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ELECTROCONVULSIVE THERAPY AND CINEMA. FROM "THE SNAKE PIT" TO "REQUIEM FOR A DREAM"

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Introduction: Electroconvulsive therapy is nowadays one of the most useful treatments for severe mental disorders. A lot of patients refer an improvement or even a remission of their psychopathology after this treatment.

Objectives: To demonstrate how cinema has favoured the creation of a social stigma against mental health professionals, against the treatments we use and, most of all, against the people we treat. We based this project on the portrait cinema has made of electroconvulsive therapy (ECT).

Methods: ECT appears in more than thirty films. We take into account the most representative ones shot from 1948 to 2008.

Results: ECT makes its debut in cinema in 1948, ten years after its first use as a psychiatric treatment. During 60 years, ECT comes on stage in more than 30 films. The main indication in cinema to use ECT is to control and punish antisocial behaviors. Medical consent is not asked in most of the films. The ECT modified procedure doesn't appear.

Conclusions: Cinema has contributed to stigmatize mental illness, psychiatrists and treatments we use, specially electroconvulsive therapy.