

## Chapter

# 3

## Dream On: Psychoanalysis and the Cinema

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You chose psychoanalysis over real life? Are you learning disabled?  
(Woody Allen)

Cinema and psychoanalysis were born around the same time. In 1895 the Grand Café of Paris hosted the first movie event of history, while at the same time *Studies of Hysteria* by Joseph Breuer and Sigmund Freud hit the shelves of bookshops in Vienna. It is hardly surprising that the histories of psychoanalysis and cinema ran parallel throughout the last century, despite the fact that the “father” of psychoanalysis, Sigmund Freud, developed a snobbish neglect of the new medium (as he did with most of the new inventions of his age, the radio and the telephone, for instance). Although his home city, Vienna, hosted around eighty cinemas, Freud visited the cinema for the first time in 1909 in New York. As Ernest Jones documents it, Freud was only “dimly amused by ‘one of the primitive films of those days,’ full of ‘wild chasings’” (Heath 25).

Later, in the 1920s, there was an attempt by German filmmaker G. W. Pabst side by side with Freudian disciples Karl Abraham and Hans Sachs to initiate a collaboration to make of a film on psychoanalysis, but Freud turned it down (26). Psychoanalysis, after all, was thought to be rather about the translation of disturbing images into words, not vice versa. It was during his field trip to the famous psychiatric clinic of Charcot, in France, that Freud started to develop the framework of the “talking cure,” which meant that the patient had to translate dream sequences and images into words, thereby tying the potentially harmful effects of these images into manageable verbal forms. While Charcot used photography and image recordings to document and study forms of hysteria, Freud considered this approach to be a dead-end. At that time hysteria – originating from the Greek *hysteria*, i.e. “womb” – was considered to be a neurotical disorder of women, a psychic conflict translated into bodily symptoms, thus it became the most important case for psychoanalysis.

During the history of film, there have been five main psychoanalytical approaches in film criticism and theory. One of them is cultural myth analysis that focused on the study of myths surrounding films (cf.: Hollywood’s star system) and emerging through them (culture-specific myths as main themes of film narratives). This trend is pivotal in investigating, for example, Hollywood cinema, which is, even nowadays, actively shaping the ways of thinking of million spectators. According to Glen O. Gabbard, cultural myths are utilized by producers in win-

ning spectators for their films because these myths – as Claude Levi-Strauss (1975) explains – express conflicts and binary oppositions (basic oppositions that characterize Western thinking, such as good/bad, white/black) that otherwise cannot be explored openly (Gabbard 8). When spectators choose films that present underlying conflicts (for example, good vs. bad), they unconsciously seek ways to project their wish-fulfillment. In an adventure film the protagonist always gets his/her reward and the bad gets punished. This reinforces a basic cultural code in the spectator, his/her wish for the social equilibrium is thus secured. As Gabbard explains, films play part in changing cultural norms, too: Clint Eastwood's acting career exemplifies a trajectory in the representation of masculinity from the traditional notion (described by adjectives like strong, active, determined, leader, fighter, muscular) towards a more elaborated one (described by adjectives that tinge the extremes of binary oppositions).

Another influential approach is the analysis of the filmmaker's biographical relevance in connection with a particular film or a cycle of films. This approach takes the biography and documents pertaining to it as a starting point in investigating films under the name of the filmmaker. Moreover, elements of a film can also be used to trace back unconscious impulses, repressions and childhood traumas from the life of the filmmaker. This kind of study, however, poses serious questions regarding the nature of production of films, as film is a communal product in which it is very difficult to dissect individual contributions.

The third approach is the analysis of characters appearing in films. Characters and their narrative lives, relations to other characters in the film, or even connections of several characters in cycles or series of films (for example in a family saga or a trilogy of films) are analyzed to produce comprehensive case studies that explain the motives and characteristics that govern the plot. According to Gabbard, many criticisms pointed out that the analysis of fictional characters is doomed to failure because these figures are fictional creations – so analyzing the characters should rather be done through the analysis of the filmmaker (13).

In case of classical Hollywood narratives the story usually focuses on the fictional life of the male protagonist. He has to overcome some obstacles, solve some problems to arrive at finding his place in society (it is traditionally marriage or the promise of a new life). This simple storyline, however, stems from the Freudian description of the *Oedipal scenario* that involves complex psychic changes in the case of the male child. Freud evokes the story of Oedipus in order to find a pattern or analogue “to explain a child's acquisition of ‘normal’ adult sexuality” (Hayward 261). In the description “normal” adult sexuality means heterosexuality, and the gender of the child is male because Freud found it problematic to talk about the psycho-sexual development of the female child. The male child is bonded to his mother through the breast, and imagines himself in a unity with her. This unity, however, soon breaks up when the child senses his difference from the mother (descriptions often include a visual scene in which the child is held up in front of a mirror, and then sees his difference not only from his mother but from the outside world, as well). The realization of his difference

prompts the child to desire the lost unity but, as Freud insists, this desire sexualizes the mother, that is, the mother-child relationship attains a sexual aspect. The sexual component is necessary for the child to realize that the only person who “has ‘lawful’ access to the mother” (261) is the father. The child also associates the power to castrate with the father because he sees that the mother “is not like him, she does not have a penis” (ibid.). Since the only person having access to her is the father, the child imagines that it was the father who castrated her possibly as a punishment. At this point, the child’s desire for unification becomes problematic for him because if he chooses to identify with her and thus accomplish the lost unity, he becomes like her, he gets castrated, too. If he chooses to unite with her, “he runs the risk of punishment from the castrating father” (ibid.). To resolve this castration threat, the child identifies with the father which signals his first step into social acceptance because he succumbs to the primary law of society: the repression of incestuous desire for the mother. Becoming like his father, the child moves toward social stability by adopting heterosexual orientation through redirecting his repressed desire for the mother toward other women in a socially acceptable manner. The Oedipus complex in case of the male child is resolved by the repression of his desire for the mother, which Freud coins primal repression.

From the first half of the 1970s, the role of the spectator became the focus of psychoanalytic considerations. Thus the fourth approach explores the issue of reception: in other words, how the spectator sees and comprehends films. Cristian Metz’s work on the issue of spectators’ identification during watching films opened the way to a comprehensive study of the position of the spectator. Discussions of the film viewers’ identification led to considerations of the role of the camera in setting up the narrative frame of the film through the interaction of the points of view involved in watching a film (those of the characters in the film, the camera, and the spectator). The highly influential essay, “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema” by Laura Mulvey (1975), gave another impetus for discussing the issue of reception, and triggered the involvement of feminism in psychoanalytical debates concerning films (Mulvey’s essay is discussed at length in Chapter Six “Gender and Cinema: All Sides of the Camera”).

The fifth approach takes film to be a working model, and analogue for psychoanalysis in many ways. One influential trend within this approach, signaled by the name of Bruce Kawin, among others, thinks of film as a representation similar to the “dream screen,” (Kawin qtd. in Gabbard 11) which is an unnoticeable screen onto which all dreams are projected. This view opens the way for investigations that employ methods of decoding dreams discovered by Freud such as condensation (many features or characters condensed into one figure), displacement (one feature or character is replaced by another one on the basis of some associative connection), and other dream mechanisms in the interpretation of films. As Metz noted, “it is in their gaps rather than in their normal functioning that the film state and the dream state tend to converge” (Metz 104). On the basis of Roman Jakobson’s idea adapted by Jacques Lacan

(Lacan 1977, 146–178), the methods of the interpretation of dreams serve as rhetorical figures – such as metaphor and metonymy – and help the interpreter to establish a coherent interpretation of the particular film. Charlie Chaplin's *Modern Times* (1936), for example, opens with a juxtaposition of “the image of a flock of sheep and that of a crowd pushing and shoving at the entrance to a subway station” (Metz 189), which recalls the figure of metaphor. When the famous harmonica tune is heard in Sergio Leone's *Once Upon a Time in the West* (1968) well before the Charles Bronson character appears on the screen, it serves as a metonymy: all the characters know that he is around, that the tune signals his approach as it belongs to him, yet no one can see him.

In close connection to this approach, another view within this analogue model takes the cinema itself as an analogue of dream. The starting point for this type of analysis is that as the dreamer is passively following the images of the dream sequence, the spectator of a film, too, is immersed in the images on the screen. Lastly, a possible approach in this analogue model is “suture,” a concept based on the oscillation of shot and reverse shot that is used in narrative films to “stitch” or “sew” (literally, suture) the spectator in the filmic narrative. A film image can show only 180 degrees of the entire space of the diegesis at any given moment. To complete the sense of a full spatial setup, another shot needs to cover the missing half (again, 180 degrees) of the previous shot. The sequence of shots and reverse shots produces the illusion of a complete and continuous visual field in film.

In film theory psychoanalytic approaches became dominant during the 1970s and 1980s, at the heyday of the poststructuralist movement. Poststructuralism looked beyond the constraints of the text and put into question the notions outside the text, notably those of subjectivity and culture. While still relying on linguistics and structuralist semiotics, the post-structuralist agenda started its own inquiries of visual phenomena such as film and television, visual arts, and everyday aspects of the field of vision. It was Lacan who emphasized the importance of “a meditation on optics” (Lacan 1991, 76), the relevance of which is that according to him “for each given point in real space, there must be one point and one corresponding point only in another space, which is the imaginary space” (ibid.). In other words, in order to study visuality and optical phenomena, it is best to turn to psychoanalysis – and it was and is doubly so when it comes to the cinema.

It may seem to be a common-place, but the following statement is intricate even in its simplicity: cinema is about *absence* and *presence*. Film is an illusion inasmuch as it presents something that is absent. It puts forth a show, which also means that it conceals something: if something is projected, its source is always concealed. Presence on the screen is limited to 180 degrees of visibility. When there is presence, that is, we see something on the screen, there is always something that is outside the frame of the screen. Thus presence evokes absence; if something is onscreen, the point of view is offscreen. When the spectator looks at the image, the pleasure that s/he takes in looking at it is always already marked by a lack: the lack or

absence of what cannot be seen. In this sense, the spectator looks at an image, at the screen, in order to fill in or forget this lack.

To account for the concept of this absence or lack, Metz studied the difference in watching a theatrical play and watching a film. In theater the space of play is the same as that of the audience: "everything the audience sees and hears is actively produced in their presence, by human beings or props which are themselves present" (Metz 1982, 43). According to Metz, the presence is in a "true space" (*ibid.*) and not in a photographed or projected one. The spectator of a theatrical performance has a sense of his/her own body, "as a member of the audience, being proximate and co-present with the action on the stage" (Rushton 108). The scene the theater-goer finds himself or herself watching is the "same scene" as that of the performers'. By contrast, as Metz argues, cinema presents an "other scene:" the cinematic screen. This space becomes "other" because the spectator of the film is not situated in the same space as that of the diegetic reality. The spectator is consequently absent from that scene. What appears on the screen may – as in the theatre – "be more or less fictional, but the unfolding itself is also fictional: the actor, the décor, the words one hears are all absent" (Metz 1982, 43). Characters, the scenery, the visual environment, and the dialogues, voice-overs and other audial components of film are only replays of a previously recorded performance in another scene/space, and even the process – and sometimes the very space – of recording is largely discontinuous. The unfolding of the story, action or fiction is clearly non-identical with the space where it is viewed, i.e. the space of the auditorium of the actual cinema where the particular film is projected.

The story that unfolds on the theatrical stage is fictional, but the representation is real. The story that unfolds in film is fictional, and its representation is also fictional. What is projected onto the screen are not real objects, but mere shadows, reflections, or recordings of particular objects. Therefore, an imaginary object paves the way for an imaginary scene. The nature of the cinema's mechanism of representation is doubly imaginary: imaginary in what it represents (the more or less fictional story), and in the way it represents the imaginary object. As Metz defined the notion of the *imaginary signifier*, "[w]hat is characteristic of the cinema is not the imaginary that it may happen to represent, but the imaginary that it is from the start, the imaginary that constitutes it as a signifier" (Metz 1982, 44).

Interestingly, this doubly imaginary nature of the cinematic representation brings us closer to the impression of reality than in the case of any other art-form. In theater the fiction performed is obviously a fiction but through the technique of representation it draws attention to itself as staged, as constructed reality. In case of the cinema what is presented is obviously a fiction, but the imaginary nature of representation does not call attention to itself as staged or filmed. "In this sense, unlike in theatre, in film there is no contradiction between what is represented and the representational process itself" (Rushton, 109). Thus, there is no break, no opportunity to remind ourselves that it is imaginary – it is "psychologically more con-

vincing” (ibid.). There is an imaginary belief involved in the film-viewing situation, and Metz opted for two theoretical paths to better understand this imaginary belief: the notion of fetishism, and Lacan’s theory of the mirror stage.

Metz used a quite narrow reading of Freud and Lacan’s texts when he talked about *fetishism*, nonetheless, the main idea persists in his description of the fetish and its role concerning the relationship of the spectator to the screen. The theory of fetishism in psychoanalysis concerns the co-existence of contrary beliefs. The most illustrative example of this is Freud’s analysis of the Wolf Man, who was a Russian patient, born as Sergei Constantinovich Pankeiev (Freud 1918). The Wolf Man simultaneously entertained two contradictory beliefs: 1) all human beings are endowed with a penis (this is what we call a primary belief); and 2) some human beings do not have a penis (what is the evidence of the senses). While it is obvious that not all humans have a penis, under certain conditions (precisely the conditions that give rise to the fetish) those who would normally not have a penis may be endowed with one (the fetishist believes they have one), or at least a substitute that will eradicate the anxiety of the missing organ of the penis. The anxiety concerning the lack of penis is, in turn, referred to as the castration anxiety which is fuelled by the presence – or the belief of the presence – of lack or absence. To put it in a nutshell, the fetishist conceals the lack or absence by substituting something for what is missing, to attain a complete picture.

What the fetishist constructs is a logic of representation similar to that sketched above in terms of the cinema: the fetishized object is a fiction that is covered over by another fiction. In other words, when the fetishist realizes that not all humans have a penis, the primal belief turns out to be what it *is*: a fiction. But in order to live his life on, this fiction needs to be covered by another fictive scenario to arrive at the concluding dictum: “all the same, I continue to believe.” What this fetishistic scenario entails, therefore, is a doubling up of beliefs. It leads us to cinema, in terms of which we might establish the fetishist scenario as follows: “I know very well that *this film is a representation*, but all the same *I shall accept this film as reality*” (Rushton 111). This doubled-up belief in contradictory situations is, albeit in different light, also part of the logic of identification.

In his discussion of cinematic identification, Metz made reference to Lacan’s notion of the *mirror stage*. The mirror stage is the most important description of identification, and on account of its strong visual connotation it legitimizes the study of cinematic identification processes, as well. The description of the mirror stage is a basic description of the process of the forming of the *self*, of the *ego*. Children between 6 and 18 months have a minimal control over his body and movements looks into mirror and identifies with the seemingly full and perfect image, which is his reflection in the mirror (Lacan 1977, 1–2). The lack of perfection that the child experiences on the level of his body is filled in or screened over by a fiction: an *imago*, an ideal image, an illusion of completeness. This way the child misperceives himself in the image as an ideal, complete, and total person based on the image that appears to him or her

in the mirror. The paradox here is that it is precisely this fiction of the *other* (image) perceived as himself that keeps up the child's sense of reality and consistency. His misrecognition is, in fact, the very fantasy or fiction that covers the gap between him and his image (6). Obviously, the process of mirroring and the resulting identification with the image can also be taken less literally, as the child starts to acknowledge himself on the way of identification when he recognizes himself in other members of its species (3). This is the series of joyful moments when the child identifies, for example, a baby as such and, pointing at the baby, shouts "baby!" This recognition, in turn, solidifies his notion of himself.

However, the mirror stage does not belong solely to the Imaginary (the psychic repertoire of images that forms the gist and gives the basis of mirror stage); it is also an issue concerning the Symbolic, which signals the entry of the child into the symbolic network that organizes human life: language and society. Here language comes to mask the body because language is deployed to represent the child for others in the system of communication. The moment the child gains a notion of himself as complete (i.e. when he identifies with his mirror image), he can utter the personal noun "I" referring to his own self as a coherent and representable entity or unity. By using a signifier to signal his presence, the child enters language, which is the domain of social interactions. It is through various interactions in this Symbolic network – a kind of matrix, or the Matrix which Neo escapes when he meets Morpheus in the Wachowski brothers' *The Matrix* (1999) – that the child gains a socially legitimate position, in other words, he becomes a *subject*. Subject grammatically marks the source of utterance or action. In semiotic and psychoanalytic theories the subject is an ever-changing marker of the position of the individual in the symbolic network of social interactions. In other words, subject is "a critical concept related to – but not equivalent with – the individual, and suggests a whole range of determinations (social, political, linguistic, ideological, psychological) that intersect to define it" (Stam, Burgoyne and Flitterman-Lewis 123).

The mirror stage is about identification and the positioning of the subject. Metz argues that something similar happens in the context of the cinema, making the claim that the screen is like the mirror, too. Obviously, Metz is aware that the analogy is far from perfectly denoting the similarity. He notes that the "film spectator may be looking at the images but he or she does not mistake them for his/her own reflected image" (Rushton 112), and then claims that the spectator is absent from the screen, unlike the appearance of his ideal image in the mirror. However, we should not have the same expectations for the experience of watching a film as we have for the experience of everyday life: "[t]he spectator is absent from the screen: contrary to the child in the mirror, he cannot identify with himself as an object [...] At the cinema it is always the other who is on the screen, and I am there to look at him" (Metz 1982, 48).

If the outcome of the Lacanian mirror stage is that one's self is posed as an other, cumulating in a conflict between the two above-mentioned identificatory positions, in the cinema we can claim that there is no trace of such a conflict, since it is already other on the

screen. This means that unlike in the mirror stage scenario, when one assumes the role of a spectator in the cinema, there is no misrecognition of one's self in a perfect image. In the mirror stage the self is opposed to the other, whereas in the cinema the self disappears: the spectator becomes entirely other because in the context of cinema one loses the coordinates of selfhood of everyday life and takes up the existence of somebody else, a subject position proper: a spectator of the cinema.

Because of the camera position, the spectator is encouraged to forget about his or her physical presence, which results in the curious situation where there is no antagonism between the real existence of the spectator's body and the imaginary existence of his or her mirror image. This way the spectator's body itself becomes an imaginary entity made up of a body that is an eye and an ear: an "all-perceiving" subject, as Metz calls it (1982, 48).

In real life (or in the spectator's subjective reality) the split between the real body and the imaginary image creates an identity for the subject. In the cinema, however, the subject makes up an imaginary body that can take up any shape and value, as in the cinema the Imaginary is not "out there" – it is the world we are involved in during the time of projection. Furthermore, it is precisely at this point that the spectator's identification occurs. Metz introduces two levels of identificatory processes: the *primary cinematic identification*, which is identification with the look of the camera, and *secondary cinematic identification*, which is identification with look of an onscreen character.

What is pivotal in the process of cinematic identification is the issue of looking. It is not too difficult to realize that the look of the camera is by definition imaginary because it is absent. Yet, it insists even more effectively. This is the *gaze* in the film-event, the marker of the lack or absence. In his *Seminar XI: The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-analysis*, Lacan defines this concept and refers to a situation which he takes from Jean-Paul Sartre's *Being and Nothingness* in which a voyeur is peeping through the keyhole of a door. It is a moment of visual pleasure, of full immersion in the field of vision. Then suddenly, the voyeur hears footsteps approaching, and starts feeling that he is being looked at, he, the peeping Tom, too, is seen. Finally, the voyeur realizes that although he believed that he is looking at an object, actually his look is preceded or framed by another, absent look that Lacan defines as the gaze.

In Lacan's work the gaze is described as "unapprehensible," as something there-but-not-there. As Sartre argues, "in so far as I am under the gaze [...] I no longer see the eye that looks at me and, if I see the eye, the gaze disappears. [...] The gaze I encounter ... is, not a seen gaze, but a gaze imagined by me in the field of the Other" (Lacan 1998, 84). The Other here is a symbolic construct, "a transcendent or absolute pole of the address, summoned each time that a subject speaks to another subject" (Wright 298). The Other can be conceived as a provider of symbolic context within which social interaction is made possible, and can be seen as designating the laws of society (Hayward 294). It is different from the term "other" in that it represents the laws of society and thus "the danger of castration – in terms of decapitation



(being de-capitalized from O to o)" (ibid.) while the small case other refers to Imaginary relations (with the mirror-image or the mother). The Lacanian gaze seems to be omnipresent while being entirely absent. Lacan's text has more than just mere connotations to film and visual arts in general because he uses the camera as a signifier for the gaze: "What determines me, at the most profound level, in the visible, is the gaze that is outside. [...] the gaze is the instrument through which ... I am *photo-graphed*" (Lacan 1998, 106). The gaze "does not judge, create, or dominate", it is only there to "put us in the picture" (Silverman 1996, 168). The relation between the gaze and the look is that the latter is absorbed in the former. Furthermore, the gaze – now in terms of visual representation in film – cannot be allocated to *anybody*, for that would not be "Other," since that character would be apprehensible. What a diegetic character can assume (or be assumed) to have is the look, which is related to the bodily organ of the eye.

To explain the split or difference between the look and the gaze, Lacan makes reference to Hans Holbein's painting entitled *The Ambassadors* (1533). The painting depicts two figures, equipped with and surrounded by "a series of objects that represent in the painting of the period the symbols of *vanitas*" (Lacan 1998, 88). However, there is something disturbing in the center of vision: something that escapes the spectator's recognition, since it is blurred and strangely deformed figure. When the spectator turns back to cast a final glance at the painting, a strange skull takes shape out of the weird spot and it seems that a skull is "looking" straight at the spectator! This is a technique called *anamorphosis*: and it consists of an image that appears distorted until viewed from a specific point of view (Greek, *ana-* + *morphē*, "to transform"). It is precisely when the "anamorphed" part gains its comprehensible form that the spectator realizes that his or her viewing position is only a fiction because an imaginary, impalpable, and unattainable look has always already been there before the spectator could take a look at the painting. The spectator's look has been preceded by another, imaginary look: his or her vision is made possible by a gaze outside his or her body, outside his or her eyes, or look.

An everyday example of the split between the look and the gaze can be described in the situation when one is sitting in a public space, a library for example, immersed in reading a book. If someone else keeps looking at the reading person continuously, the feeling of being looked at will sooner or later make the reader look up and search for the source of "surveillance." The moment the reader looks up, the source and, indeed, the effect of the gaze disappears. Here, the look of the reader's eyes has been preceded by an unattainable and unlocalizable, therefore imaginary look, which is the gaze.

To sum up, what is important to see is that the look is radically different from the gaze. The look is by definition connected to the viewing organ of the spectator, to his or her eye, whereas the gaze is an impossible look, always on the side of the object in the field of vision. Consequently, the spectator is looking at the screen, whereby s/he adopts the look of a source that is missing and from which the fiction unfolding on the screen becomes visible in the first

place: the camera. As this is a missing look, its nature is imaginary, its source is there but missing at the very same time. Therefore, the look of the camera in the space of fiction becomes the gaze: a lack that is continuously covered by the changing angles and points of view. By adopting the changing vantage points of each and every consecutive frame, the spectator enters into a mechanism film theory calls *suture*.

As many a notion in the film theory of the 1970s, suture or, literally, “sewing” or “stitching” was also taken over from Lacanian psychoanalysis. The discussion of the term always includes sentences like: “Lacan used the term suture to signify the relationship between the conscious and the unconscious which, in turn, he perceived as an uneasy conjunction between what he terms the Imaginary and the Symbolic” (Hayward 378). The term denotes the subject’s entry into discourse, whereby a lack or gap is born at the moment when the subject is inaugurated into language. In other words, when “a given signifier (a pronoun, a personal name) grants the subject access to the symbolic order” (Silverman 1992, 137), it does so at the expense of alienating it from its needs and drives. Thus “the signifier stands in for the absent subject ... whose lack it can never stop signifying” (ibid.). This lack in turn has to be sutured, so that the subject can function in the Symbolic.

Lacan, in fact, uttered the word suture only once, in his seminar on February 24, 1965. It was his disciple Jacques-Alain Miller who used suture as a complex term in his first and seminal article, “Suture (Elements of the Logic of the Signifier).” It was also Miller to define suture as designating “the relationship between the signifying structure and the subject of signification” (Žižek 2001, 31). With reference to Miller, Jean-Pierre Oudart introduced suture into the discourse of film theory in the late 1960s, but it became a pivotal term only in the 1970s. The reason for talking about suture was a stringent need to account for the relationship of the spectator to the film narrative unfolding on the screen.

For Oudart it was the *shot-reverse shot* structure that meant the basic technique of suture in classical narrative film. In the sequence of shots, the spectator first encounters a cinematic image, and he or she feels much the same jubilation as the child looking into the mirror, discovering itself, in Lacan’s description of the mirror stage. As Hayward comments, “[t]his image appears to be complete or unified in the same way that the child’s” mirror image appears to him (Hayward 382). Then the spectator becomes aware of the frame of the image, which immediately implies that there must be a space that is excluded from the pleasurable unity the first image induces in the viewer. In other words, “the image starts to show itself for what it is, an artifact, an illusion and in so doing it threatens to reveal” (383) that the reality the film had so far built up is fake, illusory, and artificially constructed. As presence presupposes an absence, it also reveals a gap and raises the question of point of view: if the shot is a framed spectacle, an illusion of wholeness, an artifact, whose subjective selection is what the spectator sees? The subject of the look is at that crucial moment the *Absent One*. The capitalized formula of the Absent One refers to its symbolic quality and role: it represents an imaginary *monstrateur*

or the Other. What helps the spectator remain in the illusory world of film fiction is the reverse shot that promises a quite similar scenario: first an Imaginary plenitude then disappointment upon the discovery of the frame, and then comes another shot, going on till the end of the film. The second shot, therefore, does not simply follow the first one – it is signified by it. The narrative is thus safely constructed, and is capable of re-inscribing or “stitching” the spectator into the filmic text.

When the spectator casts his/her glance at the screen, his look is always already preceded by another look: an imaginary look, the gaze of the Absent One/Other. It is thus not his look, but the Other’s gaze that structures not only the narrative, but the subject’s comprehension of the narrative as well, in other words, the spectator’s participation in the narrative as an “Invisible Mediator” is secured and at the same time controlled by the gaze of the Absent One. The gaze is thus present in its very absence, it is missing, it is invisible: an outside sutured into the inside of the fiction.

A standard scene from a western film, the duel, usually uses the suture operation to build up the suspense before the shootout. When the protagonist takes up his position in the middle of the street, the first shot presents the empty street with the sun rising far on the horizon. The second shot shows the other 180 degree of the diegetic reality, focusing on the squinting eye of the protagonist: the eyes that presumably saw what the spectator perceived as the visual content of the first shot. The third shot reproduces the first one, perhaps with the inclusion of the opponent arriving at the scene (only to be shot dead after a couple of shot-reverse shot oscillations). This suture procedure is taken up by Daniel Dayan in 1974, who stressed the ideological implication of the shot-reverse shot structure. He argues that if the system of suture renders the signifying operations of the film practically invisible, then the spectator has limited ability in decoding the film and, what is more, the ideological effect of the film is this way easily absorbed unwittingly (Dayan 129).

According to the above description, the operation of the suture seems uncomplicated and all-encompassing, however, there are a couple of problems which need to be addressed in relation with this term. The first problem that arose in filmic critical discourse already in the 1970s was that the proportion of the shot-reverse shot structure in the classical narrative film was only thirty percent. Due to its low rate implication, critics admitted that it could not be regarded as a basic editing formula, or as a structuring device of the perception of the spectator. The other problem was in fact a direct attack on the very idea of the shot-reverse shot structure. According to William Rothman, films feature a tripartite structure instead of the duality of shot and reverse shot. Often, the spectator encounters the eyeline match of a character; then sees what the character is supposed to be looking at, and then the third shot reinforces the subject of the look (Rothman 133). While Rothman’s scenario turns the original, classic setup inside out, it still seems to retain the basic idea of the spectator being stitched into the film text through a variety of cinematic operations.

During the 1980s the notion of suture was extended and reworked from its previous considerations in order to account for a complex spectatorial experience. Kaja Silverman argues that the basic element of editing, the simple “cut” may be seen to guarantee “that both the preceding and the subsequent shots will function as structuring absences to the present shot. These absences make possible a signifying ensemble,” igniting the process of signification (Silverman 1992, 141) and the spectator’s understanding of the film. Along the same lines, Stephen Heath agrees with Silverman’s critical elaboration claiming that “suture – because it is the conjunction between the Imaginary and the Symbolic – is necessarily present at all levels of filmic enunciation and that therefore all texts suture” (Hayward 384).

After the 1980s, the concept of suture rarely used in theory and criticism. However, it made its return recently, with the renewed interest in psychoanalytic film theory. Theorists like Slavoj Žižek and Joan Copjec claim that the phase in the history of film theory labeled as Lacanian film theory lacked, in fact, essentially Lacan. Like Lacan did with Freud, they started to reread Lacan’s works, and re-conceptualize the basic terms in film theory – suture among them. While Žižek agrees with most of the criticism that once shook the foundation of the concept of suture, he warns against discrediting it completely. Instead, he proposes to examine specific examples where suture actually fails. Following the examples of Hitchcock’s procedures of suture in *Birds* (1963), Žižek presents cases where the shot and its reverse shot are rendered in one and the same shot. One of the most prominent examples for the special Hitchcockian suture in *Birds* is the sequence in which the birds attack Bodega Bay: the center of the town is shown from high above, in a “God’s-view shot” (36) that is disturbed by a strange, black blot entering the film frame reshaping as the attacking birds, who thus enter the image shot from their own points of view.

This – however obscure it sounds – is a common technique, and not even considered a special effect: for an early “prototype” of this technique, let us refer to Velazquez’s painting, *Las Meninas*, which is perhaps the prime example of this condensation. In this painting members of the royal court and the painter himself are looking out of the picture, straight at the spectator. However, the mirror on the wall in the background reveals some “proper subjects” whose potentially “productive look” appears to be the point of view from which *Las Meninas* could be created: the royal couple, the queen and the king, whose portrait is just being created on a canvas that is partly visible on the left side of the painting, its back to the spectator. As Oudart notes: the scene what the spectator is faced with is in fact the reverse shot of the painting the painter is completing.

Žižek calls this technique *interface*. An example of the operation of interface can be seen in Steven Spielberg’s *Minority Report* (2002). The film introduces an elaborate transparent screen, which is connected to the brains of “pre-cogs” (originally human beings whose brains are manipulated by special medicines to stimulate their talent of sensing and seeing future events) and renders the imagery in an unorganized sequence of short clips and images. It is the task of

the inspectors to pull images together with the help of a special glove to calculate the future place and time of the crime. A special force is sent to the venue before the crime scene could even take place, and thus the culprit can be arrested before the conception of the deed. In one of the central scenes of *Minority Report*, Jon Anderton (played by Tom Cruise) is standing in front of the transparent screen on which images start to flicker. The camera shows him from behind the screen, so that the shot includes both the eyes of the one who sees (Anderton), and also the object being looked at (the whirl of images on the screen). As the images start to make sense in being grouped into short clips of continuous events, Anderton spots himself committing a future crime he has, of course, never thought of doing. The film emphasizes this moment by superimposing the objective shot of Anderton's face (as seen by the camera) and the subjective shot of his picture on the screen (as seen by Anderton).

The interface performs a double function here: while it threatens to disrupt narrative unity by short-circuiting the standard operation of suture because it merges the shot and its reverse shot into one image, the interface also draws the spectator's attention away from the potential narrative block with the very same gesture. It is as if the film narrative of *Minority Report* halted to contemplate one shot instead of a continuous flow of shots, which runs the risk of disrupting the impression of reality of the diegesis, but the superimposition of the faces of Anderton secures the completeness of the shot-reverse shot formation. As Žižek argues, "the uncanny poetic effect of [such] shots resides in the fact that it appears as if the subject somehow enters his/her own picture – [...] not only is the picture in my eye, but I am also in the picture" (Žižek 2001, 39). Quite visually in case of *Minority Report*, the interface adds a "spectral dimension" (40) to the reverse shot.

As this above scenario proves, the mechanism of suture works even when it is short-circuited, or when – in extreme cases – the narrative setup attempts to circumvent its operation. Thus, while its shot-by-shot relevance cannot be upheld in many cases, its overall structuring principle is still a useful analytic tool for the study of the ways film narratives create diegetic reality. Today, psychoanalytic film theory continues to intrigue theorists and critics alike, but it needs to revise and revitalize its vocabulary often imported from psychoanalysis uncritically and carelessly (suture is probably the most prominent example for such an import). While it seems that the renewed interest in Lacan's writings will benefit psychoanalytically informed studies of the cinema, it is also evident that the arrival of new forms of movie consumption (the DVD, the Internet, and portable devices) challenges central concepts in psychoanalytic theory, such as the issue of identification, the analogy of the dream situation with the film viewing situation, or the Oedipal trajectory of film narratives. The new task for psychoanalytic film theory and criticism is therefore to account for the new ways of representation and the new forms of spectatorial engagement these ways involve.

## Keywords

Oedipal scenario, castration, Symbolic, Imaginary, imaginary signifier, mirror stage, primary and secondary cinematic identification, subject, Other, lack, absence, fetishism, gaze, look, suture, Absent One, shot-reverse shot, interface, anamorphosis

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