Paulo Alexandre e Castro

Ways of seeing films

Cinema and Philosophy

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To my daughters Alice and Laura

always my inspirations

always my twin souls

From the author:

[Essay]

Ensaios (modernos) de Filosofia Antiga. Porto: Edições Esgotadas, 2019.
ISBN: 978-989-8911-48-3

Desafios presentes no futuro, editor e co-autor (Porto: Fénix Editores, 2018).
ISBN: 978-197-9004- 36-7

Acerca do Indizível. Sobre a linguagem e outras coisas em Wittgenstein (Porto: Fénix Editores, Jul 2017). ISBN: 978-153-9720-53-9

Mark Rothko e Romy Castro. Matérias da Intimidade. Intimidade com as Matérias [bilingue português/inglês], (Charleston: PBC/CreateSpace, 2013). ISBN: 978-149-365 4444

Metafísica da Imaginação – Estudos sobre a Consciência Irrealizante a partir de Sartre (Lisboa: BonD-Quimera, 2006). ISBN: 978-989-8060-01-3

[Literature]

Há flores de plástico e gravilha a enterrar a memória (Lisboa: Esfera do Caos, 2014).
ISBN: 978-989-680-116-8 [Poetry]

Loucura Azul (Porto: Fronteira do Caos, 2010). ISBN: 978-989-8070-58-6 [Novel]

Aqui entre nós (Porto: Papiro Editora, 2010). ISBN: 978-989-6365-34-9 [Theatre play]

Gramática do @mor Tecnológico (Porto: Papiro Editora, 2009). ISBN: 978-989-6364-68-7 [Poetry]

Toda a Poesia Nua [português/francês], (Lisboa: Chiado Editora, 2008).
ISBN: 978-989-8222-05-3 [Poetry]

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Preface

My main concern with this book is to do what Duchamp did with art: to reinvent and deconstruct a conformed vision in relation to objects, that is, to discover new ways of seeing and interpreting. The idea of publishing this book starts with that, that is, with the central idea of seeing what is not immediately seen or given, of trying to see beyond the gaze. Thus, the *ways of seeing films* are also the continuous work of these different ways of looking (to what can be seen beyond images) that I have been building over the years, through aesthetics, philosophy, theory of art and other disciplines. However, this does not mean that this ways of looking at films is the most valid, the most correct or even the most perfect; it is just another way of seeing them (through philosophical eyes), decoding them, interpreting them, in short, to be an active beholder.

In recent years, there have been several books on philosophy of cinema and cinema as philosophy that has become more than a subfield of contemporary philosophy, or even a mere special section on philosophy of art. The philosophy of cinema has gained an important field of research in aesthetic research programs and, therefore, in the panorama of philosophical investigations. Topics such as the nature of the film, authorship, the emotional involvement of the viewer, the theory of cognitive cinema, the narration and, especially, the film as philosophy, enabled an area of research that captivated much more than studies around film theory, cinematographic narrative, theory of moving image, scenography, wardrobe, among others. The fascination comes from the innumerable hermeneutic possibilities that are open to philosophical thought, through reflection and criticism that extended to society, economics, politics, civilization (more than a critical reflection on art or the theory of art by themselves). This book is engaged with this reflexion, meaning that, it is a book more devoted to the philosophical content of films than about film being an artistic medium or artefact.

Films are not mere illustrations or metaphors of philosophical questions but as Mulhall points out «films are not philosophy's raw material, nor a source for its ornamentation; they are philosophical exercises, philosophy in action – film as philosophizing» (Mulhall, 2002: 4). Regarding films as valid contributions to philosophy (and to other disciplines) allows to go further on our visions and perspectves about the world and reality. To say this does not mean that I am neglecting the philosophy of cinema, but only that I am not paying much attention to it; I am not also saying that, as Nöel Carroll or Wartenberg defend (See Carroll and Choi 2006; Thomas Wartenberg 2007), the thesis that films can do philosophy.

As I mentioned above, my main concern is to say that there are different ways of seeing films, be they poetic, analytical, theoretical, unconcerned or philosophical. This book is about that without any other than telling you: I saw it this way but I could have seen it from so many others (as in life). Philosophy is nothing more than a way of seeing and interpreting the world, just as cinema does in an artistic and aesthetic way.

That said, this book brings together a set of essays that were presented and published in colloquium collections, except for the essay "the limits of zombies films" that was publicly presented at the «International Conference on Philosophy and Film - The Real of Reality», in Karlsruhe University of Arts and Design (Germany), November 3, 2016.

The essay "The Village (M. Night Shyamalan) and The Giver (Phillip Noyce)", was published in *Other Places-Utopias, Dystopias, Heterotopies* (Braga: Húmus and CEHUM, 2018); the essay "Viktor Navorski and Sir Alfred. The limits of consciousness on the border of chaos", was published in *Transcultural Amnesia. Mapping Displaced Memories* (Braga: CEHUM and Húmus, dec. 2016. The remaining essays were presented and published at the *Avanca Film Festival*, namely, "Philosophy of time and being in Alice through the looking glass" in 2017, the essay "Scientific fiction movies: is there any place for God?!" in 2016,

«Why *Lucy* makes me feel angry or why the brain cannot be a screen», in 2015 [presented here as *Lucy* or why the brain cannot be a screen], and "Alienation and slavery from Precious or what we do not want to see" in 2013.

Finally, I would like to thank to Professor Mário de Santiago Carvalho for the work of revision and encouragement that allowed this publication and to Dr. Robert Junqueira for the editorial work, without which this work would not have such a careful arrangement.

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Scientific fiction movies:
is there any place for God?!

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I. **Scientific fiction movies: is there any place for God?!**

In scientific fiction movies, we see most of the times, deeply reflections about human nature or human condition, and inevitably the post-human (among similar themes). It seems unavoidable that a reflection about what means to be human should also reflect about the spiritual life of mankind. Taking this point of view, spirituality presupposes religion, since there is no religion without spirituality. It is also true that there is in scientific fiction movie a constant and sometimes aggressive vision between science and religion leading to long debate that seems to never end. However, can we see a kind of *absconditus* God on them? Is there any place for God in these movies?! On one hand, if there is, how can we understand the future scenarios such as those in *Avatar* or *Lucy*? On the other hand, if there is not, is it possible that scientific utopia becomes true and there is no need for God?! Considering God as the monotheistic individuality that characterizes Western culture and civilization, we will see if our analysis reflects his need in this type of films.

1. A brief introduction about the birth of science fiction.

In recent years, a science fiction wave invaded many of the shelves of bookstores such as movie theatres. In many bookstores we often see a misclassification of those books as if the “fantastic” was the same, and that is very clear when find *The Lord of the Ring* (J. R. R. Tolkien) or *Harry Potter* (J. K. Rowling) as science fiction. So, what can be said about science fiction, what are the main characteristics? First of all, we have to say that it begins as a literary genre in the nineteenth century and by definition is to see depicted the impact of science on the individual or in the society. We can also say, that was born of the literature and at a time when the moving image was not yet able to expose its full potential, all fiction was produced based on utopian dreams of scientific progress and hence issues such as

travel, time travel, parallel universes, extra-terrestrial life, robots and cyborgs, elixirs of immortality or youth, are recurrent in it. Illustrative of what we have just said are the already classic works of Mary Shelley, *Frankenstein or the Modern Prometheus* (1818) and Robert Louis Stevenson, *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (1886). They are not merely and purely illustrative of science fiction literature; in fact, they illustrate the ability to create and improve, or another being or a society of individuals "healthier", that only scientific progress could provide. A good example can be found in Ridley Scott's *Blade Runner* (1982), based on the novel *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* (1968) by Philip K. Dick, which also inspire Steven Spielberg to perform *Minority Report* (2002).

In fact, there are earlier works and although opinions are not consensual as to the classification in science fiction, we can find several examples, such as Johannes Kepler (1571-1630) who wrote a story, *Somnium* (*The Dream*), which describes an inter-planetary trip, or *L'histoire comique des États et empires de la Lune* from Savinien Cyrano de Bergerac (1619-1655) which tells of a travel to the moon and how the "Selenites" see the land. A few years later also Fontenelle, in his book *Entretiens sur la pluralité des mondes* (1686) provides the idea that there are other inhabited planets, or extraterrestrial life.[1]

Driven by revolutions in astronomy, physics and biology, also Voltaire (1694-1778), retakes in *Micromegas*, the theme of space travel and in the beginning of XIX century, Jules Gabriel Verne (1828-1905), developed even further with his many travels and innovative handsets predictions.

We cannot forget about one of the major names in the early science fiction, Camille Flammarion, that in addition to his novels (in particular *La fin du monde* or *Uranie*) wrote an essay called *La pluralité des mondes habités* (1862) in which seeks to prove the existence of extraterrestrial life but without taking the role of God in the universe,[2] and by putting man

[1] Fontenelle divides his book into six *soirées* in which the first concerns that the earth rotates on itself and around the sun; the second, that the moon is a land inhabited; third and fourth that there are other inhabited planets; fifth, that the stars are suns that illuminate other planets; and sixth, which are confirmed by the above new thoughts.

[2] Flammarion believed that in addition to the existence of other beings (also described as humanity) also believed that knowledge would suffer a revolution with its discovery: "terrestrial humanity is not the only family

as specie of “humanity” among other “humanity species” in the vast universe (what he calls the “collective humanity”).[3] However, this was just a few remarks of what can be understood as science fiction, because the definition still very problematic (even today as we’ll see) and so much more other examples could be provided to show that there was already a certain kind of literature that explore the scientific dimension of man’s dreams.

Hugo Gernsback (1884 – 1967) was one of the first in using the term “science fiction”, and it is considered by many as “the father of Science Fiction” (Siegel, 1988: 5). In his honor, the awards at the “World Science Fiction Convention” were named the Hugos. Gernsback described his vision saying that «by scientification I mean the Jules Verne, H. G. Wells and Edgar Allan Poe type of story – a charming romance intermingled with scientific fact and prophetic vision». (Gernsback, 1926: 3)

Or, as Lester del Rey wrote, “even the devoted fan, has a hard time trying to explain what science fiction is”, and the main reason for that is that “there are no easily delineated limits to science fiction” (Del Rey, 1979: 5), and therefore, to give a full satisfactory definition.

Nevertheless, we can point out a few science fiction elements such as other universes or dimensions and travel between them; specific and different social and political systems (pos-scarcity, pos-apocalyptic, dystopian, etc.); different forms of communication that includes wormholes, time travel, teleportation, and others that can be associated with paranormal abilities as mind control, telekinesis or telepathy; scenes in outer space or in other worlds; futuristic time or alternative and parallel timelines; the inclusion of characters such as aliens, mutants, androids, cyborgs (or similar forms of evolution from human species); hi technology like futuristic humanoid computers, special guns with laser or sound waves, teleportation machines and biometric machines, and more recently the theme of artificial intelligence.

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of the Creator: the beginning and the end of the Earth are not the beginning and the end of the world; in a word, the great principles that we believe are absolute are only relative, a new philosophy, great and sublime, rises itself on the modern understanding of the universe” (Flammarion,1877: 3).

[3] (Flammarion, 1877: 323).

Setting aside this discussion (meaning, the problem of a clear definition of science fiction), one of the major problems in science fiction is the inevitable confrontation with religious beliefs, similar to had happen most of the times in the history of ideas (science and religion lived in very different worlds, but sometimes they share tolerance, and other times distillate heat and confrontation).

2. Religious beliefs *vs* Science Fiction

Even there are some religious people who like science fiction movies, even so, there are some moral constraints that not only prevent them from enjoy the films as prevent them from issuing a critical judgment on something that is known to be just and only a product of human imagination. This means that those people are not criticizing the science fiction movies but they are criticizing the imaginative ability of human beings to create, to invent, to produce new ideas, which seems to us, to be so much more serious and dangerous. So, we may ask: why this (still) happens? It is really easy to understand.

Concepts and ideas in science fiction movies face directly main taboo subjects of religion. If you have the idea of a supreme being, creator of heaven and earth, that puts man at the center of the universe, etc., any idea that contradicts this may not be well received. In fact, even movies that can get more into the realm of fantasy than science fiction ends up being placed under the same criticism. Thus, among the many issues that challenge or can challenge religion are the use characters from other worlds with intelligent life (or use of mythical creatures like elves, fairies and dragons, which would be like instruments of Satan); the claim of evolutionary theories or interference of intelligent life in the development of mankind; the use of a kind of advanced humanity (and utopian) that dispensed religion; the use of powers (over human or magical) that does not come from God; the spread of points of view anti-Christian or ironic points of view on most of the literature and science fiction films; the use

of bio-technological experiences that puts man in the place of God. For a religious person this is the same thing that saying that all forms of fiction are a lie, and as all people should know, lies come from Satan.

If paying more attention, people (especially those religious viewers) would see that man does not cease to be at the center, as the alien – which is almost always a smart and evil creature with pretensions to conquer all earth or enslave humanity –, always get defeated.

To be correct at this point, the superiority of man over aliens, it is always the superiority of the North American man who becomes the hero and save mankind; more than the prototype of the successful and fearless man it represents the hegemony of one nation over all others. Well, we can ignore this point of view and refer another possible vision (a less political one) that, in a way, meets a certain religious perspective, when putting man at the center of the universe: when man overcomes aliens, ultimately is demonstrating that he is the higher animal, the top specie in cosmos.

It is the "dignity", of the man who is claimed in the context of intelligent life. One way to put into question this higher intelligence can be found in the movie (already classic), *Planet of the Apes* (Franklin Schaffner, USA, 1967) where the reverse order of the species is clear or in the comic movie *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy* (Garth Jennings, USA, 2005), in which irony serves as theme for this "high intelligence", by putting a normal man escaping from the end of world in a space travel.

From this theme often pass to the machine, in particular for a kind of rebellion of the machines that is, when the machine stops working according to its program and becomes autonomous, rebelling against his creator, as in the religious viewpoint it resembles to the man's revolt against god (the creator). However, if the machine is going to his rescue, if it works in an unpredictable way (even maybe against its own program), then the concept of “dignity” becomes very difficult to apply. So as Philip. K. Dick says, if “man” and “human being” are terms,

> they do not concern neither the origin nor the ontology, but a way of being in the world.
> If a mechanical construction interrupts the course of their normal operation to come in our help, then we will be recognized in the machine a human character that no analysis of its transistors or circuits could unveil. (Dick, 1998: 82)

Here it is portrayed one of the issues that most intrigued the philosophers since Descartes: the difference between man and animal, and or the difference between men and machines. The difference it is in the spirit, in the *anima*, in the feeling, as we can see, in one hand, *Star Trek IV: The Voyage Home* (Leonard Nimoy, USA, 1986) and on the other hand, *Terminator Salvation* (Mcg, USA, 2009). Machines can not feel, and therefore, only an animal is capable of feelings, and so, they can (somehow) pray to a God.

3. Is there any place for God?!

It seems to be certain among film critics that science fiction is a world where God was abolished, or at best, that God has lost the status of being omnipotent and omnipresent. But is it really unshakable that position, that is, is it really safe to say that God is really out of science fiction?! Or on the contrary, that God is absolutely present in his way of being absent?!

Take for instance, references to God may be surreptitiously present without being the main theme (or object) of the film. Or it can be the case that a small modification or rather an adaptation (of the book to film) can change the meaning of a work, and in this case, can determine the existence or the non-existence of God. Take *2001: A Space Odyssey* (Stanley Kubric, USA/UK, 1968). Despite being written by Arthur C. Clarke and Stanley Kubric, there is a tiny difference in relation to the “black monolith”; in reality, this difference seems to be assumed by both. (*cf*. Gelmis, 1970: 302).

In the movie we see Dr. Floyd announcing the discovery of the monolith at a conference during which it is said that this discovery should remain hidden from public opinion because its disclosure would lead to social and political upheavals, but in the book it is said that life, philosophy and human values (which it can be understood that these values are based on the existence of a supreme or divine being) would be transformed by this discovery (once that will prove the existence of other life forms). That is, while Arthur C. Clarke give us in the book clear explanations about the mysterious monolith and about the star gate, Stanley Kubrick decided to make an enigmatic film which concentrates the dialogue in the essential words without giving much explanations (maybe the perspective that art shows by itself his own meaning). However, there is in the film some sort of transcendence but it is not in the way we could expect, i.e., the figure recognized culturally as God, but instead most closely resembles the absolute spirit of Hegel. So, what is the place for God or for religion in the science fiction movies?

One possible and simple answer is that there is no place, since they are opposites themes. This position is well known between critics and fans of science fiction movies (as we saw at the beginning of this text), but that does mean they are correct. In fact, the other possible answer says that they can be present in the same film, since we often see several references to God or faith, whether is an invasion of aliens or a crusade against an asteroid threatening Earth. Some authors like Georg Pal, call this a Christian Science Fiction. For instance, in the film *When Worlds Collide* (Rudolf Maté, USA, 1951) opens with a biblical quote (in fact it's the only book that the spectator can read among other titles of books that are taken to the trip to planet Bellus) and ends with another quote of the bible.

In a way, the film *Armageddon* (Michael Bay, USA, 1998), recreates the same theme. Although the title is a clear reference of the great biblical tragedy, the plot is very simple: after discovering that an asteroid (the size of Texas) is going to impact Earth, NASA recruits a team of deep core drillers to save the planet, by placing a bomb at the earth of the asteroid.

So, what is the point? It’s clear that there is no religious approach in the film (as theme), but there are several references to God, namely, when people are “watching” the developments of the team in the asteroid.

One of the movies that can be understood as hard science fiction and at the same time having the omnipresence of God is *War of the Worlds* (Steven Spielberg, USA, 2005). If we pay attention we see at the beginning of the film, through the narrator's voice, that he’s telling us about the dominion over Earth from human being’s ant then explains how humans were unaware of the intellectually superior beings that were making plans to occupy Earth.

The closing narration reveals that the aliens were immune to man's machines, but were not immune to the microbes present on Earth, that is, to the smaller creatures of God (that is his wisdom put down on Earth).

One must make a brief parenthesis to say that there is one essential thing that cannot go unnoticed: that aliens seem to have been created in the image and likeness of Western man, and therefore as monotheistic creatures (when they have a “religion”).

The movie *Contact* (Robert Zemeckis, USA, 1997), adapted from Carl Sagan’s Novel with the same title, tells the story of Dr. Eleanor "Ellie" Arroway (Jodie Foster) who works for the Search for Extraterrestrial Intelligence (SETI) program at the Arecibo Observatory in Puerto Rico; she listens to radio transmissions hoping to find signals sent by extraterrestrial life. After four years, she finds a signal repeating a sequence of prime numbers, apparently sent from the star system Vega. Putting aside the plot, we see that the film shows in many instances the existing differences between thoughts of religion and science. Note that the film does not give a “face” to aliens but shows its presence, as if to remember that not always need to see to believe, like as in religious faith. Maybe we can go further and say that the film shows that the choice between science and religion has no reason to exist, since both are rooted in faith.

One of the movies in which religion appears exposed by the presence of divinities is *Immortel - ad vitam* (Enki Bilal, France, 2004). The plot is simple: a floating pyramid appears in the Manhattan sky, city inhabited by mutants, aliens and humans, real or synthetic. Horus, god falcon-headed, which has only seven days to preserve his immortality, leaves the pyramid and goes in search of a host body, which will serve to impregnate a mutant and to survive through descent. Although the fictional genre can slip into the fantasy, it doesn't cease to be a science fiction movie in which the deity is present; it is thus a film merging the two dimensions with no apparent conflicts.

In the *Zero Theorem* (Terry Gilliam, UK, 2013), the story is centered on Qohen Leth (Waltz), a reclusive computer genius working on a formula to determine whether life holds any meaning (see fig. 3). Qohen constantly waits for a phone call, hoping that it might bring him happiness or the answers he seeks (maybe a phone call from God?!). But he will learn that the Zero Theorem aims to prove life is meaningless through the big crunch theory (that's why reaches 100% means to get into nothingness or as it happens to Qohen to be sucked into a black hole).

In a different direction, we see man trying to be God, that is, playing God's paper, like in *Transcendence* (Wally Pfister, USA, 2014). In few words: Dr. Will Caster (Johnny Depp) is a scientist who researches the nature of sentience, including artificial intelligence. He and his team work to create a sentient commuter; he predicts that such a computer will create a technological singularity, or in his words "Transcendence." An anti-technology terrorist group "Revolutionary Independence from Technology" (R.I.F.T.) shoots Will with a polonium-laced bullet and carries out a series of synchronized attacks on A.I. laboratories across the country. Will is given no more than a month to live. In desperation, his wife Evelyn (Rebecca Hall), comes up with a plan to upload Will's consciousness into the quantum computer that the project has developed. Will's consciousness survives his body's death in this technological form and requests to be connected to the Internet to grow in capability

and knowledge. This is one of the movies that can lead to serious questions about post-humanism, artificial intelligence and mind, or in a manner of speak, to the major philosophy of mind problems. But the point here is the desire of man to become more than human (a kind of Nietzschean *Übermensch*), to become omnipresent and omniscient (as a God can be).

In *Avatar* (James Cameron, USA, 2009) it is possible to feel the spirit of pantheism in Na'vi people of Pandora. The film takes place 22 century, when humans are colonizing Pandora, a lust habitable moon of a gas giant in the Alpha Centauri star system, especially in order to obtain the mineral "unobtanium". However, this exploration threatens the existence of a local tribe called Na'vi, a humanoid species indigenous to Pandora.

The Avatar title refers to a genetically engineered Na'vi body with the mind of a remotely located human that is used to interact with the natives of Pandora. We can see in this movie a political criticism, for instance to United States role in the Iraq War (and at the same time to the impersonal nature of mechanized warfare in general), an ecological critique to the way humans exploit nature, and due to these two, the way they respect neither their religion nor that of others. That it is well represented in the film when humans aim to cut the home trees, even knowing that it could damage the biological neural network oh the native Pandora. But the clearest reference to religion is seen through the "Tree of Souls", that give us the idea that pantheism (that was present in many primitive tribes in the human species) could be after all, the respect for nature and therefore for God (like Spinoza would have said).

In *Lucy* (Luc Besson, USA/FR, 2014), the biggest theme is the ten percent of brain myth (myth from the nineteenth century, probably from William James and Boris Sidis but also attributed to Albert Einstein), states that people only use ten percent of the capacity of the brain. It's the intrigued question of what we are, what we have done so far, and most of all, what are the possibilities that is debated. So, it was quite natural that to create a film whit these philosophical questions, Luc Besson

had to use one of the most famous myth. But far from being a hard science fiction film, there are two references that we should mention.

When Lucy begins a space-time journey into the past, eventually reaching the oldest discovered ancestor of mankind, implied to be *Austrolopithecus* "Lucy" and touches fingers with her, we see the famous painting of Michelangelo Buonarotti (around 1511) of the Sistine Chapel, "The creation of Adam", that is the scene in which God creates the first man (an episode of the Book of Genesis as we all know). Well, in fact it seems also a recreation of *2001 Odyssey* that Besson states to be the third part of the film; as if 'Lucy' still remains the same ancient Lucy but now full developed.

Another religious reading is in the following scene: when Lucy (Scarlett Johansson) metamorphoses into that black matter and then enters the computer, after delivers the pen to professor Norman (Morgan Freeman), disappear, leaving only some dust. Because matter it is only dust maybe a religious view of Besson beliefs can be made here, since the famous biblical quotation that we are dust here is very clear. Although there are still more examples, we conclude with a russian film called *Hard to be a God*, (Aleksei German, RU, 2013).[4] The film that takes place in Arkanar planet where a group of Terran scientists were sent to study ("to be closer, to be lower than other planets"), his inhabitants. The planet is populated by human beings whose society has not advanced beyond the Middle Ages. They can only observe, not interfere - hence the title, as the protagonist, Don Rumata, cannot do anything for those people further lapsing, he is a *god* who just watches and grieves. The novel's core idea is that human progress throughout the centuries is often cruel and bloody, and that religion and blind faith can be effective tools of oppression, working to destroy the emerging scientific disciplines and enlightenment.

[4] The first version of *Hard to Be a God* is a German one: *Es ist nicht leicht ein Gott zu sein*, a joint Russian-German science fiction directed by Peter Fleischmann released in 1989, based on the novel with the same name by Arkady and Boris Strugatsky.

Thus, whether it is explicitly thematized or not, the subject of religion turns out to be, in some way, always present like God in human life: its presence can be given by its absence – what we can say to be the phenomenon of faith. So, the place of God in science fiction movies it’s the same place that it takes in everyday life: a form of existence given as transcendence in everyday immanence that only those who believe can see. Maybe God can be the most perfect fantasy created by the human mind, or maybe the human mind is the result of God's creation, which allows in the final analysis doubt about his place in the universe

The Village (M. Night Shyamalan) and _The Giver_ (Phillip Noyce)

or

why Utopia is (im)possible

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II. *The Village* (M. Night Shyamalan) and *The Giver* (Phillip Noyce) or why Utopia is (im)possible

Starting from the preliminary reading of *Utopia* by Thomas More, a set of assumptions are found that underline the cultural heritage of his work and that at the same time give rise to different implications, whether at a philosophical or at a political level.

After these opening remarks, two different but concrete examples in the cinema will be explored, namely the film *The Village* (by M. Night Shyamalan), as a possible, and, somehow, concrete representation of utopia, and the film *The Giver* (by Phillip Noyce) as a representation of dystopia, including the characteristics that guide or can determine both scenarios.

In a third and final moment, this essay will seek to draw the theory-hypothesis that, in both cases, a structural impossibility exists: one that has been named "The Theory of the Impossibility of Utopia", or just TIU, and that Thomas More himself had hinted at but not developed. It will thus be argued that if this hypothesis is indeed corrected, according to its set of propositions, one will be allowed to deconstruct any possible scenarios of utopias or dystopias.

1. Some utopian notions. Remembering Thomas More

At a first glance, adding "impossibility" and "utopia" in the same phrase seems to be a repetitive and unnecessary use, since utopia already seems to contain (in itself) a certain degree of impossibility. However, this apparent redundancy is justified by the clear objective of grounding a structural theory that can be applied to any form of utopia or dystopia, and that may thus demonstrate the inability to form or to establish such a society or civilization. The central question to be asked is whether we need such a theory and, if so, why we need it. One may clearly respond that it is needed, as it will be argued, because it will not only allow us

to understand part of the reality, that is, ourselves to create it (not the “real”), but it might also allow other forms of thinking about it such as those delivered by literature or fine arts.

A short note must be made: the difference between reality and the real that was made previously has a *raison d'être*. Considering the teachings of metaphysics and Ontology, the “real” has indeed a different meaning from “reality”; the “real” is what exists by itself, without any interference from our interpretation structures. In other words, the “real” is the field of the “thing”.

From the perspective of psychoanalysis, and according to Lacan (Lacan, 1998), the real, the symbolic and the imaginary are so intertwined that they are all agents of reality. Therefore, one can only go to the “real” through the symbolic or through language. As such, in his later work, Lacan conceives the “real” as belonging to the order of the impossible, that which escapes the symbolic, as Žižek in turn pointed out (Žižek, 1991, p. 71). But that does not mean that reality cannot be constructed by the subject and, in this sense, any (kind of) utopia (or dystopia) can only be thought of as a possible reality in a human world, that means, at least at an imagination level, where things can be structured with a certain degree of “reality”.

Thomas More’s *Utopia* (initially published in Latin in 1516 and in English in 1551) describes an ideal society where men could live with justice and dignity. The author’s purpose was, on the one hand, to write a work of criticism of early sixteenth-century England and, on the other hand, to sketch an essay of rationality and imagination about the improvement of human life, especially as a society. Doing this exercise of literary and philosophical writing, he also recovers an ancient idea, and in this precise sense, it is also a eudaemonist society.

One must not forget that Eudemonism encompasses the ethical doctrines that put happiness as the ultimate value and crucial criterion of choice of human actions, as we find in the thoughts of Aristotle, Epicurus, and then, a few centuries later, in Espinoza, Montaigne, Diderot,

among others. Of course, such way of thinking implies one fundamental and founding idea: the general trust in man, which remains the irreplaceable key to any kind of humanism or idealism. At least, so it was thought; in the present day, happiness has become an imperative, an obligation, in such a way that its meaning has been transmuted and not rarely confused with success and power; that is why some essayists like Lipovetsky call it a state of paradoxical happiness (Lipovetsky, 2007); another way of seeing this phenomenon of happiness in society is through the quantity of guru's and coaches that have appeared in the last two decades with its miraculous methods and spiritual mantras (that only provide happiness to the seller or author of the books, workshops and courses).

Utopia is not, as we all know, the first book on the possibility of the existence of a free or egalitarian society. Like many other concepts (like freedom, dignity, etc.), Thomas More was inspired to write *Utopia* especially by Plato's *Republic*, like Logan (among other writers) refers.[1] With this type of work, authors seek a natural way out for the fictional utopianisms that so often attempt to transform an imperfect, incomplete and unjust society into an ideal one.

However, it is well known that many of these imaginary constructions often end up becoming dystopias or negative utopias, which demonstrate the danger inherent in a desirable but (certainly) impossible perfection. There are several examples, but we can point out for this purpose *Animal Farm* (1945), by George Orwell, as it shows oppression and injustice taking the place of equality and happiness in a society supposed to rule itself through the principles of reason and prosperity; this shows how *Animal Farm*, can be a clear example of a dreaming utopia becoming a destructive dystopia (it should be remembered that it has been read as a satire of the soviet totalitarianism).

[1] «*Utopia* is a deeply enigmatic book. To be sure, its *subject* is clearly indicated by its full title: *de optimo reipublicae statu deque nova insula Utopia* – "Concerning the Best Condition of the Commonwealth and the New Island of Utopia". This title identifies More's book as belonging to the oldest genre of political writing, the discourse on the ideal Commonwealth initiated by Plato's *Republic*». (Logan, 1997, p. 7).

So, *Utopia* may not be a philosophical, an ethical or even a political essay by itself, *per se*, but rather the literary narrative that allows us to understand the possibilities of creating such essays in philosophy or, in other words, it delivers the concepts in a literary way that can be understood and thinkable in philosophical terms, as pointed out by Pierre-François Moreau when he says: “What is characteristic of Utopia is to visualize its concepts, not to explain them” (Moreau, 1982, p. 27).

Returning to *Utopia*, Thomas More describes the constitution of such a republic in its social, political and religious ways (in some cases, with several important details); for instance, he considers several items about the architecture of common houses, agriculture, education, the manufacturing of goods, etc., but, most importantly, he considers not only the conditions for everybody to have such an occupation but he postulates equal opportunities of access to all of them (subject to their capacities, skills, or given education). We will not discuss these items here; instead, we want to emphasize the importance of this writing within the framework of a global understanding of utopian theories, and to subsequently affirm our thesis about the structural impossibility present in both utopias and dystopias.

The first step towards this is to see, as argued further down, that Thomas More himself recognizes some sort of limitations in his book. At the end of it, he first says that: «thus have I described to you, as particularly as I could, the Constitution of that commonwealth, which I do not only think the best in the world, but indeed the only commonwealth that truly deserves that name» (More, 1901, p. 168). But Thomas More is conscious of the work he presented; he knows the degree of difficulty that is present in his essay - in thinking of how a perfect society can be structured. And so, almost at the end of the book, he seems to admit, and to be aware in his narrative and literary way of writing, that there may be some flaws in his Utopia:

> When Raphael had thus made an end of speaking, though many things occurred to me, both concerning the manners and laws of that people, that seemed very absurd, as well in their way of making war, as in their notions of religion and divine matters — together with several other particulars (…) In the meanwhile, though it must be confessed that he is both a very learned man and a person who has obtained a great knowledge of the world, I cannot perfectly agree to everything he has related. However, there are many things in the commonwealth of Utopia that I rather wish, than hope, to see followed in our governments. (More, 1901: 174)

George Logan is very clear about such problems in More's *Utopia*. He acknowledges the importance of the essay but also its imperfections (as it was said, Thomas More also assumes these limitations), imperfections that are today, as seen at a distance from our time, much clearer, since for Thomas More and his contemporaries it could seem like a real effort to build a more egalitarian society. Logan presents some examples of Utopia's imperfections in the following passage:

> The commonwealth of utopia is highly attractive in some ways, and highly unattractive in others. No one goes hungry there; no one is homeless. The commonwealth is strikingly egalitarian. On the other hand, personal freedom is restricted in ways large and small. Discussing political issues outside the senate or the popular assembly is a capital offense; a citizen must get permission from the local magistrates to go on a vacation, and from spouse and father even to go for a walk in the country (Logan, 1997: 8).

So, considering this theoretical analysis, and also assuming the possibility that art can illustrate concepts instead of just explaining them, we will now use two films that expose and uncover the major characteristics that guide or determine the scenario of a utopian society and also of a dystopian one.

2. *The Village* and *The Giver*. Some remarks on ideal societies

The first one is *The Village*, written and directed by M. Night Shyamalan (2004), and it tells us a story about a small and isolated village in Pennsylvania, called Covington, in the nineteenth century, whose inhabitants live in a kind of utopian society. To keep this society together, the elders have constructed a large barrier of oil lanterns and watch towers that are constantly manned to keep watch of nameless creatures in the surrounding woods, which means that the inhabitants live in a constant fear (of those creatures). At the same time, neighboring towns are described as wicked, and that is one of the reasons why they can always deny any request to go outside the village [even when Lucius Hunt (Joaquin Phoenix) wants to get medical supplies and his mother, Alice (Sigourney Weaver) scolds him for wanting to do that]. One of the examples of this fear scenario is given shortly afterwards, when Lucius makes a short venture into the woods, and the creatures appear secretly and leave warnings in the form of splashes of red paint on all the villagers' doors.

This fear is one of the key concepts that allow Night Shyamalan not only to create the psychological thriller atmosphere but also to develop the plot about the village. As we all know, one of the effects of fear is to disturb the senses and to make things seem what they are not in reality. We can recall, in this context, Thomas Hobbes, who defended the notion of the "Social Contract" based on the idea that fear is the key motor for the necessity of this contract (Hobbes, 2010). People can be controlled by fear in the way they can stick together for the purpose of security (like it can be seen in the film).

As it more directly concerns this essay, we will only say that the last five minutes of the film reveal that the village was actually created in the 70s (20th century) by Ivy's father, Edward, an ancient American history professor of Pennsylvania University, who created the community with other members of a psychotherapy group (this is a very curious detail,

since psychotherapy often deals with problems directly related to fears and traumas that are originated in society). The Village would be a place where they could sustain themselves and be protected from any aspect of the outside world, a utopian kingdom. So, they built this community in a wildlife preserve purchased with Edward Walker's family fortune, with the promise of keeping it preserved and a no-fly zone, funding ranger corps to keep the area safe from strangers or influences. So, at the end of the film, we see the importance of this detail, when Ivy Walker (Bryce Dallas Howard) returns to the village with some remedies provided by Kevin (one of the rangers). It must be said that Ivy Walker is the blind daughter of the elder leader Edward Walker, who agrees to let his daughter go through the forest and seek remedies to heal Lucius (who had been stabbed by Noah out of jealousy).

Edward explains to Ivy that all of that is fake, the creatures are members of their own community wearing costumes, trying to keep the community together and avoiding any attempt to leave Covington. While she is in the woods, the elders secretly remember their past traumas and gather around Lucius's bed when one person informs them that Ivy has returned and that she killed one of the creatures. Unfortunately, the drugs that Ivy brings do not catch up in time and the plot takes a twist. Edward points to Noah's distraught mother that her death will allow them to continue to deceive the rest of the villagers (continuing with the idea that there are creatures in the forest that must be feared). The elders thus voted to continue living in the village, continuing the utopian dream of this community to live safe and in a fair way, which also means to live free from the aggressions of the outside world.

The other movie is *The Giver*, directed by Phillip Noyce (2014), and it tells us a story about a dystopian society that was reorganized after an event called "The Ruin" (see fig. 6). It is a film with some similarities with *The Village*, but which also has its own characteristics, like the use of high technology as a way to control communities, institutions or even the State itself, namely the use of biotechnology as a way to genetically

manipulate the new born ones, and to contribute to the general goal of happiness (we have already seen this kind of scenarios, for example, in *The Hunger Games* films). In *the Village,* in contrast, the general idea is to get back to a (certain) past when there was no such kind of technology – the one that seems to corrupt mankind. We must not forget that dystopias (also known as anti-utopias) are characterized by a totalitarian or authoritarian (dissimulated) regime that usually generates an oppressive society.

In the film we see a community isolated from the world, except from a few similar towns, where everyone from small infants to the Chief Elder has an assigned role. To be like that, the reorganization implies that only one person can have memories from the past, which are held by the "receiver of memory". Since the receiver of memory is the only person in the community who has the memories from before, he must advise the Chief Elder (Meryl Streep), and the other Elders, on the decisions for the community (taking lessons from the past to construct the future).

One particular aspect of the movie (among several others) is that the inhabitants seem to live in a black and white world, without emotions, without any kind of consciousness experiences, or any kind of *qualia* (that is, without having subjective experiences). To live like that – in a black and white world –, they take an injection every morning that allows them to live in a very unstressed way and, as inferred, in a state of (fake) happiness.

Jonas (Brenton Thwaites) is a young boy that was selected to be the next "Receiver of Memory", and progressively receives memories from the past receiver, *The Giver* (performed by Jeff Bridges). Jonas is a different boy and he is, somehow, aware that there must be something else in the reality they live in. So, he begins to teach his findings to his friends Asher (Cameron Monaghan) and Fiona (Odeya Rush), with whom he decides to share the idea of emotions. He tries to convince Fiona not to take the morning injection so that she can feel things in a different way, but in vain. Fiona is unable to fully comprehend the idea

of emotion and, therefore, is unsure about what she feels. Jonas then kisses Fiona, an action which is antiquated and unknown to the community, and which Jonas gained through memory.

Jonas sees that there is a way to help the community, that is to go past the border of what they call “Elsewhere”, beyond the community, therefore releasing the memories back into the community. Someone else had tried, Rosemary (Taylor Swift), but no one knows what happened to her. After a few events, Jonas is seen together with the Giver, arriving to the understanding that the time for change has come, that the Community has lost its way and must have its memories returned. The only way to make this happen is if Jonas leaves the Community, at which time the memories he has been given will flood back into the people. When Jonas manages to get Elsewhere, we see the colors reaching the community again (truly a metaphor about a grey world changed into life). In a certain view, one could admit the existence of utopian proposals made true, like mind-uploading, neuro-enhancement techniques and other futuristic or post-human ideas.

To synthesize and create a parallel between the two remarkable films (in the way they show the ideas we are discussing), we can see that:

a) in both films, there is a moment in which the main protagonist breaks the boundaries of the known world he/she lives in;
b) in both films, something or someone creates an atmosphere of ignorance (we must not forget, as Hobbes (2010) and Spinoza (1988) pointed out, that fear and ignorance are the main reasons for a mislead and unhappy life);
c) in both films, the element of hope relies on the capacity of keeping the community together by some form of government or social ability;
d) in both films, there is the illusion of freedom and justice, ignoring the possible states of mind of their own inhabitants.

This is very visible in the way that society is guided by the secret of a few to control the many, and curiously (despite being different directors and different plots, scenarios and anachronisms) they use the same stratagem: in *The Village,* the elders have secrets of their own and of the society where they once had lived and keep contents that are reminders of evil and tragedy hidden in black boxes and, in *The Giver,* the elders and the Giver himself know the truth, but they maintain the evils of society before "the ruin" in secrecy, like suffering, pain, hunger, etc., trying to keep them away from the community.

It can be said that these are only films or fictions, which do not reflect reality, but there are several examples of this kind of communities around the world, and that unfortunately have in most cases finished tragically. These communities, often also called sects, a term which has a strong religious component, end up tragically like the People's Temple with Jim Jones, one that finished with a collective suicide of nine hundred people.

It can also be said that it seems that humans do not take lessons from history or from *Utopia* very seriously. As Logan points out, *Utopia* also demonstrates what can be the result of such desires for egalitarian civilizations, when he says: «In general, if Utopia anticipates the welfare democracies of our own time in many respects, the elaborate constraints imposed on its citizens also frequently put us in mind of modern totalitarian regimes» (Logan, 1997, p. 8).

So, according to this, and as we have pointed out, in both cases – utopia and dystopia – there is a structural impossibility, one that Thomas More had already pointed out but not developed, which means that in the presence of this theory — that we name "The Theory of the Impossibility of Utopia" or just TIU – one will be allowed to deconstruct any possible future utopia or dystopia, as we will see in the next paragraph.

3. Notes about the possible and the impossible of utopia

It seems that utopia is, by essence, impossible; we saw it on the films and see the impossible arising in our everyday life (it is a utopia to think that starvation will finish one day). Political and economic strategies are building our global world, where a dream like utopia seems to be impossible. However, there are two ways of thinking about this: one is to realize that even in Thomas More's *Utopia* there are no such things as happiness, free will or even dignity; another way is to understand it as Herbert Marcuse or Ernst Bloch do, that utopia is possible if, from within, it surpasses itself.

For Ernst Bloch (Bloch, 1959), there is a "real possibility" for utopia if it is unconditioned, that is, with no predetermined conditions, like in art (in general). In art, there are utopian impulses that lead to perfection, and that is the same kind of hope that should be given to mankind. In other words, there is within men's essence a way to build a different and organized society and, therefore, a society where a concept like utopia can be just a literary metaphor for Thomas More's work.

In 1967, Marcuse gave a lecture at the Free University of West Berlin, where he argued that utopia – as a non-realizable dream – had ended, and it was then a real-possibility (Marcuse, 1970: 62). The idea is that he sees a rupture in history, a change in social organization allowing that all the material and intellectual forces to be at hand and be put to work for the realization of a free society (Marcuse, 1970: 64). Of course, we cannot forget the historical context in which Marcuse was living. He thinks and retains the term 'socialism' for a society in which he foresees a «convergence of technology and art and the convergence of work and play» (Marcuse, 1970: 68), and thus socialism could be a utopia made reality.[2]

[2] «The abolition of labor, the termination of the struggle for existence – that is to say life as an end in itself and no longer as a means to an end – and the liberation of human sensibility and sensitivity, not as a private factor, but as a force for transformation of human existence and its environment. (…) It means that the creative imagination (...) would become a productive force applied to the transformation of the social and natural universe. It would mean the emergence of a form of reality which is the work and the medium of the developing sensibility and sensitivity (...) And now I throw in the terrible concept: it would mean an "aesthetic" reality – society as a work of art. This is the most Utopian, the most radical possibility of liberation today» (Marcuse, 1968: 184).

There are several implications about this kind of approach, but for our purpose (in this essay) we can say that it does not seem to account for the problems we are facing now (somehow, they lived with an optimism that can no longer be real), as there has been a certain return of totalitarian regimes, fascism, fanatic religious movements, new forms of sexual and labor slavery, etc.; and, above all, utopia has its own internal problems. As we saw from the two selected films, there are several items both against and in favor of the utopian dream, but they can also provide the grounding material for our thesis, one that postulates the following propositions and hopefully clarifies the evidence of the impossibilities in the structure of utopian projects:

1. In order to be considered possible, a utopian or dystopian project cannot have any kind of conditions (as Ernst Bloch referred), since the imposition of conditions destroys the heart or essence of utopia;
2. Utopia does not consider the flaws in human nature and, therefore, can never provide sufficient tools to avoid any form of disappointment, disagreement or ambition;
3. In a modern political and economic scenario, as the one we live in, a Utopia/dystopia cannot exist, as Herbert Marcuse had thought, because he did not consider the phenomenon of globalization as a cultural and economic movement in itself and in the way we are living it now;
4. An aesthetic creative force, like the one Herbert Marcuse proposes, which as he said has the potential for liberation, cannot serve the interest of economies and, therefore, cannot create a rupture in the historical continuum, as he thought it would be possible;

5. Utopia as a non-place (as in Thomas More's *Utopia*) is a false premise since non-places can:
    a) already have some degree of existence, such as in virtual world's or augmented reality scenarios;
    b) already exist as pointed out by Marc Augé in his major work (Augé, 1995) such as airports or shopping malls.

In synthesis, the TIU can be considered a valid theory, since there is no utopian project that has yet been completed or that can one day become held, even considering the variety of contradictions inside all the theories. The critics of this facts, would say that, if some utopia can be held, then it will not be considered a utopia. One can just contend by saying: things that we (humanity) have considered as impossible and that become true, were those utopians things or just (im)possible things waiting for the right time (and probably, technology)?

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The limits of Zombies films are
the limits of philosophy?

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III. The limits of zombies films are The limits of philosophy?

In the last decade we have witnessed a growing phenomenon around mythical characters linked to the supernatural, to an order that is beyond our rationality, such as the phenomenon that we want to highlight: the *undead* or zombies. In fact, the idea of the *undead* has deep roots and it is possible that they have a grain of truth in all of this.

The image of a Zombie, which is nothing less than a walking dead of afro-Caribbean folklore, is perhaps one of the most frightening images of all the terror iconography. The idea of something (a corpse) raised from the dead and animated by some magic ritual, that has strange powers and that eat human flesh (like cannibals) is very well explored by the cinema. But it is not only this: if we think about it, it is really bizarre why we have this strange mix feeling of fascination and fear (almost hypnotically). In fact, one may ask: what can offer a zombie? The answer is quite clear: extinction Maybe this is one of the reasons why zombie has maintained a constant appearance in terror films over the years, and through all the countries (it seems, almost like a formula to a movie to become a success, at least in American films). If we look at history of cinema, we'll find several examples of this attraction to zombies' films, from the oldest like, *White Zombie* (1932, USA); *The Walking Dead* (1936, USA); *Voodoo Man* (1944, USA) to more recent like, *Stalled*, (2012, UK), *Rise of the Undead* (2013, USA); *Pretty Dead* (2013, USA), *In the Flesh* (2013, UK), among many others. In this sense we can see how voodoo influences entered in our contemporary culture (mostly) through cinema. But the figure of a Zombie is also used in philosophy, namely in philosophy of mind to illustrate the hard problem of consciousness. Creating a parallel between cinema and philosophy we may think that the hard problem of consciousness can be, if not solved, at least be illustrated (as a solution) by films and on the other hand, if there is any limitation to this exercise. The aim of this essay is to search for an answer to the question put in title.

1. Are zombies real? From folklore to films

For many people, it's a cliché look at a voodoo priest and see a sorcerer with eyes rolled, planting pins in a doll as if it were a man. The dolls are an object of the so-called black magic and many of the African priests have never heard of them. The prejudice was created, somehow, by Hollywood film industries: the first in the film *White Zombie*, in the (19)30's, and more recently, by *007 - Live and Let Die*, if we want to put aside many of the zombies and voodoo movies (see Russel, 2014). Since then, the figures (dolls), from time to time, appeared in the news. In 2008, were offered for sale figures of Nicolas Sarkozy – with an indispensable set of 12 needles – (for only 13 euros) and many people were interested in poking the French President; well, at least the K&K Editor, played fair and marketed a kit of his opponent, Ségolène Royal.

Another episode came in the year 2014, when a African wizard said that used four dogs to invoke the spirit of "Kahwiri Kapam" with the purpose of provoke damage to the Portuguese player Cristiano Ronaldo, preventing him to play on the field against Ghana, in the last game of the qualifications for the world cup. Portugal wins Ghana and Ronaldo not only played but scored (2-1). So, one may think that maybe the spell was not totally correct or the spell only works on those who believe in such sorceries. Well, the important in these stories is that either Sarkozy, Ronaldo and many people felt threatened, and as we know, Sarkozy went to court and to prevent the sale of the doll (unfortunately for him, lose the action). So, what philosophy and cultural traditions can teach us about these mysterious characters and what are the limitations.

Zombies are, in fact, driving our attention to the borderline horizon in which philosophy and art are settled in their ambition of producing something. The ultimate answer to all of this may be that the artist and the philosopher are in a different world and apart from the speed consumerist society and therefore, alienated of the general alienation in which everybody seems to be a zombie. It can also be the case

(at least as an approach in philosophy) that we are all (some sort of) beasts or even zombies with the strange idea that we have a mind and that we are moral beings. Well, we may not see clearly but the accounts of “bestial” are already in Aristotle, for example in the fifth chapter of Book VII of *Nicomachean Ethics*, when he provides us the idea of a feral women who devour unborn fetuses, the black sea tribes who sacrifices babies, mad slaves that eats other’s people’s livers.

Aristotle in his work, in his approach and pursue of virtue and happy life (as *Eudaimonia*) is saying something quite clear about this: to have a life organized around material acquisitions it is wrong, and therefore, not ethic. But most important, we think that Aristotle, even not knowing or dreaming about our devotion to consumerism, is as if he were saying that if we live like that, then we are a kind of bestial beings, that is, what we could call “living death beings”. Certainly, this is another question and we must focus on zombie’s films.

Note that in the last decade we have witnessed a growing phenomenon around mythical characters linked to the supernatural, to an order that is beyond our rationality, such as the phenomenon that we want to highlight: the *undead* or zombies. However, we must not forget that not everything in horror or fantastic movies are created from the scratch, that is, a fictional character developed without any reference from humans’ traditions or legends.

Well, the zombie it is fictional but in a certain way, may not be so fictional as we might think: the idea of a corpse raised from the dead and animated by a divine force or some magic ritual, that has strange powers, it is present in several cultures, from the ancient Sumerians to the most well-known Afro-Caribbean folklore. Note that the concept of zombie has been with us for a long time, not just decades or centuries, but since ever. It has been an integral part of our myths, legends and beliefs for thousands of years. Long before the series and movies about them, there were the dark spells and incantations in the ancient Egyptians and Sumerians, and «their high priests sought to restore the dead to some semblance of life

and to zombify the still-living».[1] Their goal was to have them do the bidding of their human masters and to control them. Within the culture of Celts, Scandinavia, Africa and Haiti, belief that the recently deceased could be reanimated and the living could be reduced to zombie status and used in almost slave-like fashion, was widespread centuries ago.

We all know from history that early necromancy was related to and most likely evolved from shamanism, which calls upon spirits such as the ghosts of ancestors (we shall return to this important point of view). If we want examples, we have one of the oldest literary account of necromancy in Homer's Odyssey, namely in book ten and eleven (under the direction of Circe, a powerful sorceress, Odysseus to the Underworld (*katabasis*) in order to gain insight about his impending voyage home by raising the spirits of the dead through the use of spells which Circe has taught him; The Odyssey's passages contain many descriptive references to necromantic rituals: rites must be performed around a pit with fire during nocturnal hours, and Odysseus has to follow a specific recipe, which includes the blood of sacrificial animals, to concoct a libation for the ghosts to drink while he recites prayers to both the ghosts and gods of the underworld), but we found in Asclepius the real personification of this practices.

Asclepius (in Latin: Aesculapius or in Greek: Ἀσκληπιός, Asklēpiós) was the Olympian god of medicine in ancient Greek religion (it as the capacity to bring people from dead). Asclepius represents the healing aspect of the medical arts; his daughters are Hygieia ("Hygiene", the goddess/personification of health, cleanliness, and sanitation), Laso (the goddess of recuperation from illness), Aceso (the goddess of the healing process), Aglaea / Aegle (the goddess of beauty, splendour, glory, magnificence, and adornment), and Panacea (the goddess of universal remedy). Zeus killed Asclepius with a thunderbolt because he brought Hippolytus back alive from the dead and accepted gold for it.

[1] «Long before exotic viruses, biological warfare, and sinister military experiments brought the dead back to life in our cinemas and on our television screens, there were the dark spells and incarnation of the ancient Egyptians, The Sumerians, and the Babylonians. Theis high priests and priestesses sought to restore the dead to some semblance of life and to zombify the still living» (Redfern & Steiger, 2015: xiii).

In other version, it is said that Asclepius was killed because after bringing people back from the dead, Hades thought that no more dead spirits would come to the underworld, so he asked his brother Zeus to stop him.

But for those who think that this is just a remaining dust from the ancient Greek world, there are also several references to necromancers – called "bone-conjurers" (illusionists) among Jews of the later Hellenistic period – in the Bible. The Book of Deuteronomy (18:9-12) explicitly warns the Israelites against engaging in the Canaanite practice of divination from the dead; the death penalty of necromancy is postulated in Leviticus 20:27.

As we can see, these are some of the multiple cultural influences that helped to build a vision for the necromancy (even in countries that we do not expect to see such as in China with the *Jiang-shi* figure).[2] And if one may think that this is just a mere caprice of people less informed, well, we all must think again. In the last century, during the cold war, the CIA developed a program called amusingly “Acoustic Kitty”. The idea was very simple: to place a cat into a zombified condition, so that he could be obey and be carefully released it close to soviet Embassy. Unfortunately for the first cat and for the directors of the million programmes, when released the 007-like zombie cat get squashed under the wheels of a speeding taxi.

The influence of these beliefs, the influence of voodoo cults in our culture extends far beyond what we could think. With the comics and movies, the exploitation of our fears come back to the top. If we remember the Freudian thought present in the text of 1917, *Mourning and Melancholia* and the studies of Nicolas Abraham and Maria Torok (almost in from the 90’s), strongly influenced by the father of psychoanalysis, we see that there is always a possibility of bringing back to life some part

[2] «In china the zombie is known as the Jiang-shi. And it is just about as deadly and terrifying as its Haitian and western counterparts. Jiang-shi translates into English as “stiff corpse”. And there is a very good reason for that: the movement and gait of the Chinese undead are not at all dissimilar to the zombies of George A. Romero’s *Night of the Living Dead*. In China, the jiang-shi is a creature with a seemingly never-ending case of rigor mortis. Most people are familiar with the concept of this post-death condition: when a person dies, the body significantly stiffens. (...) Notably, the jiang-shi has another zombie parallel: like its cinematic counterpart, the jiang-shi feeds on humans». (Redfern & Steiger, 2015: 52-53.)

of ourselves that was buried beneath our everyday life. Bringing back to life in this sense, it is the wish that gives meaning to life.

One aspect that we must regard as relevant to this analysis is precisely the connection between reality and the supernatural, the connection between zombies and voodoo, that is to say, the religious aspect that, as Bob Curran says, is quite difficult to analyse.[3] One of those difficulties, that Curran also alerts us, is related to the name itself – Voodoo –, since there was an anglicised construction in his history;[4] However, there is no agreement about the source as Redfern and Steiger advert us:

> some historians of Voodoo suggest that the origin of the word zombie may have come from jumbie, the West Indian term for a ghost. Other scholars favour the Kongo word nzambi, the spirit that has resided in the body and is now freed as filtering down through the ages as zombie. Although the practice of Voodoo and the creation of zombies was familiar to the residents of Louisiana before 1871, a number of etymologists believe that it is about this time that the word "zombie" entered the English language (Redfern & Steiger, 2015: 86).

History tells us that religious practices are directly connected with strong events. In the case of Voodoo there is, according to several historians, strong spiritual beliefs of African people and their cruel and unfair slave's period,[5] which means in this case, a significant and closer

[3] «Zombies are, of course, inextricably linked in the popular mind with Voodoo, a religion found in West Africa, the Caribbean, and some parts of America. Therefore, no examination of zombies can be carried out without first examining the belief system. However, because of its complexity, Voodoo is incredibly difficult to study. In its purest state, the religion that we refer to as Voodoo is only one of a myriad of beliefs that reflect either the ideologies of their practitioners or the area from which they have come. Some are even fragments of what may have once been broader and more wide-ranging beliefs; others have been adapted to suit the area in which they flourished. Thus, Santeria, Umbanda, Quimbanda, Mami Wata, Shango, Moyambe, and Candomble are all considered as variants and aspects of Voodoo religion». (Curran, 2006: 178).

[4] «Even the name creates problems because "Voodoo" is something of an Anglicized construction, and other variations are given as voudon, voodun, vudoun, and voudoux. An even further Anglicized word, Hoodoo, is also sometimes used. The original terminology comes from the language of the Ewe/Yaroba peoples of the Arada area of Dahomey (now Benin) in West Africa and literally means, "to draw water". Eventually it became modified to mean "to drawn down spirits". This was done by means of a weave or coloured pattern that was spread upon the ground». (Curran, 2006: 178).

[5] «*Vudú* es una voz de origen africano occidental, que significa "espíritu" y com la cual se designa al conjunto de creencias prácticas que incluem fetichismo, culto a las serpientes, sacrifícios rituales y empleo del trance como medeio de comunicación com sus deidades. Esta religión se originó a partir de las creencias que poseían los nativos que fueron trasladados como esclavos desde el Africa Occidental hacía America. El tráico de esclavos hacía America, produjo un fuerte fenémeno de sincretismo entre el vudú y las creencias cristianas de los esclavistas». (Rionda, 2010: 193).

relationship with the occult, with magic rituals,[6] with the gods or the original rituals of being closer to the mysteries of spiritual nature.

As we have seen, voodoo has a kind of a link between natural and supernatural world; the spiritual mysteries (that we may say are similar to miracles) and the magic component give rise to a strong feeling of belief for those who live in such kind of religion. There is one good explanation for this: the living relationship established between the living and the dead. In no other form of religion seems to be so close, not only by dealing with death but by integrate her in everyday life. In this case there are one or two aspects of the most importance: the contact and the invocation of spirits by dancing that conducts to a state of trance. Such state is the direct contact with divinity: to dance in the temple or in the street is to become God (that is why they handling burning ashes with impunity). And for those who are zombie there is no pain, because dead people do not feel pain (and in cinema we find this same idea). The zombie is something that only has one purpose: to accomplish the task that is in his mind. Well, this is just a way of putting the question because one may ask – and philosophers of mind are always asking this –, if a zombie is just someone with a brain but without a mind or with a mind but without a brain? Are some of the people around us undead, and how could we tell? The paradigm of the "monster in the machine", it is not only a philosophical question putted by Aristotle or Descartes; it is also delivered in literature, for example, by Mary Shelley with *Frankenstein: or the Modern Prometheus,* which become one of the most famous movies ever.

Maybe, movies can tell us a little bit more than just about our fears our about the religious our rituals histories that our mind can deal. Maybe, and this is certainly a mere hypothesis, maybe we are already zombified, since being it is not just to exist.

But we can also think that in the past decades, the monstrous narratives have become omnipresent in our lives; this means that they can represent the collective social anxieties over the 21st century. It is as

[6] «La magia sempre es una combinación de lo tangible y lo intangible, lo físico y lo etéreo. Funciona en su próprio mundo y desafia la necesidad de una explicación lógica». (Dorsey, 2006: 78).

if these narratives can be, not a metaphor for the new challenges, but a necessary condition to live in the new cultural monstrosity century. Note: in the last 20/30 years, our rapidly changing world faced enormous threats such as terrorism, climate change, immigration in large scales, global epidemics, among new communication technologies, new mobility's transportations and new ways of meeting people.

Fears and tensions reflect this evermore-interconnected global world and uncertainty. In this scenario, the zombie ontology then rediscovers the spaces of intimacy that had remained buried under the current techno-affective paradigms, mass advertising and uncontrolled hyper-consumerism and the fictional threat of an apocalypse and the total collapse of civilization that often accompanies productions gender, constitute an oblique criticism of contemporary societies of spectacle and modernization, as denounced authors like Baudrillard, Debord, and Deleuze, among others.

The zombie ontology is so much more than just a way of seeing death: is a way of telling us live your lives as it should be lived, do not become a zombie. Working, go to the stores, buying stuffs, go home, go working, buying more, this is in a way, a zombie life. The normal life of a person is already zombified if we look at the heart of social interactions: everybody seems suspicious everywhere, and somehow persons seem to be like walking dead, look at the way people felt or looked at during the pandemics in 2020.

In short, one can say that voodoo is for thousands of people not a magic ritual practice but truly a religion. Is there a plausible reason to believe is such religion or sorcery, and in this particular case, in voodoo? Well, it seems there is and it is called fear (as in all religions, people want or need to believe in their salvation or at least to not to be condemned to wherever hell or punishment involved); nobody wants to be a zombie (or to be in contact with one), that is, to become a slave of the dark powers that go beyond our comprehension. In the introduction of the *Zombie Book,*

The Encyclopedia of the living Dead, Nick Redfern and Brad Steiger state about zombies:

> is a creature that provokes a wealth of emotional responses: menace, terror, panic, excitement, fascination, and trepidation all share equal, top billing. And it's not just the actions of the zombie that engineer such states of mind. It's the very name, too. Indeed, the "Z word" is one that hits home in near-primal fashion. Just mentioning it strikes a deep, chilling, and malignant chord in our subconscious, even if we're not overly sure why that should be so (Redfern & Steiger, 2015: xiii).

In the book *Real Zombies, the Living Dead, and Creatures of the Apocalypse*, Brad Steiger states that a real zombie is a reanimated corpse that most often is brought back to life to serve as slave labour. Well, according to Lisa Lee Harp Waugh, a noted necromancer and president of the "American Ghost Hunters Society",[7] a zombie «is a soulless human corpse, still dead, but taken from the grave and endowed by sorcery with a mechanical semblance of life. It is a dead body, which is made to walk and act and move as if it were alive». (Steiger, 2011: 369).

We must say that this definition from Lisa is consistent with the purposes of necromancy, which can be defined as a form of magic involving communication with the deceased for the purpose of divination, imparting the means to foretell future events or discover hidden knowledge. And how they do it? They do either by summoning their spirit as an apparition or by raising them bodily. This imagery was very explored by cinema and the result is that almost everywhere we have a new iconography rising, from games to fashion. But the figure of Zombie is also used in philosophy as we shall see.

Returning to our question about the limits of zombie's films and limits of philosophy, lets us recall Wittgenstein: he wanted to draw a border line in relation to what could be thinkable and what could be said,

[7] *Vide*: http://ghosthuntersofamerica.com

establishing the well-known premise that the limits of language are the limits of (the subject) world.[8]

Regarding the *Tractatus Logico-Philosophcus* the border of the thinkable cannot be drawn from the non-thinkable (one of the reasons why philosophy seems to be like a language without sense, he says); expressed in another way, if thinkable coincides with the limits of logic of language, the boundaries of thought coincide with the limits of language: «(3.02) The thought contains the possibility of the state of affairs which it thinks. What is thinkable is also possible».[9] In the case, could we formulate the question about the limit of philosophy or of art? Are zombies films the limit of the thinkable? The limit itself of philosophy? Well, Wittgenstein in his later period saw that language it is also formed by other structures besides logic and we play together with her games.

So, the main reason why zombies' films are called to this discussion is because they provoke a replication thought about the limits of philosophy, and as such they can also be used to illustrate the hard problem of consciousness in philosophy of mind. Note that from the point of view of philosophy of language (and this could be another point of discussion) zombies became a sort of confirmation of the language games theory since, as we have been seen in movies, they just use most of the time a kind of self-expressed body language, that challenges the paradigm of the Wittgenstein's *Tractatus*.

2. The mind-body problem and the empty-minded zombies?

First of all, we should start to explain that the mind-body problem puts the general question of knowing the relationship of the mind to the body, which is translated in many ways and through different forms, for instance, how consciousness is possible if we only have biological matter? How can

[8] See for instance the following propositions: «(3.01) Die Gesamtheit der wahren Gedanken sind ein Bild der Welt». And also: «(5.6) Die Grenzen meiner Sprache bedeuten die Grenzen meiner Welt». Wittgenstein, *LPA.*

[9] «(3.02) Der Gedanke enthält die Möglichkeit der Sachlage die er denkt. Was denkbar ist, ist auch möglich». *Ibid*.

a mind exist outside the body? Can a brain by itself be a mind? What's the nature of particular mental states? and so many others.[10]

To respond to such "hard problem", we have two major perspectives concerning philosophy of mind (which dedicates to study the nature of mind or mental events, and specifically consciousness and their relationship to body, that is, with the brain): one, identify as dualism, and can be traced back to Plato, but most precisely formulated by René Descartes in XVII.

As we all remember, Descartes divides human in two distinct substances, one, material, the *res extensa*, and the other one, the soul or spirit, the *res cogitans*. Two substances that united form man. So, in this perspective it is argued that the mind is an independently existing substance, and therefore (even that there are some dualists that admit their relation to the brain) cannot be reduced to the brain. The second perspective, known as monism or reductionism is the position that asserts that the only existing substance is physical; states that mind is the result of the brain activity, and therefore, there is only one 'substance' (maybe we could call it some sort of 'monad' like in Leibniz thought).[11] Let us not forget, that the *res extensa* from Descartes is like an automaton, and that was one of the reasons why the Cartesian thinker told that animals were automatons, that is, substances or living beings without spirit or mind.

We should also tell that there is a variety of formulations, either for dualism either for monism, just to mention a few: for dualism, we have the *qualia*, psychophysical parallelism, occasionalism, property dualism. In monism we have behaviourism, identity theory, and functionalism. Let us look at a few arguments.

Most of modern philosophers of mind adopt either a reductive or non-reductive position, maintaining in their different ways that the mind is not separate from the body. For instance, Hilary Putnam and Jerry Fodor

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[10] *See*: McGinn, Colin, "Can we solve the mind-body problem?", Mind, Vol. 98, No. 391, July 1989, pp. 349–366; Levine, Joseph, Materialism and Qualia: The Explanatory Gap, in: Pacific Philosophical Quarterly, vol. 64, no. 4, October, 1983, 354–361; Jackson, F. (1986) "What Mary didn't Know", Journal of Philosophy, 83, 5, pp. 291–295; Place, Ullin (1956). "Is Consciousness a Brain Process?". *British Journal of Psychology*.

[11] Armstrong, D. (1968), A Materialist Theory of the Mind, Oxford: Routledge; Smart, J.J.C, «Identity Theory», in The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Summer 2002 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.); Putnam, Hilary (2000). *The Threefold Cord: Mind, Body, and World*. New York: Columbia University Press; Stanton, W.L. (1983) "Supervenience and Psychological Law in Anomalous Monism", Pacific Philosophical Quarterly 64: 72–79.

developed the functionalism mainly as a reaction to the limits of identity theory by Smart and Place.[12] The functionalists put the question of mental states in terms of a computational theory of the mind.[13] Well, the truth is that physicalists (generally speaking) maintain various positions on the prospects of reducing mental properties to physical properties, which means that the ontological status of such mental properties remains obscure. Some philosophers take a kind of epistemic approach and say that the mind–body problem is currently unsolvable, and perhaps it will always remain unsolvable to human beings.

For Colin McGuinn humans are cognitively closed in regards to their own minds. For human minds, according to McGuinn, it lacks the concept-forming cognitive procedures to fully grasp how mental properties such as consciousness arise from their causal basis.[14]

Thomas Nagel holds that the problem is unsolvable (that is, at the present stage of scientific development) but it might be possible in a new future scientific paradigm or cognitive revolution to bridge the explanatory gap.[15] This is usually termed as new mysterianism. But to put in question these two approaches we will going to use David Chalmers arguments. First, we have to say that he calls his perspective as naturalistic dualism, since he believes mental states have its origins in physical systems (brain) and dualistic since he admits mental states are from a ontologically different kind and not reducible to physical. To do this, he introduces zombies into the dialog as a possibility to understand the mind-body problem, saying:

> for a start it is unlikely that zombies are naturally possible. In the real world it is likely that any replica of me would be conscious. (…) But the question is not whether it is plausible that zombies could exist in our world,

[12] Identity theory was developed by John Smart and Ullin Place (in reaction to failures of behaviorism). These philosophers stated that, if mental states are something material (therefore, not behavioral), then mental states are probably identical to internal states of the brain. In very simplified terms: a mental state such as “desire for a chocolate bar” would thus be nothing more than the activity certain neurons in certain brain regions.

[13] *See*: Block, Ned, «What is functionalism» in *Readings in Philosophy of Psychology*, 2 vols. Vol 1., Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1980

[14] McGinn, Colin, «"Can We Solve the Mind–Body Problem? », Mind, Vol. 98, No. 391, July 1989, p. 350.

[15] See the famous text of Thomas Nagel, (1974). "What is it like to be a bat?". *Philosophical Review*, 83: 435–456.

> or even whether the idea of a zombie replica is a natural one; the question is whether the notion of zombie is conceptually coherent. The mere intelligibility of the notion is enough to establish the conclusion. (…) I confess that the logical possibility of zombies seems equality obvious to me. A zombie is just something physically identical to me, but which has no conscious experience – all is dark inside (Chalmers, 1996: 96).

So, Chalmers use some thought experiments to formulate the principle of organizational invariance: «given any system that has conscious experiences, any other system that has the same functional organization will have qualitatively identical experiences».[16] To show that there is an immediate application of the phenomenal facts, he presents the logical possibility of zombies. He admits that there may be a world identical to human (a world in which everyone would be zombie). Or rather, that zombies would be functionally identical to human (would process the same information and react in a similar way, producing similar behavior); they would, thus, be identical from the psychological functional point of view (they would have the introspection capacity and also the capacity of voluntarily control their behavior).

Gilbert Harman denies this initial premise and says that any physical or intentional duplicate would be and should be, like a properly programmed computer and with phenomenal characteristics; there is in the comprehension of this perspective a premise of a certain duality that Chalmers has used on the mind itself, in which is implied, for one side, a phenomenal sense and on the other a psychological one.[17]

Regarding this last sense, it happens that are used various psychological concepts under the guise of consciousness (waking, introspection, self-awareness, attention, voluntary control, knowledge), in which several philosophers fall, and we think that is one of the great errors about philosophy of mind, and therefore, in the philosophical zombies.[18] Note that those notions are very functional

[16] *Ibid.*, p. 249.

[17] *Cf.* Gilbert Harman, *Reasoning, Meaning and Mind* (Oxford: Clarendon,1999).

[18] David Chalmers, *Op. cit.*, pp. 26-27.

and that is why, we think, they are so often bind to phenomenal states (such as attention or introspection) and so, maybe, Chalmers wants to consider them as a natural proposal, that is, seeing consciousness as the result of the functional organization of the brain.

Returning to Chalmers, he wants to show, first of all, that zombies are logically possible, and therefore, the criticism made about natural scenarios are not eligible, that is, he is interested in creating a scenario where would be possible to sustain a thesis about consciousness and solve the hard problem. In other words, what Chalmers is really interested, is in giving a zombie design that can be intelligible and consistent and therefore, he gives the following assumptions to his argument:

1. The zombies are logically possible;
2. Anything that is logically possible is metaphysically possible.
3. Conclusion: zombies are possible.

Chalmers use another argument that he calls the inverted spectrum, which is the placement of the possibility of a world physically identical to our world that what varies are the facts about our conscious experience; this does not mean that they are missing (the facts) but they are different, they could be reversed. So, what seems to be the problem? This is a quite controversy perspective whether in Hollywood zombies or in philosophical ones: we have several examples of this scenario in movies – the possibility of world physically identical –, but nothing in those movies, nothing seems to show that zombies could have such a thing as reversed facts. As Daniel Dennett points out, Chalmers zombies are not consistent

In his webpage we find the explanation for three kinds of zombies: «All of them are like humans in some ways, and all of them are lacking something crucial (something different in each case): 1) Hollywood zombies. These are found in zombie B-movies. Their defining feature is that they are dead, but "reanimated". They are typically rather mean, and fond of human flesh. The zombies pictured on this page are mostly Hollywood zombies (though I'm informed that the one at the bottom is really a ghost demon). An expert tells me that the name should be "Pittsburgh zombies", since the most important zombie movies were made in Pittsburgh (…). 2) Haitian zombies. These are found in the voodoo (or vodou) tradition in Haiti. Their defining feature seems to be that they lack free will, and perhaps lack a soul. Haitian zombies were once normal people, but underwent zombification by a "bokor" through spell or potion, and are afterwards used as slaves. Philosophical zombies. These are found in philosophical articles on consciousness. Their defining features is that they lack conscious experience, but are behaviorally (and often physically) identical to normal humans. These three classes are distinct». In http://consc.net/zombies.html

in the sense that they lack phenomenal sense and would certainly have a distinct behavior from humans.

In addition, Chalmers would not have given an explanation about *qualia*, which means in practical terms, that Chalmers, not only nothing would have added to the appeal of the irreducibility of human consciousness, as it would have created an internal contradiction in its argument, and therefore, if zombies behave like humans would be indistinguishable from a conscious human being, which could lead to the affirmation of being in the presence of a conscious person.[19] It is difficult to remember a single movie where this situation can be looked. Even from the natural and evolutionist point of view, the zombie would have more chance of winning the race, because it is assumed that the design is simpler, which, if John Searle was right, could mean that humans were zombies who insist to themselves that they have consciousness, since we «could have an identical behavior in two different systems, one of which is fully conscious and another one totally unconscious».[20]

Question to be made: can this be accepted? No, it is unacceptable by principle that any activity performed consciously, can be also identically performed without conscience because, first, it is not actually considering the value and meaning of the word "consciousness"; and secondly, because it involves inconsistency since in the possibility of the event can be executed without conscience, it could not be performed identically (this is appropriate to the Cartesian affirmation of the automaton, of a machine); somehow, events and contents of consciousness share the same unrepeatable substance.

A different way of putting the question is to ask, how did Christof Koch and Francis Crick, if there are not already a zombie in us? Put it like that, it would seem that the authors would be inserting this question with a mystical, magic or religious component. But the zombie referred finds its match in what is the unconscious, or even better, the manifestation of

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[19] *Cf.* Daniel Dennett, *Consciousness Explained*. Also, Stevan Harnad, «Why and How We Are Not Zombies», *Journal of Consciousness Studies* 1 (1995): pp. 164-167.

[20] John Searle, *The Rediscovery of the Mind* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1992), p. 71.

the unconscious (that you see numerous occurrences in everyday life),[21] the so-called automatic behaviors (also known precisely as zombie's behavior) that perhaps the best example can be sleepwalking,[22] although, there are strange diseases that can questioning all scientific and philosophical apparatus, such as the Cotard syndrome.[23] People with Cotard Syndrome, also dubbed as “Ambulant Corpse Syndrome”, genuinely believe that they are dead and that their bodies no longer exist. Some go so far as to die "really" for not feeding, because they think that the dead should not eat food. Like bipolar disorder or schizophrenia, Cotard's syndrome is a delusional psychosis and is the only known form of this type. Those who have the problem often say they have no organs, no blood in the body, and no imaginary loss of parts of the body.

For those who are zombie there is no pain, because dead people do not feel pain (and in cinema we find this same idea, we’ve never seen a zombie in pain or suffering). The zombie is something that only has one purpose: to accomplish the task that is in his mind (or soul). Well, this is just a way of putting the question, because one may ask – and philosophers of mind are always asking this same question –, if a zombie is just someone with a brain but without a mind or with a mind but without a brain, what sort of being he can be? Or even with none? Are some of the people around us undead, and how could we tell, what can be provided as a proof? In fact, the paradigm of the “monster in the machine”, it is not only a philosophical question putted by Aristotle or Descartes; it is also delivered in literature, for example, by Mary Shelley with *Frankenstein: or the Modern Prometheus,*

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[21] «By “unconscious” we mean any neuronal activity that does not give rise to conscious sensation, thought or memory». Christof Kock e Francis Crick, «The Zombie Within», *Nature*, 411 (Jun 2011): p.893.

[22] «Even more spectacular cases of zombie behavior can occur in patients with complex partial seizures and in sleepwalkers. Both involve complex yet relatively stereotypical motor patterns: wandering around, moving furniture and even driving cars, this automatic behavior follows an internal program that can be influenced by the environment. In general, neither the epileptic patient nor the sleepwalker responds to commands or remembers anything later. The simplest interpretation is that, although consciousness is shut down by the partial seizure or by deep sleep, enough of the forebrain remains active to subserve online systems. Both syndromes accentuate the difficulty of assessing the degree of consciousness in the absence of either explicit recall or language» *Ibid*.

[23] The first cases of Cotard's Syndrome appeared in 1788 and were first identified through the work of the French neurologist Jules Cotard in 1880.

which then (adapted for cinema) become one of the most famous movies ever.

Maybe, movies can tell us a little bit more than just about our fears or about the religious or rituals histories that our mind can deal. Maybe, and this is certainly a mere hypothesis, maybe we are already “zombified”. Being it is not just to exist.

3. The fallacy of the question. Zombies films and philosophy with no limits

To answer the question put in title in this essay, if the limits of zombie’s films are the limits of philosophy, we have to put some propositions: 1) If there are no limits in zombies’ films, then philosophy still open but, 2) If the limits of zombie’s films were achieved, possibly philosophy is at the end; 3) if there are no limits in philosophy but there are in zombies’ films, philosophy should give up on zombie’s arguments to solve the hard problem. Let us discuss these hypotheses.

In fact, the zombie’s films seem, all of them, to involve the same kind of paradoxes and contradictions as in the discourses of philosophy. Take for instance the zombie character in a small detail, but one of the most important: it is always a character in a kind of trance but with very good ears, an individual who is aware of the lowest noise. Note that it is because of this ability that he can strike, i.e., the capture of these smallest noises is the trigger which makes him strike humans. Well, we said that was a small detail but one of the most important one and here is why. If the zombie is aware of something (in the case, a low noise) that means, that he perceived something, and so, there must be at least some degree of perception in the process.

Well, one can say that to be aware it is not the same thing as to have consciousness. Here is the fact: awareness implies somehow to be conscious, otherwise, attention would be produced in sleep, which is not clearly the case. As we all know from the phenomenology point

of view, two things must be considered: one, consciousness its always conscious of something, and secondly, if something it is giving to a consciousness and perceived as so, then there must be a subject in the world capable of doing it, and what characterizes the consciousness, is the intentionality present in the act. But it is not only awareness!

Let us do a particular imaginative exercise: imagine that you see a film with zombies but as a kind of realistic documentary, as if the documentary is revealing the secret life of zombies, their existence in reality. You see in the film that they attack after a person makes any kind of noise, so, wouldn't you believe that they have a consciousness, even that it can be an unknown kind of consciousness? Wouldn't you move quietly in the streets? The point is that it is not only to be aware, but it is the perception of space, of movement, the will to strike and the freedom to do it. One may ask that if isn't that what happens with the majority of animals? Well, I guess the majority of animals have a different degree of consciousness, we may suppose, and they cannot be point out as just having the instinct of survival, which by-the-way, are mostly based on awareness.

Another possible contradiction when seeing zombies' film is the troubling and confused perspective given about the hard problem. Let me explain. In some movies it seems that the zombie, which we should remind, is a living dead person, has no brain or no activity in them (since the proof to declare someone dead, as we all know, is to have no registry of brain activity). So, taking a reductionist approach, the case is that if consciousness is a product of brain activity, how can they know how and when to attack if they have a dead brain? Where is their spirit, soul or consciousness? On the other hand, assuming a dualistic approach, if they do not need a brain (because it is a dead one), how can be possible to kill a zombie by the brain or the brain area? If they are not moved by it, how can they fall? It could be pointed out that they are "living beings" like the Cartesian automatons, but in that case, would not be the case that they can be aware of the world surrounding (and of the lowest noise).

In sort of conclusion: many things about zombie movies are still open, that is, are not yet explored. As we have seen, they can have different forms of living, even of “consciousness”, of moods of being and feeling. In more recent movies, Zombies are no longer moving slowly, they are evolving, maybe getting smarter, so it is possible that they can have some strange *qualia* which are not yet discovered. Why, we may ask, we have never seen a zombie fall in love? Probably their love is dead (since love should be a feeling in mind). So, if there is not yet a limit to zombie’s films interpretations, probably philosophy hasn’t reached his end and the proof is that it still exists the hard problem of consciousness. Maybe the problem it isn’t so hard, maybe it is all about a certain way of doing philosophy, that we could say (with extreme irony) is zombified.

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Lucy

- why the brain cannot be a screen

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IV. *Lucy* or why the brain cannot be a screen

The movie *Lucy*, written and directed by Luc Besson, it is not just a science fiction film, it is also an attempt to reflect on brain functions and therefore on mind abilities. However, the reflection is already compromised because not only imposes on the brain all the mental activity, adopting a physicist view of the mind, but also because it plays with the ten percent of brain myth from the nineteenth century (probably from William James and Boris Sidis). In this sense, the enhancement of the brain potentiate mind and it seems that the brain could be a screen where everything would take place; when analysing the film, we see this firm idea from the beginning to the end. Our goal is to, firstly, analyse the film and then, demonstrate how this film is so full of mistakes – wrong ideas about brain and mind –, whether from the point of view of philosophers or neuroscientists.

1. Lucy and some other movies. The ten percent of the brain myth

One of the first things we see in the theatrical release poster is the tagline for *Lucy*: «the average person uses 10% of their brain capacity. Imagine what she could do with 100%», which is the same sentence that is repeated by Professor Samuel Norman in his college class (see fig. 8). Well, we all know the power of marketing and his importance in the cinema industry, and in this specific movie, the success achieved. However, if we want to go on pursuit of our goal of making a serious approach to a philosophical content, we must not submit to those schemes and strategies, which only want to target potential viewers and thus, increase the profit of the film.

So, by the tagline of the poster we have two major problems that immediately rise from this apparently innocent approach to viewers: first, the continuous exploration about the ten percent brain myth capacity; second, but still in connection with the first one, the mistake about what

is really said in that sentence. Let's start this reflection by the plot of the movie and then see the different issues that must be clarified.

Lucy (Scarlett Johansson) is a 25-year-old American woman studying in Taiwan. She is tricked by her boyfriend (employer of Mr. Jang) to work as drug mule. Lucy delivers a briefcase to Mr. Jang (Choi Min-sik) containing a highly valuable synthetic drug called CPH4. After seeing her boyfriend killed, she is captured and a bag of the drug is forcibly sewn into her abdomen (along with three other drug mules who will also transport the drug for sale in Europe).

While Lucy is in captivity, one of her captors kicks her in the abdomen, breaking the bag and releasing a large quantity of the drug into her blood system. As a result, she begins acquiring increasingly enhanced physical and mental capabilities, such as telepathy, mental time travel, and also the ability not to feel pain or other discomforts. She kills off her captors and escapes. Please, note that we just said mental capacities, which as we will see, makes all the difference.

Lucy then travels to a Hospital to extract the bag of drugs and the doctor explains her the volatile nature of the drug, based on a substance given to foetuses during prenatal development and its destructive side-effects. Sensing her growing physical and mental abilities, Lucy returns to Mr. Jang's hotel, kills his bodyguards, assaults Mr. Jang, and telepathically extracts the locations of all three drug mules from his brain. At her shared apartment, Lucy begins researching her condition and contacts a well-known scientist, Professor Samuel Norman (Morgan Freeman), whose research can 'save' her. After the dialogue between Lucy and the professor (and provides proof of her developed abilities), she flies to Paris and contacts a local police captain, Pierre Del Rio (Amr Waked), to help her find the remaining three packets of the drug. Her powers continue to grow, leaving her able to telepathically incapacitate armed police and members from the Korean drug gang. With the help of Del Rio, Lucy recovers the drug and hurries to meet Professor Norman, with whom she agrees to share everything she now knows,

after he points out that the main point of life is to pass on knowledge, something she now possesses an infinite capacity for. Jang and the mob also want the drug and a gunfight ensues with the French police. In professor's lab, Lucy discusses the nature of time and life and how people's humanity distorts their perceptions. Then she is intravenously injected with the contents of all three remaining bags of CPH4. Her body starts to metamorphose into a black substance, spreading over computers and other objects in the lab, as she transforms these into an unconventionally shaped, next generation supercomputer will contain all of her enhanced knowledge of the universe.

She then begins a space-time journey into the past, eventually reaching the oldest discovered ancestor of mankind, implied to be *Austrolopithecus* ‘Lucy’ and touches fingers with her. At the same time in the lab, Jang enters and points a gun at Lucy's head. He shoots, but in the instant before the bullet strikes, Lucy reaches 100% of her cerebral capacity and disappears within the dimension she was (spacetime continuum), where she explains that everything is connected and existence is only proven through time. Only her clothes and the black supercomputer are left behind. Del Rio enters and shoots Jang. Professor Norman takes a black, monolithic flash drive offered by the advanced supercomputer before the computer disintegrates. Del Rio asks Professor Norman where Lucy is, immediately after which, Del Rio's cell phone sounds and he sees a text message: "I am everywhere".

The plot is certainly catchy, but one of the reasons why the film becomes a good exercise for philosophical reflection is the number of possibilities of analysis that provides. It is so rich, not only by the plot, but by the way it is filmed, by the graphic design, and so many others that raise countless questions. For instance, there are several issues from the point of view of the script and argument and the way that is transported to screen. In an interview Luc Besson said that *Lucy*

was to be like *Léon: the professional*, the second part to be like *Inception* and the third part to be like *2001: A space Odyssey*.[1]

One of the major questions about this film is certainly that one about the brain. Luc Besson is fascinated and intrigued with the brain of 'Lucy', a female *Australopithecus Afarensis*, that is well known of scholars. One of the things that left Luc Besson stunned was the difference of weight between the *Australopitechus* 'Lucy', with a calculated brain of merely 400g, and any actual Lucy with a (normal) weight of around 1,4 kg. Meaning differences of capacities and abilities but still leads us to where we are, that's why we ear «Life was given to us a billion years ago. Now you know what to do with it».

So, this maybe one of the reasons why we see at the beginning and almost at the end of the film (in the space-time travel), references not only to 'Lucy' but to *2001 Odyssey* that Besson states to be the third part of the film; as if 'Lucy' still remains the same ancient Lucy but now full developed. It's the intrigued question of what we are, what we have done so far, and most of all, what are the possibilities whit this brain. It was quite natural that to create a film whit these philosophical questions, Besson had to use one of the most famous myth about the brain: the ten percent myth.

The ten percent of brain myth (myth from the nineteenth century, probably from William James and Boris Sidis (but also attributed to Albert Einstein) states that people only use ten percent of the capacity of the brain; at the same time, it suggests that a person may harness this unused potential and increase intelligence. One must not forget that it is in the nineteenth century that the brain (as organ of human body) is taken as an important object of study, namely after the astounding arrival of Phrenology, by Franz Gall.

[1] Luc Besson Stated in a press note by July, 2014 the following: «this film is extremely visual. It is difficult to describe in words without running the risk of losing or boring the reader. I have come up with a simplified summary, therefore, like a reader's guide, which will conjure up the images in as few words as possible: the beginning is *Leon The Professional*; the middle is *Inception*; the end is *2001: A Space Odyssey*. Don't interpret this as pretention on my part, merely a visual, emotional and philosophical point of reference».

Primarily focused on the human skull and stating that the brain is the organ of the mind, soon established that certain brain areas give the clear understanding of some specific functions.[2] Probably, and this is a mere speculation, it was here that really starts the huge mistake between brain functions and mental activity, and that goes along to the ten percent of brain myth.

2. The enhancement of humanity and the post-humanism after Nietzsche

The problem is that it is suggested that the enhancement of the brain potentiate mind and it seems that the brain could be a screen where everything takes place. Possible reflections about what can be the mind and the role of brain in human nature are already compromised because imposes on the brain all the mental activity. A major question rises here: if mind is the result of brain activity according to *Lucy*, why is this thesis so wrong?

One of the questions delivered by *Lucy* is that one about the possibility of the neuro-enhancement. In fact – and we should say it clearly –, this is a point where fiction meets reality. Human enhancement can be defined as the use of technological means to select or alter human characteristics and capacities, whether or not the alteration results in characteristics and capacities that lie beyond the existing human range. It started as a way of treating illness and disability, but it jumps to the process of enhancing human characteristics and capacities by the use of different technologies such as biotechnology, human genetic engineering, neural implants, use of drugs (specially from pharmacology), prosthetics,

[2] In 1809 Gall began writing his principal work *"The Anatomy and Physiology of the Nervous System in General, and of the Brain in Particular, with Observations upon the possibility of ascertaining the several Intellectual and Moral Dispositions of Man and Animal, by the configuration of their Heads* (it was not published until 1819). In the introduction to this main work, Gall makes the following statement in regard to his doctrinal principles of that will became known as phrenology: "the brain is the organ of the mind". See Lyons, Sherrie L. (2009), *Species, Serpents, Spirits, and Skulls: Science at the Margins in the Victorian Age*. Albany: New York Press.

neuro-stimulation, gene-therapy, and so many others that search to improve human performance.[3]

This theme it is not new as we all know. Since Friedrich Nietzsche that emerges the possibility of a new man. Well, there are several readings of Nietzsche's philosophy, and his writings are not particularly clear about the arrival of a new man: if it is a new moral man and a new biological one. This is a sensible question: in his work, *the will to power*, Nietzsche seems to give an approach of the biological importance of the new man by saying, in a Darwinian way that only the wealthy man can be able to deal with the challenges of life, that is, to survive. Truly, what Nietzsche was looking was the *Übermensch*, that is, a new man with new values, that can exceed the ordinary man, but this is by itself a utopian view of humanity and Nietzsche knows it (in *Thus Spoke Zarathusta* the philosopher ends the book by saying "mediocre man eternally returns").

In the novel of Aldous Huxley, *Brave New World* (published in 1932) we see some sort of materialization of human enhancement through the use of advanced technology that generates a happy and peaceful global society (set in dystopian London of AD 2540 – according to Gregorian calendar –, the novel anticipates developments in biotechnologies, reproductive technology, sleep-learning, psychological manipulation and classical conditioning that are profoundly combine to change society). Well, the fact is that, like in *The Republic* of Plato, there are different classes or casts. From birth, people are genetically designed to fit into one of five castes, which are further split into 'Plus' and 'Minus' members and designed to fulfil predetermined positions within the social and economic strata of the World State.

The peaceful and stable global society, where the population is permanently limited to no more than two billion people, which means that goods and resources are plentiful for everyone to be happy, gives rise to a dark side of this perfect world: the mysterious use of biotechnology

[3] See for example: Roco, Mihail C., &, Bainbdrige, William Sims (eds), (2004), *Converging Techonologies for Improving Human Performance*. London: Springer; Parens, Erik (2000), *Enhancing Human Traits: Ethical and Social Implications*. Georgetown: Georgetown University Press.

to control population. Natural reproduction has been done away with and children are created, 'decanted', and raised in 'hatcheries and conditioning centres'. But if this book gives us a way of studying the utopian human enhancement, is in the *Doors of Perception* (first published in 1954),[4] that we find eco of the of *Lucy* experiences.

Huxley writes about experiences when taking a psychedelic drug, in the specific case, mescaline. Huxley recalls the insights he experienced, which range from the "purely aesthetic" to "sacramental vision". After this, he will also incorporates later reflections on the experience and its meaning for art and religion that was something experienced by some other intellectuals and artists (we already saw that about drinks and other drugs from Balzac, Baudelaire, Oscar Wilde, Sartre, etc.). Well, the use of mescaline has been used in native American religious ceremonies for thousands of years.

In the case of *Lucy*, we see the perfect use of a drug to enhance the capacities of brain and therefore, the performance of mind. She began to see more clearly the connections, the relations between things, to see the nature of things, and to experience the real capacity of mind, namely to stop time and to act upon material world (which the deeply desire of those who believed in such powers of mind, not only in scientific ways but religious ones). Then she achieved the one hundred percent capacity and happens another cultural belief established from the early and ancient civilizations: the dematerialization of matter to some sort of spiritual being. In the case of *Lucy*, there also an intriguing aspect: *Lucy* changes into a black matter.

This (called) black matter that also it will be partially incorporate in a supercomputer capable of deliver a pen with all the knowledge, remind us, that in every utopian dream, there is also a dark side, and that in that side, we have to deal with the god and bad nature of humanity. Also, interesting: Besson seems to be aware of the importance of the theme

[4] *See* Huxley, Aldous (1954), *The Doors of Perception*, New York: Harper and Brothers.

(in philosophy of mind what is known one as the mind-body problem) and the question of artificial intelligence.

3. About the mind and the brain. *Lucy* or why the brain cannot be a screen

We already saw (in zombies) the major problems in philosophy of mind. The true is that physicalists maintain various positions on the prospects of reducing mental properties to physical properties, and the ontological status of such mental properties remains unclear. One example of this is the position of Hilary Putnam has also adopted the position that the mind-body problem is an illusory problem which should be dissolved according to what Wittgenstein stated decades ago. Well, one must not forget some of the idealists: that the mind is all that exists and that the external world is either mental itself, or an illusion created by the mind.

Now, with this general vision of the philosophy of the mind and the mind-body problem, we are in conditions of regarding a different approach by John Searle that we can understand through a simple question: can computers think or, can they have a thing such as a mind? This question has been propelled into the forefront of much philosophical debate because of investigations in the field of artificial intelligence. John Searle coined in the field of philosophy of mind a distinction between Artificial Intelligence in terms of a weak artificial intelligence and a strong artificial intelligence (AI). The exclusive objective of "weak AI", according to Searle, is the successful simulation of mental states, with no attempt to make computers become conscious.[5] With strong AI, on the contrary, is a computer with consciousness similar to that of human beings. Well, Searle is recovering an ancient proposal of the pioneer of computation, Alan Turing. The famous Turing test searches to answer to the fundamental question of “can computers think?”.

[5] *Cf*. Searle, John (1980), «Minds, Brains and Programs», in. *The Behavioral and Brain Sciences* (3): 417–424.

After several experiences of Turing tests,[6] Searle developed an experiment called “the Chinese Room”, which as a similar logic, but that allows him to refute the argument of strong AI.[7] These themes have longer discussions and we cannot do it here. The question about the possible sensitivity, mental experiences (*qualia*) of computers or robots still remains open and new films will be continuing to explore this theme.

After seeing the main theories and arguments of philosophy of mind, we are now in conditions of returning to *Lucy*. So, what’s wrong in the movie? Well, first of all, there is a huge mistake by the way in which the brain is presented, that is, with a confusion between characteristics of mind and brain. In fact, it seems, almost, that we are talking about the same thing, and that is not definitely the case. In the film we can considerer the so called the neural correlate.

A neural correlate of a content of experience is any bodily component, such as an electro-neuro-biological state or the state assumed by some biophysical subsystem of the brain, whose presence necessarily and regularly correlates with such a specific content of experience, which in the case means a specific mental content. When the ontological consistence of the mind is established in a way that we may see at least that brain states generate those, we are in presence of neural correlate. In the movie we feel that the confusion created can lead the spectator to this sort of neural paradigm. Another way of using this model is saying that a neural correlate can encompassing the production of mental content but not of consciousness.

Anyway, the problem still remains and in *Lucy*’s it is not clear how to deal with those issues of philosophy of mind. But the most disturbing ‘thought’ of the film is the premise established as a leitmotiv: “the ten percent brain myth”. The problem as we all know by now; it is the word brain used

[6] For Turing, a computer can be said to "think" when, if placed in a room by itself next to another room that contained a human being and with the same questions being asked of both the computer and the human being by a third party, the computer's responses turned out to be indistinguishable from those of the human. The Turing test has received many criticisms namely by John Searle.

[7] The Chinese room is a thought experiment presented by Searle to challenge the claim that it is possible for a computer running a program to have some kind (simulation of) a "mind" and "consciousness”, in the same sense that people do, simply by virtue of running the right program. The experiment is intended to help refute a philosophical position that Searle named "strong AI".

instead of mind. What really should be said is mind. It is the mind that can be enhanced not the brain, or is it not?! From recent discoveries, we know that the brain is totally in connection with himself. The brain works totally at the same time, even there are some areas with more activity, the remaining areas of the brain are also working. So, as in some currents of orient philosophy, what they try to achieve is to enhance mind. But let's continue this reflection.

Another possible reading that also gives raise to some important questions is to see the brain as a screen where everything takes place. Again, the same problem, but this time we should go a further along with this question but entering in the heart of philosophical question, by the view of Deleuze studies.

Deleuze sees something interesting in the two ways of thinking or viewing the world, some sort of parallel perspective from cinema and philosophy: if philosophy brings movement to thought and cinema brings movement to image. So, by this he says that if there is a model, that model should be that one of the biology of the brain:

> The brain is unity. The brain is the screen. I don't believe that linguistics and psychoanalysis offer a great deal to the cinema. On the contrary, the biology of the brain — molecular biology — does. Thought is molecular. Molecular speeds make up the slow beings that we are. (…) The circuits and linkages of the brain don't pre-exist the stimuli, corpuscles, and particles that trace them. (…) Cinema, precisely because it puts the image in motion, or rather endows the image with self-motion, never stops tracing the circuits of the brain (Flaxman, 2000: 37).

At the end of *What is Philosophy*? entitled "From Chaos to the Brain", Deleuze and Guattari state that the brain is central to not only philosophy, but also art and science. Together they are three aspects under which a brain becomes subject, a "thought-brain" (Deleuze & Guattari 1994: 210).

According to them, it is the brain that thinks in the “I conceive” of philosophy, the “I feel or perceive” of art and the “I know or I function” of science (in all these domains the brain confronts chaos).

The understanding of ‘Chaos’ should be seen at the level of both the vastness of the universe and the microscopic (and smaller) level of the atoms.[8] In creating and dealing with thoughts, philosophy, art and science refer back to chaos rendered consistent, like a mental “chaosmos” (then they argue that chaos however, are not the biggest struggle but ‘opinion’; we would say that they are recovering something from Spinoza about the influence of opinion in the construction of knowledge). We see clearly the influence of the work of Münsterberg when the conclusion is that the brain is the junction (not unity) of the three.

In *The Reality of Illusion* by Joseph Anderson, we have a different approach to cognitive film theory. Anderson is inspired by the biological organisation of the brain (and the modulations) and changes that take place into the brain in perception and cognition. So, for him one of the problems in film theory addresses the question of reality or illusory characteristics of the film image. In the history of cinema, we have two opposite schools of thought: one, that comes from Bazin and Kracauer, where film is seen as the perfect realistic form of art, and the other, from Metz and Eisenstein, where film is considered to be the ultimate perfect illusory or artificial form of art. Anderson takes the Necker cube to see whether this can shed a new light on the problem. The Necker cube is a visual illusion: when you stare at the wire frame model of a cube for a while, the cube seems to flip its orientation between two interpretations of the picture. Anderson relates this to film viewing, saying that:

[8] Deleuze calls the plane of immanence (matter-flow of images). In the book *Cinema 1: The Movement-Image,* he says: «It is rather a gaseous state. Me, my body, are rather a set of molecules and atoms which are constantly renewed. Can I even speak of atoms? They are not distinct from worlds, from interatomic influences. It is a state too hot for one to be able to distinguish solid bodies in it. It is a world of universal variation, of universal undulation, universal rippling». Deleuze, 1986: 58.

> It is not a matter of being in a semihypnotic state in a darkened theatre. It is not a matter of suspending disbelief. It is not a matter of being 'positioned' as a spectator or 'sutured' into a text, and it has nothing to do with dreaming. It is instead our perceptual system alternating between two incompatible sets of information (a three-dimensional world or a flat screen with shadows on it) (Anderson, 1997: 48).

To summarize we may say that the visual system sees, the cortex interprets, but in this amazing process there is always the possibility of illusion, in which «the system follows its own internal structures, but arrives at a percept that is in error if compared to physical reality» (Anderson 1997: 20).

What is being said is that the experience of film viewing is some sort of illusion, but nevertheless one that triggers the activation of information within the neo-cortex, which allows us not only to see, but also to understand, learn from and interpret visual information. What Anderson is telling us is that the way it works the perception of reality is quite similar to the way it works the illusory perception of reality in cinema. We may think that this was what the representative of the formative theory (which gives the film the importance of form and aesthetics), Hugo Münsterberg was looking for. in his famous and unique written, *The Photoplay: A Psychological Study* (1916), was the first to associate the human mind with the cinema.

For Münsterberg the human mind is in fact the substance of the films, and therefore films should translate mental events. Münsterberg be a neo-Kantian, naturally reflected critically on the experience of watching the movie and the beautiful (for example: when it states that attention is a mental act that organizes the chaos of impressions, Kant plays on the originally synthetic unity of perception).

Another interesting appointment from the biology of the brain that demonstrates the similarity between the perception of reality and the perception of film is the so-called 'mirror-neuron'. Mirror-neurons are fired when we actually do something, but the same

neurons are also fired when we see (or hear) somebody doing something. It is assumed that for the brain there is no difference between seeing someone in reality or seeing someone on film (which is quite disturbing). When we are seeing something in a film, the same brain areas are fired to imitate the perceived actions or feelings. This means that images have an internal power that creates certain effects in the brain.

Antonio Damasio in his book's states that neural patterns and corresponding mental projections of objects and events outside the brain are creations of the brain that are related to the reality that causes these creations, but not a passive reflection of this reality. The role of environment cannot be dismissed in the construction of the images we form. But this thesis about Mirror-neurons and the way in which the brain is affected by images can give insights into the implications not only of Deleuze's "the brain is the screen" for film theory, but also for the *Lucy* tagline, the ten percent brain myth.

We are not saying that this might not be the correct way of thinking about the biological running of the brain and the way it sees reality or illusion, but the way that it is used and reduce the reality of mental life of man to a purely physical or biological matter. In fact, it can be the case that mind could have nothing to do with brain, and in this sense the brain can never be a screen.

What we can say is that it is in the mind that everything takes place, and unfortunately, we are not in conditions to prove it, unless we use the cinema: when *Lucy* metamorphoses into that black matter and then enters the computer, and after delivers the pen to professor Norman and disappear, leaving only some dust, it is the mind that is represented, some kind of spiritual entity, because matter it is only dust (maybe a religious view of Besson beliefs can be made here). It is using the powers of mind that Lucy 'sees' things, that she disarms the Mr. Jang gangs. So, we are dealing with a film that is entertaining, that uses the urban ten percent brain myth but that can never deliver us the true meaning of what could happens if your mind could reach the hundred percent.

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Viktor Navorski and Sir Alfred:

the limits of consciousness at the border of chaos

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V. Viktor Navorski and Sir Alfred: the limits of consciousness at the border of chaos

What is a man but a congress of nations?

Ralph Waldo Emerson

1. About *the terminal*, Locke and Lipovetsky

Viktor Navorski is the name of the character played by Tom Hanks in the film directed by Steven Spielberg, *The Terminal* (2004). The film narrates the story of a man who travels to New York and during the trip, his country, the fictitious Krakozhia, undergoes a revolutionary coup and the passport is no longer valid. The character is retained in John F. Kennedy Airport during 9 months. In 1988 the Iranian Merhan Karimi Nasseri is a refugee seeking entry in Europe, after being persecuted and tortured by the Iranian secret police, Savak. On November 16, he presents himself at the counters of British Airways in Paris for London destination, without any document, claiming it to have been stolen and ends up boarding the plane. Arriving in London he is immediately returned to Paris. He cannot get in any of these two countries and ends up living in Terminal one of Charles De Gaulle Airport for 18 years. Nasseri would be known as Sir Alfred. Between fiction and reality, we feel that the limits of consciousness of these characters are echoed at the very border of chaos, that is, at the border of memory/ amnesia, either for his defense before the legal restrictions, either as structuring source of meaning in the chaos of their lives, and that is what we will argue.

The Terminal, it is not just another sweet movie, a family movie that people watch on a couch on a rainy weekend instead of going to a mall. It is not just another movie with a melodramatic effect so characteristic of Spielberg style, like *Jaws* (1975), *E.T. the Extra-terrestrial* (1982),

Schindler's List (1993), *Jurassic Park* (1993), *Saving Private Ryan* (1998) or *War of the World's* (2005), in which we see this kind of mixture between innocence and revenge, a continuous fight between good and evil, the two forces violently contending, where good always wins.[1] This movie is quite different.

In fact, *The Terminal* is an American comedy-drama film directed by Steven Spielberg in 2004 that raises important and interesting questions from the point of view of philosophical reflexion. From the different issues that arise, in particular, concerning the moral and ethical questions such as sympathy, compassion or the lack of it, concerning political or judicial authority to prevent or restrict individual freedom, are the issues around identity, space and time that are on the list to be addressed about this movie.

One of the questions that arises after seeing the film is the status of the person. This does not mean to see the person's status from a legal point of view (which is not the purpose of this essay), but from a philosophical point of view, which means in a few words, seek to determine the status of the person represented by Viktor Navorski. In this sense, and as we know, the identity of the person coincides with what the person is, and in the case of Navorski that should be taken as a philosophical postulate in the way Locke thinks of it.

A person, Locke tells us, is a "thinking intelligent being, that has reason and reflection, and can consider itself as itself, the same thinking thing in different times and places". (Locke, 1975: 335). This may seem a mere definition of person, but it actually brings important references for thinking about the character Viktor Navorski (which is the name of the character played by Tom Hanks). Forgetting for the moment that "reason" is a concept present in all the philosophical tradition from Aristotle to Descartes,

[1] «In his most famous films (*E.T.* [1982], *Jurassic Park* [1993], *Jaws* [1975]), virtuous protagonists flee from, and eventually triumph over, terrifying villains. In *E.T.*, an alien from outer space, assisted by a brave boy, escapes from a variety of faceless adult officials (most of the time we see only their legs and flashlights). In *Jaws*, three men fight an enormous shark. In *Jurassic Park*, two children successfully escape the jaws of a T-Rex and a pair of velociraptors. Asked to describe his 2005 film *War of the Worlds*, Spielberg told an interviewer: "It's about a family trying to survive and stay together, and they are surrounded by the most epically horrendous events you could possibly imagine". The formula for many of Spielberg's most famous films is innocence in great jeopardy. Normally, innocence is represented by children and their families» (Kowalski, 2008, 7-8).

one of those references must be for the case, the notion of reflection. We should say that one of the characteristics of identity (as an attribute for persons) is that one where we are aware from the inside of our thoughts, that is, subjectively (thoughts, perceptions, and experiences, counting as our own). As Locke puts it, it is “impossible for anyone to perceive, without perceiving, that he does perceive” (Locke, 1975: 335). Consciousness, Locke’s preferred term for this second-order awareness – which he notes “always accompanies thinking” (Locke, 1975: 335) – is what allows persons to recognize themselves as selves. The Navorski that took a plane in Krakozhia is the same Navorski reflecting on the impossibility of leaving the airport. It is the same person who will use cross-cultural amnesia as a safety device or mechanism for his identity and time (as we shall see).

In fact, Navorski can take here a double role: is the character-subject (subjectivity) and the character that represents the (somehow) lost people of hyper-modernity (like Gilles Lipovetsky pointed out). Individuals living in different rhythms, in different levels of perception and illusion may come together to their lives. In this sense, they live unexpected experiences concerning life, like the one lived by Viktor Navorski in the John F. Kennedy terminal airport. But we must make a brief presentation of the film's plot to understand what is in question.

The film narrates the story of a man – Viktor Navorski –, who travels to New York and during the trip, his country, the fictitious Krakozhia, undergoes a revolutionary coup and his passport is no longer valid. Navorski is at the airport and does not understand almost any word of English and cannot therefore, understand what is happening in his country. It is only after a few minutes of the film, that we see a man crying which is when Viktor sees the news at the television screen about Krakozhia. This news ends abruptly and suddenly begins a commercial with the announce of a boat saying “would you like to have a boat with twenty-seven metres long?” Probably many viewers do not

take these few seconds of the film to recognize this subtle change, but it is precisely here that lies much of the meaning of hyper-modernity.

The advertising in the movie is functioning as a metaphor for the hyper-power, the hyper-consumption, the hyper-narcissism that rules the world these days. This is more than just the commodity fetishism that Marx had already spoken; this is the void of meaning, the emptiness of human meaning for life. And also, this reminds us about the indifference in the world we live in. But there is more. In another episode, after a few minutes, we see again the character watching the news and it is said something like...«since the 80's and 90's that Krakozhia live in an instable period since it independence».

This is not only a mere melodramatic effect to create sympathy with Viktor Navorski, this is also the vision of the western countries – or should we say, the vision of the United States – about the ancient countries of Soviet Union; it is the perspective that media disseminated of those countries, and the difficult transition to a democratic regime. We should all look, for this purpose, at the fabulous documentary of Boris Malagurski "The weight of chains", about the no longer existing Yugoslavia.

So, how can we understand the feelings of the character Navorski? Or even better, how can we understand the phenomenon of subjectivity in modern society through *the terminal*? First of all, we can see, more than just a metaphor of the *homo viator*, a metaphor of the void installed at the hearts of contemporary men's lives. It seems that man survive in a mechanical way, travelling, landing, doing business, travelling, getting home, travelling, etc., that is, living like a zombie, living a non-life. In fact, the permanent battle for success, the everlasting purpose to achieve goals, creates a man full of loneliness, and at the same time, a man who lives in a pursuit of happiness. Like Gilles Lipovetsky remember us, this is the time of the happiness paradox, that is, never men have so much and felt so unhappy, which means that man never had a time like this where he can have everything, where he has the conditions to have and do everything, but steel not feeling happy.

The movie shows in a general way this kind of men, but it also shows Viktor Navorski, which is the man who wants to pursuit a (romantic) dream, that we only understand at the end of the movie, when it is reveal the purpose of the travel to New York: to have the signature of one of the idols father. But as we seen happen to all romantic men, reality insists to impose itself. When Viktor Navorski is prevented from entering the country, it is not only the lesson that romantic people must come down to earth, it is also the hard lesson of the American dream that fades away, at least to those who do not meet the United States requirements.

2. Being someone at a non-place

According to what has been said so far, can subjectivity have a place in this scenario? Can a place like an airport be somehow familiar, be something that we might even call home, that is, and using the perspective of Marc Augé, how can a non-place become a place? There is no intrinsic meaning to look for, and yet, in *The Terminal* (film) under the right conditions, even non-places can become places. How can this be? The apparent contradiction is placed according to the premise that a place is not arbitrary and that it is somehow symbolically permanent. However, nothing is hermeneutically ruined that cannot (re)establish itself, and places are no longer stables as they used to be. Well, we must understand that Marc Augé is also telling us about a major phenomenon that he calls super modernity or over-modernity (Augé, 1995: 75-79). The author claims the airport terminal to be some kind of quintessential non-place, since according to him, is a place which has exhausted its symbolic force, crushed by the emergency of meaning that points to a bigger outside; after all this non-place is a suspension point, a perennial deferral in travel, a place of transit.[2] Though, at the same time

[2] John Urry tell us some criticism outlined about Marc Augé application of the concept of non-places to airports: "First, even airspaces are less distinct as places and share many characteristics in common, there are various ways in which airspaces are nevertheless different from each other and where they are not characterized solely by a 'solitary contractuality'. Second, this claim that airports are non-places rests upon a far too sedentarist notion of place as though 'places' are given and unchanging and share no characteristics with airspaces. Rather what is striking is how places are increasingly like airports. (...) Airspaces are places of material organization and considerable social complexity. They are not simply 'non-places'". (Urry, 2007: 147).

these non-places are places where people cohabit without living together, and they create a kind of uninformed and unconscious contract where everybody is polite. For instance, we can imagine the same scenario when people go to a church in a foreign country and share the same space, the same statement of belief and feel that it is among nice people.

So, for our character as it is for most of us, an airport is at the same time a no-man's-land and the most familiar place (or at least they are design as such, like Iyer says), a strange mixture of time and place, where everything is in the right place so that we can feel a familiar connection with space:

> A modern airport is based on the assumption that everyone's from somewhere else, and so in need of something he can recognize to make him feel at home; it becomes, therefore, an anthology of generic places – the shopping mall, the food court, the hotel lobby – which bear the same relation to life, perhaps, that Muzak does to music. There are discos and dental clinics and karaoke bars in airports today; there are peep shows and go-carts tracks and interdenominational chapels. Dallas-Fort Worth International is larger than Manhattan, and Istanbul has a special terminal just to accommodate 'shuttle shoppers' from the former Soviet Union" (Iyer, 2001: 43).

The public space becomes thinkable, becomes a key-concept to analyze contemporary society and public spaces (for instance, see what happens in a mall), as pointed out by Sudjic,

> The airport, alongside the museum, and the shopping mall, is one of the key public spaces that serve to define the contemporary city...It is a surrogate for the public realm, one that offers at least the illusion of a meeting place in which the rich and poor are in closer proximity than almost anywhere else in an increasingly economically segregated world (Sudjic, 1999: 182).

We can see through this quote what is also in the movie, the miscellaneous people that cross an airport, creating a kind of global space, where time is the measure. In this era where everything changes so fast – we should not forget and even call upon the studies of Richard Sennet, Paul Virillio, Gilles Lipovetsky, Zygmunt Bauman among others –, we must recognize that stability is a very useful illusion. In fact, Anthony Giddens, Niklas Luhmann, George Balantier and specially Ullrich Beck speak of the individuation process as a risk society component. Thus, we must say, is ironic and disturbing that face such "acceleration times", before the vertigo of this super modernity, the caption that appears on the movie poster, just below the title is: "life is waiting". It is like a reminder to tell viewers of the film, that beyond any airport terminal, there is a life that awaits us.

3. Reality vs Fiction. Merhan Karimi Nasseri as Sir Alfred

Vicktor Navorski is retained in John F. Kennedy Airport during nine months. If this fiction is credible, reality far surpasses it. In 1988 the Iranian Merhan Karimi Nasseri a refugee seeking entry in Europe, after being persecuted and tortured by the Iranian secret police, Savak. On November 16, he is presented at the counters of British Airways in Paris for London destination, without any document, claiming that he has been stolen and boarding the plane. Arriving in London he is immediately returned to Paris. He cannot get in any of these two countries and ends up living in Terminal 1 of Charles De Gaulle Airport for eighteen years. Nasseri would be known as Sir Alfred. The coincidence between fiction and reality can be understood by the comprehension of consciousness. Between fiction and reality, we feel that the limits of consciousness of these characters are echoed at the very border of amnesia. The question to do is how? First, as his protection before the legal restrictions and secondly, as a way of structuring source of meaning in the chaos of their lives.

Amnesia can be the instrument, the legal instrument that Navorski and Sir Alfred can use. If we look at the definition of Amnesia (from the Greek *ἀμνησία* from ἀ- meaning "without" and *μνήμη* memory), also known as amnestic syndrome, which is a deficit in memory caused by brain damage disease, or psychological trauma. Amnesia can also be caused temporarily by the use of various sedatives and hypnotic drugs; essentially, one could say, amnesia is loss of memory. However, with this sort of knowledge a person may use it for his benefit. like Navorski does when he needs. Let us take a closer look at this essential point to understand how amnesia can be used as a legal instrument.

If, according to the definition of person provided by John Locke, of using the reflection as a way of being aware of himself in different times and places, and knowing that in the original latin *persona* is *per sonare*, that is, a type of mask made to resonate the voice of actor, Navorski is able to use this intelligence resource in his favor. He can be “forgotten” or be “aware” of legislation, like Sir Alfred did or other refugees, when detained for long time.

As we all know, there is in all airports, a so-called international area, which allows the travelers to circulate without any restriction. In this area, identity and nationality can be set in suspension. One of the resources that Sir Alfred had and also the character Navorski, was to use this area and at the same time, to use some sort of amnesia to justify the understanding of laws of the countries where they want to go. At the same time, they use memory as an instrument of salvation. We are not talking about religious salvation but about the use that memory can provide to give meaning to every day at the airport. What is curious here is that we see some kind of reverse Stockholm syndrome happening. Stockholm syndrome or capture-bonding, is a psychological phenomenon in which hostages’ express empathy and sympathy and have positive feelings toward their captors, sometimes to the point of defending and identifying with the captors. The airport where Navorski and Sir Alfred

are kept – and if we may say, they are the hostages, it is curious to observe how the people that work at the airport become captured by them.

In an essay called *The Global Soul* by Pico Iyer (which is about the experience that the author lived about the time he spent in the Los Angeles International Airport), Iyer writes about the place as having all the amenities of a modern metropolis, a mysterious space filled with individuals from all cultures tingling with hopes and dreams, where people have out-of-the-body experiences brought on by jet lag and where strangers reach out to each other with the camaraderie of exhausted travelers with jangled nerves. It is an environment that often strikes us as a mirror of modern ills including bureaucracy, fast-food, consumerism, and free-floating rage that frequently explodes out of impatience.

> Yet in the modern world, which I take to be an International Empire, the sense of home is not just divided, but scattered across the planet, and in the absence of any center at all, people find themselves at sea. Our ads sing of Planet Reebok and Planet Hollywood – even my monthly telephone bill in Japan speaks of "One World One Company" – yet none of us necessarily feels united on a deeper level.
>
> Reflecting on all this, I began to wonder whether a new kind of being might not be coming to light – a citizen of this International Empire – made up of fusions (and confusions) we had not seen before: a "Global Soul" in a less exalted (and more intimate, more vexed) sense than the Emersonian one (Iyer, 2001: 18).

It is as if we find another world inside the world, as if we can see through the Airport all the people in the world (in a way, we can see it since people around the world circulate through airports). There thousands of million people crossing the world every day,[3] from different countries, with different interests, cultures and languages, and where people feel

[3] In the book of John Urry from 2007, he predicted some numbers about passengers; however, it did not count the mass refugees from Syria, Iraq and Libya: "The scale of this travelling is immense. It is predicted that by 2010 there will be at least one billion legal international arrivals each year (compared with 25 million in 1950); there are four million air passengers each day; at any one time 360000 passengers are at any time in flight above the United States, equivalent to a substantial city; 31 million refugees roam the globe". (Urry, 2007: 131).

exposed, vulnerable, anxious, and in no position of demanding anything, like Navorski did in the first few hours. Iyer says that all these people are part of the "global soul" where everywhere is made up of everywhere else. As he said,

> And what complicates the confusions of the Global Soul is that, as fast as we are moving around the world, the world is moving around us; it is not just the individual but the globe with which we're interacting that seems to be in constant flux. So even the man who never leaves home may feel that home is leaving him, as parents, children, lovers scatter around the map, taking pieces of him wherever they go (Iyer, 2001: 27).

According to Iyer, the borders between here and there are collapsing but strangely enough more people than ever have no real sense of home. It is hard to accept this position, especially if you think about the thousands of refugees and therefore, about the way they are forced to leave their home and country. Moreover, Iyer is making his analyses over the frequent passengers, and therefore, it seems he does not think that if everybody is flying, there is always a point of return to home. Even those people who are always flying somewhere, have a place or a non-place (maybe a hotel or a friend's place) that they can call "sweet home".

In the film and as in the particular case of Sir Alfred, the dialectic game between be aware and not knowing, that is, to be conscious or to suffer from amnesia, can be a strategy to deal with the constraints of law (even with the consequences of law). Imagine the following circumstances: if a refugee comes from a dictatorial country and he knows that there is no agreement between that country and the country in which he wants to enter (both countries do not have any kind of diplomatic relations), perhaps the best strategy is to suffer from amnesia. The lack of memory can give him the opportunity of starting a new life. Or maybe just recall what happened to Sir Alfred. We all know that the world is in a constant transformation (and jobs and relationships with it). What we can call home is no longer a clear definition or a safe place. The meaning of global

it is not just about economic globalization, or about climate change but also about the constant change of politicians and politics that are creating relevant social and economic scenarios. It is as if the world were shrinking and yet we cannot feel cut off from its unity.

Our home and home of thousands of species is planet Earth, and we are neglecting the importance of that for our survival. In this context, Narvorski and Sir Alfred are part of the “Global Soul” and at the same time part of the place that they call home, even that due to that they have to be in the border of chaos, in a non-place full of transcultural amnesia

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Alienation and slavery from *Precious*

or what we do not want to see

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VI. Alienation and slavery from *Precious* or what we do not want to see

Our purpose is to establish, in a parallel reading, two films (highly rewarded), namely *The Fence* and *Precious*, that apparently being so different, are an illustration of the reality of life and the modern democratic world: the social uprooting and slavery. If in the movie of Phillip Noyce and Christone Olsen *The Fence*, is told a story of three young Aboriginal girls who are forcibly taken to be transformed into domestic slaves, in the movie of Lee Daniels *Precious*, the young woman is already a servant in her own home and seeks the transformation of her life. Uniting these two stories, we find fundamental elements: illiteracy, ill-treatment, the idea of a migration (real or metaphysical), among others, but whose fundamental notion is the journey. If the film *The Fence*, the fence itself is used to conduct the three young Aboriginal to a real reunion with the family, in *Precious*, the metaphorical 'fence' is the limit of her world. From this interpretation, we will undertake our reflection about what we consider to be the alienation of the modern world and the silence we produce about them.

1. Cinema as a moment: the exclusive experience of feeling film

In the *Invitation to Philosophy*, the Brazilian philosopher Marilena Chauí mentions: "cinema has the extraordinary power, characteristic of the work art, of making the absent present, near the distant, distant the next, intersecting reality and unreality, truth and fantasy, reflection and reverie" (Chauí, 2000:23).

Such a conception leads us to the power that the work of art has to carry, to suggest, to make visible in the absence, to place us before new images. Just as listening to music contributed to the sharpness of the ear (of the musician), cinema contributed to critical reflection, not only of the contents, but also of the art that is the cinema itself.

We can say that cinema as the duty of giving us such more than just soft images of light stories. Cinema should provide a wide reflection, a critical and philosophical reflexion that must be therefore deeper, because as we know Deleuze himself did not know how to explain what a philosophy-cinema should be, leaving us with the open question, as in the end of a film in which we see the philosopher walking away under a sunset, walking towards the horizon, with the sense of accomplishment.

One of the things we must keep in mind about cinema is that it acts on us in totality, that is to say, it not only allows us a certain aesthetic experience, but also raises reflection, aesthetic and/or critical judgment, and emotions. Such emotions are 'felt' in the body and in the mind, and this is an aspect that should also be highlighted (neuroaesthetics and experimental aesthetics are dealing with this major topic).

The analogy of thought as a chain of images or film that would pass through our heads is not quite as original as we might think through António Damásio or Gilles Deleuze. The representative of formative theory (which ttributes to cinema the importance of form and aesthetics), Hugo Munsterberg in his famous and unique writing*, The Photoplay: A Psychological Study* of 1916, was the first to associate the human mind with the cinema (but the idea of images in the mind is older as we known at least from Aristotle).

For Munsterberg the human mind is in fact the substance of films, and therefore, films must translate mental events, that is, human emotions face to all possible realities. Munsterberg, being a neokantian, naturally reflected critically on the experience of watching the film and on the beautiful (as an example: when he mentions that attention constitutes a mental act that organizes chaos of impressions, Kant reproduces about the originally synthetic unity of perception), but what he seeks to answer effectively is: what goes on the viewer's mind when he watches a film? Or, in his own words, "what psychological factors are involved when we watch what happens in the screen? (Carrol, 1996: 63), and, not so much to analyse cinematographic techniques as an analogy of mental (functional)

processes as Noel Carroll believed in his criticism,[1] or the phenomenological approach of Marl Wicclair that reduces the subject to a passive receptacle, dispassionate of any kind of mental experience, whether he is a cinema spectator or not.[2] The analyses of what is the experience of being in the cinema, the experiences of feeling the cinema must be carried out according to the set of experiences that the subjects voluntarily undergo based on the artistic, aesthetic, cultural and cinematographic creation of the presented movie.

Thus, cinema is, if we want to use the well-known expression of Merleau-Ponty, "an object to be perceived". What does such an expression mean? At his 1945 conference, in the Hautes Études Cinématographiques de Paris, entitled "Le cinema et la nouvelle psychologie", Merleau-Ponty highlighted the new kinaesthetic character of perception, considering cinema as a form in motion, a temporal form that would give a lot to think about. This meant, as we know from the author's thought, that we must relearn to see the world around us through what we are: consciences embodied in the chiasm of sensitive.

The French author sees here the point of intersection that interests us: «If, therefore, philosophy and cinema are in agreement, if reflection and technical work proceed in the same direction, this means that the philosopher and the filmmaker have in common a certain way of being, a certain view of the world» (Merleau-Ponty, 1948: 73-74), and, adds the famous phrase: «André Bazin ontology of cinema». Pietro Montani comments on this philosophical connection with cinema that,

[1] It seems that Carrol, in trying to understand the analogy of the German thinker (say that the term is only used by Münsterberg only once in his writing), inserting his functional point of view, ends up formulating his own criticism badly: «for do we really learn about anything by being told that the close-up is an analog to the psychological process of attention when we know so little about the way in which the psychological process of attention operates? And analogies to memory ant to the imagination are on no firmer standing. Analogies to such process have no explanatory force where we have so little grasp of the nature and structure of the mind». (Carrol, 1996: 302).

[2] In fact, although Wicclair wants to establish a parallelism between the experience of consciousness during a moment of attention and the experience of consciousness of viewing images given by cinematographic techniques, he does not seem to have considered that the subject who is involved in an act of attention and the subject who is in the cinema before a close-up, is significantly different. *Cf.* Wicclair, 1978: 39-41.

> the truth is that Bazin, like Merleau-Ponty, is a phenomenologist who realized the ontological bet of the imagination game: the emergence of the image from a 'flow' and a 'reflux', from its constitution as a coming and going of the vision, from things to form and vice versa, from fact to meaning and vice versa. (Montani, 1999: 74)

Now, it seems to us that what is being said here – and unlike the arts before the appearance of the cinema - it is that the cinema kind of "works" the individual in a conscious and committed way. The conscious subject - the viewer - absorbs the film as an experience, as a determined and voluntary moment of its visual and therefore mental enrichment.

Merleau-Ponty's contemporary Jean-Paul Sartre warned, in his youth essay *The Imaginary*, that the images we have in mind would not be mere contents of consciousness but a psychic form, that is, that the incarnate subject would collaborate in the constitution of them. In this sense, cinema becomes an extraordinary field of perception and imagination for the human mind. In other words, cinema is that object to be perceived because it allows a new visibility of the world, or the latent in-visibility of the world in motion, in this experience of “perception of the whole” that is «More natural and more primitive than that of the isolated elements» (Merleau-Ponty, 1948: 62).

According to this point of view, cinema allows the opening to a new ontology of the vision in which there are movements of representation, in which there is a new way of symbolizing thoughts, a new way of making the absent present, and thus of making feel the spectacle of the sensitive world.

Now, in the experience of ‘feeling’ a film, something extraordinary and unique should therefore happen: bringing a vision, a perspective of ‘reality’ felt. But that doesn’t seem to happen. What happens then between the momentary feeling of the film and the confrontation with reality? It was not just the cinema that was transformed: our relationship with the images has metamorphosed in such a way that the feeling provided by cinema is only a moment of the already felt. Mario Perniola helps us with

this purpose. In contemporary society there is an 'exhaustion' of the field of feeling for what is already felt. A kind of *ad infinitum* repetition of what has already been given. He tells us:

> Today, nothing escapes, therefore, when feeling; it is no longer about each particular subjectivity that the burden of being exposed in the first person falls without the protection of this experience. The feeling has acquired an anonymous, impersonal, socialized dimension that demands to be repressed (Perniola, 1993: 13).

A fundamental question then arises: are we dealing with a merely playful-aesthetic phenomenon, that is, the repetitive search for an aesthetic experience in the Nietzshian way of an eternal return to the cinema for a feeling? Thomas Zengotita tells us that we are so 'mediatized' that we can't have a representation of ourselves:

> That way, escapes usyhe most important and disturbing aspect: not only does the image of ourselves not completely belong to us, but even the way we feel it seems in some way strange and, as it were, prefixed. If for the narcissist the world is a mirror in which he looks at himself, the experience of the already felt seems linked to the fact of becoming the mirror in which the world looks. (Perniola, 1993: 19).

2. Two movies, only one reality

What we have as reality seems to present itself in different ways, such as how to access it. Through cinema, reality can be given to us if it is more or less colourful, more or less dramatic, more or less comic, but it is given to us.

With cinema we started to access realities that we did not know, we did not imagine or more simply that we did not seem to want to know, even though we knew of its existence, as in the case of the two films that we are analysing.

What unites two films so different, whether in the genre, in the filming mode, in the cast, in the commercial distribution, etc., is the fact that they tell real stories.

The film, *Precious*, by Lee Daniels, is based on the book *Push* by Sapphire (Ramona Lofton) that tells the story of an illiterate and obese teenager of sixteen years Clarice 'Precious' Jones who lives with her dysfunctional mother in the neighbourhood of Harlem in New York. She is ill-treated daily by her unemployed and social security dependent mother, and she was sexually abused by her father, with her mother's connivance, from the age of three. From these abuses a son with down syndrome was born and ‘Precious’ is pregnant again. It turns out that the author of the novel, Sapphire was also sexually molested by her father at the age of eight. We will be back to *Precious*.

The film *The Fence* of Phillip Noyce and Christine Olsen, is based on the book *Follow the Rabbit-Prof Fence* by Doris Pilkington which tells the story of three young Aboriginal women who are forcibly removed to be turned into domestic slaves in this apparently remote Australia. Early 20th century. It was common practice at that time, for Aboriginal children to be taken from their parents by the federal government or by missionary churches without being educated at the *Moore River Native Settlement*, which was a kind of reformatory. This practice lasted from 1909 until about 1970 and became known as the “stolen generation”. Now, in Doris Pilkington's novel, one of these characters is Moly Craig, Doris's mother, who managed to escape the *Moore River*, traveled over nine weeks and more than 2500 km by the only reference she had, the fence. It should also be noted that Doris Pilkington herself, who was born Nugi Garimara (but the lady responsible for the registration, considered to be a stupid name and renamed her Doris), was also removed at the age of three and a half, as was her sister Annabelle (of who no one never knew the whereabouts) to go to the *Moore River ission*.

Both are award-winning films, although *Precious* largely outperforms *Fencing* (and you can find a lot of information available online) but it is important to remember that these are films that are an illustration of reality, of social history and of life and how the modern democratic world has been erected at the expense of social uprooting, slavery, ignorance, that is, what we do not want to see.

Thus, both in *Precious* and in *The Fence*, we find plans of the characters in which there is a sharp silence that becomes intimidating. The constant tension that is experienced in the escape along the fence does not allow great dialogues, as if to speak meant to denounce its existence.

The silence silences the language, but it does not stop saying. We know it and as well as the directors of both films, who demonstrate that they use this ploy wisely when they keep the characters' expressive stillness and only read their thoughts.

In *Precious* this is taken further with the character's own narrative. It will certainly not be by chance that in many scenes of the film, especially when Clarice 'Precious' is interrogated (either by her mother, teacher or other person), we see close-ups of her face, and although her lips remain sealed and she does not respond, the viewer is invited to follow her thoughts by the constant narration that the character does.

In fact, in these plans (close-ups), the character's face remains singularly expressionless, so the viewer is guided not only by the narrated words that emerge from his thought but also by the daydream images that Clarice 'Precious' shows, when she dreams of being a star or a desired, loved woman. This dream that the viewer is invited to see, seeks the exploration of Clarice's inner-self as an escape from the repetitive trivialization of the mistreatment caused by her mother or by the sexual acts perpetrated by her father. We can thus say that the character's inner monologue, which the viewer has access to through her narration (the director presents the dream images of her thought and her words), is much more valuable than the few words she expresses in dialogue with others characters.

It should be noted also the silences in the film. The silence in which the director places Clarice ‘Precious’ reveals not only the psychological tension of the character but also a certain ontological need for the discourse. It also happens that silence is the perfect analogy, the ideal metaphor for what we refuse to talk about: what we don't want to see and what we see unintentionally and we don't talk about either. And we don't want to see the reality that *Precious* gives us, we don't want to see that reality that can be on the floor next to us, in our building, or in our block, as in the reports of kidnappings or family sexual abuse that has been going public in recent months. And we do not want to recall the historical facts with which a nation is built.

However, the journey of our characters is still a silent one. Speaking is also denouncing and we denounce when we are emotionally committed to a situation of injustice. Now, if cinema, alongside other arts, denounces these silences, carriers of what are situations of extreme violence, why does the viewer decide to remain silent after contact with them? How can we not speak of the silence of others, of those who suffer?

There is, therefore, something absurdly unsettling in the silence. Whether in *Precious* or in *The Fence*, the absurd voices of silence are transmuted into a generalized alienation.

3. The paradox of precious silence or what we don't want to see

Throughout our reflection we are thus led to what seems to be a paradox about silence. In fact, silence revolves around those who have suffered and those who have not suffered, remain silent. Is silence the form of spiritual redemption in the modern society we have built? In fact, there is something strangely unsettling about the success of the film *Precious*.

We would dare to say that it would be a kind of symbolic atonement regarding the state of affairs in the world, as if mere visualization allowed

and altered social reality. In this crude way of visual redemption, the words of John Berger resound in the background when referring to Picasso's blue period, he sarcastically referred “because it treats the subject of the poor pathetically, it was always the favourite for the rich” (Berger, 1989: 3).

In support of the truth, Precious is perhaps one of those films that, because it is so credible to reality, can only be silent, and in this absence of ‘noise, present the alienated dimension of contemporary society.

The situation of the main character moves us and bothers us because she is a carrier of a real dimension, I mean, we know it happens. We feel compassion and sympathy for the poor young woman and the events she is going through. But do we denounce? No. No, because accommodation to violence is part of our alienation. Olivier Mongin says:

> The images of violence are as if exposed in a cinematographic laboratory where they parade to infinity, as if they put on stage a strange world, our world, this world with which we wanted to "have nothing to do". Seeing violence in order to better isolate itself from it does not mean converting it: this attitude does not correspond to the experience of catharsis, which is, inseparable from the experience of a look that accepts to be tested by the spectacle it attends. Here we are in violence but out of the show, out of play. Desensitization does not correspond to a purification of the fright produced by the violence of images, it is rather the invention of an absent, “suspended” subject, under the cover of his own violence and that of the world, it is a production of a subject who looks at violence imagined in the laboratory, an in vitro violence that does not (or no longer) concern you, a subject who moves away from a world he is too afraid of. Of course, a subject who is no longer a subject (Mongin,1998: 174).

The reality in which the subject lives is not consistent with the complaint and remains silent. If the denunciation was a speech, a manifestation, the paradox of silence lives in the heart of society. This alienation, as Marx had already warned, has several forms, but it also

gains other forms concealed either by the overwhelming rhythm that modern life instils as the establishment of the paradigm of achievement (professional, personal, etc.) or satisfaction (see leisure and entertainment industries that explore different paradigms) or by the de-subjectivation of relational experiences and experiences where the dispersed, the discontinuous, the defragmentation of temporality, instants, emotions, lives, which continually impoverish the human being and it generates a time without memory, as Walter Benjamin warned a few decades ago. José Jiménez points out as a cause (among others) for this de-identification of the experience, the fact that we are «many things at the same time, but not always in continuity with each other, often in a diluted or dispersed way and, usually, not in a full but *fragmentary* way. This is the time for *the plurality, the discontinuity, the dispersion, the fragment*". (Jiménez, 1997: 22).

We are facing a modern alienation that can be translated into passivity, or rather an inter-passivity to be faithful to Žižek. This notion of the Slovenian philosopher, translates the following reasoning: it happens that we deposit our actions in another, that is, what Žižek classifies as a subject-supposed-to enjoy and believe, even if those actions imply our enjoyment, our satisfaction, or even our achievement.

Žižek provides countless examples (for the subject-supposed-to-enjoy and for the subject-supposed-to-believe), be it the shows with pre-recorded laughs in which this other one laughs for me, or the fetishism of the merchandise that encourages to believe through Christmas, in Santa Claus.

A small parenthesis opens here: the philosopher goes even further when he says that even in charitable actions, "it is the humanitarian mask that conceals the face of economic exploitation" (Žižek, 2008: 28); when they try to appeal to this streak of conscience of the alienated subject, it makes him believe (among other things) that he is contributing

to the happiness of others, because happiness is also and above all a business.[3]

Now, there is a very explicit example in this interpassivity that Žižek speaks to us and that we cannot fail to mention, and that is the one that Žižek mentions about DVD fans who compulsively record films and end up watching much less films than when there weren't recorders.

> although I don't see movies today, knowing that I've kept them in my video library gives me deep satisfaction and occasionally provides me with the relaxation and enjoyment of the enchanting art of the farmer, as if, in a way, the video device was watching them for me, in my place - the DVD recorder occupies the place of the great Other, it is the medium of symbolic recording (Žižek, 2006: 26-27).

It seems that we are in a register of dissolution of subjectivity itself, in the register of mortgaged intersubjectivity because what is inherent in alienation is to make human relationships clouded (even troubled ones). It is as if each man carried the spectrum of himself, another alienated from us, that invades us and forces us to give up our "most intimate space-time", as Lyotard had said:

> and finally, new technologies now invade public space and common time (invading them in the form of industrial objects of production and consumption, including 'cultural'), at the planetary level; it is, in this way, the most "intimate" space-time, so to speak, in its most "elementary" syntheses that is "assaulted", pursued and, without a doubt, modified by the current state of consciousness (Lyotard, 1997: 55).

The measure of our silence is precious for the maintenance of this generalized alienation. The displacement of the activity of consciousness (perceptive, imagining, etc.) to what has already been

[3] "According to liberal communist ethics, the relentless pursuit of profit is offset by beneficence. Beneficence is the humanitarian mask that conceals the face of economic exploitation. In a super-business blackmail of gigantic proportions, developed countries 'help' the underdeveloped by granting them aid, credits and so on, and thus avoid the fundamental issue, namely their complicity and co-responsibility with regard to the miserable situation underdeveloped countries' (Žižek, 2008: 28).

done, to what has already *been-done-ready-to-consumed*, raises serious doubts about the possible and the achievable, because we are in a kind of hyper-consumption society, in a kind of paradoxical happiness as Lipovetsky suggests in his latest book: never has the contemporary individual reached such a degree of abandonment with such happiness. Although the term happiness is naturally debatable here, it is important to note, however, that alienation is also a frustration that, as in all frustrations, remains silent. Incidentally, we also perceive here the unhappiness of others (theirs suffering) but in no way it affects our life, because as Susan Sontag tells us,

> The frustration that we are unable to do anything about what the images show can translate into an indictment of the indecency in looking at such images, or the indecency in the way in which these images are disseminated - surrounded, as may well be the case, by ads for skin creams, pain medications, off-road jeeps. If we could do something about what the images show, we may not be as interested in these issues (Sontag, 2007: 122).

In this sense, our indifferent frustration in dealing with reality is evident in the film *Precious*. The society in which Clarice 'Precious' lives is the same society in which we live; the thriving Australian society is the same one that committed the silenced atrocity of "stolen generations".

This frustration of feeling is associated with the inoperability of the decision, implied the alienated inter-passivity of modern man: what we do not want to see. A change in the mode of feeling implies a change in the way one sees the world, in the way of living life (and dreams), in the way of being involved in the construction of historical and social reality. Says Perniola:

> Feeling implies wanting to feel: sensitivity, affection, emotion are not comparable to inactive mathematics that is shaped by an ideal and immaterial form. They are born of a decision, they are consolidated

> with practice, they involve work on themselves, an asceticism in the literal and etymological sense of the term, which means precisely exercise. Feeling is selective: we are the ones who establish which doors to open or close. There is nothing spontaneous about this process: learning to feel is equivalent to learning to live. Attention, vigilance, constant application are conditions of feeling (Perniola, 1993: 103).

It is in these words of Perniola that we feel the echo of the hope of the films analysed by us. Whether in *Precious* or in *The Fence*, despite all the silences, the willing to live is always affirmative. The desire to resist, to overcome, to achieve, to undertake the journey is sufficient reason to initiate the change of an alienated state. That's what made Moly Craig in real life escape from *Moore River*; this is what made Doris Pilkington write about this reality; this is what made Sapphire report and assume the condition of thousands of children who were abused and sexually abused by family members. It is that their silence transmuted reality.

And this is where the paradox of silence can be interesting: alienating the alienation of those who remain silent consent. Coming out of silence in silence can be the matter of thought for the complaint. What we don't really want to see is that we don't want to see realities like those narrated in these films. Reverse the order of the situation that becomes a spectacle to be real; inverting the order of frustration into human, interpersonal fulfilment. *Precious* as *The Fence* are the example of the affirmation of life, of the richness of reality over fiction. The film viewer can no longer deny the scope that cinema has introduced in his life, the scope of what he shows. The spectator who embraces reality and denies the indifference of silent frustration will establish vital communication with the world.

The cinema-philosophy that makes you think can be this “ontologie d’aujourd’hui” as Merleau-Ponty said, which is urgent to undertake so that we can see how precious it is to look at the world as the best of all possible worlds.

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Philosophy of time and being
in
Alice through the looking glass

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VII. **Philosophy of time and being in *Alice through the looking glass***

The film *Alice through the looking Glass*, presents not only a reflection on the possibilities of the human mind through the exercise of theimagination, but also a deep and serious reflection on time and in the experience of subjectivity, the experience of feeling and the experience of imagination (even as an awareness process). This means that there are different presentations about time such as duration, the inevitability and irreversibility of time, impossibility and inability to change the time lived, and a series of metaphors that can be used to describe/analyse the temporal experience of existence, which is nothing less than the existential experience of being in time.

In this sense it can be found here Henri Bergson, F. Nietzsche and Martin Heidegger thoughts and it will be from them and with them that it will be made a reading of the experience of time.

According to this, and admitting that humans are the creators of time or the only beings capable of living through time, should not humans be aware of the importance of living a more dignified and more altruist life, as Alice did in the movie? So, the final question is: what lesson can we take from Alice about being and about being in time in Alice? This essay will try to provide some reflections (more than answers) to this challenge.

1. Some initial considerations on *Alice*

Alice through the looking glass, it is one of those movies that does not create consensus among critics (like the ones given in *Rotten Tomatoes* website or *Metacritic*, or the reception given in *The New York Times* or *The Boston Globe*).[1] One of the reasons is that has little to do with what

[1] See: "Alice through the looking glass" (2016), in *Rotten Tomatoes*, 21 January, 2017; "Alice through the looking glass", In *Metacritic*, 27 May, 2016; Stephen Holden, "Review: Alice through the looking glass and a trippy time machine", In *The New York Times*, 3 June 2016; Ty Burr, "Alice through the looking glass is no Wonderland", in *the Boston Globe*, 3 June 2016.

Lewis Carroll had imagined, and therefore, out of the questions that the author had in mind. But it must be said that critics seems to be more concerned with technical or economic details,[2] that with the film as a work of art. In fact, with few exceptions, the critics not even care about any kind of aesthetical details (not to mention the relevance on philosophical and literary questions). So, the argument that Lewis Carroll had imagined other things it is completely wrong. And it is wrong because, on one hand, the main ideas are certainly represented in the dialogues during the all film, and then, because if taking a closer look to the biography of the author, it is seen that he not only study but developed several essays for long time in mathematical and symbolic logic, algebra and probability. It can also be said that Lewis Carroll reflects his complex personality in his writing and therefore, his full imagination ability in the (two) novels. So, it is only natural to see some approaches to philosophical issues and fundamental questions, since there is the abstract terrain in which booth take place (take for instance, the number of dialogues where can be seen the interference of symbolic logic). But for the purpose of this essay, we are concerned to describe and analyse the main philosophical questions – or should we say, the metaphysical and ontological ones –, about being and time.

Alice through the looking glass is an American fantasy film based on the novel written by Lewis Carrol (pseudonym of Charles Lutwidge Dodgon, 1832-1898), a sequel of *Alice in Wonderland*. Directed by James Bobin and produced by Tim Burton, Joe Roth, Suzanne and Jennifer Todd. Once is produced by Tim Burton the aesthetics remain the same as in *Alice in Wonderland*, that is, with scenarios and characters that can find is place in a grotesque and somehow uncanny logic and aesthetic.

[2] For instance, Stephen Whitty wrote on the New York Daily News that the film "hugely expensive and extravagantly stupid" and that, overall, the movie "is just one more silly Hollywood mashup, an innocent fantasy morphed into a noisy would-be blockbuster" (Whitty, 2016). Another example is the words of Matt Zoller Seitz in RogerEbert.com describing the movie as "the most offensive kind of film…one that spends an enormous amount of money yet seems to have nothing on its mind but money. You give it, they take it. And you get nothing in return but assurances that you're seeing magic and wonder" (Seitz, 2016).

The main plot: after returning from the sea, Alice discovers that her ex-fiancé, Hamish Ascot (Leo Bill) has taken over her father's company. He also had made a contract with her mother, Helen Kingsleigh (Lindsay Duncan), exchanging Alice father's ship, "the wonder", for the family home. After a big discussion, Alice runs away, and comes across her butterfly friend Absolem that leads her to an upstairs room. She discovers a magic mirror and find out that she can cross it, and get back to Wonderland. Once she gets there, Alice (Mia Wasikowska) discover that much has changed and there is a grey ambiance in her old friends. The main reason is given to Alice by her friends saying that the Mad Hatter (Johnny Depp) is in danger of life. She decides to talk to him but the Hatter wants the impossible – as we will see further –, and they end up with a big discussing. However, the White Queen (Anne Hathaway) points a dangerous solution: Alice must talk to Time (Sacha Baron Cohen) a very relentless character, and convince him to travel in time, back to past and change the present. And that is why Alice decides in disagreement with Time to still the chronosphere (understodd as the heart of time). In this travel time, Alice also discovers the reason that separated the sisters White Queen and Red Queen or Queen of Hearts (Helena Bonham Carter).

After this adventure and giving back the smile to Hatter, Alice returns to the room and realises that the importance of being in time, that is, the importance of solving past problems can give security for the future. Time travel can be a metaphor for memory, as impossible can be a metaphor for the barriers that everybody builds around conformism. Memory is fundamental to understand the relationship between change and continuity, as we shall see further ahead through the thought of Henri Bergson. In fact, as Alice seems to point out that, impossible can be just a mere justification for inaction, for passivity. Humans are time, and this means that time it is only conceivable with memory and imagination.

2. The impossible and the possible in Alice's time

One of the fundamental concepts of the film in which we can reflect is the concept of impossible. Always present, although not mentioned many times, since the first scene of the film, the impossibility of the ship crossing the shallows and then into the final scene where Alice appears unexpectedly. Remember these two moments. At minute 11:26 when Alice's mother tells her "time is against you, and you're being careless", Alice responds: "I want to believe that I can do six impossible things before breakfast".

Another impressive and important moment, nearly at the end of the movie, the word it is not used but the concept is there. Alice appears in the room where her mother prepares to deliver the ship. And it says in 01:40:42 "I'm afraid but certainly it is not. Time is many things Hamish but it is not money, nor is it our enemy". And to the question "Where did you come from?", Alice replies "I came through the walls". And then Alice's mother rips the contract seeing the importance of "being", that is the importance of being happy with her daughter, the importance of taking life in her own hands, transforming the apparent impossibilities of life into a project for future.

So, what sort of impossible is this? In the specific case of Alice, it is a way of life; it is what people like to call a philosophy of life. The term impossible seems to be a kind of a clash between what can be done and what can be thinkable. For instance, when someone like Alice says that nothing is impossible, they are automatically precluding the possibility of the impossible. In this case, the impossible loses its significance in the realm of the real. It should be noted that we used the word 'real' and not reality. In fact, real may be a construct or a certain mental disposition of the subject to live in reality. Take for example Lacan, for whom reality is symbolic-imaginary, that is, reality is an eminently fantastical construction that helps to face the real. In fact, the concept of the real in Lacan seems to be linked to the impossible, since it occurs in the order of the unqualifiable.

A way to understand the question is throughout the formulation of impossible worlds, and in the history of philosophy can be found some examples. Take David Hume for instance, the concept of impossible cannot be conceived. However, a different approach is possible in Hegel. He says that inconsistencies and logical impossibilities are thinkable. What Hegel was saying (and then many others) is that humans have representational abilities that go beyond the possible, that we can conceive or imagine impossibilities (of course, many of these so-called impossibilities rely on the capacity to imagine concepts such as a centaurs). As Francesco Berto points out for Moritz Schlick "the merely practically impossible is still conceivable, the logically impossible, such as an explicit inconsistency, is simple unthinkable" (Berto, 2013). So, there are different discussions inside the big discussion between possible worlds and impossible ones. Graham Priest is clear about the possibilities of the impossible worlds.[3]

This discussion is long and deserves an appropriate place other than here. In fact, the theme is fascinating and has to do with the amount of (logical) structure such worlds can have. As mentioned, Lewis Carroll was someone who challenges the limits of mathematics, the limits of symbolic logic, and in Alice we find several examples. It is therefore likely that an approach can be made from these impossible worlds.

Returning to the connection between reality, real and impossible, it can be seen in the movie one major example connecting these concepts. It takes place when Alice speaks with the Mad Hatter for the first time. In this dialogue it can be understood the notion of real connecting with impossible. But to understand this point, it should be recall, once again, what Lacan says about the real: "is what is strictly unthinkable". By saying this Lacan is pointing out the evasive character of meaning. Likewise, the impossible enters into the realm of what cannot be symbolized.

[3] "As far as I can see, any of the main theories concerning the nature of possible worlds can be applied equally to impossible worlds: they are existent nonactual entities; they are nonexistent objects; they are constructions out of properties and other universals; they are just certain sets of sentences. … There is, as far as I can see, absolutely no cogent (in particular, non-question-begging) reason to suppose that there is an *ontological* difference between merely possible and impossible worlds" (Priest 1997b: 580–1).

Thus, the real falls in trauma, and therefore cannot be assimilated by the psychic apparatus (it has no possible representation). Putting in different words, the real seems to be what is pure nonsense (in contrast to a certain meaning that fulfill the imaginary, and or the double meaning present in the symbolic).

In the dialogue between Alice and the Hatter, the presence of the impossible and the trauma go side by side. If, on the one hand, the Hatter relives the trauma of losing his parents through the first hat he made when he was a small child founded on the ground, on the other hand, it is Alice who introduces the impossibility at the insistence of the hatter that only she could bring his family back. At minute 22:01 after Alice said an astonishing thing: that it is impossible to bring his family from the past, the Hatter replies: “You are not my Alice”. This sentence it is precisely the opposite of what the Hatter had said when she had rung the bell: “You are you. You are my Alice”. This means that Alice was the one for whom the impossible is impossible, and therefore, capable of impossible tasks. For Alice the impossible is possible, or in another words, the impossible is just another dimension of the possible.

So, if Alice were Alice, as the Hatter thinks, it was impossible to say impossible as an answer. So, he gets angry and expels her from home, saying at the door: “I don’t know who you are. You’re not my Alice. My Alice would believe me”. In this passage, in addition to questioning the principle of identity (A = A), it is offered the theory of the irreversibility of time, hence the impossibility of changing the past.

Alice is aware of the impossibility of time: it cannot be changed, and therefore, past events cannot be modified. It is as if she could agree, for the first time, that there is one impossible thing in life. But this kind of impossibility is soon annulated when the White Queen points the only possible way of changing the past and Alice accepts the dangerous challenge.

For the adventurous Alice, is as if she needs someone to tell her again that there are no impossible tasks. Following this adventure, Alice after the reluctance of Time of giving up the chronopshere, Alice takes a chance and steals it. It should not be forgotten that the sphere is applied here as a metaphor for time: it can be moved by and in itself. But most importantly, by its round shape, is what can move in any direction (even if it is making the contradictory movement on itself) allowing therefore to move backwards and forwards, and so, it can be read as a metaphor for travel time movements (into the past or future).

Alice starts the journey in the chronosphere through the ocean of memories and events. It must be said that in this scene, she is making the only possible travel in time. This means at least two things:

1) that through fantasy and or imagination you not only can travel in time but also can be whatever you want to be;

2) that there is an horizon in which the impossible is dissolved.

Taking from 1) it can be seen that anything is possible, and therefore, 2) is no longer possible, since impossible is impossible in the horizon of all possibilities. This may seem a contradiction at first sight but considering that a double negation is an affirmation, means that, impossible as being impossible in the frame of all possibilities it becomes possible by dissolving itself.

Considering what had been said, one of the reasons why a philosophy of impossible is possible is that anything is possible (even the formulation of impossibilities). To do six impossible things before breakfast is to perform that kind of impossibilities, changing them into possible tasks or things.

3. About time and subjectivity and subjectivity in time

In fact, the notion of time fuses with the notion of subjectivity, and so with the interiority of the subject. If it is within the subject that dreams and fantasies develop, it is also in this interiority that the essence of time can be felt. It is in the realm of inner life as Henri Bergson calls it, that duration can be felt or like he points out through intuition. Thus, the search for and attempt to subvert time in Alice's inner dream turns out to be, in a sense, the experience of duration while retreating into the past to restructure the future.

Alice wants to seize time in her inner purity. It is in this dimension that a certain philosophy of the impossible is felt. As Henri Bergson says change is constitutive of the real, so there is no essence that would remain unchanged, a permanent identity behind the changes. Henri Bergson is trying to say something particular important: we cannot blend space and time. By doing that, that is, taking in consideration our spatial representation; we end up treating states of consciousness as things that occupy place in time. An immediate consequence of this approach is that psychological time is also represented as “ideal where we suppose aligned all past events, present and futures” (Bergson, 1993a, 209).

For the philosopher, time is not some sort of emptiness in which events would happen similar to the idea of empty space in which objects would be placed simultaneously. Henri Bergson states that time understood as succession, continuity, memory, and creation it is not and cannot be separated from events, whether they are psychological or physical. In this sense, time is unique, that is, it is the nature of the infinity of contemporary temporal flows or durations.

Alice, as pointed out already, at the end of the movie knows that it is impossible to change time unless you do it in your imagination. She knows that, like Heidegger knew: the *Dasein* is being on time. Knowing that, Alice is aware, whether at Wonderland or in her dialogue with

her mother (understood here as reality), that existence must be lived in connection with others and that means, specially, to live with-the-others, which also means to take care of others, the Heidegger's central notion of *Sorge* (care or concern).

The *Dasein* which lives as being-in-the-world, builds the experience of living not so much as a recognition of the other but living in the proximity of the welcoming of the other. But even most important is that *Sorge* is the proper ground of existentiality once it belongs at the same time to facticity and existentiality. To say it in other words, or as Rufus Duits puts it: “the unitary ground of the totality of being-in-the-world is the ontological ground of the existentiality of Dasein” (Duits, 2009: 73).

Care is only understood temporally, that is, by making an assessment of what is life (past, present and future), which is nevertheless always unfinished, because the evaluation of the whole of life is only attained in death. The philosopher claims to affirm that with the realization of being-to-death *Dasein* can and should create, manage, build his life by feeling and embracing his “Self”, with his authenticity (ignoring the interpretation that others make of the world, which the public impersonal drags along), hence the subject of care is an urgent and unequivocal task for *Dasein*. Alice embraces the challenge of being in time, the challenge of being among others in the world feeling the movement.

Alice teaches us a lesson that is far greater than a mere confirmation of the importance of time in our lives. Alice warns us of the importance of the impossible in our daily life.

The impossible can be the dimension from which it makes sense to think life, since it is in this dimension that the challenge of living takes its place. Being in time is the ultimate adventure of being alive. If we recall Nietzsche with his eternal return, we realize that Alice is in a sense, the Dionysian and Apollonian figuration of the tragic character. Is to the extent that Alice represents the affirmation of the will to power, and this reaches its highest degree of reflection in the eternal return.

Let us explain: the idea is that one must live this life in such a way that we want to live it again (the eternal return may seem impossible at first but his aesthetical content tells us that). Accepting the will to power means to be able to accept all aspects of duration, all aspects of life, ageing, memories, facts.

As phenomenology teaches us, things can appear in different ways, that is, of how things can be present to a subject (through imagination, memory and in reality). Kant told that and then Sartre, Husserl and others told the same thing; I can have two coins in my hand or I can imagine having two coins in my hand. They both exist but with different degrees of existence. In fact, Alice seems to be living in this limbo at all the time, constantly changing between dimensions. What is amazing in Alice is the way she uses the lived experiences in Wonderland to shape reality. Note: not to give a different shape in his appearance but to shape in his content (that is why Alice wants to do six impossible things before breakfast).

In a certain sense, it can be said that Alice is (somehow) reinventing psychoanalysis; through the experiences lived in the unconscious mind she discovers meanings for the present and futures experiences in real life. In this sense, the philosophy of the impossible takes his higher point: it becomes the matrix of an ethical life. Alice acts and thinks in Wonderland – besides al doubts she expresses to his friends – in an almost ideal or perfect way. She takes in consideration, that is, she respects all living beings, whether they have different degrees of existence, matter or shape. It might be said: it is not just a correct behavior but a way of thinking, a way of acting. It follows that Aesthetics and Ethics, like Wittgenstein mentioned (in the *Tractatus*), are one, and Alice seems to know it. When Alice is acting in full respect for all, she is already defying impossible. This is one of the moral lessons to take from Alice. So, why not to think that it can be done, that it is possible? This issue is completely forgotten among philosophical writers: it seems impossible to act all the time in such a correct – ethical – way, but Alice is just living accordingly

to her philosophy of life. Maybe there is a way of doing a different approach to Ethics. In fact, as it can be seen in Alice, Ethics find his full meaning in Aesthetics. If taking in consideration not only the “beauty” of life but also assuming that every living being has a place and a meaning in the world, it can be structured a way of living a good and fair life (recall for instance Albert Camus about life).

Whether in Wonderland or in reality, – and probably the meaning of life itself –, only can come through the experiences that are entailed with respect, love and admiration between beings. One of the reasons why Alice wants to seize the chronosphere is that she knows she can make the Hatter smile again, that is, she can make the Hatter gain the joy of living again. And this is probably the great lesson of Alice: only those who accept the duration can live with some joy; only those who accept in their memory the aspects of the past can take care of others in the present; only those who can be authentic in time with the others can imagine the future.

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