

**DREAM WITHIN A DREAM:  
A PSYCHOANALYTIC ANALYSIS ON THE 90s CINEMA**

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## **I. Introduction:**

The starting point for my thesis is the blast in the number of films, during the 90s that tackle the subject of reality, representation, illusion, hallucination and simulation. Many of the films of the 90s either put the problem/question “what is the difference between reality and dream (illusion, fantasy)?” at the center of their plot, or involve this subject as a side theme/issue. The following films are the most prominent ones, some of which involve this issue explicitly, the others take it on rather implicitly: *Total Recall* (*Paul Verhoeven, 1990*), *Johnny Mnemonic* (*Robert Longo, 1995*), *Strange Days* (*Kathryn Bigelow, 1995*), *12 Monkeys* (*Terry Gilliam, 1995*), *Lost Highway* (*David Lynch, 1997*), *Contact* (*Robert Zemeckis, 1997*), *The Blackout* (*Abel Ferrara, 1997*), *Dark City* (*Alex Proyas, 1998*), *Pleasantville* (*Gary Ross, 1998*), *The Truman Show* (*Peter Weir, 1998*), *8 mm* (*Joel Schumacher, 1999*), *Ed TV* (*Ron Howard, 1999*), *Fight Club* (*David Fincher, 1999*), *The Sixth Sense* (*M. Night Shyamalan, 1999*), *ExistenZ* (*David Cronenberg, 1999*), *The Matrix* (*Andy and Larry Wachowski, 1999*), *Being John Malkovich* (*Spike Jonze 2000*), *The Cell* (*Tarsem Singh 2000*).

If the list is examined, it can be asserted that by the second half of the 90s the number of the films which deal with this subject has increased. Nevertheless, the question “what if all experience – all we watched- is a dream (illusion, fantasy)?” has been an appealing subject for the cinema from the beginning of its history. During the golden years of classical narration, films like *Laura* (*Otto Preminger, 1944*), *Women in the Window* (*Fritz Lang, 1944*), *Spellbound* (*Alfred Hitchcock, 1945*) can be specified as the most interesting examples of films that involve the same question/theme. Starting from the 70s, remarkable examples, though they emerge infrequently, give the signs of the coming tendency of the 90s mentioned above. Among these, there are films like *Don't Look Now!* (*Nicolas Roeg, 1973*), *Blade Runner* (*Ridley Scott, 1982*), *Videodrome* (*David Cronenberg, 1983*), *Brazil* (*Terry Gilliam, 1985*), and *Blue Velvet* (*David Lynch, 1986*).

As discussed by many film theorists, film affords influential experience that can be considered as form of illusion akin to the experience of daydream and dream. If cinema is considered as a form of illusion, it becomes apparent that the reality/dream problem inherits great importance, since the medium itself echoes the problem/question. So, the topic I research begins with the conceptualization of cinema as a form of illusion. This characterization of the cinema has roots back to Plato's criticism of art in 'The Republic'. Plato considers art to be "essentially illusionary: rather than being master of what we see, we are placed at the mercy of a point of view upon the world that is dictated by the artwork." <sup>1</sup> Hence, as a form of representation, as an art form, cinema evokes the concept of illusion.

If we consider the structure of cinema as a form of illusion together with the question "what is the difference between reality and dream (illusion, fantasy)?" which many films of the 90s tackle, we can say that our research takes us to the domain of philosophy. As Gilles Deleuze states, "philosophy is not a state of external reflection on other domains, but in a state of active and internal alliance with them, it is neither more abstract nor more difficult." <sup>2</sup> For Deleuze, philosophy can not be reflected on something else, but concepts are thought in a new way.

The question "what is the difference between objective/true reality and its representations or semblances like dreams, illusions, hallucinations?" has attracted philosophers from the beginning. The question "what if we do live in a dream (simulated) world" which attracts contemporary filmmakers is not a new one. 'All experience is a dream, we live in a dream' this same old argument has been defended by skeptics for centuries. Epistemologists challenge skeptics to block this argument. But one of skeptics' arguments has not been defeated so far. (There are new, more complex versions of this simple argument.) The argument is as follows: suppose that highly sophisticated equipment makes it possible to get somebody's brain and keep it alive in a vat. Scientists have given the entire story to the brain, about the entire life. It is not possible for brain to know that this life is different from normal life unless scientists explain it to the brain. Skeptics ask

what guarantees that we are not one of those brains in a vat. What guarantees that we don't live a life as brain lives?

The 'brain in a vat' argument was the starting point for Descartes who is considered the founder of modern philosophy. Starting from rejecting everything, being skeptic about his own existence, his experiences and his entire life, he comes to the point that he has the capacity to doubt, to think viz. being capable of believing or disbelieving these possibilities, he proves that he exists. By following this methodological doubt, he puts forward the reason viz., cogito (the basis of mental activity) as the source of all knowledge. Thus, the kernel of Descartes' theory of knowledge relies on the methodological doubt which is derived from the question "what if all experience is a dream?" Therefore, regarding the questions/concepts that I pursue throughout my thesis, one alternative is to elaborate on these concepts on the basis of some well-known philosophical themes. However, for reasons that I will mention later on, in my study I will instead use psychoanalytical criticism to ponder on these issues.

If we return to the cluster of films that have been selected from the 90s, the significant thematic resemblance among them becomes clear after a brief examination. Having specified their resemblances, these films can be gathered into sub-groups. For example, some of them especially focus on the question of the difference between objective reality and its semblance(VR), some concentrate on the difference between the experience of waking state (conscious) and dream state (unconscious), or others emphasize the difference between accurate perception(or memory) and false perception(or memory). The main drive that plays an important role in the selection of these films is that they belong to the mainstream cinema rather than the so-called "art cinema". The reason of this restriction which is imposed from the start will be clear as I open up my research topic. To be precise in my analysis, I chose four movies to examine in depth. The final list of films, which I have selected is as the following: The Truman Show (Peter Weir, 1998), The Matrix (Andy and Larry Wachowski, 1999), Being John Malkovich (Spike Jonze, 2000), The Cell (Tarsem Singh, 2000).

Beyond the practical reasons, there are some decisive factors that played role in my decision for this selection. First of all, these are examples of late 90s cinema and they are highly aware of their predecessors. Because of this awareness, these films are quite mature in treating their subject matter. As I will discuss in detail in the film analysis section, that these films include almost all the points which are revealed by their forerunners -most of their names are tried to be mentioned in the above list. Especially “The Truman Show” and “The Matrix” are full of visual and thematic quotations from previous examples and give references to these films nearly turning their text into a collage of past films, deconstructing them at the same time. The maturity in narration and intertextual quality are part of the reasons for the selection of these four films.

The major factor that distinguishes these films from others in the list is their self-conscious and self-reflexive narration. The intertextual narration is one of the characteristics which make them self-conscious. Intertextuality is a significant determinant that changes the process of creating meaning in the film. While it makes the viewer more active in this process, it may either render film’s intention more graspable and explicit or may make it quite confusing. By means of either way intertextual narration addresses the screen-spectator relation. Moreover, these four films mirror their subject matter which questions the difference between reality and dream (illusion, fantasy) by transferring the same question/uncertainty to their narration. In other words, with a narration-wise play, these films duplicate the same question they asked narrative-wise. So, the question/theme they deal with is reminded to the viewer once again by their narration-wise strategy which makes the spectator confused/think about the epistemological status of what they watch. Therefore, their most distinctive quality which distinguishes them from the previous films stated above is above all, this self-conscious and self-reflexive quality. Thus, I have chosen to examine these four movies from late 90's, a decade during which most films have turned on to themselves as they mix dream (fantasy, illusion) with reality. They tell about themselves not only by focusing on self-related subjects such as reality, representation, illusion and more specifically principles of cinema or

experience of the spectator, but also by bringing up the same subjects through their narration.

Thus, with an emphasis on the self-conscious and self-reflexive narration, these movies foreground the screen-spectator relationship. At this point, the reason why I do not prefer to use philosophical paradigm in my study becomes clear. The screen-spectator relationship has not been theorized from a philosophical point of view by the film theorists. One of the popular areas in which the screen-spectator relationship has been explored is the psychoanalytic approach. The literature written on this subject is mainly composed by the psychoanalytic theorists. Yet, the question, that my thesis topic is derived from and the films of the 90s tackle invite us to the field of philosophy, and I will not entirely stay away from this domain. That is why the theorist who is most frequently referred to in my thesis will be Slavoj Žižek. His works are intercutting psychoanalysis, philosophy and cinema. For instance, he brilliantly blends Hegel and Lacan, and in most of his works he provides an amazing reading of psychoanalytic theory of Lacan through the works of contemporary popular culture, from horror fictions to films.

The focus on the spectatorship side of the subject is also the very reason for the exclusion of “art cinema” examples from the list. Since “art movies” are not made for box office success, and do not aim to be popular, generally they do not meet with the great masses. That is why the spectatorship side is a minor issue in evaluating these films. Another point regarding art movies is that they typically give more weight to the subject-matter than how this theme is narrated. Most of the films that fall into the category of “art movies” involve philosophical problems and give emphasis to the elaboration of their content. In contrast to mainstream cinema that provides popular themes and texts “art cinema” focuses on deep issues which invite modernist criticism to discover the meaning “supposedly” endorsed beforehand.

Mainstream cinema allows one to think over popular texts and thus provokes postmodern criticism. While, the modernist criticism requires extreme closeness to the studied text, postmodernist criticism lets oneself keep the necessary distance from the text. In postmodern

criticism, distance from text is necessary to re-consider what is superficial and easily grasped when examined straightforwardly. Popular texts that look shallow, simple and obvious are more industrious for postmodern criticism. Žižek perfectly clarifies the distinction between the modernist and the postmodernist criticism as follows: "...the pleasure of the modernist interpretation consists in the effect of recognition which 'gentrifies' the disquieting uncanniness of its object ... the aim of the postmodernist treatment is to estrange its very initial homeliness..."<sup>3</sup>

Popular texts also have a lure that attracts psychoanalytic criticism. This attraction comes from the similarity between the texts of psychoanalysis, namely dreams, and popular texts. The former resembles the latter in being meaningless, hollow and invites interpretation because of this very meaninglessness and absurdity. As postmodern criticism attaches a deeper sense to popular texts that look shallow and plain, psychoanalytic interpretation attributes meaning to dreams; seemingly meaningless, non-signified/non-symbolized texts. This explanation also accounts for why I prefer to use psychoanalytical criticism in my research.

To put it again precisely, my thesis is about the following tendency in the 90s: by their self-reflexive nature, many films of the 90's deal with the subject of reality, representation, illusion, simulation and hallucination and bind these subjects to the very nature of cinematic narration and experience. On the basis of this broader scope, I try to answer the following questions: how can an analogy be drawn between these themes and cinematic experience; how does cinema represent these subjects; and how does this preoccupation change film form as well as content? Finally, how does cinema mirror itself, i.e. become self-reflexive; in return, what is the change in verisimilitude in the cinema of this decade?

To commence to answer these questions, the following two different planes should be clarified. First, keeping in mind that cinema and dream are both representation mechanisms as mentioned by many theorists, there is a kinship between filmic narration and experience, narration of dream and experience of dreaming. (The first plane will later conclude that 'conscious fantasy'<sup>4</sup> is

more likely to be compared with film than dream regarding how our perception functions during these three different activities. In addition to Christian Metz, who takes the concept of fantasy or conscious fantasy as a mere physical cognitive process, I examine this concept considering other academicians who also dealt with the issue, from Laplanche and Pontalis to Slavoj Žižek or Elizabeth Cowie.)

The other plane, which belongs to a further epistemology, refers to how cinema -whose narration already highly resembles the perception principles operating in dream's (fantasy's) narration- represents dream. My primary objective is to explain how the films of the 90's erase the distinction between these two planes, and how they comment on their very nature by making obscure the ground on which they stand.

As mentioned above, during the 90s films have turned on to themselves in such a manner that every film tells something about itself whatever its subject is. To examine a tendency which involves the act of looking/turning into itself is analogous to psychoanalytic theory which, broadly speaking, is the practice of delving/looking into a person's unconscious to understand him/her as a psychic being. So, the tendency which I will examine is in resonance with the psychoanalytic approach. The films I selected comment on the cinema itself by mirroring it through their self-reflexive and self-conscious narration and also by means of their subject-matter. This distinctive pattern of these films bears again certain resemblance to one's gaining insight through the psychoanalytic study.

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<sup>1</sup> Richard Allen, Representation, Illusion, and the Cinema, Projecting Illusion: Film Spectatorship and the Impression of Reality, Cambridge Univ. Press, 1995, p.81

<sup>2</sup> Gilles Deleuze, Cinema 1: The Movement-Image, Trans. By Hugh Tomlinson, Barbara Habberjam, Univ. of Minnesota Press, 1996, p. IX

<sup>3</sup> Slavoj Žižek, Introduction, Everything You Always Wanted To Know About Lacan (But Were Afraid To Ask Hitchcock.) , Edited by Slavoj Žižek, Verso, 1992, p. 2

<sup>4</sup> Christian Metz, Film and Fantasy, The Imaginary Signifier: Psychoanalysis and the Cinema, Indiana Univ. Press, 1984, pp.129-137

### **Ex-cell-ence in Narration:**

#### **Self-conscious Narration: Are we in a movie?**

Self-consciousness is narration's greater or lesser acknowledgment that a tale is being presented for a perceiver. Self-consciousness is a matter of degree. All filmic narrations are self-conscious, but some are more so than others. Classical narration makes itself invisible by supposing that narrator, narration and audience do not exist. Self-conscious narration, on the other hand, displays a recognition about its narration by making these elements visible.

Although "The Cell" has an invisible narration, in the film, the narration becomes self-conscious by making both editing and sound editing visible. Most of the scenes do not hide that they know about the rest of the story. The scenes communicate with each other; questions asked or comments made in one scene are replied by the following scene. In the film, editing, especially the parallel editing sequences towards the end, are highly self-conscious. Mostly, we see Julia after the point of view shots of Novak. In one scene, back from the journey in the unconscious of Carl, Novak shouts 'Can you get me out from this fucking ...' in the lab. In the following scene, the noise of water coming from several fountains all over the cell represses Julia's screams. Thus, Julia's unheard voice is given by Novak's shouting in the previous scene. It is not Novak, but Julia who is desperately crying out to be rescued.

Towards the end, intervals between edited scenes are shortened. Catherine returns back to hold the dying child whose voice almost echoes at the parallel scene as he begs her to save him. Hearing the voice coming from the previous scene, Novak follows it and finally gets into Julia's cell. Here the totally unheard voice of Julia, who has gone under water, is again represented by another voice.

At an earlier scene, we see Novak looking at Carl's picture, and asking himself 'You are the bad man, aren't you Carl', after which they find Carl in his home. There is a cut from Carl's picture, to Carl lying in the bathtub. This scene answers the question asked by Novak since he is

like a child who spouts water from his mouth. He seems so ordinary and innocent. This perfectly fits with the movie's proposition that nobody is the absolute good or evil. These two scenes again communicate with each other.

In order to reverse the process, Catherine tries to tune the equipment and sees a glass sphere and a tarot card on which there is a picture of a woman resembling Virgin Mary. In this scene, we hear the same exotic flute tune that was heard at the beginning of the movie. Making such use of music, the film makes a metonymical connection between these objects and the unconscious world. We easily recognize the affinity between music and the unconscious, since this music was first heard in the landscape of Edward. In the following scene, our supposition is proven to be true: when the reversal is realized, we see Catherine as Virgin Mary inhabiting a peaceful, pastel world, in which falling blossoms -match the snow flakes in the sphere. The importance of this connection becomes clear when the next explanation is considered.

Towards the end, as Novak searches Carl's house, from his point of view, we see a picture showing a torture scene that looks like depictions of the Medieval Ages, highly resembling his own torture executed by Carl. If we consider this scene and the one above together, we discover that these carry great importance in regard to film's main motive. In the movie, unconscious scenes are very pictorialist, composed of images inspired by famous paintings, works of plastic artists. This connection draws a parallelism between the construction of the unconscious world and the construction of movies.

There is also one very important sequence in which Catherine is lying in bed and watching TV that shows an interesting animation called "La Planète Sauvage" directed by René Laloux . In this animation, first we see a baby boy who looks sad and desperate, trying to get rid of the big hoop placed around his neck, but all his efforts are in vain since all he does is to pull it towards each side. Then, we hear a metallic toned voiceover that says "not so much power, the animal is delicate." Afterwards, we see two creatures who are blue skinned, red eyed, with big, egg-shaped

heads that look like Martians. The voiceover we heard previously which sounds as if indicating the child's weakness, seems to belong to one of these Martians. Finally, the animation shows the two women who are bound to each other by their long hair, trying to separate. Like the child who pulls the hoop to each side, the women do not come closer and try to undo the knot; rather each one pull their hair continuously towards themselves. This part of the animation seems to depict the situation of Catherine, whose mind is linked together with Edward's inside the lab and she cannot help thinking about Edward even outside the lab. Catherine is like the women trapped by their hair; she can not disconnect herself from that link. Considering Edward's relation to Catherine, the hair connecting the women can be interpreted as a symbol of umbilical cord which connects the baby to his/her mother. Edward is like the baby depicted in the animation, although he is a child who is supposed to meet—at least- some of his needs by himself, yet he does not hold any mastery over bodily processes. Psychoanalytically speaking, he is like an infantile at the pre-Oedipal stage of development in which the distinction between me and not-me is not constituted yet. He is in a state of complete dependency on another from whom he is not separated yet.

In the following scene, Catherine falls asleep and dreams about Edward. In fact, before going to bed, we see her smoking marijuana. When she is lying in bed, she first looks at the wrinkles of the blanket on her and those wrinkles turn out to be the dunes from Edward's world. So, this scene can be interpreted as her hallucination rather than her dreaming. If we consider the previous sequence, presentation of this scene as a hallucination becomes important. Because in the previous sequence, we witness a conversation between Edward's father and Catherine. Edward's father wants to end his son's treatment and put him in a hospital because he does not believe that the treatment works. He tells Catherine "All you are giving me is the belief that your interaction with my son is not a hallucination." Thus, the film proposes that the difference between dream state and waking state is not so distinct, neither is the one between hallucination and accurate perception.

In this hallucination, she searches for Edward, but she is confronted with his bad side ('Mocky-Lock'). When she suddenly awakens, we again see the same animation on TV, this time showing the baby boy with the hoop on his neck held by a huge, blue hand probably of one of the Martians. At this point, why "an extraterrestrial" offers a hand to help the baby is crucially important. In the eyes of an infantile, at the mirror stage, his/her mother is an autonomous, unified and fully coherent being. As in our imagination, we believe that somewhere in the universe, other living beings ("the other" of our culture) live in more developed, complex and superior civilizations, as it is always depicted in science fiction genre. So, the baby at the mirror stage imagining her/his mother as superior is similar to the way we picture an extraterrestrial organism with -supernatural- powers that we do not possess. Thus, each part of the animation is full of parallelisms with the movie's narrative. What we see is like an animated version of the movie. This is a highly self-reflexive sequence because it mirrors the movie's story.

### **Journey to the Unconscious:**

#### **Edward's:**

Most parts of "The Cell" take place in the unconscious of the three protagonists. The film opens with a series of shots of Sahara-like sand dunes, part of the unconscious landscape of a comatose child. Catherine Deane walks among these vast geometrical planes. The images that follow show her riding across the sands in a flowing white dress, and then finding the little boy in a landscape filled with Dali trees. The dunes, barest lands accompanied by exotic atmosphere music, represent the unconscious as *terra incognita*. Catherine tries to discover this unknown, indefinable dreamland, unconscious realm, '*terra incognita*' exposed to ongoing changes. Changes in the shape of the dunes reflect the tides in the mood of the child. The pattern and the results of the changes in Edward's unconscious are unpredictable, as that of dunes. The alterations occurring in Edward's temperament are presented as if he wears a horrible mask; he does not totally turn into another

character (as in the case of Carl). This shows that Edward's split identity problem is not at an irreversible point, we do not see multiple Edwards around yet.

### **Carl's: First Journey**

From the extreme close up of Catherine's pupils, we almost experience a free fall to Carl's unconscious. During this fall, we pass through entangled electric cables, many dolls intertwined with them. These cables sparkle at various points, in other words, make short circuits. That is why at these points we find the dolls, which are the reason for the short circuits of his mind. As we fall through some plants, we finally reach their roots. At this point, we see the day of Carl's Baptism. This shows what lies at the root of Carl's problems: his Baptism.

In Carl's unconscious, Catherine first finds herself lying in a small pond of water, thus we are warned about the coming danger signified by water. We already know that he imprisons his victims in a glass cell, which slowly fills up with water. In the earlier scenes, we see Julia, Carl's last victim, sitting by the poolside before she is trapped. Similar to Catherine, in the later scenes Novak is also seen lying in water as he enters Carl's unconscious. These introductions of Catherine and Novak can be interpreted as their birth in another person's mind, since the main source of the water metaphor in the film is Carl's Baptism. Later, we learn that his father baptized him so fervently that he nearly drowned. A pattern emerges: water everywhere, a means to both ruin and salvation, death and birth.

Through the words of a criminology psychiatrist the movie itself gives an explanation about Carl's illness as follows "Whelan's infraction...it is a form of schizophrenia... this thing is caused by a virus that infects the neurological system in utero. It lays dormant until it is triggered by some kind of trauma. The triggers can vary, usually water-related..." Even without this explanation, we can easily see that Carl's baptism is a traumatic experience for him. Why does the moment of Baptism affect him so traumatically? To answer this question, we should ponder on the sacrament of Baptism.

According to the Christian Sacrament of Baptism, the terms "Baptize", "Baptism" are employed to signify the sacramental washing by which the soul is cleansed from sin as water is poured upon the body. Theologians generally underline both the physical and the metaphysical definition of this sacrament, some of them prefer to combine and others formally distinguish between these two definitions. By the former sense, the action of ablution and the utterance of the invocation of the Trinity are expressed; by the latter, the definition: "Sacrament of regeneration" or that institution of Christ by which we are reborn to spiritual life. What is important for our analysis is the metaphysical signification of the sacrament rather than the physical one.

The term "regeneration" distinguishes baptism from every other sacrament because baptism was instituted to confer upon men the very beginnings of the spiritual life, to transfer them from the state of enemies of God to the state of adoption, as sons of God. In other words, by the sacrament of Baptism, men are made members of Christ and incorporated with the Church. Thus, according to the Testament, unless a man is born again of water and the Holy Ghost, he can not integrate with the spiritual life, what makes a newborn Christian is the sacrament of Baptism. Parallel to Christianity, in terms of the psychoanalytic approach, the child does not enter to the symbolic order unless his birth is sealed by the name of the father; biological birth, i.e. having been born from woman is not sufficient for the subject's entry into the symbolic system. What Carl's father does by immersing him so ardently and not pulling back immediately is to reject Carl's entry into the symbolic order. The entry to the symbolic system necessitates the separation of mother and child and the latter's announcing the name of the father, therefore the recognition of the paternal order. By pushing him into the water and keeping him there longer, Carl's father shows his reluctance to take him from his mother's womb. Since he is not taken out of the water (which is the symbol of the biological birth) Carl's separation from his mother is delayed, and he is symbolically pushed back into his mother's womb. Thus, at the moment of his Baptism Carl regresses to the point where he is inside his mother's womb. He regresses to the point where the differentiation from the mother

is not yet accomplished, where he is not a subject yet because his birth to the symbolic order is not successfully accomplished.

In the conscious realm, we see that Carl confines young girls in a glass cell and drowns them slowly. He kills them with water, the element he was plunged for his Baptism, therefore a symbol of purity. With an identical intent of purification, he bleaches them, drains their body and finally turns them into a doll, painted and pale. What is Carl's psychic drive behind the act of purification? As we mentioned above, he did not experience the separation of mother and he regressed to the pre-Oedipal stage. Thus, he is still inside the womb since the father has not performed his function. In the pre-Oedipal stage, the infant is integrated with the maternal body. To return to the mother/womb indicates returning to the oneness of things, to non-differentiation. The paternal symbolic constructs the reconciliation with the maternal body as abject. Barbara Creed explains the "abjection" of the body as follows;

“...the entry of the subject into the symbolic system... involves the repression of the maternal authority and period of her training when the mother controls the body of the infant. ... The normal state of affairs... is reversed; the dyadic relationship is distinguished not by the marking out of child's 'clean and proper body' but by a return of the unclean, untrained, unsymbolized body. Abjection is constructed as a rebellion of filthy, lustful, carnal, female flesh.”<sup>1</sup>

Thus, at the roots of Carl's lust for purification lies the intent of purifying the abject. His desperate efforts for cleansing in order to overcome the feeling/being of "abject" which is caused by the fact that the distinction between ego and not-ego is effaced. As Julia Kristeva writes, "it is not the lack of cleanliness or health that causes abjection but what disturbs identity, system, order."

<sup>2</sup> So, Carl's body becomes abject since the boundary between self and the other has been transgressed.

Kristeva states that the whole course of religion is aimed at holding off the danger of slipping in the maternal body:

“... that of being swamped by the dual relationship, thereby risking the loss not of a part (castration) but of the totality of his living being. The function of these religious rituals is to ward off the subject’s fear of his very own identity sinking inevitably into the mother.”<sup>3</sup>

At this moment, the movie’s emphasis on Carl’s Albino dog “Valentine” is worth mentioning. In the course of events Valentine plays an important role: his hair causes Carl to be caught. Detectives investigate a dog’s hair found at the crime scene and discover that the murderer has an Albino. “Hypomelanosis and a complete absence of melanin... the dog is an albino, I believe an albino dog is a rare animal” one of the detectives explains. The knowledge of dog’s rareness and purity of the element which makes this dog peculiar is highly emphasized. His dog does not come from a mixed race; it is pure and uncorrupted by another race. Carl wants everything around him pure, clean and unadulterated.

The womb relates both to the origin of the subject and also to the subject’s first experience of separation. The tanks become the symbolic space, the place of beginnings, and thus "the womb" to which the victims resist returning back. In the video recordings of Carl’s previous victim -before Julia- we see that the girl begs his father to save her. Moreover, Julie who, we are informed lives with her mother (her father has passed away), beseeches to God as follows: “Our father, who art in heaven hallowed be thy name”. So, both the victims call the name of the father, since without the third part, without the interference of the father, it is impossible to find the way out of the tanks, the cells, the womb. As we mentioned above, the accession to the symbolic order requires the separation from mother and the intervention of the father as third term in the dyadic. To announce the name of the father is necessary to guarantee that the subject takes his/her proper place in relation to the symbolic.

We see Catherine in a slow-motion world, where water (again) drops onto a leaf, causing the death of an insect, followed by the slow flapping of a fly. The movements of these small animals in slow motion magnify the effect of fear and horror element in Carl's dark world. Catherine sees a black dog, Carl's look-alike, Albino 'Valentine'. Meanwhile, she looks towards the direction where the voices come from, and sees a house that is too small in proportion to its surroundings. These scenes are very similar to Max Ernst's painting 'Two children are threatened by a nightingale'. The distortion of perspective is one of the main qualities in Surrealist painting. We see a lot of scenes borrowed from Surrealists' works, images, and symbols throughout the movie.

Then, Catherine endeavors to reach the "little boy" version of Carl, trapped inside and alongside the long stairs. This reminds Escher's famous stairs, despite all their perfection in mathematical proportions, they rebel against logic and Renaissance perspective, creating endless illusions; thus, they suppose different kinds of realities. These stairs fit perfectly to the depiction of unconscious realm. We see 'little Carl's hopeless attempts, going up and down the stairs. According to Freud, "-Steps, ladders or staircases, or, as the case may be, walking up or down them, are the representations of the sexual act." He continues as follows:

"... we come to the top in a series of rhythmical movements and with increasing breathlessness and then, with a few rapid leaps, we can get to the bottom again. Thus the rhythmical pattern of copulation is reproduced in going upstairs".<sup>4</sup>

If we think of this stair-symbolism together with the following statement, we come close to discover the sexual symbolism in the representation of Carl's unconscious. "Children in dreams often stand for the genitals; and indeed, both men and women are in the habit of referring to their genitals affectionately as their 'little ones'".<sup>5</sup>

In Carl's unconscious, Catherine follows little Carl, and witnesses the imaginary horse, that turns into still pulsating pieces within panes of glass, this scene is a restaging of the famous work of

contemporary artist Damien Hirst's sliced-up horse. Then, she goes through the collection of Carl's victims as dolls in display. We see most of the dolls' bodies joint with mechanical apparatus; they make erotic dances and striptease, showing their bodies' genitals. (Among them, one alludes to Degas' famous "Dancer"). One of the dolls reminds the famous depictions of Virgin Mary sitting in peace and quiet with the animals. When Catherine gives her hand to this girl, -why Catherine chooses this Virgin-like woman is quite understandable, since as we see later, she idealizes herself as Virgin Mary- a huge, enormously built masculine woman stops her. *S/he* is the bodyguard of Carl the King. So, in the unconscious of Carl, we see all women are made functionless in regard to sexual activity. This last one is made useless by its look of masculinity-*S/he* is neither woman nor man based on its body-. All of them arouse the feeling of abjection. They cause this dichotomy, being at the same time attractive and repulsive, exciting and not responsive. Carl's ambivalent thoughts concerning women are expressed by this presentation of women. He turns every one of them into semi-mechanical dolls, so that he no longer is charged with having sexual relation with them. As we see in conscious realm, he suspends himself over the doll's corpse, using the hooks he has implanted in his back, and does not even touch her when he is masturbating.

At the following scene we see Carl the King, wearing a purple cloak that covers the walls and the ceiling of a huge room. As Catherine later mentions to Novak, 'he is an idealized version of himself, a king in his kingdom'. He is the king in his unconscious, since, as Freud says, "Dreams are completely egoistic". The existence of the bodybuilder woman can be interpreted as the one, which his ego wants to see himself. As Freud states, "Whenever my own ego does not appear in the content of the dream, but only some extraneous person, I may safely assume that my own ego lies concealed, by identification, behind this other person; I can insert my ego into the context." <sup>6</sup>

Carl the King, upset at Catherine's intrusion, roars a critical question: 'Where do you come from?' His voice is drowned with his body at his Baptism. When his bad side shows up, his voice becomes hoarse and inscrutable, like talking from under the water, he does actually talk from under

the water where he is stuck. Asking this question, Carl reminds us that she is watching him according to her own background. Catherine's intentions and motivations are questioned here, since we later see that she is also as egoistic as Carl in her dreams. How does she dare to trespass into Carl's unconscious, while totally ignoring her own selfishness?

### **Carl's: Second Journey**

This time Catherine finds herself stuck in the cell. She is trapped inside the cell as Carl's other victims. Catherine, follows Valentine to get into the house where little Carl lives. She finds him in the kitchen washing the dishes, again trying to 'clean' something. Carl hides her into the cupboard, fearing from his father's yelling. Catherine watches behind the cupboard his father beating, burning, and torturing him. In the cupboard, she later looks down to her foot and sees several snakes curling. Sexual symbolism is again apparent here. Freud mentions that "–Boxes, cases, chests, cupboards and ovens represents uterus..."<sup>7</sup> He also emphasises that

"Many of the beasts which are used as genitals symbols in mythology and folklore play the same part in dreams: e.g. fishes, snails, cats, mice (on account of pubic hair), and above all those most important symbols of the male organ–snake".<sup>8</sup>

It is easy to understand why the depiction of his childhood is filled up with such sexual symbolism. His father punishes him for his playing with dolls and accuses him of being a homosexual. Later, Catherine sees Carl; this time he is as in the conscious realm, in front of the bathtub. He tells about how he messed up his first job. In the bathtub, there is a girl, with cuts all over her body, bleeding. (I will return to this point in the flashback section.) Then, Carl the King shows up, traps her and puts a collar around her neck. This time, Catherine can not return to the lab.

### **Carl's: Entrance of Novak**

In Carl's unconscious, Novak encounters with three identical women sitting on small sand dunes. They are like paper-dolls cut from cardboard. The location of these women within the frame,

and the mise-en-scene credits in this scene makes them two dimensional, as in a photograph. These women represent Carl's mother. This scene gives the impression that there are an infinite number of women; because of the rules of perspective, they look as if they intersect with the horizontal line. Thus, they are reduced to mere forms, devoid of any character traits. These women turn towards Novak one by one, showing identical mechanic gestures as they talk about their son. They speak in a hurry, as if they are afraid of being caught. Afterwards they open their mouth towards the sky and freeze in that position. As all the other women in Carl's unconscious, these are also like puppets, his mother does not function her mother-role either.

Carl finds Catherine lying in bed, wearing a metal veil and a collar chained to the bed from the back. She calls him to her side and starts flirting. Catherine asks Novak: 'Did daddy do bad things to you?' At an earlier scene Novak explains Catherine the circumstances that forced him to quit his job as a prosecutor and start working for the FBI. He loses a child-killer case and feels responsible for the child's death. At the end of this conversation, Novak says: 'Not every abused child grows up to be a monster.' When Catherine asks: 'Are you sure?', 'Yes, I am sure.' he replies. In the latter scene, Catherine's question -mentioned above- assures us that Novak himself is the proof of his certainty. While Catherine distracts Novak, Carl catches him from behind. Novak asks for Catherine's help to escape Carl's tortures. Meanwhile, we learn that Catherine has a dead brother in her past. Catherine finally responds to Novak's begging and stabs Carl from behind.

How should we interpret this information given by Novak to stir up Catherine to help him? Or we can ask in another way how does remembering this fact about her past cause Catherine to wake up from that catatonic state? We will analyse her relation with Carl in detail later, but at this moment it is necessary to mention some points concerning Catherine's position in order to clarify the importance of this scene. To put it concisely, by going back and forth between conscious (symbolized) and unconscious (non-symbolized) realms and gaining a mastery over this transition, Catherine is a threat for the symbolic order which is retained only if the distinction between these

two realms is maintained. If we remember that Catherine reverses the feeds and brings Carl into her mind by breaking the rules, her rebellious acts and thoughts against the symbolic order becomes clear. By reversing the feed, she desires to reincorporate what it once gave birth to and prevent the infant's castration, thus making available and possible what is symbolically impossible and prohibited: the desire for the mother.

Keeping in mind her problematic relation with the symbolic order, we can infer that the trauma caused by her brother's death is related with her guilt complex. We can ponder on the following scenario: Catherine might have fantasized/wished his brother's death because of both her sibling's rival position in the Oedipal scenario and also her penis envy (he reminds Catherine of her deficiency because he possesses a penis). According to Freud, the unconscious is marked by its timelessness, its exemption from the law of non-contradiction and its lack of coordination and negation. Specifically, unconscious mechanisms have no means at their disposal for representing logical relations such as; 'if', 'because', 'just as', 'although', and 'either-or', and neither the relation of a contradiction, a contrary or a 'no'. So, we can assume that in Catherine's unconscious fantasy, there would be no difference between her fantasizing/thinking about his brother's death and her execution of his death. After his brother has died, Catherine inescapably feels guilty because of her previous fantasies. As psychoanalytic theory states there is no original trauma, the death of his brother is not originally traumatic; it becomes traumatic for Catherine, because she thought/wished for it to happen previously. In other words, the death of his brother causes guilt complex in Catherine because of her fantasy/thinking about it before he died.

At the previous scene, there is a graphic match -on action-, from Carl crying out and nodding his head to Novak shouting and again nodding his head, both suffering from pain. This way, the scene makes a connection between Novak and Carl and causes us to think about the strong possibility that Novak was also exposed to his father's violence. The visual presentation of Carl's torture, which is obviously a scene of castration, is worth mentioning. Carl pierces a scissors into

Novak's belly button and takes out his intestines. Here, the intestines evidently replace the umbilical cord and their being pulled out is a highly evident, literal representation of castration, not even a symbolic one. When the infant experiences separation from the mother and castration in the Oedipal period, the earlier experience of his umbilical cord being cut, in other words, one of his body parts(organs) being detached becomes traumatic.

### **Catherine's: Carl's visit**

Catherine imagines herself as Virgin Mary living in a calm, peaceful, pastoral and kitsch world that is covered with blossoms. We see Catherine throned above the stairs in front of a pool. Little Carl comes and sits on the stairs, and Catherine goes near him. Although they sit side by side, they are not situated within the same frame, since Catherine explains him why it is not possible to stay in the same world, in the very same frame, together. During their conversation, the frame becomes covered with ivy leaves starting from the edges. When Catherine refuses Carl, the leaves shrink rapidly and at the end of the sequence, they totally disappear.

The same effect could be created without painting on the film material (without intrusion of extra material between the screen and the viewer), just by making some arrangements in the mise-en-scene elements. The two protagonists sit in front of some garments and these are blown off by the wind, as Carl is refused. There should be a reason for this choice. In Catherine's unconscious, there is an enormous kitsch element in the depiction of her as Virgin Mary and the surroundings.

Although Catherine wants to imagine herself as Mary, she is just as much a queen in her world, as Carl is a king in his. When she catches him, having pleasure from seeing him in pain, she says 'my world, my rules'. Then, she shoots him with arrows on his wrists and ankles. However, she realizes that when the king is wounded, so is little Carl. Although the good side of him is separated from the bad side visually, embodying different appearances, in fact they are bonded together. Thus, the film expresses that the good side of a person can not be split from the evil side.

Little Carl absorbs all of the sins of Carl the King and man in general. Therefore, like Christ he sacrifices himself in an ultimate crucifixion.

In the following scenes the degree of kitsch element increases. Catherine turns back and tries to save little Carl although she knows that she has to kill him. She holds the wounded child. As Dorfles states

“...photographic reconstructions of sacred scenes such as The Virgin and the Child and so on, where the hieratic iconography of the religious image has now become an emblem is translated into the vulgar, physical charms of any old photographic model”.<sup>9</sup>

Reduction of these dramatic scenes into merely kitsch installations is not a coincidence. Catherine loses her patience easily, she does not show any mercy to Carl the King. Although garbed in nun's habit, she does not hesitate to torture him. On the contrary, she uses her power and enjoys her sovereignty. As Carl is not just a malevolent demon, she is not benevolent goddess either. Thus, the movie does not imply that she is like Virgin Mary, just the opposite, with the pompous costumes and decors exaggerated to the kitsch level, she is reduced to a model. She can be Virgin Mary only in her dreams!!!

How should we read “The Cell”'s presentation of Catherine as Virgin Mary? At the very beginning of the movie, we learn that Catherine wants to reverse the process and believes that Edward's coming into her mind will affect him in a very positive way. As the movie unfolds, in order to save little Carl, she reverses the feeds and brings him to her mind. Finally, she understands that it is not possible to save Carl in any way and has to kill him. Little Carl pleads her saying “save me” although Catherine replies “you can stay here with me”, she plunges him into the water. At the very final scene, this time we see Catherine bringing Edward into her mind.

Keeping our analysis of Carl in mind and considering Catherine's relation with him, how can we explain her constant desire for reversing the feeds? If Carl regressed to the pre-Oedipal

stage and he is still in her mother's womb, Catherine is the oral-sadistic mother who engulfs him. She is the dyadic, devouring mother maternal figure of the pre-Oedipal who has incorporating desires -desire to reincorporate what it once gave birth to. In this dual relationship, the father is excluded and the child (Carl) has incorporated to the devouring mother. Creed explains as follows:

“By refusing to relinquish her hold on her child, she prevents it from taking up its proper place in relation to the symbolic. Partly consumed by the desire to remain locked in a blissful relationship with the mother and partly terrified of separation, the child finds it easy to succumb to the comforting pleasure of the dyadic relationship.”<sup>10</sup>

Thus, in the dyadic relationship, the father is completely absent and the mother is the sole parent. Under the light of these explanations, why the film represents Catherine as Virgin Mary in the unconscious world becomes clear. According to Christian thought, Virgin Mary gives birth to a fatherless child; the child who is born of Mary without the intervention of man, is the son of God.

Close to the final, as Cathreine immerses the little Carl into water, in other words, as she fully incorporates him, Carl does not exist as subject any longer. He loses his chance of being (a subject) at the cost of incorporating to the maternal being. By referring to George Bataille, Creed explains the connection between the desire to return the mother/womb and death drive:

...life signifies discontinuity and separateness, and death signifies continuity and non-differentiation, then the desire for and attraction of death suggests also a desire to return the state of original oneness with the mother. As this desire to merge occurs after differentiation, that is after the subject has developed as separate, autonomous self, it is experienced as a form of psychic death.<sup>11</sup>

### **Flashbacks**

Since “The Cell”'s most scenes take part in the unconscious world, in this film temporality disappears and the notion of time is transferred into spatial qualities as it happens in dreams. The

occurrences/thoughts in the unconscious of Carl are not temporally ordered; they are chains of events/thoughts devoid of any causality and chronology. In the unconscious scenes, the events are not given as 'such and such things happened and therefore these events took place'. Instead, logically connected events are given side by side, simultaneously. Probably that is why there are many rooms in the depiction of unconscious world: in one room we see the little Carl is beaten by his father and in the next one, he cleans up his victim's body. As Freud writes

“...dreams take into account in a general way the connection which undeniably exists between all the way the portions of the dream-thoughts by combining the whole material into a single situation or event. They reproduce logical connection by simultaneity in time. “<sup>12</sup>

In this narration, flashbacks are inevitably important. In the unconscious realm -or in the world where the notion of time disappears-, there are no yesterdays or tomorrows, just now. So what is given in flashback is very crucial for the narrative. We see only one flashback about Carl that takes place in the unconscious world. In that scene, Carl replays over and over the day of his baptism, when water washes over the child Carl. Although he loses the notion of time -since he does not discern reality from fantasy- he can remember his Baptism clearly.

### **Mise-en-scene, Costume, Decors and Lighting:**

In the film, elements of narration such as mise-en-scene, costume, décors and lighting have great importance. In comparison, plot twists, turning points and characterization are simply secondary. The inter-cutting is done so well that at the end there is a great tension from all three directions. Why does the movie give so much importance to elements of narration rather than plot construction? There is an obvious answer to this question: the depiction of unconscious realm requires pictorial expression. In the process of transforming the dream-thoughts into the dream-work, representation of logical connections is ignored. Freud writes,

“The incapacity of dreams to express these things must lie in the nature of the physical material out of which the dreams are made. The plastic arts of painting and sculpture labor indeed, under a similar limitation as compared with poetry, which can make use of speech; and here once again the reason for their incapacity lies in the nature of the material which these two forms of art manipulate in their effort to express something”.<sup>13</sup> ... “But just as the art of painting eventually found a way of expressing, ... so too there is a possible means by which dreams can take account of some of the logical relations between their dream-thoughts, by making an appropriate modifications in the method of representation characteristics of dreams”.<sup>14</sup>

So, the expression of dream-work is quite similar to that of plastic arts, in the way they both exclude verbal texts and represent a different kind of logic. Characters’ depth is not given by dialogs, rather by the change in their costumes and the set-up in which they are placed. Thus, through allusions to several works of contemporary art, “The Cell” makes a lot of sense considering this analogy and what Freud mentions above. This is not the only reason for referring mostly to the works of Surrealist painters. Surrealists were interested in the nature of dreams; therefore they aimed to materialize the images of unconscious reality. That is why the movie makes references to Surrealists paintings in portraying the world of unconscious.

### **Conclusion:**

How should we interpret Carl’s hanging himself by the hooks pierced through his body? If similar performances of some artists such as Australian electronic artist Stelarc are taken into consideration, we can give a profound account of Carl’s acts. In one of his famous performance series, Stelarc hangs himself by piercing through his back and his legs. So, Carl’s acts can be read as an allusion to Stelarc’s performances. If the film’s highly intertextual narration is considered, this allusion to one of the contemporary performance artists is easily grasped. Up to this point, we mentioned many visual allusions to works of art, such as the works of Damien Hirst, Degas, Escher

and some Surrealist painters. Thus, why do Carl's acts become more comprehensible, when they are interpreted to have an affinity to Stelarc's work?

Carl drowns young women slowly while several video cameras are running so that he records every moment of their drowning. Suspended over his victim's body, he masturbates without even touching her and always keeps his distance. During this ritual, he replays the video record and watches his victim's drowning from the video screen. Thus, while he is masturbating, he needs the company of his victim's images. He does not observe her sinking into the water by his bare look, instead he mediates this event through video recording and watches the mediated images. In other words, he does not watch what is happening there, but the representation of it. Here, an allusion to a representation of art, namely to cinema becomes apparent.

What makes Carl's experience similar to that of the cinematic one is obviously Carl's viewing position. By putting the screen between the event and himself, he is transformed from being the actor of the event to being a viewer. That is to say, he is transferred from an active position to a passive one. At this moment, in order to clarify passivity of the spectator, we should elaborate on the affinity between the position of a spectator watching a film and that of a dreamer or daydreamer- one who fantasizes. The most frequently referenced psychoanalytic text regarding this topic is Freud's famous article 'A Child Is Being Beaten' which discusses beating fantasies reported by some of his patients.

Slavoj Žižek summarizes the workings of fantasy elaborated by Freud in his article as follows:

“Freud explains here how the final form of the fantasy scene ('a child is being beaten') presupposes two previous phases. The first 'sadistic' phase is 'my father is beating the child (my brother, somebody who is my rival double)'; the second is its 'masochistic' inversion: 'I am being beaten by my father'; while the third and final form of the fantasy renders indistinct, neutralizes the subject (who is doing the beating?) as

well as the object (what child is being beaten?) in the impersonal ‘a child is being beaten’. According to Freud, the crucial role belongs to the *second*, ‘masochistic’ phase: this is where the real trauma lies, this is the phase that is radically ‘repressed’. We find no trace of it in the child’s fantasizing, we can only *construct* it retroactively on the basis of ‘clues’ pointing to the fact that *there is something missing* between ‘my father is beating the child’ and ‘a child is being beaten’.”<sup>15</sup>

What is important for us here is the ‘neutralization’ of the subject and the object in the beating fantasy. The (third) final form of the fantasy opens up the domain of shifting, multiple identifications/positions for the fantasizing subject; he/she can adopt the position of the object, subject, both of them or the position of an onlooker, i.e., the gaze that watches the scene. Thus, the (third) final form of the fantasy is characterized by the absence of subjectivization. By referring to Laplanche and Pontalis, Elizabeth Cowie explains that in fantasy the spectator engages in multiple identifications as follows:

“The fantasy scenario always involves multiple points of entry which are also mutually exclusive positions, but these are taken up not sequentially –as in a narrative- but simultaneously or rather, since the unconscious does not know time in this way, to take up any one position is also always to be implicated in the position of the other(s).”<sup>16</sup>

Thus, the crucial point regarding the logic of fantasy revealed by this article is that fantasy entails multiple points of identification and places of enunciation.

Keeping in mind that cinema and dream (fantasy, conscious fantasy) are both representation mechanisms as mentioned by many theorists, there is a kinship between filmic narration and experience, narration of dream and experience of dreaming. The similarity between filmic narration and fantasy is remarkable in Laplanche and Pontalis’ description of fantasy in terms of a cinematic metaphor when they write of it as ‘the *mise-en-scene* of desire’.

When Catherine sees the marks of the hooks removed from Carl's back, she comments as follows: "You should have left him the way he was. He used to suspend himself, did not he? They are comforted by the feeling of weightlessness like flowing in water." Considering the above explanations, it is apparent why Carl likes this feeling of weightlessness (which resembles floating in water). Carl is still in her mother's womb in which he is like blissfully floating.

Like Carl, Catherine is suspended as well. When she is suspended, she wears a special costume in which her body seems turned inside out, as if her red muscles have burst out of her skin. Psychoanalytically speaking, this being inside out can be thought as an entry to the inside, i.e., an entry/return to the womb. Thus, they are both suspended, but for different reasons: Catherine is suspended to pass into a different world and forget about her existence in this world; on the contrary, Carl suspends himself to feel his existence in this world, he gains a grasp of this world by his hooks.

At this point, we should examine further Carl's relation with the symbolic order. Do we interpret his masochistic acts i.e., hanging himself as disobedience to the symbolic order? Here, Žižek's notion of perversion is worth mentioning:

"...in contrast to the neurotic, who acknowledges the Law in order to occasionally take enjoyment in its transgressions... the pervert directly elevates the enjoying big Other into the agency of Law. The pervert's aim is to *establish*, not to undermine, the Law... he gains satisfaction from the very obscenity of the gesture of installing the rule of Law -that is out of 'castration'." <sup>17</sup>

In addition to the above statement, if we consider that Carl's entry into the symbolic system is delayed (suspended), his performances can be interpreted as that of the pervert who endeavors to establish the Law, not to defy it.

"A perverse ritual thus stages the act of castration, of the primordial loss that allows the subject enter to the symbolic order, but with a specific twist: in contrast

to the 'normal' subject, for whom the Law functions as the agency of prohibition that regulates (access to the object of) his desire, for the pervert, *the object of his desire is Law itself...* the pervert, this 'transgressor' *par excellence* who purports to violate all the rules of 'normal', decent behavior, effectively longs for the very rule of Law."<sup>18</sup>

Carl, for whom the Law has not been established, strives for founding it. Since he is not symbolically castrated and did not adopt the symbolic Law which prevents access to the (incestuous) object, in carrying out his rituals, he obsessively tries to maintain a set of rules that substitutes the Law. As we see throughout the film, when both drowning the girls and hanging himself, he follows definitive rules in performing each step and works like a cautious technician. He puts his victims in a glass tank, a clockwork mechanism that automatically fills with water in 40 hours and drowns them. After they're dead, he prepares them for his ritual with great care, uses bleach to make them doll-like. Then, he suspends himself (using steel hooks embedded in his skin) over their dead, bleached bodies while watching their death videos. He works systematically and follows a complicated procedure full of regulations. Therefore, psychoanalytically speaking, Carl aims to substitute the Law with elaborately set up, self-imposed rules. Žižek perfectly illuminates the pervert's ritualistic activities as follows:

“A further point regarding the pervert is that, since, for him, the Law is not fully established (the Law is his *lost* object of desire), he supplements this lack with an intricate set of *regulations* (see the masochist ritual). The crucial point is thus to bear in mind the opposition between the Law and regulations (or 'rules'): the latter bear witness to the absence or suspension of Law.”<sup>19</sup>

As we mentioned above, the film draws an obvious parallelism between Carl's and Catherine's situations regarding their hanging themselves. We interpreted Carl's hanging ritual to have an affinity to the experience of the spectator (of a film), how should we read Catherine's

suspending herself? Is her experience similar to the psychological experience that the spectator undergoes?

From the outset, “The Cell” shows us how Catherine is involved with her job so immensely that she can not stop thinking about the patients even outside the clinic, and she is occupied every minute with the idea of reversing the feeds. Being so intensely Involved with her patients' thoughts, she suffers from insomnia. As we mentioned before, the only scene in which she falls asleep is after she smokes marijuana. So, the film gives the impression that the scene that comes after her smoking is not a dream but a hallucination. Thus, Catherine can not experience the realm of unconscious without the help of drugs (we know that in the clinic drugs are used to go inside one's mind). So, Catherine’s mind is always awake and active. Even when she is inside Carl’s or Edward’s mind, she is not inert, she wants to interfere with the course of events happening there. So, Catherine wants to change their unconscious world; by gaining their trust, she supposedly helps them to find their way not only symbolically, but also literally because she gives them a mirror through which she identifies their location.

In contrast to Carl, Catherine’s experience which starts with hanging by the hooks is not a passive one, and her experience is not like a journey analogous to the cinematic one. Her travels inside another mind is quite an active, moreover an interactive experience. Catherine does not passively observe but interacts with the flow of events, interferes with them.

In his article ‘Is it Possible to Traverse the Fantasy in Cyberspace?’ Žižek “considers how an engagement with cyberspace, through the distancing it offers, can allow particular structures of fantasy to surface”.<sup>20</sup> He gives an account on alternate modes of engagement with cyberspace regarding libidinal/symbolic economy. One of the options that cyberspace can provide, he suggests, is as follows:

“in cyberspace (or through cyberspace), it is possible to accomplish what Lacan calls an authentic act, which consists in a gesture that disturbs (‘traverses’) the subject

fundamental fantasy. For Lacan a gesture counts as an act only in so far as it disturbs (unhinges) this most radical level of the subject's consistency..."

Žižek notifies us that in order to grasp this notion of 'authentic act' here, we should reject the common sense notion that immersion in cyberspace is by definition not an act since we dwell in a virtual universe instead of engaging ourselves with the 'real' world. Žižek also mentions that

"for Lacan, fantasy is not simply a work of imagination as opposed to hard reality –that is, a product of our mind that obfuscates our direct approach to reality, or ability to 'perceive things the way they really are'." <sup>21</sup>

Thus, Žižek points out that fantasy is not merely a function of mind's faculties, which distorts reality; on the contrary, it is a window, a frame through which we can grasp perspective of reality. The important point is that for fantasy space to be provided, it is necessary to draw a line between what is imagined and what really exists outside. What Žižek calls as 'traversing the fantasy' emerges when this distinction is undermined.

"Traversing the fantasy ... involves our over-identification with the domain of imagination: in it, through it, we break the constraints of the fantasy and enter the terrifying, violent domain of pre-synthetic imagination, the domain... not yet unified and 'domesticated' by the intervention of a homogenizing fantasmatic frame." <sup>22</sup>

Back to the film, Catherine's relation with the unconscious realm and her attempts of reversing the feeds can be perfectly explained with Žižek's concept of 'traversing the fantasy'. Catherine, who is far from being a passive observer, actively participates in the unconscious world. She wants to participate, interfere and manipulate the unconscious universe. As opposed to Catherine, Novak stays away from the struggle between the little boy version and the idealized version of Carl. He only observes Carl's unconscious, does not interfere with the stream of events. After he notices the symbol that enables him to find Carl's victim, Novak tries to convince Catherine to leave there and forcefully separates her from little Carl. So, Novak fulfills the function

of 'the name of the father' by intervening with the incorporation of the child and the mother and tries to maintain the symbolic order.

When the line that distinguishes between the conscious and the unconscious is blurred for Catherine, she loses her control and totally believes in Carl's dominance and obeys him. As she comes to believe that unconscious world is as real as the conscious one, what she lives in the former, starts to be real. At the end, when she kills Carl in the unconscious, he becomes dead in the real world. Ironically, Carl's last words are 'this is not real'. Thus, as Catherine is involved in the unconscious sphere more and more, this realm overflows to the conscious one, as Žižek describes the fantasy is traversed. She over-identifies with the realm of unconscious, the limitations of fantasy are removed and the line separating the two spheres is annihilated. To conclude, while Carl's rituals resemble the cinematic experience and the experience of the fantasizing subject; Catherine's experience is similar to 'traversing the fantasy', Žižek uses this definition to explain one of the options that cyberspace provides. Catherine's experience is not like cinematic one; rather it is close to the one virtual reality apparatus generates.

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- <sup>1</sup> Barbara Creed, The Monstrous Feminine: Film, Feminism, Psychoanalysis, Routledge, London, 1993, p. 38
- <sup>2</sup> Julia Kristeva, Powers of Horror, Columbia Univ. Press, 1982, p.4
- <sup>3</sup> Kristeva (1982), p. 64
- <sup>4</sup> Sigmund Freud, The Interpretations of Dreams, Penguin Books Limited, London, 1991, p. 472
- <sup>5</sup> Freud (1991), p. 474
- <sup>6</sup> Freud (1991), pp. 434-5
- <sup>7</sup> Freud (1991), p. 471
- <sup>8</sup> Freud (1991), p. 474
- <sup>9</sup> Gillo Dorfles, Kitsch, The World of Bad Taste, Studio Vista Limited, London, 1969, p. 142
- <sup>10</sup> Creed (1993), p. 12
- <sup>11</sup> Creed (1993), p. 28
- <sup>12</sup> Freud (1991), p. 424
- <sup>13</sup> Freud (1991), pp. 422-3
- <sup>14</sup> Freud (1991), p. 424
- <sup>15</sup> Slavoj Žižek, Looking Awry: An Introduction to Jacques Lacan Through Popular Culture, The MIT Press, Cambridge, 1993, p. 120
- <sup>16</sup> Elizabeth Cowie, Fantasia, Representing the Women: Cinema and Psychoanalysis, Macmillan Press Ltd., 1997, p. 135
- <sup>17</sup> Slavoj Žižek, The Zizek Reader, Edited by Elizabeth Wright and Edmond Wright, Blackwell Publishers Ltd. Oxford, UK, 1999, p. 117

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<sup>18</sup> Žižek, (1999), p. 117-8

<sup>19</sup> Žižek, (1999), p. 118

<sup>20</sup> Žižek, (1999), p. 102

<sup>21</sup> Žižek, (1999), p. 122

<sup>22</sup> Žižek, (1999), p. 122

### **Spectators As Puppets On A String Of Identification:**

“Being John Malkovich” opens with ‘Craig’s dance of despair and disillusionment’ developed by Craig to show off his string-pulling skills. In the show, the puppet of Craig’s model, as if defeating himself, beats himself, scatters everything around and finally breaks the mirror and becomes exhausted. In the diegetic world, this is Craig’s first mirror stage experience in which he destroys his own image. Considering that for one to have an identity it is necessary to recognize oneself in the mirror, Craig can not stand his reflection in the mirror, and thus ruins his image along with his chance to own an identity. He does not want to have a rival, a challenger, that is to say an *other* and hence rejects an identity.

In analyzing a film whose own title supplies the concept of ‘being’, from a psychoanalytic approach, it seems very helpful to give a brief introduction on Jacques Lacan’s mirror stage. Lacan in his article “The Mirror Stage” gives an elaborate account on the emergence of subject through identification. He starts his essay explaining that the child, although defeated by the chimpanzee at the same age in instrumental intelligence, can nevertheless already recognize its own image in the mirror.

Lacan writes that ‘we have only to understand the mirror stage as an identification... namely, the transformation that takes place in the subject when he assumes an image...’<sup>1</sup> Elizabeth Cowie explains how Lacan establishes this stage as a mode of identification by which the ego is constituted, as follows:

“It is a moment in which the child recognizes itself as constituted by a corporeal image, whether as in Lacan’s example it is through the mirror reflection of its own body, or through the agency of another’s –its mother’s or carer’s look and address- who grants that image to the child. The moment of recognition is also one of identification: that’s me, that’s mine. I am that image precipitating the I of the ego which emerges to claim the image as its own. Lacan therefore terms the child’s

recognition a misrecognition in so far as its narcissistic identification is with its mirror image, and this appear to present a unified, whole and coherent image.”<sup>2</sup>

This misrecognition in fact is both necessary and essential for the child to live through his physical inefficiencies and adopt a total and united self. Lacan states:

“I regard the function of the mirror stage as a particular case of the function of the *imago*, which is to establish a relation between the organism and its reality... In man, however this relation to nature is altered by a certain dehiscence at the heart of the organism, a primordial discord betrayed by the signs of uneasiness and motor unco-ordination of the neo-natal months”.<sup>3</sup>

In other words, man overcomes his primeval insufficiency and inferiority regarding his natural reality by a split in his very organism.

Thus, what constitutes the ego is this misrecognition, its self-assured autonomy. The coherent, unified image presents itself to itself in the mirror; that is how the ego is constituted as alienated and imaginary. That is to say, for the child this alienated image of his own is constituted as other. Cowie remarks that “the other here is for Lacan the mother...this other functions as the *Other* which is thus already present in the register of the imaginary”.<sup>4</sup>

Cowie points out that the child projects its desire in its alienated image as ideal ego, however that object is not only triggered but assured and secured by the Other. The Other who is thus itself supposed as autonomous and complete, makes that demand of being full identity once possible, though never satisfies it. Therefore, what is initiated in the subject is not just ego/ideal ego, but also the ideal ego as an object of desire. That object is already lost, however the demand for it and thus the object itself is constituted through the other. What is supposed to be lost is the subject’s one part, its complementary that makes it total, unified in the imaginary. The subject, equating -identifying- itself to its image, posits its image as an object, and as other. Cowie states that “the first love-object is therefore the subject itself, as its ideal-ego which is instituted as

separable -indeed lost- in the moment it emerges”.<sup>5</sup> What is crucial here is that for the subject acquiring an identity and acquiring a love-object happens simultaneously. When the subject’s ideal-ego is formed as an other in the imaginary, this other becomes the subject’s love-object at the same time. What is loved and desired by the subject is the substitute(s) of its ideal ego. “Thus desire emerges in identification which figures it as a fundamentally narcissistic”.<sup>6</sup>

Mirror stage and narcissism -as the outcomes of this phase- constitute the ego. Besides, the subject’s relation to objects is established on model of its own image as its first object. Thus, the subject has the capacity to produce infinite number of objects, “that is as libidinal object choices; and the correlative function of the aggressivity”.<sup>7</sup> As stated above, the subject emerges in so far as it recognizes itself as other, in such acknowledgment the identity is split and the subject is alienated from its image, hence it can potentially confront it. Confronted with this ideal, unified image, the subject can feel aggressivity towards it. As soon as the other is figured out, it inevitably becomes competitive, challenging and the source of aggression for the subject. By referring to Lacan, Cowie shows the connection between this challenging disposition of the other with the Oedipal rivalry. “Lacan ground the boy’s later Oedipal rivalry with his father in the prior alienating function of the constitution of the ego as other and thus itself as potentially rivalrous.”<sup>8</sup>

### **7 1/2 Floor**

Though completely dedicated to puppeteering, Craig hardly ever earns any money from it. His passionless marriage to unattractive, pet-o-phile spouse is just as worn out as everything in their basement apartment. Their apartment is worth mentioning briefly; what is disturbing about the house is not the untidiness, or the mess around. Though it is indeed very messy, what arouses the feeling of *abject* in us is the couple’s intermingled life with the animals. The animals have cages but they mostly play around. Their life is so composed with the animals that it erases the borders between the binary oppositions –animal-human/nature-civilization etc. Lotte and Craig’s way of

living, which can not be discernible from that of the animals, threatens the binary order. As Kristeva writes,

“it is not the lack of cleanliness or health that causes abjection but what disturbs identity, system, order. What does not respect borders, positions, rules. The in-between, the ambiguous, the composite”.<sup>9</sup>

Craig, chronically unemployed, in fact not so enthusiastic about having a proper job and rejecting all the necessities of being married, such as having sex or having a baby, hardly fills a certain position in the sociosymbolic network. Basically, he refuses to grow up and is symbolically a child. Forced by his wife Lotte, Craig finds a filing ‘position’ with Lester Corp., a company on the seven-and-a-half floor of an office tower. It can only be reached by wrenching the elevator doors open with a crowbar. When Craig enters the building, he can get to this floor by the help of an *other*, black/women, and as the elevator is stopped between the floors, the first image he recognizes is the legs of a woman on high heels –similar to a crawling child’s first images-. In this office building, with ceilings so low that employees are forced to walk stooped over, everybody seems like crawling.

Craig’s boss Dr. Lester has been convinced by his hearing-impaired secretary, Floris, that he has a speech impediment. Lester examines Craig to see if he can discern a letter from a draft. In this between-the-floors office, to recognize a letter -the symbol of language-, is appreciated. In one scene, soon after Craig met with his self-assured, sexy, sarcastic co-worker, Maxine, he tries to guess her name by mumbling in order to impress her; at last he succeeds to spell it out by syllables. In this scene, he looks like a baby uttering his first words, as if for the first time, his mumbling turns out to be words, symbols.

In the diegetic world, we are given a funny explanation that this floor was created by an Irish sea captain so that his “miniature-sized” wife could have a space of her own. Though there is narrative explanation, there should be significant reason for the film to create this claustrophobic

atmosphere. In fact, this floor is between limits of the imaginary and the symbolic; it is in the register of the symbolic order. That is why Craig, as a child must announce his acceptance of the social order and language. Craig, like his parrot, did not have a word of his own to say, till he acknowledged his place in the symbolic. There the sketches are to be turned to signs and mumbling to the words, since the symbolic starts with language, and the Name of the Father is after all a matter of speech.

Until that time, Craig who avoids occupying a certain place in the symbolic order, stays away from both the responsibilities and the rewards of the assumed position. In one scene, Lotte says to Craig “you have an action figure to play with”, that summarizes Craig’s relation with puppets very well. For a child, these kinds of toys are figures to identify with, so are the puppets for him. He transfers, projects his thoughts, desires and demands to his puppets, and identifies with them; thus his life is constrained in a set similar to a toy-house. After meeting with her in the-between-floor, Craig falls immediately for Maxine. Soon after, he makes a Maxine puppet to talk to, but these “action figures” do not satisfy him any more, he should get into action himself. Self confident, poised Maxine is so much idealized and desired by Craig that he identifies with her. As stated before, what is loved and desired by the subject is the substitute(s) of its ideal ego. As Craig desires Maxine, he places her in the same position as his ideal ego; thus identification emerges in the desired one. We know that the subject acquires an identity and a love-object at the same time.

At this point, I will return shortly to the chain of identifications that should be clarified in order to understand how our protagonist’s course of identifications progressed. In Lacanian view, subject’s identifications are a series of moves by which the subject emerges as resulting from the demand of lack –mentioned before as “the lost object”- and that is connected with the three registers of the real, the imaginary, and the symbolic. Lacan’s registers yield three forms of identification corresponding to the tripartite structure (ideal-ego, ego-ideal and super-ego) developed by Freud. Cowie summaries these registers as follows:

“Privation, in the registration of the real, is a demand which is directed to a lost object – the ideal self’... The ideal ego as lost object belongs to the real... It is nevertheless not originary but always constituted retrospectively, when the ideal-ego is formed in the emergence of the imaginary which thereby retrospectively constitutes the real. Frustration, in the register of the imaginary, is a demand which can not be given its object, a demand addressed to the other from where it cannot be met, leading to Freud’s regressive identification with a libidinal object and the development of the ego-ideal. Castration, in the register of the Symbolic, involves a demand for which there is no object and hence involves the acknowledgment, if not the acceptance, of lack. It corresponds to Freud’s identification between egos...and the consequent emergence of super-ego.“<sup>10</sup>

Craig’s identification with Maxine is of the regressive type. According to Freud this form of identification is “a regressive identification through the substitution of a libidinal object-tie by means of introjection of the object into the ego”.<sup>11</sup> He posits Maxine as the substitute of his mother’s imago; in other words she is introjected as Craig’s ego-ideal. Considering that he was like a baby when he met her, this become clear.

### **“Craig’s dance of despair and disillusionment”**

Turned down by Maxine, Craig finds a door in his office that opens to a birth canal-like portal to John Malkovich’s head. Experiencing “being Malkovich”, Craig sees through Malkovich’s eyes’ and feels through his body. As a puppeteer, he is able to master dominating his new puppet while inside him. As the film unfolds, it becomes clear that this portal is not to John Malkovich’s mind or soul, but to his body. This portal offers people literally to get into someone’s head. Malkovich’s inhabitants do not share his feelings or thoughts as supposed by the phrase “getting inside someone’s head” metaphorically. Instead, Malkovich’s body becomes "a really expensive suit” that everybody enjoys wearing.

Craig manages to perform his “dance of despair and disillusionment” within Malkovich. The title of this dance becomes Craig’s own final statement throughout the film. Although he achieves his dreams by making Malkovich the star puppeteer, he could never be one himself. This is just an illusion, which turns out to be a total frustration for him. Craig loses his chance of being himself at the cost of fame that he can never enjoy. It is Malkovich who acquires the fame and a new existence, while Craig remains anonymous forever.

Craig uses Malkovich’s celebrity to get Maxine and enjoy the success as a puppeteer. He finds another substitute to put in the place of his ego-ideal, consequently he identifies with Malkovich. His identification with Malkovich is of the hysterical type; “identification involves taking the same position as the model in relation to the love-object”.<sup>12</sup> Craig identifies with a place from where he is watched, and from where he looks at himself, so that he feels being loved. This occurs because the demand that the Other provides to the subject an image of its completeness, fullness, is rejected. Thus, he identifies with an image (Malkovich) for the gaze of the Other (Maxine), as the place from which the other desires him. Introjection of Malkovich as ego-ideal is not because of its image but its function as it instructs the way to become someone else.

In the light of the above explanations -considering ideal ego is placed in the imaginary while both ego-ideal and super-ego are in the symbolic-, it can be concluded that in the series of identifications the subject undergoes, there is ongoing oscillations between these registers. Cowie points out that these registers can not be opposed to each other. The difference between the imaginary and the symbolic order lies in how they relate to lack. In the latter, lack is constituted as the other and castration is accepted together with the accession to the Law. Whereas in the former, the object is supposed to satisfy lack, thereby there is a continuing struggle to deny and challenge lack, but this satisfaction is never accomplished.

Furthermore, ideal-ego and super-ego involve a different relation to a demand. As mentioned above, the ideal-ego lies in those identifications that arise as a result of the rejected

demands; on the other hand, super-ego in the identification with the demand. The formation of super-ego is a consequence of the decline of the Oedipus complex. To renounce Oedipal wishes is twofold; "...it is not just the mother as love-object who is denied to the child, but the Other to whom the child directed its demand as a guarantor of its unity, its plenitude, that is the phallic mother".<sup>13</sup> Thus, the acceptance of castration, symbolically is the impossibility of the satisfaction of the demand, of the desire that is, for the mother.

Craig in the tides between his self "in" and "out" of Malkovich, comes and goes between the imaginary and the symbolic. After he enters permanently into Malkovich's body, Craig sticks with the field of imaginary. He is able to marry Maxine who is the substitution of her mother's imago. The formation of super-ego involves not the "introjection of the love-object but the internalization of authority".

"Internalization here marks a differentiation in the process of identification for the subject may be said to identify with objects... whereas intersubjective relations are internalized, as in the internalization of a prohibition..."<sup>14</sup>

In the case of Craig internalization is not achieved. While he identifies with his love object, he does not accept the prohibitions and demands that come with the identification.

So, in the state of Craig, the true dissolution of Oedipus Complex can not be accomplished. He does not renounce the demand, instead he represses it. Consequently the super-ego is reduced to the identity of desire and law. Cowie quotes from Catherine Millot that

"It is the super-ego that, in the Lacanian perspective, hardly still deserves this name, since it results from the assimilation by the subject of the law in so far as that law frees him from demand and at the same time constitutes his desire".<sup>15</sup>

Craig attempts to make such a pact with the symbolic; he accepts the Other as such that it constitutes his desire and at the same time does not demand from him to give up that object of his plenitude, his unity. Thus, at the end, he regresses to the point where he is in the mother's womb.

He regresses to the point where the differentiation from the mother is not yet accomplished, where he is not a subject yet.

**“Meet you in Malkovich in one hour”**

Once Malkovich becomes Craig's puppet (and Malkovich starts to play Craig), it's clear that “Being John Malkovich“ is a movie about acting and spectatorship. Metaphorically an actor is someone who is required to keep a certain number of spare personalities within easy reach. In the film, this abstract expression that defines acting is literalized as the actor's having lots of different people inside himself. Thus, the film literalizes what can be said about both acting and spectatorship metaphorically.

The claustrophobic atmosphere surrounding the seven-and-a-half floor continuing in Malkovich's head supported by extraordinary use of sound makes the spectator of ‘Being John Malkovich’ conscious of the fact that he/she is in a very similar ambience. Underlining that this fantastic journey has a business side by showing the protagonists’ charge people in the entrance to Malkovich, the film again repeats the relation of the spectator to cinema. More importantly, in the diegetic world, the characters’ identification with Malkovich exactly echoes the psychological experience that the spectator undergoes. Needless to say the movie is self-reflexive, mirrors the cinematic experience in many aspects. At the centre of such a plot, how does John Malkovich “be” Malkovich?

In the film, Malkovich plays not himself but his star image which is constituted by the cinema. Lounging in his hotel room with a copy of Chekhov, plays a vain, awfully courteous, caricature of himself. His star image by definition is as ambiguous as all other stars’, since what makes the star image is this ambiguity. He is incontestably an intellectual that is safe by his cinematic image, but his intellectualism is hardly detectable from dandy personality in front. He is dedicated to good taste; he spends moments ordering bath linens from a chic catalogue. We do not see him struggling with any deeper problems than deciding one color over another. He is sexually

ambiguous too; what is most attractive in this virile man is something feminine -as Lotte says- his feminine side. On the one hand, throughout the movie his homosexuality is hinted at several times, especially in the sequence that Lotte is chasing Maxine through Malkovich's unconscious or when a taxi driver confuses him with Robert Mapplethorpe, who is one of the most contentious of American photographers due to his homosexuality. On the other hand, he is heterosexually active and he discusses his love affair with his pal Charlie Sheen who encourages him to keep dating Maxine, the "hot lesbian witch".

Furthermore, the film boldly underlines how boring Malkovich's life is by such moments when he is getting breakfast, drying himself after a shower or getting ready to go out, yet everyone is so enthusiastic to repeat their experience as soon as they are thrown out from his head. Malkovich seems so distant and quite so that he does not give us any clue about what he thinks or feels. Although the actor dismantles his own image that can actually never be complete, the film does not spoil the lure of his star image or decipher it to efface its obscurity. Star image is based on the conflicting, ambiguous features of the actor/actress. Star image is a poly-semantic concept that consists of contradictory traits, qualities, as in the case of Malkovich, his life seems so vain yet tremendously mysterious, he is sophisticated though seems so superficial and shallow and more than these, sexually ambiguous.

The star image is a hybrid notion that involves a person who is ordinary and extraordinary at the same time. "The cinematic image (and the film performance) rests on the photo effect, the paradox that the photograph presents an absence that is present".<sup>16</sup> In this sense, star image repeats, echoes a very fundamental notion of cinematic experience: "presence-yet-absence". Cinematic image stages an object that is present as absent. The star image that is both ordinary and extraordinary, is available for desire but unattainable. In fact what excites desire is its unattainability. Star image is on the one hand so ordinary that it raises the feeling of accessibility, on the other, it is so gorgeous and marvelous that it never satisfies this feeling.

This image is so tantalizing that it solely satisfies our looking. The resemblance between the star image as well as the cinematic image and the mirror image is apparent. They arouse desire in the spectator/viewer exactly the same way; presenting an absence that is present. The spectator-screen relationship as a mirror identification is studied by Christian Metz in his book "The Imaginary Signifier". According to Metz, the subject engages in an imaginary identification in the cinema, what makes this identification "imaginary" is not the activity of perception but what is perceived. "The perceived is not really the object, it is its shade, its phantom, its double, its *replica* in a new kind of mirror".<sup>17</sup> Thus, cinematic image, like the child's mirror stage, is imaginary because the spectator takes as really present what is absent.

**"Don't stand in the way of my actualization as a man."**

At this point, I will try to focus on the concept that surrounds the mechanisms of identification: desire. In his article "From Reality to the Real", Slavoj Žižek mentions Zeno's Paradoxes to articulate psychoanalytic notions of desire and fantasy. About the paradox related with the case of Achilles and the Tortoise, Žižek puts forward the function of the paradox as follows: "The paradox stages the relation of the subject to the object-cause of its desire, which can never be attained. The object-cause is always missed; all we can do is encircle it".<sup>18</sup> This paradox explains perfectly the spectator's relation with the cinematic image. What is presented in the cinema is actually the absent that signifies a present. What rises the spectator's desire is the unattainability of its object-cause.

As Craig, Lotte's character mirrors the spectator-screen relationship as well. After her first time in Malkovich's head, Lotte thinks that she is transsexual and considers sexual reassignment surgery. At that point of the film, Lotte has not yet seen Maxine in Malkovich's head or elsewhere, she first meets with her in the office where she tells Craig not to "stand in the way of her actualization as a man." This raises the concepts of transvestism and masquerade, which are both used to describe a metaphoric transfer from female to male point of view in the spectator. The first

theorist of the masculinization of female spectator has been Laura Mulvey. Using psychoanalytic theory, Mulvey argued in her famous article “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema” that the visual pleasure of (Hollywood) cinema is based on voyeuristic and fetishistic forms of looking. Because of the ways these looks are structured, the spectator identifies with the male protagonist in the narrative and thereby the spectator position that is produced by the film narrative is necessarily a masculine one. In her “Afterthoughts” on visual pleasure, Mulvey argues that because the female spectator must assume a masculine position in order to identify with (active) desire, she is objectified to oscillate between the female and male identifications. Thus, the female spectator is habituated to transsexual identification.

Mary Ann Doane opens up a different avenue in theorizing identification and sexual difference in narrative cinema. She proposes that the transference from female to male point of view is necessary for female spectator in order to attain the necessary distance from her image. This enables female spectator to overcome her ‘claustrophobic closeness’ to the image, hence she becomes capable of seeing, owner of the look, therefore desiring. For Doane, transvestism is easy for women and culturally seen as a manifestation of women’s sexual mobility. On the other hand, “masquerade is not as recuperable as transvestism precisely because it constitutes an acknowledgment that it is femininity itself which is constructed as mask”.<sup>19</sup> That is to say once femininity is constructed as a mask, it is reduced to merely a role, and therefore the masquerade can never recover from experiencing her femininity as role-playing.

When criticizing masquerade as an irrecoverable position, Teresa De Lauretis writes the following:

“to claim masquerade as a ‘non-recuperable’ position of agency for the female subject is precisely its compensatory nature of reaction formation... of defense mechanism against the male’s requirement that women acquiesce and accept what he defines as femininity and lay no claim to masculine prerogative.”<sup>20</sup>

Lauretis points out that in developing such a reaction formation, female subject establishes a position in reference to male-determined order. If we refer to Doane's words, "to masquerade is to manufacture a lack in the form of a certain distance oneself and one's image".<sup>21</sup> Thus, Doane's depiction of masquerade shows that Lauretis is right in her criticism. Masquerade is defined in terms of lack, that is to say; it indicates a mode for being for the other. As Lauretis writes that "masquerade is not only inscribed within a male-defined and male-dominant heterosexual order, but more inexorably in the current struggle for women's equal access to pleasure in heterosexuality..."<sup>22</sup>

In the light of the above explanations, Lotte's expression seems to me like a joke on that metaphorical transference of female to male for her to desire. As soon as Lotte enters into Malkovich's head, i.e., she experiences the journey analogous to the cinematic one, she wants to be a man. This joke points out how vain is her demanding the masquerade of the phallus, in order to be in the position of looking, desiring. Not only does Lotte want to see herself as "the butch, who foregrounds her masquerade of the phallus to the femme" (Maxine), Maxine also does not find her attractive without the masquerade either.<sup>23</sup> (Although she is "smitten" by Lotte, Maxine desires her only when she is in Malkovich/masquerade. Thus, as many other notions, the film also literalizes the concept of masquerade, by turning Malkovich into just a costume.)

After her second time in Malkovich when he is having dinner with Maxine, Lotte says, "I have never been looked at like this by a woman before". Lotte's surprise by the look of Maxine alludes to our cultural imaginary that has constructed the female subject as the visible, as spectacle for the male gaze, not as looking. The woman is not the owner of the look but its addressee. What surprises Lotte is the woman who directs a desiring look. Lauretis indicates that "what can be seen and eroticized... is the gaze itself, the phallic power of the gaze invested in the male look as figure and the signifier of desire".<sup>24</sup> "Being John Malkovich", ironically foregrounding the conventions of seeing and the established modes of representation, makes them visible.

As the film unfolds, it becomes clear that female homosexuality does not need to be invoked in the heterosexual context. Lotte neither goes through sexual reassignment surgery nor gains any phallic symbol throughout the movie, still she desires a woman. After experienced Malkovich-the fantasy space-, Lotte desires Maxine. What grounds her homosexual desire is that imaginary space. Thus, Malkovich's body works as fantasy space, offering not the object but the mise-en-scene of her desire. As Laplanche and Pontalis suggest in their well-known article 'Fantasy and the Origins of Sexuality' "fantasy, however, is not the object of desire, but its setting."<sup>25</sup>

Following Laplanche and Pontalis Žižek states, "it is only through fantasy that the subject is constituted as desiring: *through fantasy, we learn how to desire*".<sup>26</sup> For Žižek "what the fantasy stages is not a scene in which our desires is fulfilled, fully satisfied, but on the contrary, a scene that realizes, stages, the desire as such".<sup>27</sup> In terms of psychoanalytic approach desire is not something given in advance, but it has to be constructed. He mentions P. Highsmith's story called Black House in order to explain the concept of fantasy. The story takes place in a small town where men get together in the evenings and tell about nostalgic stories, local myths related to a deserted old building -where no one is allowed to trespass. This "black house" is also a place that connects all their adolescence memories, which are mostly connected with their first sexual experiences. A newcomer of the town, fascinated with the stories, goes to the house expecting something mysterious and exciting, but he finds nothing fascinating about it. One of the villagers horrified with the newcomer's action, attacks him and he dies. Žižek explains that the black house is nothing but an old ruin; it is forbidden to the men because it functions as an empty space wherein they can project their vague memories, their desires. For villagers the "black house" is not a place in which their desires are fulfilled, but on the contrary, is a mise-en-scene that constitutes their desire.

"Fantasy space functions as an empty surface, as a kind of screen for the projection of desires: the fascinating presence of its positive contents does nothing but fill out a certain emptiness".<sup>28</sup> Functioning as an empty space, Malkovich becomes the locus of Lotte and other

people's fantasies. The emptiness, ordinariness of Malkovich's life are emphasized in the movie, since his life does not satisfy people's desires, but functions as a space in which their desires are constituted. Restating the analogy between the experience of Malkovich and that of cinema, Žižek's definition of 'fantasy as a kind of screen for the projection of desires' becomes highly remarkable.

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- <sup>1</sup> Jacques Lacan, The Mirror Stage, Contemporary Film Theory, Ed. By Anthony Easthope, Longman, 1994 p. 34
- <sup>2</sup> Elizabeth Cowie, Identifying in the Cinema, Representing the Women: Cinema and Psychoanalysis, Macmillan Press Ltd., 1997, pp. 87-88
- <sup>3</sup> Lacan (1994), p. 36
- <sup>4</sup> Cowie (1997), p. 88
- <sup>5</sup> Cowie (1997), p. 89
- <sup>6</sup> Cowie (1997), p. 90
- <sup>7</sup> Cowie (1997), p. 90
- <sup>8</sup> Cowie (1997), p. 90
- <sup>9</sup> Julia Kristeva, Powers of Horror, Colombia Univ. Press, 1982, p.4
- <sup>10</sup> Cowie (1997), p. 91
- <sup>11</sup> Cowie (1997), p. 82
- <sup>12</sup> Cowie (1997), p. 83
- <sup>13</sup> Cowie (1997), p. 95
- <sup>14</sup> Cowie (1997), p.96
- <sup>15</sup> Cowie (1997), p. 95
- <sup>16</sup> John Ellis, From Visible Fictions: Star as a Cinematic Phenomenon, Film Theory and Criticism: Introductory Readings, Ed. By Leo Braudy, Marshall Cohen, Oxford Uni. Press, 1999, p.540
- <sup>17</sup> Christian Metz, Identification, Mirror, The Imaginary Signifier: Psychoanalysis and the Cinema, Indiana Uni. Press, 1984, p. 45
- <sup>18</sup> Slavoj Žižek, Looking Awry: An Introduction to Jacques Lacan Through Popular Culture, The MIT Press, Cambridge, 1993, p.4

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- <sup>19</sup> Mary Ann Doane, *Film and The Masquerade: Theorizing the female Spectator*, The Sexual Subject: A Screen Reader in Sexuality, Routledge, 1992, p. 234
- <sup>20</sup> Teresa De Lauretis, The Practice of Love: Lesbian Sexuality and Perverse Desire, Indiana Uni. Press, 1994, p.108
- <sup>21</sup> Doane (1992), p. 235
- <sup>22</sup> De Lauretis (1994), pp.108-9
- <sup>23</sup> De Lauretis (1994), pp.108
- <sup>24</sup>De Lauretis (1994), pp.112-13
- <sup>25</sup> Jean Laplanche and Jean-Bertrand Pontalis, 'Fantasy and the Origins of Sexuality', Formations of Fantasy, Ed. By Victor Burgin, James Donald and Cora Kaplan, Routledge, 1989, p. 26
- <sup>26</sup> Žižek (1993), p. 6
- <sup>27</sup> Žižek (1993), p. 6
- <sup>28</sup> Žižek (1993), p. 8

### **Looking At The Real Of Desire Through The Cracks In Reality:**

“The Matrix” by placing the viewer in the same frame of reference as its protagonist; blurs the line between virtual reality and reality, dream state and waking state, physical or sensory simulations and accurate perception, for him and the viewer as well. The protagonist’s expectations and beliefs created in one scene are deceived and falsified by the following scenes.

In the beginning, Neo gets arrested by the agents. This scene is presented to us as follows; first we see Neo getting out of the building under the custody of the agents. Then the camera focuses on the reflection of them in a motorcycle’s mirror; the images in the mirror are focused and given in slow-motion; in contrast, the surrounding businessmen walking are out focused and given in sound speed. The following shot shows Trinity who is sitting on the motorcycle and looking down at its mirror. So, the slow-motion images of Neo being taken away by the agents functions as the establishing shot which sets up Trinity’s subjective point of view shot. Therefore, within the very same scene, we see both the subjective point of view of Trinity, and the “objective” record of the events. Since slow motion footage is often used to suggest that the action takes place in a dream or fantasy; this way of presentation elevates Trinity’s point of view shot to her own version of the events. This way, the importance of the event for her is emphasized; more importantly, the film obscures the line between subjective and objective point of views.

From the scene where Neo is being carried away by the agents, with the use of a sound bridge, the film transitions to a surveillance room full of numerous cameras: all of them are showing Neo sitting on the chair, alone in the inspection room. The metallic, shrill tone tune transferred from the previous scene gets more and more tinny parallel to this sound; images on one of the cameras fills the entire screen. During this transition, as sound gets more metallic, on the screen that we are approaching, there appear vertical lines that stretch and vibrate like the strings of an instrument -as if by stretching they permit us to sneak into Neo’s room. Therefore, what is shown on the single camera becomes the following scene.

Under arrest, the agents torture Neo for not cooperating with them. In this scene, his mouth turns out to be some kind of plastic substance which stretches and resists to be opened. He can not open his mouth, loses his control over his body. He is unable to speak. This resembles the well-known dream experience of losing control over body parts; one can not move his/her body though there is no evident obstacle against doing that. The metal tube used by the agents metamorphoses into a living organism, into a bug which enters into Neo's body from his belly button. (Not only the agents but also their weapons undergo material change.)

This scene is followed by the one where Neo wakes up, sweating, in his bed and checks out his belly button and his mouth. Then, he relaxes because he thinks all that was a dream. The viewer has satisfactory reasons to feel the same relaxation for not only the thematic resemblance of the previous scene to a dreamlike state, but also the way it is narrated. The whole scene of his custody is presented in greenish color, in monochrome tones; that is why the scene seems to belong to a different state of reality. Yet in the following scene, Neo (and the viewer) realizes what happened when he is under arrest is "real", not a dream. Since the bug which intruded Neo's body, is taken out from his body by Trinity. (The bug metamorphoses once more, it is just a piece of metal again.)

Neo chooses to take the blue pill which 'is a part of a trace program, is designed to disrupt his carrier signals to pinpoint his location'. (The pill functions just like the bug put into his body by the agents.) In the following scene, Neo, as if he is called by someone, turns his head to the broken mirror and sees his reflection on it. The broken mirror melts and then becomes a liquid like substance and forms a smooth surface. In the broken mirror, we see Neo's body as disjointed and some part of Morpheus' body; when the broken mirror is fused into a single body, we see the reflection of Morpheus' and Neo's whole body on it. This is Neo's first mirror stage experience. The mirror first becomes elastic then liquid resembling mercury that covers all of his body and intrudes his inside through his mouth. In the very same scene, we see both Neo experiencing this

physical simulation and Morpheus, together with his crew, trying to unplug, off-line Neo's body. Both of the events are represented as occurring simultaneously in the same place. We see the reflections of Morpheus and Trinity on the mercury covering Neo's body. Again the confusion of the protagonist (whether what he is experiencing is "real" or not) conveyed to the viewer who sees concomitantly Neo's experience of simulation and the "real" experience lived by Morpheus and the others.

After Neo is kidnapped from the mega computer to which all minds are attached, he is taken to the ship. Neo, still smeared with thick, sticky material all over his body, covered by a blanket, looks so exhausted that he can hardly stand. Barely keeping his eyes open, he can not focus his look at one point, he breaths loudly. The camera first shows Neo, surrounded by the ship's crew. Then, it presents us, from Neo's blurred, out of focus point of view, Morpheus who says to him "welcome to the real world". Thus, Neo's first moments in the real world is presented from his blurred, subjective point of view. This dubious point of view shot confuses the viewer regarding whether Neo is experiencing "reality" or he is hallucinating, despite Morpheus' words. In the next scene, after total darkness followed by the intense illumination of the screen, we see Morpheus and Trinity, again from Neo's point of view. Their appearance out of this severe whiteness increases the uncertainty triggered by the previous scene; there is an ongoing ambiguity about whether Neo is waking to reality or opening his eyes to another dream. One of the following scenes, in which Neo opens his eyes to the extreme whiteness in the simulation room and the appearance of the surrounding out of this whiteness, once more brings up the question of what is indicated with this convention of lighting.

In Nebuchadnezzar, Neo is plugged into the computer through the portal implanted in his skull. Inside the computer program, experiencing VR, Morpheus tells Neo what the Matrix is. In this scene, Morpheus turns on the TV that shows the world that exists as it is in 1999; then the moment he says that "this is the world as it exists today", they find themselves in the ruined, barren

world, shown on TV. Here, the transition between the shots is quite important: first the camera directs the viewer to watch what is shown on TV, as Neo and Morpheus do so. Then, what is shown on TV fills the full screen. At that point, our supposition is that Morpheus and Neo are still watching what we are watching (TV). In other words, what is presented to us is supposedly from their point of view. Yet, the camera abruptly free falls and when it reaches the ground, we find them in the middle of the scene that is shown on TV, previously watched by them. But they are again placed in the same setting; one is sitting, the other is standing behind the symmetrically placed armchairs; between them an old TV set stands. Narration-wise, the viewer's expectations/suppositions about off-screen space, created in the previous scene, are falsified in the latter scene. Thus, along with Neo, the viewer also sees how deep the rabbit hole goes. This narration-wise game is staged for viewer's experiencing the same sort of disorientation felt by our protagonist. As Neo loses his point of reference regarding what is "real", the viewer does as well.

The same exact deception, created by "the tumbling down the rabbit hole" affect is repeated in another scene. In Neo's birth scene, he wakes up inside a glass cube, filled with reddish-colored, jelly like liquid, he has many cords, not only the umbilical cord, attached all over his body. He first recognizes the portal inserted in his skull, then looks over around and sees plenty of cubes with their own inhabitants. While he is observing the giant constructions contained by billions of cubes, interconnected –there is an obvious resemblance between these edifices and the skyscrapers shown in the early scenes, in which Neo works, he looks down and we see his point of view, then the camera free falls and stops suddenly in the back of a person. At this moment, the viewer expects this back is to be of the another prisoner, yet camera turns 180 degrees, and we see Neo's face looking at the giant bug like machine in front of him. So, who has fallen free is not, as the viewer supposed, Neo, but the machine. In other words, who is not looking but to be looked at is Neo.

Considering the last two example, the effect created in these scenes have a crucial importance. In the first one, instead of being in it, Neo (and the viewer) are given images of the

“past world” from television. These scenes are presented to us from the point of view of our protagonists. What is shown to us is the camera’s neutral, “objective” eye viewing the events on TV. When the TV screen that separates the protagonists from what they view is abolished, a certain pacifying effect produced by this distancing disappears. Then, what “objectively” sees suddenly becomes the gaze of the subjective, deceptive camera. The same deception applies to the second example; once again supposedly Neo’s “objective” point of view turns out to be that of the giant machine; again the previous shot gains a totally different aspect by the following shot. Thus, the film makes us suspicious and aware of the epistemology of every scene/shot after it passes to another. Each subsequent scene falsifies our point of view about the previous scene. That is why the viewer is compelled to think of the epistemological status of each scene retrospectively. Therefore, till the end, the viewer can never be certain about on which ground he/she stands.

It can be said that, in the movie, all transitions among, the Matrix, the other VR simulations and the “real” world are made so invisible to erase the supposedly sharp distinction between these worlds. In one scene, when Neo and Morpheus are inside the sparring program, during their fight there is a graphic match from Morpheus’ jump to the very similar move of Mouse. Mouse jumps - out of nowhere- and runs to call the rest of the crew to watch their fight. This smooth, indistinguishable cut between the scenes gives the impression that they are not fighting inside the computer but in the room next to the crew’s.

In a later scene, we see the conversation between Trinity and Cypher. Trinity confidently tells him that Morpheus will take Neo to the Matrix when he is ready. In the following scene, we see the traffic sign and Morpheus, followed by Neo, walking in a crowded street that looks like the Matrix. Morpheus tells about the people in the Matrix, and tells him to look around. Neo, while observing around, walks behind Morpheus and at one moment he notices a woman in a red dress, then he is distracted. Morpheus, without looking back, asks him, "Are you looking at the woman in a red dress?". Then, Morpheus orders to freeze the scene, Neo is perplexed to see what he has seen

a moment ago is not the Matrix, but another computer program designed similar to that. Again, like Neo, the viewer is also confused to see another VR; since he/she expects to see the Matrix because of the dialog in the previous scene.

In the crew's first descend to the Matrix, again the movie plays on our off-screen expectations. In this scene, everybody, except Tank who is loading the program, is plugged to the computer, and the telephone rings continuously. The bird's eye positioned camera repeatedly makes circular movements, showing sequentially all of the crew, who are lying in their seats and the ringing telephone. Here, the camera makes a swish pan; the cuts, embedded in fast, continuous camera motions, are not recognized. That is why the viewer supposes that that phone and the crew are in the same place. Then, the telephone's background gets lighter, the camera pulls back more and it stops. What is seen behind the phone is the crew standing dressed in black and leather, not in the old cloths they wear in the ship, since they are now in the Matrix.

"The Matrix"'s intertextual quality, though very accessible to most of the viewers -mostly based on very popular texts-, is far from rendering its intention more graspable and obvious, rather makes it quite confusing. Since intertextual narration itself links the film/text to the other "fictional" texts, not to the referents from "reality", from the outset "The Matrix", regardless of its narrative, involves the question of reality. Moreover, the diegetic world of all the alluded texts in the film brings up the same question. The film is embedded with many verbal or visual forms of allusion to other texts such as films, "Ghost in the Shell", "Vertigo", "Total Recall" "The Wizard of Oz" and books "Simulacra and Simulation", "Alice in Wonderland".

The opening scene of the movie in which digital Japanese letters are flowing down on the screen turns out to be the title "Matrix", followed by green digits leading us into images. This scene is exactly quoted from the Japanese animation titled "Ghost in the Shell". Besides this virtual quotation, the thematic resemblance is remarkable: broadly speaking both films revolve around the central plot which involves an advanced computer program that breaks through and attains self-

consciousness and independence, and explore the limitations of human intelligence and artificial intelligence, the relation between mind and body, VR and “real” reality.

“The Matrix” alludes Paul Verhoeven’s “Total Recall” in many aspects. Not only the two movies have common themes but also the way they narrate their story is quite similar. “The Matrix” is inspired mostly by “Total Recall”’s narration-wise tactic used for viewer’s experiencing the same sort of confusion felt by the film’s protagonist -regarding what is “real”. “Total Recall” moves back and forth between various versions and levels of reality, even at the final scene, it is not clearly revealed whether the protagonist has dreamt (virtually experienced) it all or not. Douglas Quade (Arnold Schwarzenegger) keeps having dreams about Mars - dreams that finally encourage him to sign up with a strange kind of travel agency that provides him with the memory of a vacation instead of a real one. He is suddenly at the heart of a giant conspiracy with people trying to kill him left, right and center, while he tries to figure out his own past. He travels to Mars in order to find out more about his past, but is it reality he is faced with, or just a dream implant? The movie toys tantalizingly with the possibilities, especially in a scene where a convincing doctor and Quaid's wife appear in his dream-vacation to try to talk him down from it. Similar to Morpheus’ proposal to Neo, the doctor offers Quade a pill to take him back to the reality. But, Quade rejects his offering and kills the doctor. At the end, it is still not unfold if the protagonist really a spy whose trip to the false memory center triggered a series of disturbing flashbacks, or he is stuck in a psychotic dream world where he gets to become the hero in his own life.

As for Hitchcock’s *Vertigo*, besides the visual resemblance between the scenes of Neo’s (Keanu Reeves) escape on top of the skyscraper and that of Scottie’s (James Stewart) running after the criminals on rooftops; both protagonists go after reality: one looks for it behind a computer network, the other in the dissolution of the enigma of a woman who does not really exists.

In one shot, we see Baudrillard's book “*Simulacra and Simulation*” which is open to the chapter “On Nihilism,” where Neo hides his black-market computer programs in a hollowed-out

compartment. This diegetic presentation of the book is worth mentioning; once the associations of the book are invoked in the viewer, it is quite ambiguous for him/her whether he/she should take this reference straightforwardly and comment on the movie as guided by the book -that reality is nothing but a massive simulation- or he/she should take into consideration visual presentation of the book and conclude that it is a tricky reference, its content is hollowed out so that the movie does not follow the book's proposition.

Two other obvious yet again deceiving allusions of the film are created through naming. One of them is that of "Morpheus" and the other is the name of the ship where Morpheus and his crew live: "Nebuchadnezzar". Although Morpheus is introduced as the one who knows that the human beings dwell in the Matrix are imprisoned by illusion and aims to wake people up from this dream, in Greek Mythology "Morpheus" is the name of the god of dreams. He is known as responsible for shaping dreams, or giving shape to the beings which inhabit dreams in Greek Mythology. The second name by means of which the film makes another tricky reference is "Nebuchadnezzar". The origin of this name is derived from the story of King Nebuchadnezzar in The Old Testament. He is again famous for his dreams, one of which he fatally misinterprets and prepares his own end, and eventually goes mad. Since, a celestial being's –appearing in his dream- prophecy that the king's mind be changed from a man's to a beast's turns out to be true. Thus, by choosing the words associated with "dreams and dreaming" for the person who is the guarantee of reality and the place where the ultimate reality is experienced, the film once more gives misinformation about its diegetic world.

One of the verbal allusions is constituted by Morpheus' dialogue with Neo; firstly he utters "I imagine that right now you're feeling a bit like Alice, tumbling down the rabbit hole". And then while he is offering Neo the pills to choose from, he explains their meanings: the red pill is the key for the door of wonderland, it promises to take Neo to the dream world; while the blue pill returns him back to his ordinary life. So, the allusion of the film to "Alice in Wonderland" is easily

invoked in the viewer. But, if the viewer connects the two texts straightforwardly, the red pill refers to the dream world and the blue pill to reality. Yet, as the film unfolds it is seen that red pill takes Neo to “reality”.

Another verbal allusion of the film, this time to a visual text, is to the cult movie “The Wizard of Oz”. When Neo is prepared by the crew to be unplugged, Cypher says to Neo “Buckle your seat belt Dorothy, because Kansas is going bye bye”. Here again, the viewer who is more or less familiar with the popular culture grasps the reference quickly. If the viewer directly identifies Neo with Dorothy, he/she inevitably concludes that Neo takes a trip to the fantasy world similar to the one Dorothy does. Repeatedly, as the film opens up, it is soon revealed that Neo’s journey is not to the dream world but to reality. These allusions to literary or visual texts are expressive means of commenting on the diegetic world of the alluding film. In “The Matrix”, these allusions are diversely coded to make it possible for the movie to falsely/deceptively comment on itself. That is to say, through these diverse allusions, the film, gives misinformation about its fictional world instead of making clarifying comments about itself.

As I mentioned above, narration-wise the film presents the passages among the Matrix, the other VR simulations and the “real” world so continuous as if they are not distinct “realities”. Moreover, the diegetic explanations emphasize the tight interconnection among all these “realities”; such as, if one’s being hurt in the Matrix (or in another VR) he/she is affected by this in real life, or more strongly, if one is dead in the VR, he/she really dies. And also, the formal presentations of these supposedly different structures closely resemble to one another. From all these, it can be inferred that the film’s intention is to invalidate the very notion of the “reality”, by making reality so indiscernible from its simulations. In other words, the film by underlining the parallelism and resemblance between VR and the real “reality”, it makes void the concept of the reality itself.

If these formal qualities and some diegetic details are overlooked, it can be proposed that the movie directly conveys us the assumption that the discovery of reality through uncovering the

veils in front of our eyes is possible. i.e. there is an ultimate reality behind the Matrix, in contrast to the first supposition, that there is infinite number of virtual realities excluding the original one. Morpheus reveals what the Matrix is as follows:

“Matrix is everywhere, it is all around us; even now, in this very room. You can see it when you look out your window or when you turn on your TV. You can feel it when you go to work, when you go to church, when you pay your taxes.”

According to this description of the Matrix as an invisible structure that shapes and holds together our intersubjective community and makes up a coherent system out of the outer reality: it can be asserted that the Matrix corresponds to the Lacanian “big Other”; “the virtual symbolic order, the network that structures our reality.”<sup>1</sup>

The big Other which is the image of socio-symbolic order as consistent, coherent structure, is nothing but retroactive projection of us. The crucial point here is that from the fact that the big Other is a “retroactive illusion masking the radical contingency of the real”<sup>2</sup>; we can not infer that reality can be grasped if this veil is removed. Since, what makes our social reality is this very illusion. Yet, taking into consideration deception as our fundamental relation to the symbolic order, one may find the solution in keeping a certain distance from that order. “i.e., assuming a *psychotic* position. A psychotic is precisely a subject who is *not duped by the symbolic order.*”<sup>3</sup> In other words, psychotic is the one who attempts to uncover the Matrix, “the world, that has been pulled over our eyes to blind us from the truth,” and what he finally finds out will be not reality/truth; nothing but “the desert of the real”.

Psychotic involves in the deception of that the big Other is located in an agent, another subject who is not deceived. The psychotic subject supposes another subject who is aware of and responsible from the deliberately arranged consistency in this system. In other words, the psychotic subject believes that behind seemingly consistent, coherent social facade, there is another Other who provides and guarantees this consistency.

“This subject who holds and manipulates the threads of the deception proper to the symbolic order, is what Lacan calls “the Other of the Other. ...the psychotic subject’s distrust of the big Other ... is always and necessarily supported by an unshakable belief in a consistent Other, an Other without gaps, an Other of the Other.”<sup>4</sup>

Thus, paranoiac’s fault does not lie in his belief that symbolic order is nothing but a universally hold illusion, rather in his conviction that this illusion is manipulated and governed by an agent. At the beginning of the film, what puts Neo into a psychotic position is not his acknowledgement of the Matrix (symbolic order), but his search for another Other behind it, the Other of this symbolic order. The film yields this paranoid scenario for that the big Other is embodied in the really existing computer.

Slavoj Žižek, in his article about the film, points out that the film’s failure is not in its proposition that there is a real beneath the Matrix (VR), rather in its assertion that what is behind this VR, the ultimate reality. This is echoed in the words of Morpheus, what our protagonist discovers is not reality/truth but “the desert of the real”.

“The real is not the “true reality” behind the virtual simulation, but the void that makes reality incomplete/inconsistent and the function of every symbolic matrix is to conceal this inconsistency.”<sup>5</sup>

That is to say what the film presents as the ultimate “reality” is Lacanian “real” which is not synonymous / identical with it, but is the necessary lack, void for the construction of reality. Reality can be constituted through the frame which only emerges by the extraction of the real. “The reality ... obtains its consistency only ... by the exclusion of the real, by the change if of the status of the real into that of a central lack.”<sup>6</sup>

Žižek’s approach is plausible and acceptable as long as we construct our arguments based on Morpheus’ words and read the film’s conceptual framework following his guidance. Morpheus, Trinity and the rest of the crew, except Cypher, though they sometimes hesitate, believe (or come

to believe) that Neo is “the One”. Žižek puts the most apparent falsity of “The Matrix” as its indication of Neo as “the One”. Does the film really put Neo into this status, in other words, does Neo believe that there is “the One” (who is himself or the agents) and thus adopt a psychotic position? At the beginning, what initiates Neo’s quest is his psychotic belief that there is a person (Morpheus) who knows and may reveal some reality (what the Matrix is) which the others do not know. Though Neo is driven to this psychotic thought, as the film unfolds we see that he is never convinced that himself, Morpheus or the agents are “the One”. Thus, he never reaches the psychotic position as asserted by Žižek.

In the scene where the oracle will decide whether Neo is “the One”, she asks him if he thinks that he is “the One”. Neo replies “I don’t know” and the oracle says “know yourself! Being the one is just like being in love. No one can tell you you’re in love. You just know it...” She behaves not like a prophet but more like a psychoanalyst, she does not reveal anything about him or his future, instead what she does actually is to approve whatever he tells her. The dialog between them continues as follows: while palm reading, she utters “Now, I’m supposed to say, hmm that’s interesting, but then you say...you already know what I’m going to tell you.” Neo completes her words by saying “I’m not the One”. She approves him. The point is that he has heard what he wanted to hear and what he believes.

What makes him “the One” in the eyes of the others is not any of his special qualities, but their way of “looking” at him. (Probably in order to underline the character’s ordinariness, Keanu Reeves has been picked up for the role; considering his screen persona, he is “not known to be so bright”.) The parallelism between the states of being “the One” and falling in love emphasized by the oracle is worth mentioning. These states such as appearing dignified, arousing respect or to falling in love “elude us as soon as we make them our immediate activity”.<sup>7</sup> In other words, they are not attained by making them our ultimate purpose; instead they may come by themselves as a

“by-product” of our activity. Although they are the results of our actions, these by-products are perceived as one of our intrinsic qualities which make us, not as the consequence of our deeds.

“The Lacanian name for this “by-product” of our activity is *object petit a* ... that elusive, unattainable X that confers upon all our deeds an aura of magic, although it can not be pinned down to any of our positive qualities. It is through the *object a* that we can grasp the workings of the ultimate “by-product” state, the matrix of all the others: the transference.”<sup>8</sup>

Žižek’s choice of using the word ‘matrix’ to define this state is just a perfect coincidence considering our analysis.

Back to the film, the oracle says to Neo “Morpheus believes in you Neo, and no one, not you, not even me, can convince him otherwise. He believes it so blindly...” Since these states are by-products of our actions, they are neither brought about nor canceled out by the intention of the subject who is in the question or by the manipulations of another person. The subject (Neo) elevated to such a status can never have the total control of the way he provokes transference in others, since the transformation the subject undergoes is produced by the big other. “From the Lacanian perspective ...

“states that are essentially by-products” are *states that are essentially produced by the big Other* - the “big other” designates precisely the agency that decides instead of us, in our place. “<sup>9</sup>

Towards the end, after the moment of Neo’s rebirth, he, simply by saying “No!” and raising his hand, dodges the bullets directed to him; in the parallel scene, inside the ship, we see Tank and Morpheus looking at a computer screen on which green codes are flowing down. In the following scene, the camera shows the point of view of still perplexed Neo looking around; he sees everything surrounding him as green codes flowing continuously. What makes Neo “the One” is not his newly acquired ability of dodging bullets, instead he is “the One”, since finally he can see

the world as consisting of billions of codes, symbols; he is able to perceive the universe as a symbolic order. Here, the parallel editing is remarkable; sequentially edited shots of Tank and Morpheus' looking at the screen and Neo's point of view shot make quite a sense. Although they both see same images, the world as flowing codes, in contrast to Neo, Morpheus can not grasp the importance of the recognition of the world as a symbolic structure and looks for something behind it.

From the very beginning, Morpheus has acknowledged that Matrix is a virtually codified universe, a symbolic system, but he has insistently searched for an agent behind this symbolic system (the Other), who is supposed to manipulate and govern it. In the film, there are literal "agents" "who pull the strings of the great Other (the symbolic order) ..." <sup>10</sup> In contrast to Morpheus, close to the end of his quest, Neo realizes that these agents are the voids of the symbolic system. As he sees everything surrounding him appear as symbols that exist at the symbolic level, he intrudes into one of the agents' body, moves, flows (like a liquid) inside him and finally blows it up into green particles. The agents, these elements of surprise –bear in mind everybody in the matrix is a potential agent - by their non-existence, their void, make the reality incomplete/inconsistent. As I mentioned previously, only the extraction of this void which belongs to the real, provides the frame that is necessary for reality to be constituted.

What enables Neo to see the agents as hollow existences and saves him from the same psychotic position into which the film puts Morpheus is that he is able to look at the world with the insight he gained in experiencing the "real". As the film effaces the hard oppositions between fundamental binary pairings such as dream state and waking state by its narration, Neo chooses to go between the real and the symbolic reality, keeping the line separating those two safe. Because the barrier separating the real from reality is the very condition of keep away from the psychotic position. When this barrier is torn down, when the real is included in reality, the subject adopts a psychotic position. Morpheus who desires to live in the ultimate reality -which is indeed the

Lacanian “real”, mentioned above-, as well as Cypher who desires to live in pure dream state are destined to live as psychotic subject, even though they do not exist as subject.

The theme of the insertion of the bug into Neo’s body is exemplary considering “The Matrix”’s narration-wise strategy of blurring the line between “what is real” and “what is dream/VR”. The status of this scene is negated repeatedly; when Neo gets up in his bed, along with him, the viewer is also relieved to realize that it was all a dream. In the following scene, Trinity takes the bug out of his body, and we understand that the bug was really inserted into Neo’s body. Yet, after Neo chooses to take the blue pill, he learns that his entire life until that moment was virtual and thus, the status of that scene changes once more; it is not a real experience again.

In his article ‘From Reality to the Real’, Slavoj Žižek mentions Fritz Lang’s “Women in the Window” to articulate the notion of the Lacanian “real” in such films when the events reach a catastrophic climax where the plot makes a major twist so that the whole course of events turns out to be just a bad dream of the hero. Žižek points out that this strategy of rearticulating real events into fiction (dreaming) can be interpreted as “an act of ideological conformism”, only if we draw a rigid distinction between “world of dreaming” and “hard reality”.

“As soon as we take into account that it is precisely and only in dreams that we encounter the real of our desire,...: our common everyday reality, the reality of social universe in which we assume our usual roles of kind-hearted, decent people, turns out to be an illusion that rests on a certain “repression,” on overlooking the real of our desire. This social reality is then nothing but a fragile, symbolic cobweb that can at any moment be torn aside by an intrusion of the real.”<sup>11</sup>

As Žižek suggests such a turnaround in films should not be interpreted as a simple maneuver for a happy ending, rather it should be inferred that by means of this strategy they show us the real of our desire and warn us about the delicate structure of social reality.

In Žižek's example, with the use of the repetition of the very same scene (in the same setting, the protagonist wakes up twice) the long interval (in which the protagonist finds himself as a murderer involved in an intricate plot) between the two scenes (the awakenings) is retroactively fictionalized. "The Matrix" goes a step further; it retroactively fictionalizes, then negates and then again fictionalizes the very same scene. Moreover, as mentioned before, the film compels the viewer to question whether what is shown is real or dream/hallucination/VR every moment, even within the very scene.

"The Matrix" not only reminds us the "real" of our desire, but also expresses the feeling of how uncontrollable, uncontainable the "real" is. By making the "world of dreams" (hallucinations and simulations as well) so inseparable from everyday reality and by underlining that they are so intertwined, the film reveals that the "real" of our desire waits to be erupted any moment, although it only shows its face in our dreams-as mentioned by Žižek-

What does the theme of the insertion of the bug into Neo's body tell about the real of his desire? Here, if we accept this scene as the manifest context of a dream, we should translate the "object bug" into the "word "bug". We know that dream-work visualizes (literalizes) words and here "to bug" becomes literally a bug. In interpreting dreams, as Žižek suggests

"what we have to must do is translate the objects back into words, replace things by words designating them... In a dream, "things" themselves are already "structured like a language", their disposition is regulated by the signifying chain for which they stand. The signified of this signifying change, obtained by means of a retranslation of "things" into "words" is the "dream-thought."<sup>12</sup>

Then, we should take into consideration the meanings of "bug" and "to bug". The dictionary defines "bug" as "an unexpected defect, fault, flaw, or imperfection". "To bug" (also used in the film as in the form of "bugged") means "to bother, to annoy". We can infer that insertion of a bug into a body corresponds to a dream image of penetration. If we consider the two meanings of the

word together, we come close to discover the dream symbolism in the representation of this scene. Here, it can be said that the penetration of the bug refers to sexual penetration. What is penetrated and thus defected, flawed, and made imperfect is the female body, which is annoying, bothering and threatening because of this very defect. Psychoanalytically speaking, the female body represents lack and absence, which is why it evokes the threat of castration. Woman inspires terror because not only she appears to be castrated (she has no penis), but also the male imagines that she might castrate him during intercourse (vagina look like a devouring mouth). Thus, the female body, which is considered as flawed and imperfect for its lack, rouses anxiety.

If the penetration of the bug refers to the sexual penetration, should the bug itself be interpreted as a symbol for penis? If the bug metamorphoses -as I mentioned above- like an embryo becoming fetus in the womb, and Neo's belly is the place where the bug is inserted into, it becomes clear that the bug corresponds to the seed of the person who penetrates. This makes a lot of sense considering what Sigmund Freud mentions about common symbolic elements in the dream-content. In his book 'The Interpretations of Dreams', Freud writes, "small animals and vermin represent small children... being plagued with vermin is often a sign of pregnancy."<sup>13</sup> Trinity's explanation for Neo's situation that "you are bugged" is expressed exactly as if he is plagued with a vermin or so. Thus, all this analysis helps us ponder on Neo's real of desire. Real of his desire involves his considerations of being a woman and of the difference of sexuality. (The similar bug which functions just like the bug put into Neo's body, is taken out of Douglas Quade's nostril, in "Total Recall", which is supposed to be inserted before then.)

At this point, we should examine further another dream-like experience that occurs just before Neo is bugged, in which he is unable to speak. As I mentioned before, this is again a very familiar dream experience where one is incapable of doing something despite his/her efforts.

“What is the meaning of the sensation of inhibited movement which appears so commonly in dreams and verges so closely upon anxiety? This ‘not being able to do

anything' does not always appear in dreams as a sensation but is sometimes simply a part of the content of the dream".<sup>14</sup>

Freud, in the section named "The Means of Representation in Dreams" in his book, explains this 'not being able to do something' as a way of expressing a contradiction.

Freud states that "in other dreams, in which the 'not carrying out' of a movement occurs as a *sensation* and not simply as a *situation*, the sensation of the inhibition of a movement gives a more forcible expression to the same contradiction –it expresses a volition which is opposed by a counter-volition. Thus the sensation of the inhibition of a movement represents a *conflict of will*." <sup>15</sup>

What causes Neo to feel contradictory wishes? Why does Neo find himself in a state of contradictory desires? What position in which Neo's stuck produces his hesitant feelings? In order to answer these questions we should look at the whole scene in which he is not able to talk. Neo's loss of speech comes after the following dialog between Neo and the agent:

"Neo: You can't scare me with this Gestapo crap. I know my rights, I want my phone call. Agent: Tell me Mr. Anderson what good is a phone call, if you're unable to speak. "

Thus, Neo's words are related with, broadly speaking, the juridical rights bestowing one the freedom of speech. According to psychoanalytic approach, the symbolic system starts with language, and the Law (of the Father) is after all a matter of speech. By mentioning his rights, Neo's announcement of his acceptance of the social order and language contradicts with his life style and his quite weak attachment to the sociosymbolic system. In fact, the film has already shown us until that moment that Neo lives on the edge of the symbolic system, he does not firmly cling to it. He is a computer programmer by day, and a computer hacker by night, he insistently comes to work late because he spends hours hacking at night and does not notice his boss' threats to fire him. If we consider that "Neo" is his hacker alias and he's mostly referred to as such, not as

Thomas Anderson, his legal name, which indicates his existence in the symbolic world, Neo's indifference to the symbolic system can easily be asserted. Therefore, that dream-like experience which indicates one's conflict of will, is the expression of Neo's contradictory feelings and thoughts about the symbolic order. In other words, the ambivalence of his desire concerning the symbolic system is represented by the dream of 'not carrying out' of a movement which is a way expressing a conflict of will.

Thus, if we think real of Neo's desire together with the ambivalent character of his desire, we may reveal an important point which will bring an explanation to the pattern emerging throughout the film: "birth". Let's think about those two consecutive dream-like scenes together. We have stated that the scene of the insertion of the bug can be referred to Neo's desire to be a woman and also his fantasies about being able to give birth, and the scene of his being unable to speak may be inferred to his ambivalent feelings about the symbolic system. If these two suggestions are put together, we can reach a conclusion that provides an explanation to the motif of "birth" prevalent in "The Matrix". These suggestions lead us to the conclusion that Neo, who never fully integrates with the system yearns for another system; he wants to create a new order, in other words, he desires to bear a system.

Let's have a look at the "birth" motifs in "The Matrix". The film is full of images, some of them only imply and the others explicitly depict the moment of birth. Even Neo's first appearance can be interpreted as a scene of birth. In that scene, we see first the computer screen and its flares falling on Neo's face and then the cables wrapped around his head. The camera pulls back and we see that Neo sleeps hunched down on the table and his arms are perfectly in line with the curve of the ergonomic keyboard. He has ear phones on his head. So, almost all his sensory organs are in contact with the computer that is like a generous mother, from which Neo has not separated yet.

In Neo's first apparent birth scene, as I mentioned above, he wakes up inside a glass cube, filled with reddish-colored liquid resembling blood, he has many cords attached all over his body.

He first tears the membrane covering his body and then rips out the portal inserted into his mouth. Then, the giant bug-like (again a bug figure) machine releases him from all these cords. Afterwards, he gets caught in the flow of water and he is dragged along a dark tunnel and finally flushed from the end of passageway as if he is a newborn flung from his mother's body. Close to the end, agent Smith shoots Neo many times, he physically dies; his heart does not beat any longer, as shown in the computer screen as a straight line. One of the agents checks his pulse and confirms his death. Yet, Neo rises up and is born again. He is the one who begets himself. Thus, he starts up generating a new system from himself.

In the last scene, as in the beginning of the movie, a computer (screen) fills the entire screen, it shows the warning "SYSTEM FAILURE", these words first change into the green dots and then into the paths that lead to a phone receiver's holes. We know that these old phones are the way out of the Matrix. Neo's voice announcing "A world where anything is possible, where we go from there is a choice I leave you" overlaps with the scene in which the words of "system failure" opens into a way to the passage. As a result, Neo finds the solution not in building a new system, but in discovering his way out of the cracks and gaps of the present one. As stated above, Neo chooses to go between the real and the symbolic reality; in other words, he neither chooses to live in the ultimate reality -which is indeed the Lacanian "real"-, nor desires to live in a pure dream state. That is how he manages to exist in the symbolic order.

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- <sup>1</sup> Slavoj Žižek, Enjoy Your Symptom! Jacques Lacan in Hollywood and out, Revised Edition, Routledge, NY, 2001, p. 216
- <sup>2</sup> Slavoj Žižek, Looking Awry: An Introduction to Jacques Lacan Through Popular Culture, The MIT Press, Cambridge, 1993, p. 71
- <sup>3</sup> Žižek (1993), p. 79
- <sup>4</sup> Žižek (1993), p. 81
- <sup>5</sup> Žižek (2001), p. 217
- <sup>6</sup> Žižek (1993), p. 19
- <sup>7</sup> Žižek (1993), p. 77
- <sup>8</sup> Žižek (1993), p. 77
- <sup>9</sup> Žižek (1993), p. 77
- <sup>10</sup> Žižek (1993), p. 18
- <sup>11</sup> Žižek (1993), p. 17
- <sup>12</sup> Žižek (1993), p. 51
- <sup>13</sup> Sigmund Freud, The Interpretations of Dreams, Penguin Books Limited, London, 1991, pp. 474
- <sup>14</sup> Freud (1991), p. 450
- <sup>15</sup> Freud (1991), p. 452

### **Paranoid Fantasy and Nostalgia:**

In *The Matrix*, Agent Smith tells Morpheus about how the Matrix is created. He says “the first Matrix is designed to be a perfect human world where none suffered, where everyone would be happy”. This definition perfectly fits the world of *Truman (Show)*. At the opening scene, the actress who plays Truman’s wife describes the show as a life style, noble life, and blessed life.

Truman Burbank, who is adopted by a multimedia corporation before he was born, lives in Seahaven, Florida. What he doesn't know but the rest of the world does is that he's the star of a television show that features every moment of his life. Everyone in his life, from his mother to his best friend is an actor, fed lines by Christof, the creator and producer of *The Truman Show*. At the opening scene of the movie, Christof makes a speech about how “real” the show is, and how this quality makes it different from all the current special effects flavored shows. Followed by the images of Truman, then, the credits of the show appear: “starring Truman Burbank as himself, created by Christof”. After that Truman’s wife makes comments about the show and credits continue to flow; “Hannah Gill as Meryl”. Lastly, we hear Truman’s best friend’s remarks on the show expressing that “it is all true, it is all real, nothing on this show is fake; it is merely controlled.” Next, appears on screen “Louise Coltrane as Marlon”. All comments made by Christof, Meryl and Marlon are interrupted by the images of Truman’s talking to himself in front of the mirror. These scenes communicate with each other; the comments are replied each time by the scene where Truman talks to the mirror. Truman’s words sound as if they respond sarcastically to their praising comments on the show. The credits flowing during the opening sequence of the movie belongs not to the film but to the show, yet as the viewer does not know what’s going on, he/she may take these credits as that of the movie’s.

Truman lives in an ideal, seemingly utopian small town, in which neighbors greet each other over white picket fences, where the weather is always perfectly sunny and warm. (Compared to the film noir atmosphere of “*The Matrix*” and especially the old, dark facade of the “real world”,

excessiveness of bright light in Seahaven can be counted as one of the signs of fakeness of Truman's world.) The Truman Show is set in the future, its town is a 50s idyll of identical clapboard houses built around a small business center and populated by ideal demographic. Not only the style of architecture but also the fashion of costumes belongs to the 50's. Truman, not so enthusiastic about his job and rejecting the necessities of being married, such as having a baby (it is also doubtful whether they have a sex life or not as the audience of the show complains about not seeing them do it) explicitly refuses the requirements of being a grown-up. In one scene, during a discussion with his wife about his travel plans, he declares openly that he feels like a teenager.

Since childhood Truman has been discouraged from leaving Seahaven in every way. In a flashback we see Truman tell his elementary school teacher he wants to be an explorer like Magellan. She quickly pulls down a map of the world and explains that "everything has already been discovered." To make sure Truman never wants to leave the island, Christof "kills" his father in a boating accident, which makes Truman afraid of the water to death. So, Truman is kept on his island by implanted traumas about travel and water. He lives an adult life without taking any responsibility for it; he does not have a biological/symbolic father, he only has a chronically ill mother whom he can not leave behind. Psychoanalytically speaking, the oedipal scenario has not been staged yet, since the interference of the father was permanently prevented by leaving him out of the Oedipal triangle. Thereby Truman's entrance into the symbolic order was delayed; because without the third other, we cannot talk about the symbolic system. Thus, he has not even been involved in the Oedipal rivalry yet; since he still lives in his mother's womb. The presentation of Truman's world, its spherical shape can be interpreted as his being in the mother's womb. So, it can be said that he is not symbolically born yet. It is quite crucial that what enables Truman to see through and exit his manipulated world is the unexpected intervention of his father.

What Truman involves in can be perfectly described as a "paranoid fantasy": an individual living in a small city suddenly starts to suspect that the world he lives in is fake, a show staged to

convince him that he lives in a real world, while all people around him are effectively actors and extras in that counterfeit. In his article 'How the Non-duped Err', Slavoj Žižek mentions a story - which has a quite similar paranoid scenario- from Robert Heinlein's "They" (about a patient in an asylum who believes -correctly, as it turns out- that everything that happens in the world is staged by "them" in order to dupe him). Žižek comments on the novel's denouement (the hallucinations of the hero turn out to be true) as follows: "What we have here is *successful encounter*: the final surprise is produced by the fact that a certain gap (that separating "hallucination" from "reality") is abolished. This collapse of "fiction" (the contents of hallucination) and "reality" defines the psychotic universe."<sup>1</sup> In this common paranoid fantasy, the psychotic subject's belief/hallucination that behind seemingly consistent, coherent social facade, there is another Other who provides and guarantees this consistency turns out to be true. Truman's psychotic deception that the big Other is located in an agent, another subject who is not deceived, is yielded for the fact that the big Other is embodied in a real living body, Christof. Thus, outside his enclosed universe, he gradually finds out some truth/reality to be discovered. Is there really some reality beyond the end of Truman's fake world, or just the unknown abyss?

The final shot of "The Truman Show" can be interpreted straightforwardly that Truman finally breaks out from this counterfeit, imaginary world and chooses to live outside this Disneyland, in a real world. As a proof of this happy denouement of the film, we can point to the excitement and applause of the millions around the world watching the last minutes of the show, and especially his true love's leaving her house immediately to embrace Truman as soon as possible.

At this moment, we should examine narration-wise how the film presents the "audience" of The Truman Show and the real world. In order to conclude the final scene of the film as the liberation of the hero and therefore a happy ending, the status and the function of the audience in the diegetic world of the film should be considered. Until the first appearance of the show audience,

the viewer is given many hints to infer what he/she is seeing is what the TV-viewing world outside of Truman's city is seeing. In some scenes we see Truman through the eyes of a camera probably hidden somewhere; we infer so because of the oval matte around the central image. As the film unfolds, addicted viewers of The Truman Show are introduced and after a while, the interference of these scenes from outside the show becomes frequent.

The show is watched in the “real world” by a couple of waitresses at a bar surrounded by customers, a couple of old ladies sitting on a couch, two security guards, a geek splashing around in a bath tub, a few Japanese spectators gesticulating, Sylvia, a few members of Christof's crew and Christof himself. We do not see any of these characters doing different things, or in a different place. This is parallel to that Truman always sees the same people in front of his house, at the corner of a building, on the way to his office. The real world is presented as claustrophobic as Truman's world and the lives of the audience as monotonous as the lives of the inhabitants of Seahaven. The possibility of Truman's going to Fiji seems no less than the geek's coming out of the tub. On one hand, the show subsists on product placements accompanied by advertising chatters from Seahaven residents, including Truman's wife, who praises the virtues of a new device she bought at the supermarket or recommends that he try a new brand of cocoa. On the other hand, the houses of the show's audience are overflowed with the numerous products of The Truman Show from Truman sampler cushions to replicas of houses in Seahaven or Truman tagged mugs. Thus, not only the life in Seahaven is orchestrated and manipulated by the real world, but also the life outside is influenced by the show in many ways.

As we mentioned above, although The Truman Show passes in the 90s', its set, decors and costumes belong to the 50s. Beyond all its formal qualities, what makes the show look like coming out of the past is its holding authentic, firmly preserved small-town American values. The show evokes the world of 1950s where everyone is middle class, has a job, does not have sex life and never uses the toilet. Were the 50s in America really an era like the one represented in the show?

The crucial point is that the show does not portray the 50s, rather the 90s' perspective of that era. In other words, what is presented in the show is not the "real" life in the 50s, but a retrospective utopia about that decade. It is a common fantasy about a golden age which has never existed. Behind these colorful and peaceful images in media and cinema that depict the 50s, the real life was probably not that pure and sterile in those days as it had never been. Thus, it can be said that *The Truman Show* is less the 50s than the sitcom or TV dramas version of the 50s. The show equates the 50s with the old TV dramas and thus reduces the past to television's depiction of it.

In the 50s, sitcoms were the most popular programs among the existing genres of television. Family shows were prevalent among the sitcoms of that decade. If we do a quick research on the internet, we notice that most of these shows involve middle-class families with two or three children, a mother who is a perfect housewife. These families are portrayed as living in a wholesome environment surrounded by a few friends and neighbors. Most episodes revolve around the theme of growing up and address typical suburban family problems such as school issues, problems with boy/girl friends, consequences of telling a white lie, etc. Among the most famous 50s sitcoms are "Father Knows Best" (1954-62), "The Donna Reed Show" (1958-66), "Leave it to Beaver" (1957-63), "Adventures of Ozzie & Harriet" (1952-1966). Colorful, sterile and extremely hygienic life supposedly lived in 50s was actually constituted through the representations of these sitcoms. It is always sunny in the world of these shows, which is made up of picket fences, green awnings, shade trees, genial neighbors, friendly policemen and postmen who know your name.

Along with "The Truman Show", some contemporary films that use only visual characteristics of these depictions of the 50s, show that they are mere representations, nothing to do with the reality of the 50s. These movies portray the 50s era as the symbol of conformism and unrealistic opportunism. Among these films are "Blue Velvet" (David Lynch, 1986), "Going All the Way" (Mark Pellington, 1997), "Happiness" (Todd Solondz, 1998), "Pleasantville" (Gary Ross, 1998), "American Beauty" (Sam Mendes, 1999). None of these examples except "Going All the

Way” take place in the 50s, yet the atmosphere and the façade of life at “first sight” is the reminiscent of the 50s. By quoting the visual characteristics of the 50s’ TV shows, these films demonstrate how artificial, synthetic and unreal the life in these depictions is. Moreover, they comment on their fictional world and the life in contemporary times to be as fake as the life in the 50s’ shows. As an example, in “Happiness” Trish (Cynthia Stevenson), the oldest sister of three Jordan sisters, is apparently living the American dream: she has a beautiful house, a loving husband, and three children. The formula to obtain happiness seems to be exactly applied, the structure and the life style of Trish’s family is very similar to that of the sitcoms we mentioned above. Yet, as the film unfolds, we see that neither Trish nor her husband is remotely close to being happy.

The pioneer of all these movies is Lynch’s “Blue Velvet”; it opens with the blue skies, again clean white picket fences, budding red roses, and yellow tulips... the images of the everyday small-town scenes, in which people drive around the town in shiny cars, a fire truck passes in slow motion (no reason to hurry up for firemen in this peaceful town) and a uniformed crossing guard holds a stop sign allowing children to safely cross the street. “Blue Velvet” and the other contemporary films we mentioned, can be put under the category of coming-of-age movies. They either put the theme of a young person growing up at the center -as in “Blue Velvet” –, or involve this subject as a side story. As we mentioned above, 50s’ sitcoms also revolve mainly around this very same theme. In the case of “Blue Velvet”, the protagonist who is the subject of the coming of age story, can not overcome the difficulties of this period as easily as the protagonists of the 50s’ do. Going after the mystery involving a severed human ear, he uncovers this veil, the façade of commonplace and mundane, and confronts with the real grown-up world. As he digs beneath the shell of normalcy, the surface of this life, he discovers the horrors of this small town and his desires as well.

“The Truman Show” proposes, narration-wise, that the spectators of the show watch it like a sitcom or a TV drama to which they are addicted. At this point, Truman’s favorite TV show “Golden Oldies” is worth mentioning. The introductory presentation of the show is as follows: “A hymn of praise to small town life where we learn that you do not have to leave home to discover what the world is all about and no one is poor who has friends full of laughter and love, pain and sadness but ultimately redemption.” This presentation is one of the most self-reflexive moments of the film, since the outline of the Truman’s favorite show mirrors exactly the situation of Truman.

Thus, not only are the spectators of the show but also its protagonist is embedded in nostalgia. In the film, we see two flashbacks of Truman: one is the boating accident that leads to his father’s death; the other is Truman’s first meeting with his true love, and shortly after that her disappearance. The first of these two flashbacks is motivated by the protagonist’s remembering who is looking at the horizon on the beach. This flashback of the accident is presented as the oval matted around the central images. The second flashback is brought by the TV images, following immediately the image of Truman’s looking on Silvia’s jacket. On the TV, online show is interrupted by the blurring image of Truman. This blurring refers to the fact that the following scene is one of the recalled moments, and then it is passed to his high school days. Meantime, we see one of the waitresses who is watching the show at the bar, telling to the other waitress, “They got rid of her, but they could not erase the memory.” In both flashbacks, it is boldly underlined that the images are recorded, not the recollections of Truman. These “memories” are nothing else than what remains from the past and arrives to us through fiction. These are not the memories of Truman; they are the fictionalized version of so called real events which are themselves in fact the consequences of pure manipulations from the outset.

Truman himself and the viewers of The Truman Show deeply indulge in nostalgia about a lost past, paradise which in fact has never existed. How can this nostalgic fascination of both the viewers and the protagonist of the show be interpreted? In his article ‘Pornography, Nostalgia,

Montage; A Triad of the Gaze', Slavoj Žižek examines the nostalgic lure evoked in today's spectator by American film noir of the 1940s. He questions how these films can still captivate the spectators, even if the most dramatic scenes from the examples of this genre evoke laughter among them, and it is obvious that identification with these films is no longer possible. According to Žižek, "what fascinates us is precisely a certain gaze, the gaze of the "other" of the hypothetical, mythic spectator from the 40s' who was still able to identify immediately with the universe of *film noir*." <sup>2</sup> In other words, what attracts today's spectators is an authentic look- clearly not an ironic one that today's spectators have, belonging supposedly to the spectators of those days, who can identify with that atmosphere. Thus, what evokes the fascination in the spectator is not the scene displayed, but the gaze of the imaginary, naïve spectator enthralled, enchanted by that scene.

More relevant to our analysis, Žižek also mentions some contemporary films, which have an air of film noir atmosphere. He asserts that the gaze sourcing from the object i.e. from the one being looked at (Žižek calls this "gaze-object"), purely appear in these examples in which nostalgia is carried out to self-reference. These examples (*Body Heat*, *Driver*), which take place in contemporary time, are yet viewed through that look of the film noir universe. Žižek asserts that, when these films are taken into account, "instead of transposing a fragment of the past into a timeless, mythic present, we view the present itself as if it were a part of the mythic past." <sup>3</sup> What provides the gaze of the mythic past is in fact that the film noir of the 40s', as such, does not exist. Žižek explains as follows "It started to exist only when it was discovered by French critics in the 50s'... What was, in America itself, a series of low budget B-productions of little critical prestige, was miraculously transformed, through the intervention of the French gaze, into a sublime object of art..." <sup>4</sup>

From this perspective, in the film, *The Truman Show*'s spectators can be said to be fascinated by the look of the mythic spectator from the 50s' who was able to identify with the world of those TV dramas or sitcoms. If we do not take into account this gaze of 50s', *The Truman*

Show remains simply a contemporary (real life) TV series about contemporary times. Beyond the formal depiction of Truman's world, what is fascinating about the show is this look of the mythic past. Parallel to the 40s' film noir, the period of the 50s', as such, has never existed. From the outset, the TV and cinema representations have created a nostalgic distance towards the 50s'-even during the 50s'. Nostalgic distance emerges at a time when an ideal, pure, merely pleasant life was no longer possible, when such a life is perceived already as a lost object. The point is that nostalgic fascination towards the 50s' commences from the very beginning, because this life as such has not existed; it is the lost object which has never been possessed. The most obvious proof for the non-existence of that period as such is that Truman himself needs support –his favorite show- to be able to live in that mythic universe.

The show reminds us Frank Capra's "It's a Wonderful Life"; both stories revolve around the central plot which involves an ordinary man who sees the life of adventure and travel he hoped for constantly thwarted. Yet in contrast to Truman, George Bailey (James Stewart) eventually learns to love the pleasant life he has. This theme is common also to Truman's favorite show as mentioned above. In Frank Capra's movie, there is no plot against to the protagonist for his being kept in that town, but the course of events lead in a way that he can not leave his native land. At the closing scene of the movie, to defend his position, George's guardian angel grants his one wish: to see what the world would be like if he had never been born. As he and George travel through the nightmarish alternate reality, they observe how much worse off many people would be. This closing sequence of "It's a Wonderful Life" can be interpreted as the realization of the hero's megalomaniac thought, which is one of the indications of paranoia. Thus, both protagonists live a "paranoid fantasy" unfolding as megalomaniac scenario. As George observes what a horrible place the world would be without his presence, Truman gradually discovers that he is the center of the whole world's attention, a beloved star of a TV show. Thus, these protagonists' being stuck in a small town is necessary for keeping consistent their fantasy world which desperately needs their

existence. In other words, these minds created a world of their own in which they are important and ultimately indispensable.

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<sup>1</sup> Slavoj Žižek, Looking Awry: An Introduction to Jacques Lacan Through Popular Culture, The MIT Press, Cambridge, 1993, p. 81

<sup>2</sup> Žižek (1993), p.112

<sup>3</sup> Žižek (1993), p.112

<sup>4</sup> Žižek (1993), p.112

## **VI. Conclusion: Cinematic Reality Past and Future**

I have examined four films in the analysis section of my research. At the beginning of my study, I selected these films –out of a list of highly compatible films related to my research topic- according to common themes and distinctive stylistic qualities. Now, finally I will attempt to identify an emerging pattern based on the questions asked in the introduction. After a thorough analysis, some common characteristics have emerged on various levels in the movies examined. Some of these aspects appear in each film, some of them are excluded from one or most of the movies in the list. The most eminent characteristics are intertextuality, self-consciousness and self-reflexivity and nostalgia.

Intertextual quality is common to all movies examined. The way intertextual narration is set up is unique in each film. Intertextual quality is the richest in “The Matrix” which is embedded with many verbal or visual forms of allusion to other texts such as films, “Ghost in the Shell”, “Vertigo”, “Total Recall” “The Wizard of Oz” and books “Simulacra and Simulation”, “Alice in Wonderland”. “The Matrix”’s intertextual quality, though very accessible to most of the viewers - mostly based on very popular texts-, is far from rendering its intention more graspable and obvious, rather makes it quite confusing. Since intertextual narration itself links the film/text to the other “fictional” texts, not to the referents from “reality”, from the outset “The Matrix”, regardless of its narrative, involves the question of reality. Moreover, the diegetic world of all the alluded texts in the film brings up the same question.

Due to its pictorialist narration, “The Cell” only contains visual forms of allusions to other texts, not verbal ones. In the movie, unconscious scenes -most of the film takes place in the unconscious- are very pictorialist, composed of images inspired by famous paintings, works of plastic artists and contemporary artists. “The Cell” involves visual allusions to works of art, such as the works of Damien Hirst, Degas, Escher, some Surrealist painters and Stelarc. As I argued in analyzing “The Cell”, since the depiction of unconscious realm requires picturesque expression, the

film provides pictorial narration at utmost and to richen that narration it makes allusions to works of visual arts. The logic and workings of the allusions made by “The Cell” is just the reverse of those that are made by “The Matrix”. In the former, the allusions, which are created through works of art, are not within easy reach for an ordinary viewer, yet they render the film’s intention more graspable and evident; thus they are not meant to confuse the viewer. In other words, if the viewer recognizes some or all of these works of art, and ponder on why the movie employs them, she/he can correctly infer that there is a parallelism between the construction of the unconscious world and the construction of pictures, and works of art in general.

In the 90s’, not only old popular cultural products (from pop songs to TV series or icons) have started to be incorporated into films, but also works of art or (a scene, a stylistic convention of) old art movies are transferred to popular background. Old popular films are followed by remakes while old art movies are turned into new popular movies. When we consider this tendency of the 90s’, another intention of “The Cell” in making use of intertextual narration becomes clear. The works of contemporary art are re-staged, re-performed throughout the film sometimes obviously, sometimes vaguely. Thus, by inserting the products of high art into a popular context, the film provides a postmodern sensibility that erases the boundaries between high art and popular culture. (If these boundaries are sustained, some of the works that are alluded can not be comprehended,.)

Compared to the allusions made by the other films in the list, “The Truman Show” involves rather implicit allusions to other texts. “The Truman Show” carries on visual resemblances to some contemporary films that portray the 50s era as the symbol of conformism and unrealistic opportunism. It does not refer/allude to a specific movie or a scene but a distinctive atmosphere, impression created by a group of movies. The ambiance set up in “The Truman Show” can be expressed as a derivative of (or have an affinity to) the atmosphere common to following movies; “Blue Velvet” (David Lynch, 1986), “Going All the Way” (Mark Pellington, 1997), “Happiness”

(Todd Solondz, 1998), “Pleasantville” (Gary Ross, 1998), and “American Beauty” (Sam Mendes, 1999). By quoting the visual characteristics of the 50s’ TV shows -which are mere representations, nothing to do with the reality of the 50s, as explained in detail, in the analyses section-, these films demonstrate how artificial, synthetic and unreal the life in these depictions is. Thus, these films comment on their fictional world and the life in contemporary times to be as fake as the life in the 50s’ shows. Repeating the purpose of creating such an atmosphere “The Truman Show” comments on the world in which Truman lives in a similar way.

To evaluate “Being John Malkovich” in terms of intertextual quality is not easy, because the analysis of the movie’s employing the actor John Malkovich as himself overwhelms the concept of intertextuality. Since, in the movie, John Malkovich plays himself -more appropriately his star image, as I explained in the analysis, it evokes many associations about the actor but satisfies none of them. If the viewer did not watch any John Malkovich movie before seeing this film, throughout the film he/she can not learn even the name of a single movie in which he appears. As I argued in the film’s analysis, Malkovich plays his star image, which is by definition ambiguous, therefore no significant information, clue is provided to us to draw any conclusions about his personality, what he thinks/feels or what he has done before. In fact, the portal does not enable people to enter John Malkovich’s mind or soul, but to literally to get into his head, his body. The film deliberately avoids giving information about the actor John Malkovich; here the intention of the movie, by turning him into just an expensive suit, ripping him of from all personal characteristics, is to render him only a celebrity. That is why the movie has chosen a relatively lesser known actor, instead of Brad Pitt or Bruce Willis. With this choice, the film accomplishes to emphasize what attracts people is the emptiness, hollowness of Malkovich’s image onto which they can project their ego-ideals.

Besides, through Malkovich’s playing himself, the film introduces verbal and visual allusions that enhance film’s intertextual quality. In one of these, John Malkovich practices his role

with a copy of Chekhov, reading the following lines from “The Cherry Orchard”: ”My soul has been full of mysterious anticipations”. (This is not only an intertextual moment, but also a very self-reflexive one that mirrors the actor’s situation at the very moment while Lotte is inside his head.) One other allusion from the movie is again to literary text. The only scene in which we see Malkovich playing is where he acts out Richard the hunchback Duke of Gloucester, who becomes Richard III through a series of horrible acts, killing off his enemies, his wife and most of his supporters. In this well-known play from Shakespeare, Richard is a pure, self-professed villain of monstrous proportions, as if his amorphous body, his hunchback distorted his way of thinking. In these two allusions, it is not uttered that Malkovich practices Richard III or that he reads one of Chekhov’s plays, but we can infer so from the visual and verbal clues. The last of the allusions is to an artist; a taxi driver confuses John Malkovich with Robert Mapplethorpe, who is one of the most controversial of American photographers due to his homosexuality.

Similar to the allusions made by “The Cell”, in “Being John Malkovich” allusions are constituted through works of art, products and figures of high culture. Thus, like the former, “Being John Malkovich” provides allusions which can not be easily evoked in the ordinary spectator. Even if the allusions are grasped by the viewer, they are not helpful in revealing movie’s intention. Although they are not meant to confuse the viewer, they do not render the film’s intention more clear neither. The common point of all these allusions is that John Malkovich acts out someone else or is confused by some else in these intertextual moments. In parallel to the ambiguity of his character -mentioned in the film analysis in detail-, through these illusions instead being informed about his “real” character, in reality, the viewer learns that, Malkovich’s own personality is shadowed by the constant concentration on being someone else, engaging in the work of acting so immensely.

The other allusions to the works of art are Craig’s puppeteering performance of the ”Abelard and Heloise”’s story accompanied by an opera piece and John Malkovich’s (as Craig is

inside his body) featuring with his puppet in the “Swan Lake” ballet. In the former, Craig’s street performance of this famous love story is misunderstood as a nasty, obscene presentation of a sexual act by an onlooker whose little daughter enjoys the scene. Craig is punched by the father because of this show. (The line of one of the lovers is worth mentioning because of its self-reflexive quality: “Sometimes my thoughts are betrayed by the movements of my body”. This is again not only an intertextual moment, but also a very self-reflexive one that mirrors John Malkovich’s situation of losing his control over his body.) Beyond these two specific examples, all performances of puppeteering in the film look as if they are adaptations of theatrical art works. We see a biographical TV program about John Malkovich, who in a short period of time has made a great career in puppeteering. In this program; puppeteering is mentioned as a form of art, and Malkovich as a greatest artist of this art form. In the film’s diegetic world, puppeteering, which is normally not counted as a form of art, is elevated to the level of artistic performance, as mentioned in the movie: “Malkovich’s rise to fame brought about a renaissance in puppeteering”. Thus, similarly to “The Cell”, in “Being John Malkovich” products of high culture from literature to the ballet, are brought into the context of an activity that is not included in art but also does not belong to popular culture, is on the verge of both. So, by foregrounding puppeteering in its plot and presenting the examples of high culture through this activity, Being John Malkovich also grants a postmodern premise that removes the boundaries between high art and popular culture. Moreover, the film’s choice of this activity as the center of its plot becomes important when this activity’s ambiguous state is considered. Just as Malkovich is an ambiguous personality in many respects, puppeteering is also ambiguous in terms of the distinction between popular and high culture.

To sum up, the intertextual quality of “The Cell” and “The Truman Show” renders these films’ intention more obvious and clear, in contrast, that of “The Matrix” and “Being John Malkovich” blurs their premises, instead of clarifying it.

Before evaluating the four films in terms of their self-conscious and self-reflexive narration, let me explain briefly the difference between these terms. Self-consciousness in narration –as explained in the analysis of “The Cell”- is narration’s greater or lesser acknowledgment that a story is being presented for a perceiver. On the other hand, self-reflexiveness requires narration’s acknowledgement about/of its own story/subject matter.

“The Matrix”’s narration is highly self-conscious because it constantly reminds the viewer that he/she is watching a film. Through different narration-wise tactics “The Matrix” makes the viewer aware of his/her cinematic experience. Since I mentioned these strategies in depth during the analysis of the film, here I will briefly summarize how they function. In one moment, slow-motion images and images presented in sound-speed co-exist within the very same scene. Although the convention of slow-motion does not create a disturbing affect on the viewer (since it is established as a convention and its purpose is acknowledged by the spectator), insertion of slow-motion views into the images of normal pace disconcerts the spectator. Thus, the spectator becomes aware that he/she is watching a movie that aims to tell something that can not be expressed by present conventions.

The other narration-wise game staged several times throughout the movie is that the viewer’s expectations/suppositions about off-screen space, created in one scene, are falsified in the following scene. For example, the spectator first sees Morpheus and Neo watching TV, and then he/she is directed by the camera to watch what is shown on TV, as our protagonists are doing. Then, what is shown on TV fills the full screen. At that point, our supposition is that the protagonist are still watching what we are watching (TV). Yet, the camera abruptly free falls and when it reaches the ground, we find them in the middle of the scene that is shown on TV, previously watched by them. In another scene, with the use of the same tactic, our former supposition that Neo is looking at the giant machine is falsified by the coming scene: the one who is looking turns to be the one who is looked at. In both of the examples, the camera’s point of view (which is identified

with that of the protagonist) i.e. what “objectively” sees suddenly becomes the gaze of the subjective, deceptive camera. Thus, the viewer becomes conscious of his/her activity of watching through recognition of the camera’s existence.

Moreover, as I thoroughly analyzed in the movie, there is an ongoing ambiguity about whether what the protagonist is experiencing is “real” or not. The film makes the viewer suspicious and aware of the epistemology of every scene/shot after it passes to another. Each subsequent scene falsifies the viewer’s point of view about the previous scene. That is why he/she is compelled to think of the epistemological status of each scene retrospectively. Since the viewer is compelled to think about what he/she is watching, he/she becomes conscious of his/her spectatorship position.

As I mentioned before “The Matrix”’s intertextual narration is intended to confuse spectator about its own narrative. Moreover, these narration-wise strategies that make the movie self-conscious do not reveal the purpose of the film, instead they puzzle the spectator about the film’s intention. To sum up, although self-consciousness in narration makes the viewer aware of his/her cinematic experience and his/her spectatorship position, this awareness does not make it any easier to determine each scene's status in relation to the film’s primary question, whether everything is dream or reality.

In “The Cell” self-consciousness is constituted mostly through the way it makes both editing and sound editing visible. Most of the scenes do not hide that they know about the rest of the story. The scenes communicate with each other; questions asked or comments made in one scene are replied by the following scene. All these attempts which make editing visible, remind the viewer of the making of the film, and therefore cause the viewer to be aware of the construction of the film. While making the movie self-conscious, communication among the scenes, leads the viewer to infer some parallelisms and contrast between the characters or events. That is to say, if the viewer pays attention to the communication among the scenes, he/she may conclude correctly about the relationship of the characters and gain a deeper understanding about the film’s narrative.

Thus, in parallel to its intertextuality, in “The Cell” self-consciousness is not meant to deceive the viewer; if it is grasped correctly, it provides several hints to the viewer about its theme and premises. Additionally, in one scene, we see an animation, which is like an animated version of the movie that draws many parallelisms to the movie’s narrative. That is a highly self-reflexive sequence because it mirrors the movie’s story. This self-reflexive moment also helps the viewer to comprehend the film’s subject-matter further, it is not intended to deceive him/her.

The other two movies, namely “Being John Malkovich” and “The Truman Show”, in contrast to the ones examined, do not display a recognition of their narration. Although their intertextual quality renders them self-conscious to some extent, the narration-wise tactics that make the viewer conscious are not at work in these films. On the other hand, their narrations’ acknowledgement of their own subject matter is remarkable; that is to say, they are highly self-reflexive.

One of the most apparent self-reflexive moments of the film is the scene in which Truman watches his favorite TV show “Golden Oldies”. The voice-over that presents the show praises small town life and comments that there is no reason to leave home to discover the world. Thus, the words of the narrator mirror exactly Truman’s situation.

Though it does not speak to the audience itself, “Being John Malkovich” tells about itself by focusing on self-related subjects such as principles of cinema and experience of the spectator. In other words, the film does not make the viewer conscious of his/her experience, but its narration’s recognition of its own subject matter is significant. As I argued in the analysis, Being John Malkovich literalizes what can be said about both acting and spectatorship metaphorically. In the film, abstract definition of acting, viz., keeping a certain number of spare personalities within easy reach, is literalized as the actor’s (Malkovich’s) having lots of different people inside himself. Moreover, in the diegetic world, the characters’ identification with Malkovich exactly repeats the

psychological experience that the spectator undergoes. Thus, the movie is self-reflexive, i.e. it mirrors the cinematic experience in many aspects.

All of these analyses lead us to the conclusion that these films raise the question of “spectatorship”. “The Truman Show” and “Being John Malkovich” put the subject of spectatorship at the center of their plot while “The Cell” and “The Matrix” evoke the issue by creating a plot in which the characters are exposed to different kinds of experiences which draw a certain resemblance to the cinematic experience. In “The Truman Show”, the position of the viewers of the show is significantly underlined. In “Being John Malkovich”, -mentioned in the film analysis in detail- the resemblance between the experience of entering into a person’s body and the experience of the spectator is quite explicit. In “The Cell” and “The Matrix”, the experience of the protagonists can be read as an allusion to the experience offered by cinema.

Considering their subject matter and the metaphors which are intended to signify the experience of the spectator, it can be asserted that the common point of these four films emerge as their stressing the limits and possibilities of spectatorship. Keeping in mind the protagonists of all the four films, their engagement with an alternative space (another persons’ body in “Being John Malkovich”, another person’s unconscious in “The Cell”, an entirely fictional world in “The Truman Show”, an entirely real world in “The Matrix”) resembles spectator’s involvement with cinema as a fantasy space. Yet in each example, the protagonists’ involvement with these spaces surpasses the spectator’s involvement with the experience of viewing. In other words, the protagonists of all the four films over-identify with these alternative spaces and go beyond the experience of the spectator.

At this point, to clarify my proposition, I will make use of Žižek’s account on alternate “variations on the relationship between the Self and ‘its’ Body which violate the standard moral-legal norm of ‘one person in one body’.”<sup>1</sup> Žižek gives this account in order to explain how an engagement with cyberspace decenters the subject. Here, my intention is to evaluate our films in

terms of the different ways through which cyberspace lead to subject's decenterment. One of the options which break the 'norm of one person in one body' is "many persons in a single body". The protagonists of "The Cell" and "Being John Malkovich"s state can be thought as analogous to this case. Žižek points out that if there is no clear hierarchy between the plurality of persons, (as in the case of Novak/Catherine who dwells in the unconscious of Carl, or as in the case of Lotte/Craig who is inside the body of Malkovich) the unity of the subject is obliterated. "The Cell" is also compatible with another option, that is "many bodies in a single person". Žižek gives the example of hypnosis which is quite similar to what Catherine practices, in order to exemplify this version. The third option is "many persons outside a single body". Žižek explains this option as follows: "these persons refer to the body which exists outside cyberspace, in 'reality', with the presupposition that this body accommodates a 'true person' behind the multiple masks of (screen persona) in VR." <sup>2</sup> If Seahaven Island is supposed to be a cyberspace, the viewers of The Truman Show can be thought in a similar state to the persons in the third option. Last option is "many bodies outside a single person". Žižek explains the last version as follows: "This is how we 'normally' relate to an institution: we say 'the State, Nation, company, school... wants this', although 'we know very well' that the institution is not an actual living entity with a will of its own, but a symbolic fiction." <sup>3</sup> As I argued in my analysis, in "The Matrix" what initiates Neo's quest is his psychotic belief that there is a person behind the symbolic system.

Considering these possible situations that signify decenterment of the subject, we come to the conclusion that all four films touch upon different modes of engagement with cinematic space which is evolving towards a structure similar to the cyberspace. They warn us about alternate modes of spectatorship that may/will be provided by today's cinema, which has undergone important structural changes in the last decade. These structural changes are brought about by cinema's incorporating new forms of narrative examined thoroughly in the analyses. New forms of narrative in films owe a lot to computer games and the internet, and the future of cinema seems to

be in the integration with new forms of technology such as virtual reality. For instance, Star Wars Episode II was shot entirely on digital video and in its première it was projected by digital video on 19 screens all over America at the same time.

Especially the collaboration of cinema and the internet bring up the subjects of self-consciousness and intertextuality to the focus. Convergence of filmic narrative with interactivity will increase the effect of self-consciousness. Besides, so far intertextuality requires the reader/viewer to connect the text/film with the other texts/films. With this change in verisimilitude in the cinema of this decade, intertextuality will soon be released from its dependence merely to the mental activity of the viewer, because it will turn out to be the viewer's external relation to other texts and to other viewers. In other words, the viewer will not need to connect the text with the other texts he has in his/her mind, since all of the other texts will already be present on the internet.

As mentioned in the analyses, the protagonists' involvement with alternative spaces –that resemble the cinematic space-, causes subject's decenterment, shifting among multiple subjective positions at the risk of losing all of them once and thus leads even to symbolic death. Therefore, we may conclude that these films warn us about the dangers of structural change in cinema, which is brought by its convergence to the cyberspace. They have a critical perspective towards all of these changes and do keep their distance with this abrupt structural transformation. So, the ambivalence in their attitude towards this structural change corresponds to the ambivalence they display between representation and reality. Thus, at the turn of such a structural break, these films approach the future of cinema in an ambivalent manner and this ambivalence is echoed in their subject matter. At this point, if the future itself is not real but possible, the ambivalent thoughts that these films have about the future of cinema can be considered as the starting point of their turning back its history by intertextual narration. To conclude, they search for the traces of this ambivalence which they feel

about the future of cinema in the past and turn to the same old question “what is the difference between reality and dream?”

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<sup>1</sup> Slavoj Žižek, *Cyberspace, Or, The Unbearable Closure of Being*, *The Plague of Fantasies*, Verso, 1997, p.140

<sup>2</sup> Žižek (1997), p.140

<sup>3</sup> Žižek (1997), p. 140

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