what it is that the best of Andy's work does: it "testifies" (COLDIRON, 2019)

Before proceeding, it is necessary to point out the differences between pop art and hyperrealism. What is evident in pop art is the relationship between humans and the objects that surround them—or else the human being as mediated by the object, by the media and by consumer goods. In hyperrealism, however, the human has disappeared; only objects and their surfaces remain—smooth and opaque. If the human figure appears, it is no longer as a creature, but as a mere thing. Fabris highlights the close-up faces in Chuck Close's portraits as an example of this reification, which we will examine later (FABRIS, 1975, p. 202). One can also already glimpse, in light of what has been presented, the Baudrillardian complications that will affect the term "hyperrealism" from the late 1970s onward. For now, we only wish to point out that if we use the two movements here—pop art and hyperrealism—almost interchangeably, it is because we are simply interested in considering one aspect occasionally common to both — the close-up —- in relation to Scorsese's cinema. Hence our interest in making these distinct universes collide.

II. Methodology

Scorsese's first student films were made precisely at the moment when this debate was taking shape, in the mid-1960s. Warhol's Factory was the opposite side of the coin from the "mean streets" of New York where the director grew up. It would not be difficult to suppose that that aspiring filmmaker was, in some way, influenced by the local artistic scene of that moment. What we shall do next in this article, therefore, is a brief survey of some works and discourses related to Pop Art and hyperrealism. It is also important to mention that we frame the Pop and hyperrealist problematic from a Rancièrian (2012) perspective, which would situate such phenomena as part of what constitutes an "aesthetic regime" of art—thus far removed from the "postmodern" fatalism.

Having done this, we will carry out a comparative analysis between some works by American painters of the 1960s and Scorsese's short films of the same decade, based on a shot-by-shot analysis of key scenes. We speak here of the shorts the director shot as a student at New York University: "What's a Nice Girl Like You Doing in a Place Like This?" (1963), "It's Not Just You, Murray!" (1965) and, most emphatically, "The Big Shave" (1967). Our preliminary bibliographic survey on the director points to shortcomings in the academic discourse that relates his work to other fields of the visual arts (CARRERA, 2023); more importantly for our case, we have not identified any study that places the problematics of painting as its main focus. We therefore aim to draw parallels between certain aesthetic procedures employed by the director—briefly alluded to throughout this exposition—and the aforementioned artistic tendencies, as a way of redirecting the debate surrounding his work, clarifying some of its facets, and shedding new light on old themes.

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III. Theoretical Review

The idea about pop art's "disinterest" is not new, nor was invented by pop art. The aforementioned Rancièrean concept of "mute signs", for example, could be seen as some kind of 19th century foreshadow of an entire paradigm in the arts (RANCIÈRE, 2005). That explains why the matter of reproduction, of copies, simulacrum, in sum, the entire blind alley of postmodernism do not interest us. In this sense, the close-up, the magnification of the detail, is particular to the modern arts (or aesthetic regime, in Rancière's terms). See for instance, this piece of prose from Bernardo Soares, which is one of Portuguese poet Fernando Pessoa's (1888-1935) many heteronyms:

> [...] the minimal, by having absolutely no social or practical importance, possesses, by that very absence, an absolute independence from any sordid associations with reality. The minimal strikes me as unreal. The useless is beautiful because it is less real than the useful, which continues and extends itself, whereas the marvelous futile, the glorious infinitesimal remains where it is—it does not go beyond being what it is, it lives free and independent. The useless and the futile open within our real life intervals of humble aesthetics. How much do I not feel stirred in my soul with dreams and amorous delights by the mere insignificant existence of a pin fastened to a ribbon! Woe to those who do not know the importance this has! [...] The millimeters—what an impression of astonishment and daring their existence side by side, so closely aligned on a measuring tape, causes in me. [...] I am a photographic plate prolixly impressionable. (PESSOA, 2006, p. 464-465).[2]

It is at the very least incredibly curious that so many theoreticians forget how profoundly modern such a matter is [...] and therefore seem inclined to appeal to platonist concepts and condemnations.

The problem of mimesis is what lies behind the much-discussed "fetishization" of the close-up. Ana Carolina Nunes Silva (2013) interprets post-1950 pictorial production as the realization of "cynical ideology," as she defines it through her reading of Žižek. Once the mechanisms of critique and the unveiling of the reification of material reality proved ineffective, what remained was only the ironic and defeatist celebration of everything that art had been incapable of demystifying. In this nihilistic and blasé carnival, mimesis reigns—the aestheticization "of the fetishized reality and the reified relations of society," now that the critique of fetishism has itself become a fetish (SILVA, 2013, pp. 266–267). This is a persuasive reading, which finds echoes in Baudrillard. Indeed, the thought of the French theorist, dating from the late 1970s, constitutes the dominant tone for reflecting on pictorial hyperrealism today. It is to him and to his considerations on the simulacrum that theorists most commonly refer when addressing this problematic. Let us see:

> The contemporary understanding of 'hyperreality' derives mainly from postmodern philosophy, studied since the 1980s [...] the term designates the inability of thought to discern between reality and fantasy [...] We speak of hyperreality in art to define those artistic products that increase the notion of reality, generally by overcoming and supplanting it, operating as simulations.[3] (CLAVELLINO, 2013, p. 1-2).

Clavellino's characterization is limited. If the conceptual key of the *trompe l'oeil*, which slides into simulated realities hermeticisms, is a valid interpretive line, it is far from constituting the univocal view of the modernist works in question. Referring back to Argan's accusations, who regarded hyperrealism as merely an uncritical and fascistoid kind of reproduction, Fabris (2013) counters, precisely, with an understanding of an "unreal," tense reality:

> If Argan seems to represent the spearhead of the view of Hyperrealism as a purely mimetic and illusionistic operation, there are, on the contrary, some readings that point to the existence of an unreal dimension in its ambiguous icons. This is the case, for example, with Filiberto Menna, who problematizes the idea of imitation by recalling that the references of Hyperrealism are not found in the old realist model, but rather in the photographic message, which can no longer be considered a simple *analogon* of reality.[4] (FABRIS, 2013, p. 239).

Fabris herself gestures in this direction when she writes that "Objects appear in their integrity, but they could not be more strange: they resemble reality to such an extent that they end up subverting it and finally denying it" (Idem, 1975, p. 202). Now, if we are

[2] *From the Original in Portuguese:* "[...] o mínimo, por não ter absolutamente importância nenhuma social ou prática, tem, pela mera ausência disso, uma independência absoluta de associações sujas com a realidade. O mínimo sabe-me a irreal. O inútil é belo porque é menos real que o útil, que se continua e prolonga, ao passo que o maravilhoso fútil, o glorioso infinitesimal fica onde está, não passa de ser o que é, vive liberto e independente. O inútil e o fútil abrem na nossa vida real intervalos de estética humilde. Quanto não me provoca na alma de sonhos e amorosas delícias a mera existência insignificante dum alfinete pregado numa fita! Triste de quem não sabe a importância que isso tem! [...] Os milímetros — que impressão de assombro e ousadia que a sua existência lado a lado e muito aproximada numa fita métrica me causa. [...] Sou uma placa fotográfica prolixamente impressionável". Our translation.

[3] *From the Original in Spanish:* "La accepción contemporánea de 'hiperrealidad' se deriva principalmente de la filosofia postmoderna, estudiada desde los años ochenta [...] el término designa la incapacidad del pensamiento para discernir entre realidad y fantasía [...] Hablamos de hiperrealidad en el arte para definir aquéllos productos artísticos que incrementam la noción de realidad, generalmente por superación y suplantación de la misma, operando como simulacros". Our translation.

[4] *From the Original in Portuguese:* "Se Argan parece representar a ponta de lança da visão do Hiperrealismo como operação puramente mimética e ilusionista, existem algumas leituras que apontam, ao contrário, para a existência de uma dimensão irreal em seus ícones ambíguos. É o caso, por exemplo, de Filiberto Menna, que problematiza a idéia de imitação, ao lembrar que as referências do Hiper-realismo não estão no velho modelo realista, e sim na mensagem fotográfica, a qual não pode ser mais considerada um simples *analogon* da realidade". Our translation.

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speaking of a reality that appears to us as strange, as alien to the one we experience, as its negation, then it becomes clear that we are not dealing with a mere copy, there is, with the replacement of the real by a "more real," but with an effect of shock, of confrontation. This reading seems to offer a more productive path for thinking about the various problems these works impose on us, away from preconceived schematizations and conceptual dead ends. More importantly, it is a reading that avoids a series of unclear theorizations, as we will soon see.

When it comes to thinking about hyperrealism and cinema, we encounter a series of conceptual imprecisions. Teixeira (2012, pp. 215–219), in his master's thesis, exemplifies the problem: when discussing the representation of the favelas in "Elite Squad" ("Tropa de Elite", 2007, dir.: José Padilha), the author makes use of the term "hyperrealist." What does this cinematographic modality consist of? The author refers to an idea of "shock of the real," fostered in dialogue with audiovisual techniques originating in television journalism, police chases, and, more broadly, contemporary mediatization. However, to say that "They are hyperrealist narratives precisely because they seek to amplify the potential of verisimilitude in situations of heightened emotional intensity"[5] (Ibidem, p. 219) seems to us a somewhat vague characterization; it would be necessary to define how exactly this shock of the real is constructed.

Josianne Diniz Gonçalves (2021) also mentions "hyperrealism" when addressing a certain cinematic representation of poor urban regions. Drawing directly from Baudrillard, she asserts: "Everyday, political, social, historical, and economic reality is already incorporated into the simulating dimension of hyperrealism. This means that individuals have become at once actors and audience [...][6]" (GONÇALVES, 2021, p. 155). Then, in a fabulous rhetorical leap, she concludes: "Hyperrealism would be present in cinema in relation to the poor urban regions when the images used to illustrate it were those desired by the public and not the many possible ones that may be found in those places[7]" (Ibidem, p. 156). Yet it has long been said that cinema constructs imaginaries; in fact, it is not only the Seventh Art that enjoys this privilege: institutions—from the family to the State, from the press to algorithms (if we consider the idea of "algorithmic institutionalism" [ALMEIDA et al., 2023])—delimit modes of being and acting that constitute us as subjects, outlining identities and binding us to the machinations of power (HAIDER, 2019, p. 35). The label of "hyperreal" adds nothing to the case; we are simply speaking of a historical process, constituted through a web of diverse discursive apparatuses, so that the author seems to mobilize the idea of hyperreal simulacra somewhat without criteria (or, at least, in the most superficial way possible).

"Hyperrealism" also appears as a marker in a certain theorization of sound in audiovisual studies. Leão (2019) is one of those who makes this move. The author seems to approach the issue through the idea of "immersion" combined with the increasingly crystalline definition of sound technologies, such as the Dolby 5.1 system (LEÃO, 2019, pp. 88–89). Here "hyperrealism" appears as a self-evident fact that requires no further conceptualization, even though we are far removed from the pictorial terrain in which the term first emerged in the late 1960s. Leão's work is yet another that seems to point to a vague conceptualization of the term, referring to generalized ideas about mediatization. Capeller (2008) follows a similar path in his sound studies, but at least offers more analytical elements to help us understand how the term is being employed. He speaks of an amplification of the presence not only of what is before the lens but also of what is heard—reproduced with granular fidelity and a "realism of almost hallucinatory acuity[8]" (CAPELLER, 2008, p. 65). The idea of high definition, of fidelity to the minutest frequencies of noise, is translated into deafening booms. Hence the fantastic quality that permeates such procedures, cohabiting tensely with an idea of illusion that "feeds precisely on a shaky, out-of-focus camera, on deficient lighting, and on direct sound in a nearly raw state of editing[9]" (Ibidem, p. 67). Capeller's interesting definitions finally seem to respond to our questions about the conceptual imprecision of the authors previously examined: it is toward this conceptualization that they seem to grope, falteringly.

However, Capeller's words present problems for our endeavor. The procedures cited by the author have nothing in common with the hyperrealism of the 1970s. The only reason for using the term seems to be a vague relation to *trompe l'oeil*—precisely the interpretive key we regard as the most limited. Perhaps the idea of pure and simple "immersion" could have been more productive for the analyses mentioned here. Immersion does not necessarily presuppose the adoption of a

[5] *From the Original in Portuguese:* "São narrativas hiper-realistas justamente porque buscam ativar de forma ampliada o potencial de verossimilhança em situações de carga emocional elevada." Our translation.

[6] *From the Original in Portuguese:* "A realidade cotidiana, política, social, histórica, econômica está, desde já, incorporada à dimensão simuladora do hiper-realismo. Isso significa que os indivíduos se tornaram ao mesmo tempo atores e plateia [...]". Our translation.

[7] *From the Original in Portuguese:* "O hiper-realismo estaria presente no cinema em relação à periferia quando as imagens trazidas para a ilustrar *[sic]* fossem aquelas desejadas pelo público e não as várias possíveis que podem ser encontradas nesses lugares". Our translation.

[8] *From the Original in Portuguese:* "realismo de acuidade quase alucinatória". Our translation.

[9] *From the Original in Portuguese:* "alimenta justamente de uma câmera tremida e fora de foco, de uma iluminação deficiente e de um som direto em estado quase bruto de edição". Our translation.

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Platonic metaphysics. What is at stake seems to be less the quality of the imitation and reproduction of phenomena in all their microscopic acuity than the immersive efficiency of the narrative device—the narrative's ability, allied with technique, to immerse the spectator in a story. There is no relation between copy and original; there is no copy that, in its dreamlike "unreality," surpasses the model. What there is, rather, are modes of producing an "effect of the real," mobilized to engage the spectator—which makes it easier to think about handheld camera work or out-of-focus shots, for example, without resorting to conceptual acrobatics with Eco and Baudrillard, as Capeller does.

Indeed, all the supposedly hyperrealist procedures that some try to identify in contemporary cinema had already been described in 1945 by Béla Balázs. The Hungarian theorist sang the praises of the close-up, which revealed the world of the minute, the hidden, the microscopic: not only "the adventures of insects in the wild" or "the erotic battle of flowers" (BALÁZS, 2008, p. 89), but also the imperceptible movements of a face, the subtle quivering of its muscles—in short, all its minute motions (Ibidem, p. 94). Here we are, of course, before a humanist, someone who perceives the reflection of the human even in the most infinitesimal details (Ibidem, p. 91)—thus very far removed from the machinic coldness of the 1960s–70s.

Therefore, all we cited from the most varied authors tells us less about the status of hyperrealism now and more about certain conventions of a cinematic "psychological realism" used to engage the spectator, as well as its limits and tensions. Not to mention that the same capacities of "revelation" Balázs describes were conceived, say, by Vertov from a very different perspective—one that has nothing to do with the totem of the model-copy still utilized today by some authors. In this case, why fall back into this old conceptualism entirely escapes us.

Rancière (2012), for instance, points to those images that refer to "nothing beyond themselves," but in a different way: this circularity means that alterity itself enters into the very composition of the images, insofar as this alterity always depends on something else, and not on the material properties of medium, in this case, the cinematic one (RANCIÈRE, 2012, pp. 11–12). Hence his assertion that we are not faced with mere manifestations of the properties of a given technical medium, but with operations and relations between a whole and its determinate parts, a visibility and a capacity for signification and, of course, affect (Ibidem, pp. 11–12). Furthermore, perhaps it is the very machinic nature of cinema that confuses theoreticians. Rancière himself (2005) addresses the issue: while the modern artist, like a Flaubert, sought a machinic, indifferent art capable of capturing things in their "passive becoming," the camera already emerges as machinic. It is because of this anticipation that cinema has no choice but to return to the old figurativism and to Aristotelian dictates; it is also for this reason, affirms the French thinker, that avant-garde dreams such as those of Jean Epstein were never fully accepted except in small enlightened pockets of spectators (Idem, 2005, pp. 11–19). Cinema thus finds itself in a delicate balance between "passivity" and "activity," "figurative" and "abstract," machinic objectivity and human subjectivity.

> The "passivity" of the machine, the supposed culmination of the program of the aesthetic regime of art, lends itself with equal ease to restoring the old figurative capacity of the active form imposed on the passive matter that a century of painting and literature had sought to subvert. And, along with it, the entire logic of figurative art is progressively restored. But the artist who sovereignly dominates the passive machine is also, more than any other, destined to transform his domination into servitude, to place his art at the service of the enterprises of management and monetization of the collective imagination. In the era of Joyce and Virginia Woolf, of Malevich or Schoenberg, cinema seems expressly born to counter a simple teleology of artistic modernity that places the aesthetic autonomy of art in its former figurative submission[10] (Ibidem, p. 19).

That is to Say: Rancière helps us think through the problem because he goes beyond easy oppositions or Platonic rehashings, instead situating cinema as an operation that strains distinct tendencies and produces new relations. Returning to the debate on hyperrealism, beyond supposed metaphysical implications, what interests us is the identification of an almost suffocating proximity, a clinically amplified presence—something to which Capeller (2008) already alludes in his considerations. This is what we find in the gigantic portraits of Chuck Close. Gigantic, not only because they magnify the human face through the first human, but because of their sheer scale.

The double relation of scale is of particular interest to us. Let us recall that Claes Oldenburg, already in the early 1960s Pop Art, foregrounded this very question with his gigantic hamburgers and cakes[11], enormous sculptures occupying gallery spaces. The same imagery would reappear in the 1970s in the

[10] *From the Original in Spanish:* "La "pasividad" de la máquina, supuesta culminación del programa del régimen estético del arte, se presta con idéntica facilidad a restaurar la vieja capacidad figurativa de la forma activa impuesta a la materia pasiva que un siglo de pintura y literatura había tratado de subvertir. Y, junto a ella, se va restaurando progresivamente toda la lógica del arte figurativo. Pero también el artista que domina soberanamente a la máquina pasiva está, mas que ningún otro, destinado a transformar su dominio en servidumbre, a poner su arte al servicio de las empresas de gestión y rentabilización del imaginario colectivo. En la era de Joyce y de Virginia Woolf, de Malevich o de Schönberg, el cine parece expressamente nacido para contrariar una teleologia simple de la modernidad artística que ponga la autonomía estética del arte a su antigua sumisión figurativa (Ibidem, p. 19)". Our translation.

[11] According to Kunzle (1984, p. 19), Oldenburg represents one of the poles of Pop Art. For if one of its tendencies, best represented by Warhol, is that of impassive, dispassionate, monotonous reproduction, then, on the other hand, what an artist like Oldenburg does is to emphasize and magnify the individual object, appealing to its sensual, haptic characteristics.

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hyperrealist work of Audrey Flack, who seems to celebrate those very slices of Americana, with their greasy diners and edible sodium and sugar bombs. In Flack's case, however, the emphasis on the delicate glazed contours of her cakes, saturated by a dense and vibrant color palette, generates a curious contrast. The same tension is present in the paintings that depict her artistic instruments. Beyond the metalinguistic play, it is interesting to note how, for Flack, everything becomes the same—from the instruments of Fine Arts to cheap treats. Everything is equally beautiful and terrifying.

The interplay of Pop Art with consumerism was characterized by David Kunzle (1984) as "consumerist realism." This seems aligned with the condemnation of the "cynical ideology" employed by Nunes, yet his observation brings other nuances to light. For Kunzle, Pop Art becomes the new artistic refuge (a role once played by Abstract Expressionism) in a context of rising consumption and, paradoxically, distrust toward it—or rather, a loss of faith in salvation through social ascent. Thus, Pop is able to absorb, ironically, the critiques of consumerism while simultaneously neutralizing consumer anxieties, in a context of booming U.S. art fueled by newly wealthy patrons and recently adopted tax incentive policies by the government. A new network emerges, therefore, composed of patrons, galleries, museums, and critics, which transforms into the establishment that enables Pop Art to thrive not only in the United States but also throughout the world, becoming a major export product of the 1960s (KUNZLE, 1984, p. 17). The "anxiety" to which Kunzle refers proves to be an interesting insight; though neutralized as cheerful irony in Oldenburg's sculptures, something of it resurfaces in Richard Estes's ghostlike 1970s cityscapes or in the aforementioned Flack. And something of it is also present in Scorsese's cinema, for example, in the notorious close-up of a fizzing tablet in a glass of water in "Taxi Driver", intercut with Robert De Niro's tense face. This seems to offer us some clues for future analyses.

If the terrain that links hyperrealism to cinema is unstable and swampy, the approximation with Pop Art proves somewhat simpler—or rather: clearer. We find a first point of contact in the Nouvelle Vague. Consider, for instance, the pleasurable surface of "Le Bonheur", by Agnès Varda. Its colorful idyll, complete with fades into blocks of color (a procedure Scorsese would later employ in films such as "Cape Fear" and "The Age of Innocence", referenced by Jousse [1992] as one of the director's "brutalizing tactics"), was initially taken as an example of reactionary art before being reinterpreted as a kind of acid reappropriation of marital life.

> Of late, scholars, including Holst-Knudsen, have clarified the situation further, analysing Varda's incorporation of advertising and pop cultural visual rhetoric to implicate the social forces framing the picture and those insistently "happy" people: [sic] who seem more like advertising ciphers than dramatic characters (FELLEMAN, 2021, p. 19-20).

Varda, with her vibrant colors, is in clear dialogue with the Pop universe, while at the same time her close-ups and still lifes seem to anticipate hyperrealism by a few years. She was not the only one in the Nouvelle Vague to venture into the Pop imagery of advertisements, magazine clippings, industrial products, and mass culture: Jean-Luc Godard, in films such as "Une Femme Mariée" and "Pierrot le Fou", demonstrates a similar sensibility (Ibidem, p. 20).

Indeed, Godard, with his frenetic jump cuts and typographic insertions, translates into images a certain joyful collage-like quality in his films, very much in vogue within Pop. It is not difficult to find connections between collage, Pop Art, and, in our case, cinema. We need only recall that, in 1947, Eduardo Paolozzi, in one of his collages, stamped the word "pop," as both the onomatopoeia of a gunshot and also the mark of a new age (MESQUITA, 2017, p. 184). And, thinking of a Godardian frenzy—which, as we shall see, is present in Scorsese's 1960s short films—this definition of the Pop artists sounds familiar: "They are artists [...] connected to a youthful, fast, simplified imaginary, with a clean, modern language and direct communication[12]" (Ibidem, p. 190).

Pop tendencies were not limited to French filmmakers. Glynn (2011) identifies Pop Art conventions in the films starring the Beatles, more specifically in "Help!". It is interesting to note that, when arguing for the film's aesthetic value, Glynn cites none other than Scorsese himself, who praises its editing, camerawork, and color (GLYNN, 2011, p. 23). Taking this cue, it is time to dive into Scorsese's own work.

IV. Analysis

What our bibliographical review revealed was the conception of a world in flux that increasingly turns toward minutiae, toward details—which, in turn, are not only magnified, made enormous, but also suffocating (the latter certainly being the case of hyperrealism). Hence the frequent allusion to fetishization, since it is intrinsic to any advertisement, for example, to discard the whole in favor of a glamorous close-up of the product.

We are attempting to navigate the polyssemic waters of the close-up. Beyond fetishization, beyond the humanist eroticism of Balázs—for whom the close-up constitutes an autonomous category in relation to the rest of the film, a separate space independent from the general filmic one—and beyond a certain anxiety we observed in Flack, what remains to be determined is how to approach the close-up in Scorsese's student

[12] *From the Original in Portuguese:* "São artistas [...] ligados a um imaginário juvenil, veloz, simplificado, de linguagem limpa, moderna e de comunicação direta". Our translation.

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films. In the process, we will reveal its dialogue with Pop Art and nascent hyperrealism.

In chronological order, let us begin with "What's a Nice Girl Like You Doing in a Place Like This?" (1963): the short tells the story of a neurotic writer, Harry, who becomes obsessed with a photograph on his wall. The initial premise thus proposes an explicit dialogue with the photographic medium; moreover, the short employs a fragmented montage, replete with jump cuts and graphic insertions of photographs and collages.

The film is, as the English expression goes, "too much": the typical effort of an emerging filmmaker eager to showcase as much as possible of what he knows with the shortest amount of time available. But it is curious to note that not only does Harry become obsessed with a photograph, but his wife is also a painter — which seems interesting given the scope of this paper. Later, Scorsese would make a painter his central character in his segment for the film "New York Stories" (1989).

It's "Not Just You, Murray!", from two years later, repeats some of the procedures of the earlier short, but here its collage-like quality flirts with the mockumentary genre, in a comedic tone: before a film crew, Murray narrates his rising as a small-time criminal. What we are calling "collage-like"—through the inclusion of graphics, photographs, and a fragmented montage that disarticulates space-time and creates an effect of superimposition reminiscent of two-dimensional flatness—is not exclusive to Scorsese: it is nothing that was not being explored to the fullest, say, in the Cuban short film "Now!" (1965), by Santiago Álvarez. After all, this was a moment of international effervescence in cinema, with several "new waves" (following the cue of the French Nouvelle Vague) and "new cinemas" blossoming around the world.

But Scorsese's "Murray" pales considerably beside his peers, including its own predecessor. "The Big Shave", from 1967, already shows itself to be a more mature work, in part because it relies more on images and sounds: its affective impact is placed at the forefront; the "discursive content" of the film, on its own, cannot achieve much, which is why any synopsis of the short proves rather simplistic: over the course of five minutes, a young white man enters his bathroom and shaves, until the razor begins to cut more than just his facial hair, and gallon upon gallon of blood pours from his face. The young man—a clean-cut kid, as Dylan[13] put it—remains impassive throughout the entire action. He looks at himself in the mirror, runs his hand over his neck, and approves the result. The end. But if we said that the affective dimension is placed in the foreground, this is not only due to the emphasis on the materiality of the boy's (fake) blood, dark and thick. No—the foreground is literally a central concern here.

We find here a preoccupation with surfaces, which extends to the gleaming smoothness of the young man's bathroom, with its white tiles and reflective materials. In the opening sequence, before the young man even enters the scene, we are introduced to that space. It presents surfaces from which the human element has been banished. The whiteness of the bathroom complements its clinical quality. The flush handle, the faucet knob, the chrome showerhead, the glass cup on the sink, the solitary drop that drips into the drain: everything is captured in close-up, with no shortage of detail.

The montage stitches these shots together quickly; the speed flattens the space, leaving only the objects. The sequence ends with a mirror and a fade into a white screen. Soon, the mirror will reflect the young man's shaving as he enters the bathroom. While he spreads the foam over his face and slides the razor across his skin, the camera continues its strategy of flattening the space—now, it is the young man's face that appears fragmented, decomposed into details. There is a certain impersonality here, both in the apathetic expression of the young man and in the depersonalized space he inhabits. The upbeat jazz soundtrack, for its part, evokes a kind of advertising-driven imposition and standardization of happiness.

But the camera gets too close. The hand holding the razor cuts across the entire frame as it shaves off a small tuft, so close are we to this face. This gesture then acquires a violent undertone. The imminent violence is heightened not only by the razor but also by the small red dots that appear on the pale skin, inflamed pores on irritated flesh. In other words, already in this clinical proximity, there is a horrific dimension to the image. From then on, the horror only escalates, as the redness of the blood—made even more striking in contrast to the whiteness of the setting—coats the face of our clean-cut American boy, this good American kid. And it is this very clean-cut wholesomeness that, in 1967, was being shredded in the tropical jungles of Vietnam, scorched by the napalm of American fighter planes. At home, in the domestic setting that decorates advertising catalogs, Scorsese arrives at the same annihilation of the human figure, supplemented by a reification that intertwines the erotic with the clinical. For if eroticism erupts, it is in the service of horror, as when the blood drips down the young man's chest like chocolate syrup.

V. Conclusions

We hope to have been able to demonstrate how Scorsese's *oeuvre* can be seen in proximity to artistic schools from the sixties and seventies. We also hope to

[13] "*I'm a clean-cut kid and I've been to college too*". "Motorpsycho Nightmare", from *Another Side of Bob Dylan*, 1964.

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have pointed ways in which we can evolve the discourse on hyperrealism beyond old academic clichés. Therefore, providing fresh ways to analyse the matter of the close-up, the detail, while at the same time pointing to how this has been a central concern to modernist practices since the 19th century.

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