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Metamorphosing Worlds in the Cinema of the Fantastic

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Juan González Etxeberria,
"Metamorphosing Worlds in the Cinema of the Fantastic"
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Abstract: In his article "Metamorphosing Worlds in the Cinema of the Fantastic" Juan González Etxeberria reads fantastic films as appealing products of both unconscious psychological and institutionalized sociological anxieties. A result of the binary opposition of rhetorical strategies that shaped modern culture, the genre is an open door to other worlds where to dream of uncertainties and to indulge in our traumas. Its transgressive indeterminacy against the Cartesian system is traced from the origin of creative filmic language to postmodern disturbing fantasies about the unknown, having social control and individual free will as the only limits of its imaginary trips across time and space. Technical and financial restraints, on the one hand, and mystical and revolutionary ambitions, on the other, have configured a genre that has lately become an even more polysemic and polymorphic universe, where computer-generated simulations fulfil human desires and seek pleasure through a new vision of the body, a site where natural and cultural orders fade away. Resemblance to actual places or to persons living or dead, especially the latter, is never coincidental.

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Thematic issue *New Studies on the Fantastic in Literature*. Ed. Asunción López-Varela

Juan GONZÁLEZ ETXEBERRIA

Metamorphosing Worlds in the Cinema of the Fantastic

Cinema and psychoanalysis, twin brothers, created innovative images; in fantasy, from the Greek for making visible, their connection crystallized into monsters, from the Latin for warning; monstrous fantasies as a way of cautionary representations of reality established the modern escapist forms of Gothic classics and were continued by the scientific romances written by H.G. Wells between 1895 and 1901. In those years, Sigmund Freud's studies and the Lumière brothers' cinematography broadened human horizons offering not just a factual record of life but an experiential one; film technology made visible the worlds psychoanalysis had located beyond our rational universe. After recording the outside world, the new invention was able to re-create inner fantasies, enlightening reality, "the image is evaluated not according to what it adds to reality but what it reveals of it" (Bazin 28). Free from documentary burden, Georges Méliès explored alternative geographies; his work is not antithetic to the Lumière brothers' films, since they included the first visual transformations. Considering Méliès as a synthesis of their photographic interests and his own creative imagination helps understand that D.W. Griffith (1875-1948) was not the only one who owed him everything and learned from his two cinematic tools, *mise-en-scène* and editing. In Montreuil he built a humorous combination of realism and artistic trickery for *Le Voyage dans la lune* (1902), where physical space and time became fantasy through hand-painted sets and props, the meaningful junction of the different shots, and rudimentary special effects. Designing scenes for the camera and using the optical transitions of cutting, fading and dissolving against the dictatorial natural order proved what seen and unseen meant on screen, among other surprising dramatic effects like the substitution splice.

The Expressionist impossibility of differentiating standard from monstrous creatures and personal from real perception derived into a psychological mood, emphasized with surrealist *mise-en-scène* and subjective camera. Having the self against the natural system meant considering cinema an art, first, because of the author's perspective, and second, because of the purely visual expressions to describe inner life. Extreme angles, distorting lenses and a powerful use of *chiaroscuro* lighting were completed by a dramatically stylized acting and strong makeup to create drawings brought to life, where abstract and concrete, imaginative and real worlds were juxtaposed without transitions thanks to designers' work. Architects, engineers, and painters created Lang's *Metropolis* (1927), "the most important science fiction film since *A Trip to the Moon*" (Mast 156) *Caligary* and *Metropolis* influenced aesthetically and thematically the future horror and science fiction films and UFA's system and workers made a worldwide impression from the beginning, as Clarence G. Badger's film *The Ropin's Fool* (1922) testifies ironically: "If you think this picture's no good, I'll put on a beard and say it was made in Germany: then you'll call it art" (on the horror film, see, e.g., Britton, Lippe, Williams, Wood; Jankovich).

Not immediately appreciated as an art film, Tod Browning's *Freaks* (1932), self-defined as "the most startling horror story of the abnormal and the unwanted," represents a uniquely unpalatable radical reversal, whose grotesque characters expanded the traditional US-American horror of works

such as Irving's *Sleepy Hollow*; Browning's beastly beauties and beautiful beasts cast doubts upon harmonious classical order. Outsiders, like in David Lynch's *The Elephant Man* (1980), highlight the unjust and unreal reduction of human nature to perfect models. A macabre film, *Freaks* created its own subgenre, fascinating dramas where the audience is emotionally captured by what is visually repulsive. The most brilliant scenes of this talkie are silent poetry to be appreciated for the power of truthful images against false words. Nevertheless, verbal language as social norm constitutes an integration tool for those who deviate from society, and an allegory of the nineteenth-century conflict between individual behaviour and group acceptance. From the wedding scene in *Freaks* where the bride is welcomed, "You are one of us," to the moment in *The Elephant Man* when John Merrick shouts, "I'm not an elephant! I'm not an animal! I'm a human being!": being accepted is the subgenre's leitmotif. Social and moral parameters pervade modern fiction and set limits to human behaviour, whose normalcy is preserved in Lynch's work by the numerous characters representing law and order, from masters of ceremonies to directors, doctors, teachers, nurses, watchmen, and royal family members. All of them ignore the outsider's most elementary need, resting, something John Merrick remembers when dying, "I wish I could sleep like normal people."

Standards are despised by mad scientists such as Frankenstein, Jekyll, or Griffin in Wells's *The Invisible Man*, when, driven by Faustian impulse, they transcend natural boundaries and rebel against social norms. Wells's work shows how invisibility offers humans freedom and power, but also provokes problems; tragic destiny leads its main character to destruction since his inhuman violence and lack of restraint collide with his scientific knowledge, rendering his discovery absolutely useless. James Whale's adaptation in 1933 underlined visually a two-sided reality and the difference between the visible and the invisible through the disembodied protagonist voiced by Claude Rains. The English director established cinematic rules as Wells had done for literary science fiction, concentrating on verisimilitude and linking together detailed natural descriptions and fabulous narrations, pointed out as Wells's "two distinguished gifts -- of scientific imagination and of mundane observation" (Raknem 31). Lovecraft's idea of horror as impossibility in a normal world could only be appreciated in visual language if both were convincing, and so Whale's naturalistic approach to the small spot in West Sussex renders the pseudo-scientific experiments more striking. To obtain Barthes's *effet de réel* the fantastic expands the audience's willing suspension of disbelief, and being credible in terms of image, structure and narration causes the voluntary refusal to verify its truth. Bazin's defence of the realistic approach for the successful upside-down turning of the genre implies transmuting fantasies into recognizable images, "To make the extraordinary seem ordinary, and cause the ordinary to seem extraordinary" (Bradbury 41). Rhetorical strategies explain science fiction and popularize its contents; the contrast between the realistic atmosphere and the imaginary threat in *The Invisible Man* is carried out by magnificent lighting effects, allowing fantasy to burst in with real density. John P. Fulton, its special-effects maestro, created visible invisibility printing a composite of up to four different sets of negatives and developing Méliès's use of black velvet; such elements, completed by physical or wire effects and directional camera movements, highlighted the director's meticulous approach to technological aspects, making possible another impossibility, to be known as an individual in the Studio years; his hallmark

was a combination of his visual language and Wells's literary aspirations, "But these stories of mine collected here do not pretend to deal with possible things … They are all fantasies … They have to hold the reader to the end by art and illusion and not by proof and argument" (Philmus 32). Whale's adaptation emphasized popular elements adding a love subplot and moving from the novel's satirical tone to a comic one, including Una O'Connor as the hysterical landlady, and departed partly from Wells, seen as "a danger to society" (Raknem 424) and his "irresistible gravitation towards the unpleasant" (Raknem 29), unacceptable even for the Naughty Nineties, when reading novels was still considered a pleasant activity.

An example of Hollywood's tendency to soften the political and social contents of its literary sources, this adaptation was more concerned about entertainment than fidelity. Wells's broad criticism on Victorian times, influenced by his socialist convictions, insists on dissociating personal ambition and social responsibility, and on substituting divine intervention for scientific experiments, to conclude, "The presumption is that before [man] lies a long future of profound modification, but whether this will be, according to his present ideals, upward or downward, no one can forecast" (Wells, "Zoological Retrogression" 253). In spite of Hollywood evasive efforts, in Sam Goldwyn's words, "If you want to send a message, use Western Union" (Grant 23), ideological readings consider the rise of the middle class as determinant in the genre's birth since fantasies dealt with the clash between the emerging bourgeoisie and aristocracy; Mark Jankovich interprets vampirism as an expression of the dialectics of power struggle in which the symbiotic relationship between old and new privileged classes made both sides feel less responsible for the unhappy outcome. The US-American film industry did not solve these political questions in its Golden Age; a perfect time-machine, cinema undid linear progression and located its artistic source in the Edwardian fiction, Wells included, in the same years that Virginia Woolf attacked it for not being "interested in character in itself; or in the book itself, but in something outside" (99-100). Gullible fantasies based on temporal and spatial adventures perpetuated in Hollywood and respected the Production Code and William Hays's puritanical obsession about moral restrictions in films to avoid showing illegal, immoral, or indecent behaviour, especially if depicting any pleasure or advantage derived from them; after all, money fed its monstrous industry, and so cycles and formulas were repeated *ad nauseam* wishing that what had worked in the past worked again. This way, themes and characters turned into mythologies that shared tone, atmosphere and, most important, a similar beneficial effect, no matter where they came from. Moreover, the genre's self-regarding tendency was increased by Universal horror box-office successes to escape the Great Depression. Sedative and reassuring effects dominated in their natural fluency and perfect balance of plot and style, and kept the dream factory constructing nightmarish subjects and imagery for a screen full of vampires, werewolves and devils that ignored the real threat of confusion, inflation and recession.

Using fantasy as a rhetorical text with a conservative subtext worked, making horror one of the most popular genres. Fusion and fission are its main narrative structures to conceal seduction and abjection; condensing conflicting natures, in the case of Dracula or Frankenstein, or splitting them, from Jekyll and Hyde to the main characters in *Fight Club (*David Fincher, 1999), provide solutions to overcome opposite categories. In the first one, in-between creatures, metamorphosing processes, and

experimental results inhabit a cinematic space ruled by elliptic editing and subordinated to makeup evolution; on the other hand, in space and time fission, mirrors, doubles or clones define identity problems, mainly sexual and social, through the appropriate *mise-en-scène* and a dialogic structure. Fusing or fissioning phobias about the ego and the libido can take any shape, size or number, but they usually follow a classic narrative model where the danger's discovery, confirmation, and confrontation dramatically succeed to underline scientific deficiencies or to punish unlimited ambition. The dichotomous system produces the character's *Doppelgänger*, the richest scheme from Poe's *William Wilson* (1839) and Dostoyevsky's *The Double* (1846), to *Der Student von Prag*, *Der Golem*, or *Metropolis*, making evident that no man can cut himself off his conscience, as Chesterton claimed for Stevenson's work. Pathologically personal, "I once told H.G. Wells and, after reflection, he agreed with my analysis that at least two people struggled inside him, Herbert and George. Bert reacted; George dreamed" (Martin 85); or socially relevant, this technique can express from horror in the indestructible immorality of *Alien* (Ridley Scott, 1979), whose monster's mimetic process would lead to a world inhabited by extensions of the intruder, to the *noir* metaphysic pessimism in *Blade Runner* (Ridley Scott, 1982), the cruellest example of the mirroring pattern where replicants are as unhappy as human beings.

Doubling bodies, giving birth to creatures, fashioning different forms of the self, copying or cloning are just examples of a genre that could have never imagined that in the 1950s political reality would become double; as a consequence, horror and science fiction overlapped to express Cold War, for Fredric Jameson, "a genuine collective paranoia" (Jameson qtd. in Savran 314). McCarthyism and Red Scare politics saw communism as a plague, and films, conceived as its antidote, unfortunately contributed to the massive contagious effects of intolerance among the US-American populace. Despite its general consequences, "The pervasiveness of the Cold War, with its 'atomic cocktail' of political and apocalyptic anxieties, is evident from almost every film made in Hollywood between 1948 and 1962" (Grant 311), and the complexity of films such as *High Noon* (Fred Zinnemann, 1952), *Johnny Guitar* (Nicholas Ray, 1954), or *On the Waterfront* (Elia Kazan, 1954) as interesting readings of the "Better Dead than Red" motto, it is Don Siegel's *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* (1956) the most debatable one, although he clarified some years later that Hollywood was at that time full of pods: his adaptation of Jack Finney's novel is an example of ambivalence and a critique to both totalitarian regimes since it "lent itself to both right- and left-wing readings" (Hoberman 17). Considering movies not as dangerous as McCarthy did and James Forestal proved when, thinking a Red Army was descending from their flying saucers, he jumped out of his window on 11 April 1949, but as cultural symptoms of their age, then, "*Invasion of the Body Snatchers* offered an all-purpose metaphor for the nation's domestic life" (Hoberman 17). The logical desire of US-Americans in the 1950s to reduce their human nature to a vegetative one to survive the unbreathable air contaminating their spirits as well as their bodies explains giving up their soul to gain security and tranquillity. From then onward, nuclear threat was another side effect of the same tension, but this time not inspiring any film as valuable as Siegel's till Kubrick's *Dr. Strangelove* (1964). Futuristic visions surpassed all the limits to assure survival in this planet, *The Day the Earth Stood Still* (Robert Wise, 1951), or in any other, *Rocketship X-M* (Kurt Neumann, 1955); to prepare our Earth from extraterrestrial attacks, *The Thing from Another World*

(Christian Nyby, 1951), more specifically, from Martians in *The War of the Worlds* (Byron Haskin, 1953), magnified ants in *Them!* (Gordon Douglas, 1954), or dinosaurs in *Godzilla, King of the Monsters* (Ishiro Honda, 1954). Enemies were as frightening as to transcend the screen's two dimensions and appeared in 3-D in *Red Planet Mars* (Harry Horner, 1952), *It Came from Outer Space* (Jack Arnold, 1953) or *Gog* (Herbert L. Strock, 1954); all these telescopic visions or the microscopic one in *The Incredible Shrinking Man* (Jack Arnold, 1957), making cinematographically a mountain out of a molehill, were perfect allegories of political reality. From the other side of the Atlantic, Hammer productions offered sequels and re-makes of horror classics, especially from the 1930s successes, repeating proven formulas and adding colour, blood, and sex in a naïve combination that worked since *The Curse of Frankenstein* (Terence Fisher, 1957), thanks to the British character of its leading and supporting actors, as well as its scenery. Nevertheless, the nationalist discourse did not prevent the identification of Britain's biggest hit, the James Bond series, with the most spectacular president of the U.S., John F. Kennedy, and no clear line separated the two English-speaking fantasy traditions for years, especially, with British Alfred Hitchcock working in the USA since the 1940s, and US-American Stanley Kubrick moving to the United Kingdom after *Lolita* (1962). They made the genre forget the Victorian conflict between individual freedom and social restraint as well as the nationalist post-war traumas; inside horror stemmed from an intricate world where individual and social constructions reciprocally built each other. Kubrick put a cinematographic end to Cold War fantasies with *Dr. Strangelove*, but maintained the spatial *topos* to launch a new subgenre, the abstract fantastic, with *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968). His obsessive observation of reality caused a detailed *mise-en-scène* which took the audience on a real spatial project; huge amounts of money and time were invested in the meticulous creation, not recreation, of outer space, which no NASA adventure could have outdone. The technological approach was complemented by the metaphysical editing to show his interests were beyond any specific reality. His universal vision could not stop by Jupiter and moved towards something as mystical as human nature, thus not subordinated to scientific progress. For him, the meaning of life had not changed from the first tool's discovery and modern machines can only augment the number of casualties, in this misanthropic connection of human essence and death. This pessimistic tone is an extrapolation of his social commentary on Western hypocrisy, banality, and violence in his works, including *The Shining* (1980), where he reconsidered the traditional antagonistic nature-culture relationship as more open and vulnerable, a route still in progress not only for human existence but for films' essence as well.

Hitchcock's contribution to a new cinematic language exploited its perverse scopic pleasure; sane and psychotic elements were given an irreverent meaning through visual evidences and breathless editing to undress the US-American way of life. A classic moviemaker, he emphasized seeing from the value of unseen. Visual ellipses and his English understatement respected the Production Code stimulating the audience at the same time. Hitchcock, a devoted disciple of German cinema, explored inner nature and identity indetermination, and his *Psycho* (1960) denies any dualistic simplification; Mrs Bates, his new monster, combines bizarre sexual practices, subverts traditional gender roles, and confuses life and death antonymic nature. His narrative and technical innovations to control expectations

made the audience give themselves up and experience new pleasures. Coming after his most brutal character, even more frightening knowing the real person he was based on, Ed Gein, the Wisconsin ghoul, but also after the murderers in *Caligary*, or *M* (Fritz Lang, 1931), psychos have populated most of the so-called body and reality-oriented horror films. Gore films started with *Blood Feast* (Herschell Gordon Lewis, 1963), developed with *The Last House on the Left* (Wes Craven, 1972), and reached its most violent and repulsive example with *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre* (Tobe Hooper, 1974). Sub-genres like the slasher film have Norman Bates's descendants killing one person after the other with methods and tools established by *Halloween*, a mix of sex and blood cloned again and again in the *Friday the 13th* series of the 1980s or Wes Craven's *A Nightmare on Elm Street* (1984); studio pictures such as *Rosemary's Baby* (Roman Polanski, 1968), the first satanic movie, later followed by *The Exorcist* (William Friedkin, 1973), or *Carrie* (Brian De Palma, 1976), apart from their technological updating, offered new perspectives, including racial and gender problems. Physical and social bodies are the main characters of George A. Romero's *Night of the Living Deads* (1968), "the most important American horror film since *Psycho*" (Mast 489), in the aftermath of the Civil Rights Movement and Vietnam.

The shift from outer space to J.G. Ballard's inner space separated again the two dominant genres of the late 1960s and early 1970s, science fiction and horror, one focused on the outside and distant, and the other on the inside and nearby. Differences augmented as long as the low-budget horror productions indulged on blood and sex to deal with personal identity, especially with growing pains. The cheap blood horror renaissance lasted to the mid 1980s, then getting an R rating from the C.A.R.A. became impossible for the sexually and violent explicit movies. In those same years science fiction approached the classic western, war or noir, and recreated their mythical constructions. Political and economic reasons made science fiction put aside the 1960s and 1970s criticism and recuperate its conservative tendency. Attacks on society were punished after *Superman* (Richard Donner, 1978), and cinema identified itself with the youngest audience, eager to see their superheroes defeat the evil forces in "kid's staff" movies. Adventures, muscular bodies, and goody-baddy plots from the world of comics increased the studios' profits, contributing to create the "blockbuster mentality," which favoured big monster hits like the first parts of *Star Wars* (George Lucas, 1977), *Terminator* (James Cameron, 1984), or *Ghostbusters* (Ivan Reitman, 1984); spending a lot of money to get huge benefits assured their success and merchandise marketing made unforgettable those films where major technical advances, Dolby Stereo soundtrack and the Steadicam, helped cinematographers, production designers, art directors, special effects wizards, and other teams to create not just possible but attractive dreams. These "feelgood" movies, "a logical extension of Reagan's invocation to the American people to stand tall and feel great about our country" (Vineberg 9), had no problem to substitute reality for a Disney production. US-Americans were invited to dream by their cowboy president Ronald Reagan, who saw cinema as part of his "Reaganomics" to recover from critical problems, as his farewell address in January 1989 reminds, "The way I see it, there were two great triumphs, two things that I'm proudest of. One is the economic recovery ... the other is the recovery of our morale. America is respected again in the world and looked to for leadership" (Reagan qtd. in Jeffords 3). In the 1980s,

most movies, not just the fantastic genre, offered "'what audiences want to see': spectacular narratives about characters who stand for individualism, liberty, militarism, and a mythic heroism" (Jeffords 16). Robert Dallek saw them as the most significant part of symbolic politics to "satisfy psychological needs as much as material ends" (Dallek xxiv), reducing his countrymen collective anxiety and allowing them to feel in control.

By the late 1980s, the economic, political, social, and cultural crises could not be ignored any longer, and movies became good examples to be followed. Right-wing ideology dominated Washington and Hollywood and violence and spectacular special effects silenced any mature critical approach to real problems. However, together with mainstream fantasies, in an absolutely disproportionate ratio, a small group of artists, David Lynch and David Cronenberg among them, faced the unsolved mysteries of contemporary existence differently. Their conscious novelty, "Of course we have to be arrogant and assume that we can do something no one else has done" in Cronenberg's words (qtd. in Rodley 225), was not a definitive solution but an accurate diagnosis about the more than ever dichotomous world. Fantastic cinema followed Eagleton's definition for postmodernism, "a style of culture which reflects something of this epochal change, in a depthless, decentred, ungrounded, self-reflexive, playful, derivative, eclectic, pluralistic art which blurs the boundaries between 'high' art and 'popular' culture, as well as between art and everyday experience" (Eagleton vii). Refusing truth and reality as single certainties, Derrida's "decentred world" was an undecipherable entity conceived as a cultural construct. This attitude distrusted grand theories and discredited totalizing master narratives in favour of open works in progress, an idea of patchwork where intertextuality and self-referentiality destroyed conventions. The nature-culture division and their mimetic relationship were substituted by a parodic form of reality where technological creations were as real as the natural one, as Cronenberg explained "Art is a scary thing to a lot of people because it shakes your understanding of reality, or shapes it in ways that are socially unacceptable … I think all reality is virtual. It's all invented. It's collaborative, so you need friends to help you create a reality. But it's not about what is real and what isn't" (Cronenberg qtd. in Rodley 227).

The postmodern denunciation of limits elevates images to a self-explanatory status unconnected with reality; their privileged value as the only source of knowledge for Baudrillard makes possible a new vision of inner and outer reality taken by the camera, considering the outside world as a constant simulation, and our perception as an influencing part of our reality. If movies are no longer considered mere optical illusions, or, at least no less than other realities, then, it is impossible to distinguish reality from fiction, or realistic from fantastic approaches since "There is nothing real outside our perception of reality, is there?" in Cronenberg's *Videodrome* (1983). Since verisimilitude is irrelevant, their main interest is movies themselves, as links of real and imagined worlds. Perception levels reality and fiction, and the latter far from reproducing the former, complements and ameliorates it, or substitutes it, as in *Videodrome* where "television is reality"; images from Cronenberg's *The Dead Zone* (1983), *Crash* (1996), or *Videodrome*, or from any of Lynch's films from *Eraserhead* (1977) to *Inland Empire* (2006) are spaces of representation where everything is fabrication with the disturbing power of transforming monolithic reality into a plurality of meanings. This artificially generated world is a fic-

tion, an idea stressed by the concept of virtual reality taken from Carroll's *Through the Looking-Glass and What Alice Found There*, Wells's *The Time machine*, or Huxley's *Brave New World*, and experimented in films such as *Strange Days* (Kathryn Bigelow, 1995), *The Truman Show* (Peter Weir, 1998), *EDtv* (Ron Howard, 1999), or *Memento* (Christopher Nolan, 2000); moreover, in some of Cronenberg's films or in *The Matrix* (Andy Wachowski and Larry Wachowski, 1999) the whole world becomes a virtual reality game where images and the self invade each other.

Traditional narratives mirrored a transcendent teleological existence and reproduced its causality principle in a coherent construction of space and time applied to both realistic and fantastic literature; in contrast, postmodern fiction "narrates the dissolution of the very ontological structures that we usually take for granted" (Bukatman 56), denying the existence of an ordering subject and proclaiming the end of subjectivity as only a human possibility. The symbolic meaning of visual messages and the role of machines connect postmodernist reality to surrealism; in the 1920s, Dziga Vertov created a provocative world of thoughts, desires, and hidden structures through the juxtaposition of fragments taken by the camera as an optimization of our imperfect eye. Physical, emotional and intellectual visions are part of Lynch's films as they were for Buñuel, whose sliced eyeball in *Un Chien andalou* (1929) displayed the multiple layers of the body as a natural and cultural product, a sexual and moral symbol, a beautiful and abject object, a rational and passionate subject, and an inner and outer reality. In Buñuel's images, as in Vertov's, our gaze creates a new reality, an inner one where opposites meet, synthesizing horror and pleasure in Bataille's belief that "opposite processes can be reconciled" (55). For Bataille, the most difficult dialectical relationship of opposites takes place in eroticism since it implies "assenting to life up to the point of death" (11). From the postmodernist ontological supremacy of the body, the source for active and passive pleasure, seeing and being seen, represents the opposites end. Voyeuristic delight does not establish moral differences since the mere act of watching justifies the existence of what is being watched; besides, the impossibility of distinguishing reality from imagination, especially if technologically connected, makes it easier to enjoy the human body spectacle both for the aesthetic distance and its sadomasochistic possibility of inflicting and suffering pain or distress. This oxymoronic enjoyment was especially intense in the 1980s when the last plague, Aids, moved bodies to the foreground not just as primitive power and strength in traditional mainstream, but as a life and death symbol. Contaminated blood represented an invisible death threat and brought back vampires and monsters as metaphorical embodiments of the wildest side of danger. Scientific and moral issues crashed in Aids analyses and contributed to an approach where horror and science fiction faced together their corporal obsession and, free from dualistic slavishness, multiplied their discourses; instead of transcendent essentialisms, entities and selves, both equally constructed, helped to shake down the political, social and sexual fields where hegemonic ideologies ruled, challenging dominant moral values and displaying sexual anxieties. For example, transgressive experiments in *Videodrome* connected cinematic bodies and real images and linked together human beings and machines in technobiology, where natural and artificial realities obtain deeper knowledge and extra power from the inversion of old hierarchies, "Television changes your brain, Videodrome changes your body" (*Videodrome*); leaving behind the old biological process of life and death to em-

brace a total transformation, "To become the new flesh, you first have to kill the old flesh" (*Videodrome*), dying and being born are substituted by a much more creative existence, the world of computer games, "Long live the New Flesh" (*Videodrome*).

Fantasy and reality merge in movies like *Crash*, based on Ballard's technological pornographic novel where bodies and machines intimate, showing new self-reflective metafictional possibilities that the Special Jury Prize at Cannes Festival approved, even if reviewers condemned its depravity and the general audience ignored its elitist transgression. Undoubtedly, visual language, away from daily rationality and bourgeois legality, recuperated its irrational energy and fantasy's inadmissible attraction; therefore, it got closer to the criminal and the abnormal margins of what has never been seen or told before. As a language derived from two nineteenth-century inventions, photography and realistic narration, cinema has eventually achieved Karl Theodor Dreyer's dream of describing inner life through outer forms, similarly to abstract art; its final result is an uncertain and gloomy but stimulating series of images for our scopic pleasure to go forward and get caught in human body, discovering new ominous and morbid realities and getting obsessed with misshapen, grotesque and disgusting attractions, like Jeffrey Beaumont in *Blue Velvet* (David Lynch, 1986), "I'm seeing something that was always hidden … I'm in the middle of a mystery, and it's all secret." Bodies are not any more preserved and respected in their purity, health and perfection, but punished, transformed and destroyed, and their human nature is complemented by animal and technological components to obtain a more complete pleasure derived from the unknown, in agreement with Freud's identification of sexuality with fantasy rather than with biology. The fantastic cinema history closes up on itself questioning reality and away from the axiomatic fundamentalist Christianity which has dominated Western culture. At this point of no return, back to the Expressionist perverse triangle of power, sexuality and death, we, like *King Kong*'s (Merian C. Cooper and B. Schoedsack, 1933) main victim eventually realize, "'Twas not the aeroplanes, 'twas beauty killed the beast." Fantasies based on rational oppositions have usually destroyed their appealing danger because of their systematic bias towards morality and retribution in commercial terms. Unaware of the final message of Apuleius's story of Eros and Psyche, they share the same prejudices about the impossibility of enjoying darkness and the false but threatening verbal menace about monsters, which are punished until beauty is eventually reunited with beast and from their union, *voluptas*, pleasure, is born to confirm the synthesis of opposites and the metamorphic state of beauty, which lies in the eye of the beholder, and, in our case, in cinema's hands.

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