VIDEO ESSAY AS A CINEMA REVIEW AND DIDACTIC INSTRUMENT. CASE STUDY: KOGONADA

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1. INTRODUCCIÓN

What is a cinema review? Navarrete Cardero (2013) starts a contribution with this interesting question, with the purpose of answering with a rigorous and objective academic perspective that this cultural format is about and what are the keys involved in this development. Although as enlightening as possible, we can define a film review as a hybrid product that is constructed on the basis of information and rhetorical expression, resulting in a point of view on an audiovisual work and the most significant elements that make it. Video essay crosses the fields of film review, theory and cinema analysis, in addition to laying the foundations for new research and communication practices (Russo, 2021).

Of course, it is a didactic and constructive exercise, but it is also problematic, because it plays a primordial function since the Cinema needs it, not only to fill the cinemas and ensure the success of a film, but also to exist within a state plan of Culture. Therefore, this type of review promotes in the spectator to learning of cultural criteria that benefit the development of Artistic Education, nourished by a broad and well-founded perspective.

The truth is that traditional forms of cinema review in written text and persuasion of the word have become obsolete (Russo, 2021). It is known as a video essay in contemporary a form that has gained strength, which consists of "a subjective practice in which a utopian desire and a transformative intention of reality underlies" (Alsina, 2016, p. 363). Also, it

is living a period of notoriety in the first two decades of the twentieth century, but it is not new either or repentant, because it has been developing, growing, and maturing in recent years (Russo, 2021). However, the tools used during the development of these new digital artistic creations, productions, and strategies have altered some processes of creation (Arcoba, 2020). So, these multimedia resources turned the review into a renewed activity (Russo, 2021).

This particular modality known as video essays offers new possibilities for critical discussion and teaching (Russo, 2021). For that, we cannot ignore that "the multidisciplinary nature of art education and its possibility of critical development with respect to the various visual and audiovisual manifestations of contemporaneity" (Reina García, 2019, p. 120). Thus, the video essay is constituted as a skilled and significant pedagogical structure in the context of audiovisual education (García Roldán, 2020) and is established as a resource where the audiovisual aesthetics itself and its language provide depth for review. So, as an audiovisual form integrated in the context of video art, the video essay manifests a pedagogical value as a strategy, being able to show and specify visual thoughts (Arcoba, 2020) that take shape through screens of different viewing media.

Therefore, in this contribution we reflect on the video essay as a didactic instrument in the classroom, and we develop a content analysis of certain elements and audiovisual strategies of some pieces of this format directed by Kogonada, in which he contributes a self-reflective vision of some transcendental classics of the History of Cinema.

In this sense, the figure of the Korean film director Kogonada is particularly significant, because we have found a lack of academic research that studies his career with a certain degree of depth. Precisely, he is known for his works in the form of video essays, audiovisual pieces of a few minutes long that are broadcast on free viewing platforms such as Youtube or Vimeo, for easy access by the massive public. Thus, Kogonada has become a director of reference in this field, whose works began as an *amateur*.

As a way of clarification, we refer to classic cinema from a technical sense, as a result of using the cinema strategies established by the North American tradition during the period between 1900 and 1960 (Bordwell, 1997).

1.1. JUSTIFICATION

Education should be understood as a strategic engine to promote social change (Fernández Alegre & Casado Berrocal, 2017). It must function as "a starting point for the emergence of alternative movements that reflect about their reality, appropriate the resources to understand it, and develop the scientific assumptions, moral and social, that allow them to recreate it" (Aguaded, 2005, p. 27).

In this sense, transformations have appeared in the educational area. This is because of the changes that have marked the daily life of today's young people, born in a cultural and technological context that gives an important weight to the audiovisual media, changing traditional customs, relationships, and visions of the environments in which they are immersed (Arcoba, 2020). Relationships that involve representing and sharing experiences, feelings, and building identities through these new digital channels (Buckingham & Martínez-Rodríguez, 2013).

In this line, Arcoba (2020, p. 3) states that "artistic activity is established as a need for human beings to recognize themselves in a complicated and uncertain world" with the desire to leave traces of their individual and collective identity through their creativity. For this reason, there has been an increase of new visions in visual culture (Hernández, 2002). An increase that has been requiring a modification in the teaching of visual arts that provides a critical look at the contemporary context (Arcoba, 2020). However, this envolves "the predisposition of the teacher that involves a review and questioning of the work methodology within the role acquired in the educational institution, and is sensitive to everyday realities" (Reina García, 2019, p. 117).

After all the above, video essay is revealed as a vehicle of creation based on image and sound that provides an essential working tool for reflection, observation, and the development of a broad cinema culture in

young people. As well as an open thought from which to sustain and argue perspectives, as an individual and as a society in which we are integrated. Also, video essay is considered as an interrogative form of various categories, rather than as a specific gender (Russo, 2021), because "raises questions and takes images from other movies as material, at stake is an operation of reading, appropriation, and transformation, with a view to emergence of a work of its own" (Russo, 2021, pp. 231-232).

2. OBJETIVOS

The objectives that we pursued in this contribution are presented in the following lines:

- Reflect on possibilities of the video essay as a didactic instrument in education.

- Explain some of the most important aspects of the Kogonada cinema style.

- Develop a content analysis of some visual and sound elements of some video essays directed by Kogonada.

3. METODOLOGÍA

3.1. DIDACTIC POSSIBILITIES OF VIDEO ESSAY

It is interesting to note that, a few years ago, at the World Conference on Arts Education in 2006 (Lisboa) (as cited in Huerta, Vidagañ & Munilla, 2014), it became clear that Arts Education is quite effective in promoting active learning, to enhance the interest of students, to structure aspects of Culture, to train and motivate teachers. Therefore, they placed "arts education, education in the arts and through the arts, as a central aspect of a global agenda for sustainable development and social transformation" (Huerta, Vidagañ & Munilla, 2014, p. 33). Although from that date to the present day, contemporary Art has progressed to the point of being able to establish new strategies of audiovisual creation.

In addition, "the audiovisual document is established as a fiction that needs an interpretation to build our cultural perspective" (Arcoba, 2020), and citizens cannot go unnoticed to adulteration of audiovisual discourses. Therefore, it is of interest to take into account that "the understanding of visual culture has become one of the most significant projects in the face of the renewal of the curriculum of that discipline" (Reina García, 2019, p. 121). Therefore, specialists such as Mirzoeff (2003) and Freedman (2006) propose the teaching of visual culture, carrying out a process in which interpretation acquires great relevance in front of creative expression.

Similarly, for some years, there has been concern about the need to improve teaching-learning processes in the education system (Bauman, 2007). Authors such as Asensio and Pol (2002) propose complementing formal education procedures with practices associated more with informal education (Huerta, Vidagañ & Munilla, 2014). In this field, contemporary art opens the way, as it can play a significant role as an educational tool, since it facilitates the development of education and critical reflection of citizenship (Bamford, 2009).

However, it is important to note that educational and audiovisual environments function as separate work spaces. This leads to the development of different curricular, organisational, and training approaches on the part of teachers (Huerta, 2003). And Cinema, for its part, has been gaining ground in this sense (Díaz Herrero & Gértrudix Barrio, 2021), because it covers a wide range of possibilities that can contribute favourably to enriching and improving knowledge in both areas of knowledge.

It is also worth remembering that in the latest educational laws (LOE, LOMCE) the concept of "learning by competencies" has been introduced as a process to give greater effectiveness to the contents learned. It had as a goal to develop the abilities and skills of the student to extrapolate the concepts and contents to their daily life (Reina García, 2019, p. 118). So, it highlights in this sense Reina García (2019) that, from the artistic disciplines, there is not little that can be done and what could be contributed to the development of social skills, creativity, and divergent thinking in students. Thus, it is vitally important to work on audiovisual

education and to have a minimum knowledge of audiovisual language in order to propose didactic proposals focused on audiovisual creation and analysis, particularly video essays, from Secondary Education and the pre-college level. This will contribute to the improvement of a more creative, collaborative, and nonhierarchical education (Bamford, 2009).

Also, we consider it relevant to comment that Huerta, Vidagañ and Munilla (2014) conducted a study in secondary schools in the Valencian Community that intended to analyze the perception of teachers on the role of contemporary art as an educational tool through a Likert scale questionnaire. There were 102 teachers surveyed, from seven public schools, and one of the most striking conclusions that came to light was that they have not necessary knowledge to carry out pedagogical activities using contemporary art in its various formats. This is a gap in which it is necessary to continue working in all areas of academic training, mainly in the continuous educational renovation of teachers. From the incorporation of improvements focused on these aspects in the curricula of the official master's degree for the teaching profession in Secondary Education, pre-college and Technical Education in different areas of knowledge.

On the other hand, an approach to the video essay was carried out by some high school teachers such as Arcoba (2020), who made a proposal for a video essay among a group of students at this level of education in the specialty of art, in an institute located in the town of Sagunto (Valencian Community). Specifically, within the framework of the audiovisual culture II subjects taught in the 2017-2018 academic year. The main objective of this experience was to deal with the audiovisual languages related to contemporary art. In her interesting contribution, more details are offered about this pedagogical experience, and among its results it is highlighted that it was far from "the rigidity of the usual procedures of reflection, crossing its limits and coordinating different elements, such as editing" (Arcoba, 2019, p. 11). The students expressed great interest and motivation, because to the fact that this practice led them to learn about new audiovisual tools.

3.2. METHODOLOGICAL BASIS

The methodological basis of this proposal is presented below. This contribution is based on a qualitative methodology, in particular, content analysis of some audiovisual pieces in video essay format. Pieces made by the Korean film director Kogonada, a few minutes long, and that are disseminated through platforms such as Youtube or Vimeo. A descriptive content analysis of a series of aspects considered most significant linked to audiovisual techniques and strategies, which are constituted as ways of writing films (Martí Saldes, 2004). Obviously without including value judgments (Anguera Argilaga, 1986, p. 29). A process that involved the review of documentation, the decomposition, and an exhaustive study in accordance with the characteristics of the proposed research, as well as the interpretation of certain elements that give shape these audiovisual pieces. Undoubtedly, it is worth remembering that qualitative research implies great rigor and is based on a collection of data information that emerges from a detailed description at the level of observability (Anguera Argilaga, 1986) and in which the previous knowledge and the cinema culture of a researcher in this field of knowledge intervene.

By way of contextualization, we will offer some details of the selected sample. Both are located on digital platforms for free viewing, favored by sharing through social networks, provided that the original author is cited. On the one hand, the piece that takes Alfred Hitchcock as a reference is titled by the Korean director *Eyes of Hitchcock* (2015). The piece that offers a vision about Stanley Kubrick's career is titled *One Point Perspective* (2013) 108. Below are the stills that start both audiovisual pieces.

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[108] The frames are used as illustrative purposes. The rights of these images belong to the copyright holders of the mentioned productions and have been included under the protection of the right of quotation established in Art. 3. Spanish Intellectual Property Law (Royal Legislative Decree 1/1996, of 12 April, approving the revised text of the Intellectual Property Law).

Fuente: Youtube. Opening frame of *Eyes of Hitchcock*.

Fuente: Youtube. Opening frame of *One point perspective*.

Content analysis is considered the most appropriate methodology for the proposed study, so this provides a series of tools to study some of the most transcendental strategies of audiovisual language, such as shots, camera angles, colours, editing, spaces, character movements, etc. Particular ways of writing and making films that, in this case, take as references two figures that set a precedent in the History of Cinema,

because significant samples have been selected, made up of two video essays. For this selection, special attention has been paid to the transcendence and historical scope of the directors Alfred Hitchcock and Stanley Kubrick, great cinema authors. Kogonada believes in the concept of auteur cinema, made by directors who take on an individual aesthetic and have a personal style. Focusing on the protagonism of his audiovisual pieces.

The purpose and methodology of this study have been defined, but we would like to clarify that it is not part of the objectives of this contribution to make an overview of the evolution of video essay, problems inherent to this category, theoretical foundations… So, we invite to consult the interesting contributions of Weinrichter (2008), Rascaroli (2017) and Russo (2021).

3. 3. Audiovisual style of Kogonada

We mentioned earlier that only a few academic studies have been found that delves into Kogonada´s trajectory. Cinema usually dedicates to him some superficial spaces of reviews in digital magazines, in the form of interviews or small reviews of specific movies. This was one of the reasons we became interested in his role as director. Therefore, we will make here several observations about his audiovisual work.

It is interesting to note some aspects that Kogonada points out in several interviews. Here, Kogonada declares that his initial interest was not the practice of film review or analysis because he was interested in playing with the aesthetic possibilities of combining cinema forms (Macaulay, 2014). Furthermore, Kogonada believes that cinema theorists considered cinema as something concrete, but explains that "I understand it as a point for discussion, where everyone's eyes converge, from those of the directors to those of the spectators" (Suárez Álamo, 2016).

Actually, his feature filmography is rather scarce, being summarized in the following productions: *Columbus* (2017), *After Yang* (2021) and *Pachinko* (2021). Also, he has been co-commissioned by leading audiovisual publishers, such as, for example, *Criterion* (Russo, 2021).

Related to his audiovisual work in the form of a video essay, the material of his pieces comes from an expert attention to the filmography of some great cinema authors. This, in a rich catalogue composed of directors such as *Hands of Bresson* (2014), *Eyes of Hitchcock* (2014), *Mirrors of Bergman* (2015); in addition to Quentin Tarantino, Stanley Kubrick, Wes Anderson, and Darren Aronovsky, for which he has great admiration. However, he is particularly interested in Yasujiro Ozu's work, especially for the way he had to create connection and humanity through time and space in this modern context.

In his video essay, the free and pure exploration of the forms, of the internal mechanisms employed by great directors acquires relevance, and this builds a "brand or personal seal" (Silva, 2017). Also, this director unites study, music, rhythm, and he believes that cinema requires that thoughts and feelings always go hand in hand (Suárez Álamo, 2016). In addition, it is remarkable that "the proposals of Kogonada install a voice built with various resources, sometimes it is pronounced by him, sometimes delegated to posters or other authors who cite or are recited by others persons" (Russo, 2021, p. 240).

To end with this brief review of Kogonada, we would like to comment that some film critics, such as a Jordi Costa (2017), define his style as "a poetics of modernity ready to reach a humanist truth through abstraction". And he thinks that Kogonada is a video essay star that proposes a new model of philosophical cinema where form is background and background is the form.

4. RESULTADOS

In this section, we will proceed to analyse the selected of two video essays, highlighting aspects of the content and the most important audiovisual strategies.

Firstly, we begin with the piece entitled *Eyes of Hitchcock* (2013). As a reminder, it is worth noting that the primary characteristic of Alfred Hitchcock's cinema style was his mastery of technique and his ability to express purely through visual means. And, this was subordinated to the dramatic impact in order to capture the audience. An essential

conditioning for the construction of suspense, also creating false clues, devising techniques not previously used, manipulating time, and also the public, even in favour of the murderer through each cut and each montage (Ackroyd, 2015).

Honouring its own name, this audiovisual piece gives special weight to the eyes as the main element, and it has a duration of 1'50" minutes. In general terms, as far as morphological and syntactic codes are concerned, it is worth highlighting that, through close-ups and detail shots, the main characters are combined here in different circumstances from different productions by this director, such as *The Rear Window (*1954), *Vertigo* (1958), and *Psycho* (1960), among others, which are shown through different visual strategies. Visual strategies such as chained fades, overlapping frames of a few seconds of duration or through an excessively fast cutting montage. In addition, original scenes of strong contrast and quite harsh lighting stand out, in black and white and others in colour, through a modification of some original colours, resulting in a strong contrast of grays conjugated with luminous green elements (turned phosphorescent by Kogonada), as can be seen in the frame below.
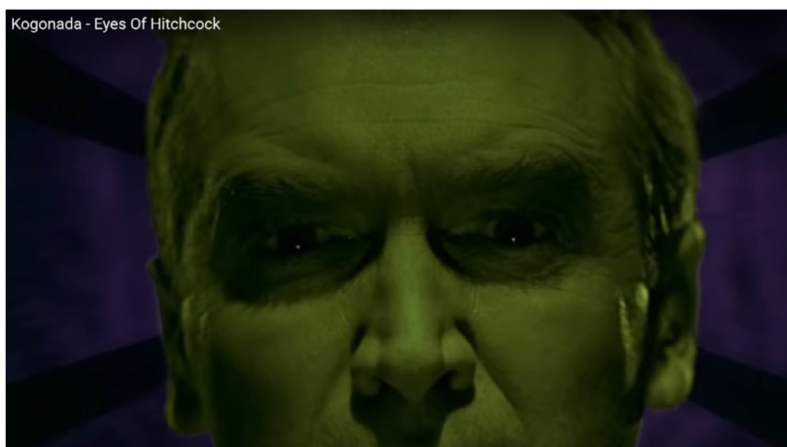
Fuente: Youtube. Frame de *Eyes of Hitchcock*.

Likewise, these faces that are presented question the viewer to the point of seeming hypnotic, coupled with accelerated movements and use of movements that resemble to *zoom in* and *zoom out.* Movements through which the breathing of the characters is simulated as a *boomerang.* Some neutral angles are accentuated, and others in dive originally presented by Hitchcock to emphasize the role of weakness that he gave to some characters in certain circumstances of the original narrative. For example, in scenes in which a protagonist is subjected to aggression or is about to fall from a considerable height.

This video essay ends with a printed eye, which is gradually being cut out as it gives way to another larger eye superimposed on a large wall. With this final detail, a brief wink is made to another director for whom Hitchcock felt a real predilection, Luis Buñuel, specifically, these eyes are reminiscent of his film *Un perro andaluz (*1929). This is shown in the influence of Buñuel's films on Hitchcock's (Stam, 1983). Hitchcock confessed this in an interview given in 1972 in a show presented by Dick Cavett on an American network. In this sense, an exhibition organized by Professor González Requena at the Centro José Guerrero in Granada in 2011 raised a symbiosis about the common obsessions, artistic and visual interests that coincided in the ideals of these two legendary directors. Some frames we reference are presented below.

Fuente: Youtube. Final frame *Eyes of Hitchcock*.

Fuente: Youtube. Frame *Un Perro andaluz.*

Undoubtedly, we cannot ignore the sound codes either, so in accompaniment to the visual strategies, through the musical theme of this brief piece, Kogonada pretends to make participate and remind to the spectator of the nervousness, uneasiness, and restlessness that Hitchcock promoted in the audience throughout the whole of his cinema career. Here is a significant and transcendent sample of it in this piece that has just been examined.

Second, we comment on aspects of the piece that Kogonada titled *One point perspective* (2015) with 5 million views on Vimeo (Russo, 2021). Here Kogonada takes Stanley Kubrick's trajectory as a reference for this review. For his part, Kubrick had a very particular way to filming and directed because it can be seen in every shot, in every movement of the camera, in the different angles, in the meticulousness and aesthetics of the composition. Now, he tackled various cinema genders, such as science fiction, horror and historic dramas, among others. Even mixing pre-existing genders, but achieving a hybrid result, translated into a totally particular and personal style as a director. A style in which we found symbolism, satire, the use of masks, the grotesque, and the creation of broken characters that ended up being self-destructive. He also

showed special interest in making use of thematic contrasts such as love and hate, desire and fear..., counterpoints related with existence and social relations, presenting a totally heartbreaking and socially critical message (Herr, 2001).

Specifically, the audiovisual piece that we analyze on this occasion has a duration of 1'45" minutes, and the main idea focuses on highlighting some technical aspects, devoting greater prominence to his visual aesthetics, such as colors and symmetry in the spaces that the director was able to build. From these colours and spaces, Kogonada masterfully combines main characters from several of Kubrick's film productions in different circumstances of   : A Space Odyssey (1968), A Clockwork Orange (1972), The Shining (1980), Full Metal Jacket (1987), and Eyes Wide Shut (1999), among others, establishing symmetries in certain areas in a comparative way in these different narrative contexts.

As for the images that Kogonada uses, we observe a strong contrast between black and white scenes and others colours. Through a montage that combines the succession of frames in a slow way, with other frames that are appearing in an accelerated way by cut and through some visual elements of transition that radiate excessively strident colors (oranges, blues, etc.), to differentiate the movie productions that he takes as a reference.
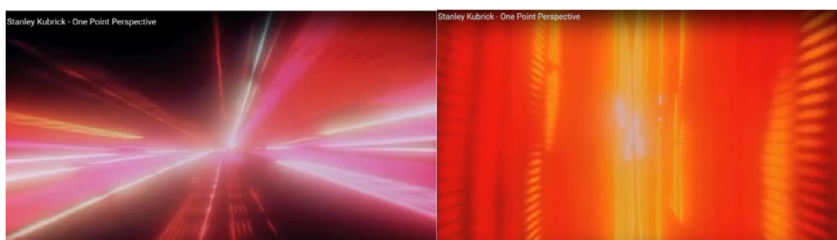
Fuente: Youtube. Frames of *One point perspective*. Visual Elements.

We insist that Kogonada emphasizes the magnitude of the spaces, also emphasizing also a series of details that are related with the placement of elements that integrate it. In such a way that the location and organization of the characters is confronted from symmetrical areas, taking as

a starting point the rule of thirds overprinted at the beginning of the video essay, which Kubrick translated favor of shots built from a vanishing point and obsessive use of central perspective. This we can observe in the next frame.
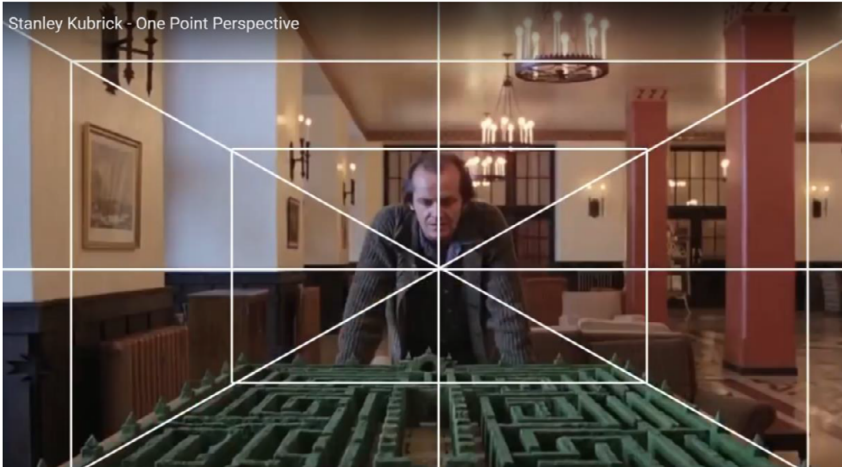
Fuente: Youtube. Frame of *One point perspective*.

Equally, the comparative presentation of characters from different productions is striking. Characters that, symmetrically, walk forward in similar postures. Therefore, in terms of syntactic elements, general shots of the spaces (when they are empty) and medium-long shots of some characters to leave space for their description. Thus, Kogonada strategically selects shots taken from the front and from the back of the characters, that is, from the back and from the front in neutral or frontal angles. Likewise, with regard to the tonality of the most attractive elements of atrezzo and his wardrobe, strident reds (the bathroom in *The Shining*), nuclear whites (in the spaces of : *A Space Odyssey*) and muted grays or browns (typical of the uniforms worn by the characters in *The Metal Jacket*) are emphasised. Colours and tones that are reiterated quite frequently in Kubrick's movies.

In this video essay, sound codes also acquire a strong weight, as is the case of the solemn song "Requiem for a Tower", composed by Clint Mansell, who also composed several songs for Darren Aronofsky's

films. Some of Kubrick's obsessions were also present in his cinema style.

5. DISCUSIÓN

Through these cinema reviews in the form of a video essay, a perspective is offered that relates to two directors who nourish each other technically and narratively. And this is done through the hybrid nature of visual poetic, which in this case translates into the presence of winks, suggestions, and references with which Kogonada allows himself to interpret the symbolic, metaphorical, chromatic, photographic, and plastic richness. First, Alfred Hitchcock, as he confessed that his inspiration took Luis Buñuel as a reference and the presence of the eyes is revealing; and secondly, with the traces of Hitchcock that can be seen in some of Stanley Kubrick's cinema productions, as in *The Shining*. This is how Kogonada exposes it from a particular visual poetics in both video essays. Only a minimal cinema culture of the trajectory of these directors and the descriptive exercise that we have presented is enough to observe the visual and narrative details through which each director materialized it in his original movie.

Balance, perfection, restlessness, thoroughness, and rigorousness are aspects that Kogonada conveys of Stanley Kubrick's career. While anxiety, manipulation, and uneasiness are the vision that he offers of Alfred Hitchcock's films. And for this, he makes use of an adulteration of the original audiovisual documents, giving these pieces a particular look. For example, we highlight almost hypnotic faces of the protagonists and a poetics characterised by the use of visual resources that have acquired greater strength in the contemporary audiovisual panorama, such as the *boomerang* and the acceleration in the editing, characteristics of postmodern cinema.

For clarification, we can explain that visual poetic is an experimental format in which the image, in all its facets, techniques, supports, predominates over the rest of the elements. This form of non-verbal poetic is a gender of its own, and its creators operate within the framework of the arts, such as Cinema, Painting, Theater, Music, and other cultural

vehicles (Thornton, 2010). So, in accordance with what commented Rudolf Arnheim (2002) Art is not an island, because it serves to understand our society and our context. Its principles apply to all fields of knowledge. They are a means of understanding the world through them. Because it is necessary "a pedagogy capable of educating the eye and drawing its incisor, capable of tuning it so that it penetrates beyond appearances, of diversifying it so that it enriches our ways of seeing" (Hernán Errázurriz, 2006).

Also, we can remember that in this cinema classification through which the cinema associated with postmodernity is articulated, it is common the temporal alteration, the combination of gender, the presentation of accelerated or aggressive montages, the excessive treatment of sexuality explicitly showing extreme human situations, the use of narcotic substances without taboos, among other aspects (Picó, 1998 and Imbert, 2019).

6. CONCLUSIONES

In this contribution, we have echoed some contemporary research voices that are strongly committed to the introduction of new practices in audiovisual and artistic culture in the classroom. Justifying the skills and competences that can be nurture in the training of students at the levels of Secondary Education and the pre-college level. Some experiences and studies have been presented in this sense, but the need for the continuous training of teachers cannot be ignored, so that they can put into practice initiatives that have the video essay as the centre of interest.

So, through this content analysis, a didactic exercise of hermeneutics has been carried out, and those elements considered most significant in two video essays that take as reference essential directors in the History of Cinema that deserve to be known by the new generations of students have been interpreted. An analysis that can help these generations learn new audiovisual strategies that are echoing in the contemporary artistic panorama and be taken into account to increase their knowledge of film culture. This through directors who started out as classics, but have

been paving the way in the use of techniques more associated with the postmodern style.

Of course, postmodernity in these pieces is reflected through the use of audiovisual strategies such as the *boomerang*, which serves in the piece *Eyes of Hitchcock to* stun or mentally disturb the viewer and thus convey an emotion typical of Alfred Hitchcock's career, such as uneasiness.

Definitely, Visual Education prepares students to think, understand and communicate through visual language, using all the systems of representation, at plastic level and those provided new technologies to society. It is not only an artistic concept, it enables the knowledge of reality and its relations through observation and perception of our context.

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