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The Paranoiacs Who Knew Too Much: Postmodern Knowledge

and Hollywood Cinema

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Abstract of the Dissertation

The Paranoiacs Who Knew Too Much: Postmodern Knowledge

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This dissertation examines a specific manner in which paranoia finds expression in postwar Hollywood cinema. Paranoia, in addition to its clinical definition, finds expression as a cultural phenomenon and has also been a popular theme in postwar cinema; both trends have grown exponentially in the U.S. during the latter half of the twentieth century. The basic premise of my project is that in Hollywood cinema paranoia emerges primarily as excessive rather than distorted knowledge. What has often been understood as a form of reactionary thought is employed in a manner that reinforces rather than challenges the status quo. The male paranoiac is an infallible hero with unique cognitive abilities, and with an unrestrained desire for truth and meaning. My project takes a unique approach to the structure and function of the paranoid style of storytelling:

using popular visual texts as case studies—and reading them against the grain—each chapter poses a theoretical question that explores the relationship paranoia holds to other nuanced theoretical concepts, such as fetishism, postmodernism, Hollywood narrative, and the female subject. Challenging paranoia's monolithic treatment through cinematic texts that do not fit comfortably in the genre of paranoid narratives reveals, among other things, that naturalized modes of thought and cinematic storytelling are informed by and even rely on the paranoid model for their effectiveness. The function and utility of paranoid narratives in the postmodern era is also explored in relation to the function and utility of Greek myth in the fifth century BC Greece. I take the mythical figure of Oedipus as portrayed in Sophocles' *Oedipus the King* to be the archetype for Hollywood's male paranoiac. I trace the socio-political similarities between twentieth century United States and fifth century BC Greece in order to identify the political function of Greek tragedy and Hollywood cinema in their respective times.

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Chapter 1: Paranoia and the Myth of Oedipus

> *"O riches, ruling power, skill after skill*
> *surpassing all in this life's rivalries,*
> *how much envy you must carry with you,*
> *if, for this kingly office, which the city*
> *gave me, for I did not seek it out,*
> *Creon, my old trusted family friend,*
> *has secretly conspired to overthrow me*
> *and paid off a double-dealing quack like this,*
> *a crafty bogus priest, who can only see*
> *his own advantage, who in his special art*
> *is absolutely blind"*
> > -Oedipus, *Oedipus the King*

> *"Paranoia is knowing all the facts."*
> > - Woody Allen

Introduction

Paranoia and conspiracy are signifiers that conjure up images of worlds infested with danger, corruption, destruction, deception, manipulation, thirst for power and control; they are words that have defined twentieth-century consciousness; words we stumble upon on a daily basis. When one considers the twentieth-century historical record it is hard to imagine people *not* feeling paranoid, *not* believing in sinister forces constantly at work. Paranoia in our days has become a prevalent phenomenon; it is increasingly common in the political and social spheres to find one accusing, or, being accused of thinking and acting in a paranoid way (meaning being unreasonable, irrational, delusional). The arts, especially literature and film, have been intricate cultural agents in shaping the public's perception about world events. From authors like Don DeLillo to filmmakers like Oliver Stone, paranoid narratives reflect a general adherence to what Michael Rogin calls "demonology," the tendency to perceive the world through the lens

of conspiracy and paranoia.[1] With reality, however, continuously surpassing fiction in scenarios of gruesome violence and devastating catastrophe, one decade's fiction is often ironically another's brute reality. In scholarly circles conspiracy and paranoia have also received critical attention, especially since World War II. Working primarily within the framework of a pre-existing general consensus on the meaning and function of paranoia, cultural critics such as Timothy Melley, Mark Fenster, and Patrick O'Donnell identify paranoia as the prevalent epistemology of our times. Dana Polan understands paranoia as "a historical activity" and "a social practice"[2] (13). In the latter half of the nineteenth century, clinical paranoia is studied by psychiatrists such as Kraepelin, Krafft-Ebing, and Kalhbaum.[3] In the early twentieth century, Sigmund Freud developed his own psychoanalytic theory on the nature of paranoia, and subsequent thinkers—Niederland and Santner—drawing from Freud's work, offered additional insights.[4]

Freud's work would also immortalize Oedipus, arguably the most popular mythic character of all; his story was revived in the twentieth century not because of a renewed interest in Sophocles and the classics, but mainly because of Sigmund Freud and the birth of psychoanalysis. Psychoanalytic theory borrows Oedipus and transforms the mythic figure into the most important stage in the psychosexual development of the child; failing to resolve the Oedipus complex, the male was condemned to become a neurotic or a homosexual, or, in cases of total failure, a neurotic homosexual. Deleuze and Guattari,

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[1] See Kathy Acker, *My Mother: Demonology* (Grove Press, 1994).
[2] See Dana Polan, *Power and Paranoia: History, Narrative, and the American Cinema, 1940-1950* (Columbia University Press, 1986).
[3] See Richard von Krafft-Ebing's *Textbook of Insanity* (1873), and Emil Kraepelin's *Lectures on Clinical Psychiatry*, ed. Thomas Johnstone. London: Baillier, Tindall & Cox, 1906.
[4] *Psychosis and Sexual Identity: Toward a Post-Analytic View of the Schreber Case* (1988) is also a valuable collection of essays on Schreber and paranoia by some of the most important contemporary thinkers, including Jean François Lyotard and Michel de Certeau.

perhaps the most (in)famous anti-Oedipalists, vociferously protest against the imperialistic figure, whose appropriation by Freud, they argue, transgressed the boundaries of psychoanalysis and literature and infiltrated into social organizations in the most oppressive ways. One has to wonder: is there anything left unsaid about Oedipus? How is Greek myth still relevant in the twenty-first-century United States? And what does it have to do with a project about Hollywood paranoia?

This chapter sets forth an introduction to the concept of paranoia and the manner in which it will be treated in the following chapters. One of the major points in the project is that in postwar Hollywood cinema paranoia is predominantly represented as a form of *excessive* rather than *distorted* knowledge, a knowledge that is overwhelmingly male. In the new paranoid style of American arts, male characters increasingly seem to be suffering from excessive knowledge, a condition that also resonates with the unprecedented access to information we have come to enjoy[5]. The story of Oedipus, as told in Sophocles' *Oedipus the King*, will serve as the starting point in identifying some of the patterns and recurring motifs based on which Hollywood constructs the male paranoiac. The central theme in *Oedipus*, namely, the noble and obsessive quest for truth, lends itself to an inquiry into contemporary representations of knowledge and knowledge production in Hollywood cinema. The figure of Oedipus as a double character—savior and destroyer, native and foreigner, villain and victim, husband and son, father and brother, king and beggar—will facilitate an examination of paranoia as a "doubling of

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[5] The notion of excessive knowledge should be read in terms of over-reading signs, over-interpreting events, and in general, of infusing surplus meaning to objects, characters, events, etc.

presence."[6] Furthermore, the dual function of excessive knowledge (the notion of knowing *too much*) as a blessing—with Oedipus ridding Thebes of the Sphinx by solving the riddle—and as curse—with Oedipus discovering himself behind Laius' murder and thus being the cause of the plague—anticipates postmodern axioms vis-à-vis knowledge and information.

In *Running Dog* (1978), Don DeLillo describes our times as "the age of conspiracy, the age of connections, links, secret relationships" (111). Timothy Melley notes that major news magazines have recently described the U.S as "a nation in the grip of 'conspiracy mania,'" and have pronounced the arrival of a "'new paranoid style in the American Arts'"(7). Beginning with the Cold War, moving to the Kennedy assassination, the Martin Luther King assassination, Vietnam, Watergate, and most recently the 9/11 attacks, United States history is steeped in paranoid responses to actions and events[7]. The growing mistrust of the government and its agencies as well as the intense anxiety over powerful corporations, have spurred a plethora of literary and cinematic texts on conspiracy and paranoia.[8]

In cinema the 1970s, in particular, is a time of an unprecedented production of conspiracy films; Sidney Pollack (*Three Days of the Condor*, 1975), Alan J. Pakula

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[6] In "Pynchon, Paranoia and Literature," Leo Bersani uses the term paranoia as "synonymous with something like unfounded suspicions about a hostile environment," adding that "the fear of persecution is only one aspect of [the] symptomatological picture" (99). At the same time he acknowledges the extraordinary complexity of the term stating that it stands at the center of "considerable classificatory turbulence," and that "[m]ore than any other psychoanalytic term, paranoia has been the focus of a nosological disarray" (99).

[7] The historical events mentioned here are all part of the Cold War era and have been analyzed as such. This too, however, reveals the tendency or desire to understand history in totalizing terms.

[8] Paranoid narratives are, of course, not an exclusively postwar phenomenon. In his chapter "Epidemiology of Paranoid Narrative" David Trotter discusses a variety of late nineteenth-early twentieth-century literary texts (such as *The Woman in White* and *Caleb Williams*) where paranoia, as psychosis, "…may under certain circumstances, prove a progressive force" (142). This is not something, however, to take on here.

(*Klute*, 1971, *The Parallax View*, 1974, *All the President's Men*, 1976), Francis Ford Coppola (*The Conversation*, 1973, *Apocalypse Now*, 1979), Roman Polanski (*Chinatown*, 1974), and Martin Scorsese (*Taxi Driver*, 1976) respond to major political events with controversial visual texts that have had a tremendous impact on shaping public opinion about the American government, engendering a paranoid anxiety that is yet to be allayed.[9] Through their lenses the world is seen as controlled by vast interconnected networks, by sinister forces that pose a constant threat to our sense of autonomy and free will. Timothy Melley calls this "agency panic" which stems from "a sense of *diminished human agency*, a feeling that individuals cannot effect meaningful social action and, in extreme cases, may not be able to control their own behavior"[10] (11). John Frankenheimer's *The Manchurian Candidate* (1962), for instance, is a perfect example of an "Oedipal" case of diminished free will and failure to control one's actions. In times of extreme political upheaval and uncertainty Hollywood has sought both to arouse suspicion and eliminate ambiguity about the "official" version of historical events by constructing narratives whose popularity predominantly relies on oversimplified stories with highly convoluted plots. The paradoxical relationship between story and plot simultaneously elicits a sense of powerlessness to the spectator—anxiety about the effects of powerful sinister forces—and a sense of power—in possessing the truth and able to eliminate ambiguity through the establishment of clear cause/effect relationships.

In addition to political cinema, however, which addresses the themes of conspiracy and paranoia in direct ways, some of the most popular texts Hollywood produces in the

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[9] Sidney Lumet's critically acclaimed *Network* (1976) is a rare occasion where the main character, Howard Beale (Peter Finch) suffers an actual mental breakdown.
[10] With regard to the notion of "agency panic" *Body Invaders: Panic Sex in America* (Arthur and Marilouise Kroker, 1988) is also of great interest.

postwar era also rely for their effectiveness on narrative structures and tropes that adhere to paranoid modes of storytelling. Films such as *Rear Window* and *The Truman Show* (discussed in Chapter Two), *Forrest Gump* and *Being There* (discussed in Chapter Three), and *Death and the Maiden* and *Rosemary's Baby* (discussed in Chapter Five), can also be read as examples of paranoid narratives although, as we shall see, not necessarily in the conventional sense (as, for instance, in Polanski's *The Tenant* and *Repulsion*). These films, despite their heterogeneity in terms of genre, subject matter, and style, all display a common feature: the hero stands at the center of all action not only in the sense that he or she is the main character whom we follow and identify with, but more importantly the hero narcissistically perceives all actions and events as somehow connected to him/her.

The ever growing tendency to understand the world through the paranoid model demands a re-evaluation of the concept itself especially of the ways Hollywood (probably the most powerful meaning-making industry on a global scale) has chosen to represent the "paranoiac" in the postwar era. Paranoia as used in the political and cultural spheres has increasingly become the weapon of choice in attacking as well as defending one's views; it has become an empty signifier to be filled with whatever meaning competing ideologies are seeking to defend, dispute, or destroy.

As a critical term of inquiry, and always within the framework of Hollywood cinema, paranoia will also serve as a means for examining other nuanced critical concepts such as fetishism and postmodernism. The goal is not to reach overarching conclusions about Hollywood paranoia that would potentially foreclose further discussions; on the contrary,

the goal is to challenge the monolithic treatment of "paranoia" as a form of counter-intellectual discourse, by stressing instead the hyper-cognitivity at work.

A Brief History of Paranoia

The term paranoia originates in clinical psychopathology (Gr.: *para* = beside, beyond, changed; *nous* = mind, reason); it was first used in the fifth century BC by Hippocrates in a non-specific sense to describe "all disorganized or delirious thinking resulting in mental deterioration." Interestingly, psychoanalyst William Niederland points out that "though the literature on the subject is vast, the word or diagnosis paranoia was not used again for many centuries"[11] (34). Paranoia in its modern use re-appears as a scientific term in 1863 in the work of the German psychiatrist Karl Ludwig Kahlbaum, and Emil Kraepelin's theories would soon follow.[12] Kraepelin, in particular, found the paranoid concept "more elusive and unclassifiable than any other mental disorder" (*The Paranoid*, 25). By the beginning of the twentieth century, David Trotter notes that paranoia was

> …one of the names given to a type of psychosis in which the patient develops an internally consistent delusional system of beliefs centered around the certainty that he or she is a person of great importance, and on that account subject to hostility and persecution. They hate me because I am special; I am special because they hate me. The paranoiac's delusions are from the very beginning 'systematized,' as Richard von Krafft-Ebing put it, and thus constitute a formal 'structure.' The consistency of that system or structure depends on its ability to eliminate randomness: to convert the material trace an event leaves in the world into a sign which only ever has one meaning,

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[11] *The Schreber Case: Psychoanalytic Profile of a Paranoid Personality*. New York: Quadrangle/The New York Times Book Co, 1974.

[12] A little earlier, the French psychiatrist Esquirol in *Mental Maladies: A Treatise on Insanity* had used the term *monomania* to describe paranoid thinking. Richard Von Krafft-Ebing in his *Textbook of Insanity*, published in 1879, distinguishes between "active" and "passive" stages of paranoia. He also considers the role of heredity and categorizes symptoms as belonging to "original" and "late" paranoia, or "acquired" paranoia. He was also one of the first to pay close attention to the cognitive dimensions of the condition.

one value. Once delusion has taken shape, it absorbs accident into itself. For the paranoiac, there is no event which does not already possess a meaning and a value[13]. (5)

The *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* II (1968) includes paranoia as a valid diagnostic entity, noting at the same time the rarity of the disorder.[14] In DSM-III the diagnostic categories include the following:

> (a) Paranoid disorder (or simple delusional disorder) characterized by non-bizarre delusions of any type, in the absence of other signs of psychosis; (b) paranoid symptoms occurring in the context of schizophrenia, affective disorder, and organic brain syndrome…and (c) paranoid personality disorder, in which a suspicious, mistrustful style, without actual delusions, constitutes a lifelong habitual pattern (American Psychiatric Association, 1980; DSM-III, cited in Kirmayer).

The most prevalent notions about paranoia, however, emerge through Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytic theory based on *The Memoirs of My Nervous Illness* by Daniel Paul Schreber. Whereas the aforementioned psychiatrists used a variety of terms to describe what is now commonly known as paranoia, and identified numerous categories and sub-categories in their attempt to classify it, Freud's work stabilizes and fixes the condition in much more rigid terms. Hence, the term paranoia begins to acquire the character of a

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[13] *Paranoid Modernism: Literary Experiment, Psychosis, and the Professionalization of English Society*. Oxford University Press, 2001.

[14] The DSM-II differentiates between paranoia and paranoid states. The former is defined as follows: "This extremely rare condition is characterized by gradual development of an intricate, complex, and elaborate paranoid system based on and often proceeding logically from misinterpretation of an actual event. Frequently the patient considers himself endowed with unique and superior ability. In spite of a chronic course the condition does not seem to interfere with the rest of the patient's thinking and personality." Paranoid states "are psychotic disorders in which a delusion, generally persecutory or grandiose, is the essential abnormality. Disturbances in mood, behavior and thinking (including hallucinations) are derived from this delusion. This distinguishes paranoid states from the affective psychoses and schizophrenias, in which mood and thought disorders, respectively, are the central abnormalities. Most authorities, however, question whether disorders in this group are distinct clinical entities and not merely variants of schizophrenia or paranoid personality."

definable and classifiable concept, and Judge Schreber becomes immortalized as the most famous male paranoiac in history.

Since World War II paranoia also emerges as a strong cultural phenomenon, a reaction to a historical reality where fear overtakes reason, and pre-emptive action—promoted by those who claim to *know* the "real" truth—is promoted as *ananke* (necessity).[15] Paranoia, among other things, can be understood as a form of *re*-action to an officially sanctioned reality; the paranoiac believes himself the sole possessor of an "*actual* knowledge" that springs from within. He narcissistically situates himself at the center of all activity as the "subject supposed to know" and does not rest until he turns his subjective reality into an objective one. The term, however, can also be interpreted as "an excess of knowledge," "surplus knowledge." In *Is Oedipus Online?* Jerry Aline Flieger notes Žižek's shift in analyzing the posthuman crisis "from the imaginary to the symbolic register. Under the sway of the dominant symbolic…the other is no longer just the 'subject *supposed* to know' of classic Lacanian theory, but is now the site of excessive *actual* knowledge…" (231).

This chapter is divided into four sections: the first deals with Judge Daniel Paul Schreber and his *Memoirs of My Nervous Illness*, the text on which Freud based his theory on paranoia; section two examines the relationship between classical myth and the birth of modern paranoia as forms of epistemology, as well as their similar function in classical antiquity and present times respectively; section three focuses on *Oedipus the King* as the paranoid subject *par excellence*; finally, section four provides a brief

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[15] See Richard Hofstadter's *The Paranoid Style in American Politics and Other Essays.* New York: Knopf, 1966. Hofstadter does not focus solely on postwar paranoia. He identifies a "paranoid style" in American politics since the early days of the Republic, one that intensified in the post-1950s era.

commentary on the ways that this type of paranoia finds expression in postwar Hollywood cinema.

The Schreber Case: from Freud to Santner

The most famous paranoiac, Daniel Paul Schreber, writes his *Memoirs of My Nervous Illness* towards the end of the nineteenth century; the book would eventually be published in 1903. Sigmund Freud never actually treats or even meets Judge Schreber, but he reads the *Memoirs* and, based on this reading, he writes the "Psychoanalytic Notes Upon an Autobiographical Account of a Case of Paranoia (Dementia Paranoides)" in 1911 where he unfolds his theory about the paranoid condition. In this remarkable essay Freud is able to link paranoia to latent homosexuality. In the *Memoirs*, Schreber constructs a highly elaborate post-apocalyptic universe filled with sinister supernatural forces and himself, a messianic figure, standing at the center of all action. The mythical elements in the *Memoirs* are too many to address, but the religious imagery and the constant references to lower and upper God and the creation of the world, in some ways brings to mind Hesiod's *Theogony,* an epic poem that concerns the origins of the world—*cosmogony*— and of the gods—*theogony*. In his "Theogony" Schreber notes:

> The posterior realms of God were (and still are) subject to a peculiar division, a lower God (Ariman) and upper God (Ormuzd) being distinguished. I know nothing more about the further significance of this partition, except that the lower God (Ariman) seems to have felt attracted to nations of originally brunette race (the Semites) and the upper God to nations of originally blond race (the Aryan peoples)…Identical with Ormuzd are Balder of the Germans, Bielebog (the white God) or Swantewit of the Slavs, Poseidon of the Greeks and Neptune of the Romans; identical with Ariman are

Wodan (Odin) of the Germans, Czernebog (the black God) of the Slavs, Zeus of the Greeks and Jupiter of the Romans.[16] (30-1)

In Schreber's cosmos, the Gods are anthropomorphized, experience human emotions, interfere and interact with humans, and even desire sexual intercourse with a mortal (Schreber being here the ultimate object of desire), not in the manner Zeus was sexually promiscuous, but rather in the "noble," pro-creative Christian sense of perpetuating the human race.[17]

Schreber was institutionalized twice at Sonenstein, both times under the care and close supervision of the asylum director Dr. Emil Flechsig, the man who Schreber believed desired to murder his soul (he called Flechsig "soul murderer") and destroy his reason.[18] The respectable judge firmly believed that the entire world had been devastated and that *he* was the chosen one to repopulate the earth. God wanted to transform him into a woman and through the divine rays—which is how God communicated with the judge— God would impregnate Schreber. Freud reads Schreber's mythic universe as symptomatic of the judge's repressed erotic desire for Dr. Flechsig. Paranoia is associated with narcissistic behavior (Schreber believes himself to be the messiah who will re-populate earth being the only living human left alive), and primarily depends on the mechanisms of narcissism and projection. Freud argues that Schreber's original repressed message "I love *him*" gets inverted into "He hates *me*" (this is where narcissism comes into play) and

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[16] The anti-Semitic references in the *Memoirs* have to be acknowledged at this point. Passages such as this reinforce and demand considering the socio-historical and political environment in which Schreber's psychosis grew.

[17] Niederland argues that the upper God is Dr. Moritz Schreber, the patient's controlling and charismatic father and the lower God is Gustav Schreber, his older brother who unable to deal with pressure, committed suicide.

[18] In *Crowds and Power*, Elias Canetti argues that the attack on his reason was the central point in Schreber's system and "everything he thought and did was a defense against this attack" (450).

subsequently projected onto Flechsig. Freud, however, also sees the *Memoirs* as the work of a brilliant mind, since Schreber despite his psychotic condition, was still able to document his hallucinatory reality. The link between hyper-cognitivity and paranoia, thus, is established, with the disease being modeled after the male psyche. Four years later in 1915, Freud re-affirms the gendering of the condition by examining a case of female paranoia which, despite the apparent deviations from the Schreber case, was still interpreted through the pre-existing male theoretical framework. Chapter five will address the notion of female paranoia.

Some of the most neglected chapters in the *Memoirs of My Nervous Illness* provide such a compelling commentary on the Hollywood film going experience, it is hard to believe Schreber had never been to the movies.[19] Schreber suffered from severe delusions and hallucinations but, interestingly enough, he builds a coherent narrative where everything is described in the most lucid manner. In addition to many symptoms, he felt that someone/something was controlling and guiding his thoughts:

> Another interesting phenomenon connected with the ray-communication—the real cause of compulsive thinking—is the so-called "*picturing*," which I have touched on earlier in Chapter 5. Perhaps nobody but myself, not even science, knows that man retains all recollections in his memory, by virtue of lasting impressions on his nerves, as *pictures* in his head. Because my inner nervous system is illuminated by rays, these pictures can be voluntarily reproduced; this in fact is the nature of "*picturing…*" To picture…is the conscious use of the human imagination for the purpose of producing pictures (predominantly pictures of recollections) in one's head, which can then be looked at by rays. (209-10)

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[19] Chapter 17 in the *Memoirs* is titled " 'Picturing' in the sense of the soul-language" and this is where these ideas initially appear, although Schreber very briefly mentions in Chapter 5, and describes in more detail in Chapter 18. The Postscripts to the *Memoirs* include many more references on this subject. Despite a plethora of references and quotes I could use, for purposes of brevity, only the most suggestive ones are included.

Schreber's cosmos is filled with all kinds of mechanical devices directing his gaze (as he notes) and posing a "threat" on his autonomous thought. Ironically, he tries to escape his harsh "realities" by what he calls "picturing." In this universe, his gaze is directed and his thoughts are controlled in what appears to be an endless film he cannot escape. Being both director and audience of his "picturing," he experiences himself as inside and outside, powerful and powerless, controlling and controlled. Without this duality, paranoid thought dissipates, since it originates in one's capacity to anticipate, read, or foresee the actions of the "other."

In *The Schreber Case: Psychoanalytic Profile of a Paranoid Personality*, Niederland, the first professional reader of the Schreber case, identifies the following symptoms regarding the paranoid individual:

> Paranoia and paranoid conditions are characterized by hostility, suspiciousness, persecutory ideas, perceptual distortions, regressive tendencies, expansive grandiosity, delusional thinking, excessive righteousness, and, in severe cases, a break with reality. The paranoid individual is easily slighted ("people are against *me*"). He sees himself persecuted by malevolent figures ("enemies"). He may become moody and depressed because he feels menaced by conspiratorial opponents, by "overheard" accusatory remarks, by "observed" inimical actions, and/or by hostile "plots" against him. (29)

Niederland identifies three basic elements linked to the paranoid response: "sexual conflict, fear, and the need for causality" (33). The need for causality, he notes, is "an important function of the ego related to its synthetic function, [and] has the compelling force of an instinct"[20] (33).

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[20] To clarify his point, Niederland offers a marvelous example which is provided here: "When a young child stumbles over a stone and falls, he feels hurt and offended. His ego, far from accepting its own weakness and lack of muscular coordination as the cause of the injury, perceives the stone as the 'bad' object, the evil-doer. In anger and revenge, the child may even attack and kick the stone, the 'enemy'" (33).

In *My Own Private Germany*, Eric Santner offers a brilliant analysis of the *Memoirs*, addressing Schreber's historical background, his life, family, and career. Drawing from Niederland's work, he reads the *Memoirs* primarily as a cultural text, and offers new insights to the socio-historical forces that contributed to the judge's mental collapse. In "The Father Who Knew Too Much," Santner centers on the relationship between the judge and his father, the esteemed doctor and pedagogue Moritz Schreber.[21] He argues that "'there is a realistic core in this delusional material,' the historical truth of which is to be found in the father's medical, orthopedic, and pedagogical theories and practices. These theories and practices provide the program, as it were, of that obscene paternal agency that I have referred to as the '*surplus father*'…In Niederland's view, the *overproximity* of such a father to a son created an environment in which, as he puts it, 'there was always castration in the air'" (66). With regards to Schreber's anxiety over the murder of his soul, Santner sees it as "a sustained traumatization induced by exposure to, as it were, *fathers who knew too much* about living human beings. Certainly Foucault's most 'Schreberian' insight," he argues, "is that exposure to this excess of knowledge that characterizes the disciplines produces a new kind of 'intensified' body, one that, in a certain sense, recollects and travesties the sublime body of the king"[22] (87). Moritz

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[21] William G. Niederland's *The Schreber Case: Psychoanalytic Profile of a Paranoid Personality* is published in 1974. Prior to that, in the 1950s, Niederland publishes a series of articles on the Schreber case, focusing on the judge's childhood years as well as on his relationship with his father. The first article "Three Notes on the Schreber case" is published in 1951. Santner notes that Niederland conducted a comprehensive research on Moritz Schreber's "theories and practices of health, fitness, and child rearing" which made it possible "to correlate the bizarre mental formations in Schreber's delusional system…to specific events in the early father-son relationship and thus to demonstrate *the nucleus of truth* in the son's paranoid productions" (64).

[22] Santner is referring to a passage in Michel Foucault's *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of Prison*. He offers this passage at the notes section at the end of the book. Since this is also relevant to my analysis, I am including it here as well: "The body of the king, with its strange material and physical presence, with the force that he himself deploys or transmits to some few others, is at the opposite extreme of this new physics of power represented by panopticism; the domain of panopticism is, on the contrary, that whole

Schreber's medicopedagogical programs, Santner explains, were modeled after the Enlightenment thought that, despite his good intentions, exerted huge pressures on his son. In the *Memoirs*, Schreber's persecutors are his therapist, Flechsig, whom he believes wants to murder his soul, and God, who wants to transform him into a woman and impregnate him. Schreber's father, Santner notes, is only mentioned four times, but since a great part of his delusions finds resonance with neglected aspects of his real family life, Santner identifies socio-cultural (external) factors that engendered Schreber's paranoia as opposed to Freud's intra-psychic mechanisms.

Moritz Schreber's theories were designed "to produce proper Enlightenment subjects capable of thinking (the right things) for themselves…As a Lutheran and a Kantian, Moritz Schreber associates true religiosity with a person's capacity to experience and to heed the inner voice of reason and conscience" (Santenr,90). Being raised in a home devoid of maternal influence, Schreber's childhood is shaped on the remnants of the Enlightenment principles of discipline, knowledge, science, and reason. In other words, Santner suggests that elements of the judge's elaborate universe were, to a certain degree, historically grounded, and that the pursuit of knowledge (through science and technology) held sacred by the father and near sadistically imposed on the son, was the primary force that ended up destroying Schreber's life. The patient's psychosis, Santner proposes, is not a product of internal demons—his erotic homosexual desire for

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lower region, that region of irregular bodies, with their details, their multiple movements, their heterogeneous forces, their spatial relations; what are required are mechanisms that analyze distributions, gaps, series, combinations, and which use instruments that render visible, record, differentiate and compare: a physics of a relational and multiple power, which has its maximum intensity not in the person of the king, but in the bodies that can be individualized by these relations" (208).

Flechsig—but rather of external ones: the excessive knowledge produced by a father who knew *too much*.

Myth and the Birth of Modern Paranoia

In his treatment of paranoia, Freud once again relies on a "mythical" text (the other being the myth of Oedipus) in order to build a universal psychoanalytic theoretical model. If myth, as Barthes argues, is a form of "depoliticized speech" and "has the task of giving an historical intention a natural justification…making contingency appear eternal," one might wonder why myth seems to lend itself to Freudian psychoanalysis.[23] Freud is concerned with the intra-psychic much more than the interpersonal; cultural, political or socio-historical specificity are inconsequential in this context as psychoanalysis builds on the universal rather than the particular[24]. Paranoia, in general, can be perhaps defined as a form of de-legitimized speech which has the task of assigning events an historical intention, eliminating contingency and attributing causality to randomness, purpose to accident. In classical antiquity myth was the epistemological tool with which people made sense of the world, of natural phenomena as well as of human behavior. Myth established firm cause/effect relationships and provided elaborate

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[23] Roland Barthes, "Myth Today" in *Mythologies*, Trans. Annette Lavers. New York: Hill and Wang, 1972. Also see Milton Scarborough, *Myth and Modernity: Postcritical Reflections.* New York: State University of New York Press, 1994. Scarborough offers an historical overview of the manner in which various thinkers perceive and define myth. Among them Sigmund Freud, who believed that "myths are public, collective dreams, and…carry the neurotic contents of the subconscious" (24), Claude Levi-Strauss, Carl Jung, C. S. Lewis, and Bronislaw Malinowski. The latter argued that "myth is not primitive philosophy or science, not the detached speculations of the intellect…" (17). Rather, "myth is a vital ingredient of human civilization; it is not an idle tale, but a hardworked active force; it is not an intellectual explanation or an artistic imagery, but a pragmatic charter of primitive faith and moral wisdom" (cited in Scarborough, 17).
[24] Freud *has* produced texts that consider the cultural dimension; *Moses and Monotheism* and *The Psychopathology of Everyday Life* are two such examples. In his work on paranoia, however, Freud neglected to consider the historical specificity of Schreber's *Memoirs*.

explanations about how and why things happened they way they did. The anthropomorphized gods were held responsible for human prosperity and misfortune; even though this belief did not completely eliminate human agency and free will, it certainly questioned the notion of autonomous action. In the postmodern era, paranoia becomes the epistemology *du jour*, a way of both deconstructing and reconstructing the past, recent and/or distant. The loss of faith in grand narratives that for centuries guaranteed meaning and understanding, combined with an unprecedented access to information as well as a socio-politically tumultuous twentieth century, bring about an epistemological crisis that increasingly seeks remedy and solace in the paranoid style of making meaning. Paranoia within the postmodern emerges as a paradox; on the one hand, the intense suspicion of knowledge production is, to a certain degree, a paranoid reaction; on the other hand, the desire to replace rigid beliefs with new ones that are just as rigid results in the re-affirmation of the very models postmodern thought seeks to contest.

Greek tragedy, using myths as its source material, deals with the lives of mortals as pawns controlled by the whims, likes, and dislikes of divine entities. The didactic qualities both reveal the hidden powers at play (and by extension explain why things happen they way they do) and provide a lesson on morality and virtuous behavior. The *plot* is the most important element; tragedy is first and foremost an imitation of an *action*; the characters are perceived as mere vehicles to carry the plot; all elements extraneous to the plot are to be eliminated; there has to be a clear beginning, middle, and end, and the truth always has to be revealed in a magnanimous manner. The hero violates the rules of social or moral conduct (knowingly or unknowingly, which often raises the question of free will vs. fate) and has to be sacrificed as a means of purification and restoration of

order. The paradigmatic punishment of the hero is also didactic in nature; morals such as accepting responsibility for one's actions, avoiding hubristic behavior, and, above all, never going against the will and wishes of the gods, were products of an ideology that sought to reinforce the status quo (ensure that those in power would not be questioned or challenged), and quench reactionary behavior. The political upheaval in Athens at the time these tragedies were performed was precisely what the poets were reacting to and commenting on and, perhaps with the exception of Euripides, the tragedies seem to be revealing art as a conservative rather than a subversive force.

"Statistically," Barthes argues, "myth is on the right…The oppressed *makes* the world, he has only an active, transitive (political) language; the oppressor conserves it, his language is plenary, intransitive, gestural, theatrical: it is Myth. The language of the former aims at transforming, of the latter at eternalizing" (148-9). Barthes sees left-wing myth as inessential, artificial, reconstituted: "hence its clumsiness" (148). His basic argument is that myth is a "…second-order semiological system" (114): What used to be a sign becomes a signifier. The signifier of myth, he notes, "presents itself in an ambiguous way: it is at the same time meaning and form, full on one side and empty on the other" (117). Barthes sees this second-order semiological system as capable of distorting history: with disguised signifiers passing themselves as signs, signifiers that are historically and culturally grounded reconstruct an *image* of a reality that does not really exist. Myth may predominantly be on the right, but at the same time one might argue it is usually also statistically on the "wrong."

An important distinction needs to be addressed: "'To know myth as myth…occurs at a later time in the history of a given society or in another society.' When recognized as

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myth, it is no longer believed, for it is now known to be false…We may speak of the myths of the Greeks, because they *were* seriously believed, even though no offerings now rise to Zeus."[25] Myth, thus, as a term describes a belief that was previously held as true and was invalidated at a later point. One who believes a myth to be true, would seldom describe it as such, much like the paranoiac would never describe his perception of reality as paranoid. As Bersani points out, "'I' can never be the subject of 'I am paranoid' as an uncontested, undivided judgment"[26] (99). "A myth," Bidney argues, "is evaluated as such *only from the perspective of those who do not share the ideas and beliefs under consideration*. From the perspective of those who accept the ideas and beliefs as true or valid, the latter are not myths at all" (cited in Hymes and Wasserman). Paranoia, much like myth, takes on a quasi-religious approach in its attempt to reveal, in a neat and ordered manner, the making and meaning of the world. It is heavily faith-based, which means that the paranoiac holds strong beliefs about ideas that cannot be supported by concrete proof. In contemporary times, paranoia appears to have a similar function to that of myth with one main difference: whereas in myth divine entities were endowed with human traits, now it is *humans that are endowed with superhuman powers*. As in myth, the world is seen as controlled by powerful, invisible entities that seek to diminish human agency and autonomous thought. As John McGowan notes, in modern times the

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[25]In the article "On the Nature of Myth: An Analysis of Some Recent Criticism" Hymes and Irving respond to Gotesky's "The Nature of Myth and Society" (1952) and Bidney's "The Concept of Myth and the Problem of Psychocultural Evolution" (1950), two challenging papers on the nature and role of myth. What is most interesting is that both essays are concerned with the role of science as a type of secular myth, and the ways science was misappropriated—constructing the myth of inferior and superior races—as a means of justifying genocide during World War II Nazi Germany. Holocaust deniers later on would declare the event a myth that never really took place. Like paranoia, myth as a term of evaluation implies a belief in a reality that is false.

[26] Leo Bersani, "Pynchon, Paranoia, and Literature." (1989).

"discovery of a hidden power must translate…into secular terms, and the result is *a shift from tragedy to paranoia*"[27] (2). Barthes notes:

> Myth is not defined by the object of its message, but by the way in which it utters this message: there are formal limits to myth, there are no 'substantial' ones. Everything, then, can be a myth? Yes, I believe this, for the universe is infinitely fertile in suggestions. Every object in the world can pass from a closed, silent existence to an oral state, open to appropriation by society, for there is no law, whether natural or not, which forbids talking about things. (109)

Paranoia is also defined by the way it transposes objects into rigidly constructed closed systems within which they gain a special and specific meaning, and it is only through their relationship to one another that objects and subjects assume this meaning. For Lacan all knowledge is "structured like paranoia in that it projects a coherence onto the world that may not be there" (Leitch et al 1286).[28] As a form of epistemology paranoid thought provides the comforting sense of being able to know and understand as well as showing one's ability to create a sense of order out of states of disorder. Paranoia as a cultural force is driven by the strong desire *to know*, by the relentless pursuit of a single rigid truth.

The Age of Enlightenment is a historical period characterized by the pursuit of knowledge through science, reason, and rationality. The rise of the scientific method of inquiry challenges former notions of authoritative knowledge and seeks to eliminate all preconceptions that relied on fate, magic, and the divine as means of making sense of the world and of natural phenomena. Enlightenment thought accepts only what can be

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[27] John McGowan, "Oedipus at the Movies." (1986).

[28] Leitch, V. et al., Eds. *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism*. New York: Norton, 2001.

scientifically observed and empirically proven; superstition and the idea of divine intervention give way to an idealized secularism that situates the individual at the center of all action as an autonomous and rational agency. This very idea, however, of perceiving humans as morally responsible and accountable for all activity initiates a new paranoid attitude that does not replace former structures of thought: cause-effect relationships are vehemently pursued; binary thought about good and evil continues to provide a moral compass for human behavior; complete faith in science reflects a new type of secular religiosity at work; and the belief in singular, absolute truths through rational and natural (rather than supernatural) explanations ensures the possibility of an ordered cosmos. Whereas in former times social evils were often blamed on supernatural forces—the devil, witchcraft —now it is devilish, morally bankrupt, power-hungry humans (either individuals or social and political groups) perceived as the source of evil and destruction. Science as a grand narrative effectively replaces former grand narratives without diminishing the desire for concrete meaning or the belief in universal truths. Both faith (in superior, benevolent beings) and fear (of superior evil beings) are relocated in the realm of humanity. The pursuit of knowledge as a positive force for progress and prosperity breeds an optimism that the postmodern era would eventually shatter.

If modernity—emerging in the Enlightenment era—rejects the superstition of the past, postmodernity treats the Enlightenment principles with the same, if not stronger, skepticism and suspicion. Lois Shawver notes:

> Lyotard (1993) defines postmodernism as an incredulity towards metanarratives. A metanarrative is a theory or story that passes itself off as a truth without exception, generalized truths that pretend to be true for all objects in a category…Metanarratives, it seems to the postmodern, are myths belonging to modernity, myths that simplify and blind us to subtleties and exceptions around us, myths that are often more false than

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true, but seldom completely true….How can modernity be credulous? Modernity emerged during the Enlightenment era (17th century) when moderns rejected the superstitions of medieval time. Modernity billed itself as the "enlightenment," and saw itself as having finally awakened from dark superstitions… Foucault's postmodern complaint is that although the moderns threw off the yoke of medieval superstitions, they developed their own myths, and the moderns bought these new myths with equally little critical questioning. (1998)[29]

One epoch's reality, thus, is another epoch's myth. The crisis in epistemology that emerges within the postmodern and the refusal to uncritically accept the official "truths" of the historical past transforms the pursuit of knowledge from a panacea into a dubious and futile task. The historical record no longer guarantees meaning, no longer is perceived fixed, stable, or closed; the constant interrogation of historiography fuels the creation of multiple versions of reality—past and present—all competing for the same legitimacy. The intense suspicion of the metannarratives of the past and the belief in hidden truths waiting to be discovered instills a vexing paranoia that often finds expression in regressive epistemologies similar to myth. Films, for instance, that offer multiple versions of John F. Kennedy's assassination are examples of Hollywood not representing history but re-writing it. In the process of re-imagining the past, the transformation of history into myth occurs. The relationship between paranoia and the postmodern era is explored in Chapter Three.

Oedipus the King, first performed around 429 BC, is held as the greatest tragedy ever made and is treated here as one of the first paranoid stories in Western literature. The

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[29] Lois Shawver, "Notes on Reading Foucault's *The Birth of the Clinic*." This article discusses Foucault's harsh criticism about the medical profession in *The Birth of the Clinic*: *An Archeology of Medical Perception.* Even though this passage refers primarily to medicine, it is an accurate reflection of Foucault's general disposition towards modernity and the sciences being informed by the principles of the Enlightenment. http://users.california.com/~rathbone/foucbc.htm

historical context in which *Oedipus* is performed is briefly discussed in the following section as a means of understanding how and why paranoid stories emerge, what it is they are responding to, as well as the way they find expression in postwar Hollywood cinema.

Oedipus the King: A Case of Justifiable Paranoia

The unprecedented outburst of artistic creativity and the revisiting of old familiar myths in ancient Greece do not occur in a vacuum; the works of Sophocles, Aeschylus, and Euripides are directly linked to the socio-historical circumstances of Athens during the tumultuous fifth century BC. As Bernard Knox notes, the century in which Sophocles composed his tragedy "…saw dramatic ups and downs rivaled only, perhaps, by our own twentieth century."[30] After the Greco-Persian war, Athens emerges as the leading city-state at a time that became known as the Golden Age of Athens (or the Age of Pericles). By the middle of the fifth century and following Persia's defeat, Athens becomes the cradle of culture, democracy, and modern civilization. Theater—established by the tyrant Peisistratus in the sixth century BC as a drama competition and part of the Dionysian festivals—is at its peak, standing firmly at the center of all Athenian cultural activity. Soon, though, internal strife and a mutual fear of power unchecked turn former allies into enemies. Sparta, an ally during the Persian wars, forms an alliance with other city-states known as the Peloponnesian League against Athens and her allies. The Peloponnesian War lasts 27 years (431-404 BC); a devastated Athens, both economically and militarily, would never recover the loss. By the end of the century, the Golden Age was over.

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[30] All historical information is drawn from Bernard Knox's "Introduction" to his translated edition of *Oedipus the King*. Since the history of Greece is not the subject at hand, I only provide a brief historical overview that helps situate the play in its historical context and draw parallels with twentieth century American history.

In the midst of all this Sophocles composes *Oedipus the King*, a story that, in many ways, foreshadows the rise and fall of Athens itself. After the glorious victory over the Persians (a David and Goliath situation), Athens feels indestructible and the hubristic attitude at work is, in part, what eventually destroys this most powerful city-state—an interesting parallel to the rise and fall of Oedipus. An actual plague had befallen Athens shortly before *Oedipus* was performed, so the motif of the plague works both on the symbolic and the literal level. The seeming universality of the character, his noble quest for truth, and the overall complexity of the story—with Oedipus being simultaneously Thebes' greatest defender and worst enemy—makes the play, in the eyes of Aristotle, the greatest tragedy of all. Sophocles' life and work reflect his conservative background; he came from a wealthy family, he was a deeply religious man, and up until his death he was actively involved in the Athenian government. He was well-respected and his plays won more prizes than both Aeschylus and Euripides. Sophocles supposedly proclaimed that he wrote men as they should be, whereas Euripides wrote them as they really are. What is more, the composition of the plays was part of a drama competition where winning the first prize would be strong incentive to composing crowd-pleasing tragedies. It is a well-known fact that Euripides, by far the most controversial of the three, won very few prizes, but he did win one for *The Bacchae*, probably his most conservative play. Apparently, even in classical Greece "left-wing" myth was also inconsequential.

In the *Poetics*, Aristotle offers a theoretical treatment of tragedy largely through Sophocles' *Oedipus the King*. "Aristotle's basic criteria for a well-formed plot are *connection* and *closure*; closure implies a *beginning* and an *end*, while connection implies a *middle* with a series of events following by *necessity or probability* one from another to

link them. Somewhere in this series of events we would expect a *change of fortune*, the beginning of which marks the pivotal point between the *complication* and *resolution*."[31]

In *Conspiracy Theories: Secrecy and Power in American Culture* Mark Fenster notes:

> The "classical" conspiracy narrative attempts to unify seemingly disparate, globally significant elements and events within a singular plot, doing so through the traditional logic of conventional popular narratives, including "causality, consequence, psychological motivations, the drive toward overcoming obstacles and achieving goals. Character-centered—i.e., personal or psychological—causality is the armature of the classical story." Its central point of identification is a character who is able to effect change in himself/herself and in the world, and who, in so doing, brings about what seems a reasonable affirming narrative resolution. (108)

The story of Oedipus can be read along the lines of a "classical" conspiracy thriller. When Laius, King and of Thebes, learns from an oracle that he will die by his son's hand, he and his wife, Iocasta, hand their newborn baby to a shepherd to be left for dead in mount Cithaeron. The shepherd took pity on the baby and hands it instead to a man from Corinth who, in turn, delivers the child to the King and Queen of Corinth. When Oedipus is grown he learns from an oracle that he is destined to kill his father and marry his mother. Trying to escape his destiny, and believing Polybus and Merope to be his parents, he flees Corinth. On the way to Thebes, Oedipus encounters Laius, and following an altercation, he kills his biological father. When he reaches Thebes, he learns about the Sphinx, a monster that has been terrorizing the city with an unsolvable riddle. When Oedipus solves her riddle, he is crowned king of Thebes, he marries Iocasta, and unknowingly fulfils the prophecy.

The play opens with the terrible news of a plague that has befallen Thebes as punishment for the murder of Laius. The citizens once again turn to Oedipus for help; the

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[31] Malcom Heath, "Notes on Sophocles' *Oedipus*." (2001)
http://www.leeds.ac.uk/classics/resources/poetics/poet-ot.htm

task is finding the murderer and cleansing the city of his miasmatic presence. Oedipus embarks on an obsessive quest for the truth behind the new "riddle" unable to decipher the harsh reality at play. When he summons Tiresias for help, the blind prophet confronts him with the truth which he vehemently rejects, accusing Tiresias of conspiring against him with Creon, his brother-in-law (and uncle). Finally, when a servant is summoned—the only surviving witness to Laius' murder who fled Thebes immediately after the incident—coupled with the testimony of the shepherd who had been part of Laius and Iocasta's conspiracy to kill their son, the queen takes her own life, and a devastated Oedipus blinds himself, entrusts Creon with Thebes and his children (also his siblings), and exiles himself just as he had promised to do to the murderer of Laius.

When Oedipus is confronted with the truth, his first impulse is to accuse Creon and Tiresias of a conspiracy to overthrow him. His paranoid reaction indicates a man who, by nature, is extremely skeptical and suspicious, a man who does not accept words at face value but rather needs proof, concrete evidence to back up Tiresias' statements. Oedipus is also a man of superior intelligence, the only one with the intellectual capacity to solve the riddle of the Sphinx. His entire being is characterized by excess; excessive cognitive capacity, excessive pride, excessive thirst for truth and justice. His paranoid disposition initially manifests as a false perception of the events—the false belief that Creon and Tiresias are conspiring against him. Oedipus' paranoia, however, is not unjustified.

A conspiracy against Oedipus *did* exist: Laius and Iocasta conspire against their own son in order to preserve their position of power. It is this conspiracy that initiates the circle of violence, a conspiracy enacted by humans—not Fate—who dared not question the truth of the all-knowing prophets. The overwhelming tendency to read the story of

Oedipus as a tragedy of fate (where blame oscillates between the cruelty of Fate and the arrogance of Oedipus) neglects to take into account the initial chain of events that led to the fulfillment of the prophecy, locating causality instead in the murder of Laius rather than in the attempted murder of Oedipus. Sophocles' play preaches that fate is inescapable irrespective of one's good intentions, but at the same time it suggests that free will is also in play. But whose free will are we talking about? What is the *hamartia* that set the wheels of destruction in motion? Who is the victim and who the villain? Fate is an interesting concept; on the one hand, it diminishes accountability on the part of humans (one's destiny is foretold and fulfilled as prescribed by the Fates); on the other hand it eliminates justification of action, or renders it tautological (tragedy befalls Oedipus because the Fates said so).

Oedipus, despite his unwillingness to accept truth, embodies truth, bearing the marks of the conspiracy that set in motion his tragic downfall. His very name is given to him because of his swollen feet—a wound inflicted by Laius when he pinned together his son's feet with an iron pin—a permanent mark of the violence inflicted on the child and of the conspiracy at play. His paranoid disposition, also manifested in his wrathful temper, stubbornness, and pride, reflects his identity or, rather, his identities. Oedipus is father and brother, foreign and native, savior and destroyer, husband and son, king and homeless outcast; excessive knowledge crowns him king and dethrones him. The Sphinx too serves a dual function. On the first occasion she becomes the reason Oedipus is crowned king; at the same time she is also the reason the citizens of Thebes did not actively seek out Laius' murderer, which brings about the plague and subsequently Oedipus' downfall.

Many of the critical readings on Oedipus center on the concepts of *hubris* and *hamartia*. Philosophical debates focus on the tension between fate and free will, the question of human agency and divine intervention. Psychoanalytic theory universalizes the Oedipus complex as a necessary stage in the course of psychosexual development. The conspiracy at play is attributed to whimsical gods and twisted fate. The theme of knowledge is also prevalent; the intense desire for truth as threatening and the idea of *knowing too much* (the moment of *anagnorisis*) become the catalyst for the hero's instant change of fortune.

The Greek term *anagnorisis* has been translated as "discovery," "revelation," and "recognition." It is the climactic moment when someone realizes the truth about himself or someone else, and this verbal pronouncement and acceptance of truth brings forth (in the audience) *catharsis*, a sense of purging, cleansing, and restoration of order. *Anagnorisis* (ἀνα-γνώρισις) in Greek means recognition; re-cognition implies not a discovery—the revelation of something new and unknown—but a re-conceptualization of something familiar, something already known but perceived differently. *Anagnorisis* in this manner implies a crisis in interpretation, a failure to read the signs properly, which however, are already in place. Oedipus does not merely possess truth; he embodies it. All the signs are there but he fails (or rather refuses) to read them properly. Tiresias (the "father" figure who *knows too much*) confronts him with the truth directly; what causes Oedipus' failure to "see" straight is a type of information overload. On one level he already knows too much but is unable to process the information; on another level as a genuine "paranoiac" he demands evidence and is highly suspicious of Tiresias' unsubstantiated claims to truth. Ironically, there *had been* a conspiracy against Oedipus—

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one that Tiresias knows but selectively and arbitrarily chooses to exclude from his "historiographic" account—albeit a failed one. The *hamartia* at hand (literally meaning missing the mark) is the misfired accusations towards Creon and the blind prophet. The fact that Laius and Iocasta's conspiracy is never raised as an issue in the causal chain of events leading up to the time of the plague reflects the cultural dynamics of father-son relationships; stories of violent conspiracies (Kronos castrating his father Uranus; Kronos swallowing his children; Zeus overthrowing Kronos) of fathers against sons, in addition to providing explanations about the making of the world, were mostly cautionary tales seeking to reinforce the role of the patriarch as the ultimate authority over his family and society at large. The fall of Oedipus within the play is caused by the overproximity to a "father" who knows too much; his fall in the overall myth is also because of a father exposed to surplus knowledge (knowing the future that lies ahead). In all cases, fear for one's well being is not the product of a paranoia that feeds from an irrational, unjustifiable and delusional sense of reality; Oedipus' paranoid reaction is entirely justified and cannot be understood as distorted knowledge but more along the lines of excessive knowledge with no preventive powers.

Paranoia in Oedipus, thus, is a complex affair. In psychoanalytic terms, paranoia relies on the mechanism of projection with the paranoiac constructing the "other," the object of paranoia, through self-projection: the "other" is in essence a projection of the self. Patrick O'Donnell offers the following characteristics of the condition:

> …[M]egalomania; a sense of impending, apocalyptic doom; racist, homophobic or gynophobic fear and hatred of those marked out as other deployed as a means of externalizing certain internal conflicts and desires (the scapegoating of otherness thus is essential to the ongoing work of paranoia); delusions of persecution instigated by these others or their agents; feelings of being under constant observation; an obsession with

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order; and a fantasizing of the reviled, abjected self as at the center of intersecting social and historical plots.[32] (13)

The other and the self here become indistinguishable, as Oedipus *is* literally the "other." Leo Bersani defines paranoia as a "doubling of presence" (subject and object of paranoia being two sides of the same coin) and more than any other tragic hero Oedipus embodies this doubling. The fantasy of the self as the center of social and historical plots is real, as the destiny of the nation is intertwined with the destiny of the self. The sense of impending, apocalyptic doom is also real; his obsession with restoring order reflects his sincere desire for truth and justice but also to a large extent reflects his narcissistic personality. Oedipus is a man of extraordinary intellectual ability which is firmly established in being the single one able to solve the riddle of the Sphinx. Everyone around him, including himself, address him almost as a messianic figure, the only one capable to solve the riddle of Laius' murder. Oedipus manifests many of the symptoms O'Donnell relates to the paranoid individual with one crucial difference: he is *not* delusional, his well-being *is* in peril, his end *is* near.

Perhaps the most paranoid aspect of the Oedipus story is the establishment of causality between the fate of a man and the fate of a people. In the twentieth century United States, the conflation of personal and national destinies mostly finds expression in the assassination of John F. Kennedy, an event that, according to popular belief, defined the historical course of a nation plagued by internal and external strife. Kennedy, much like Oedipus, was perceived as a national (super) hero (elevated to the status of a mythic figure), a man larger than life who sought to rid his country from the miasmatic forces

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[32] Patrick O'Donnell, *Latent Destinies: Cultural Paranoia and Contemporary U.S. Narrative* (2000).

driven by an ideology of violence and hatred. "Myths" surrounding John F. Kennedy's life and death often revolve around the question "what if Kennedy had lived," how would history on a global scale been completely different.[33] As in the Oedipus myth, multiple versions of the same story circulate, and, to this day, no single version has been comfortably embraced. Subsequent events such as the assassination of Robert Kennedy and Martin Luther King become inextricably linked to the Kennedy assassination which becomes "the point of departure—the watershed moment—for an entire generation…The members of that generation locate themselves in one of the founding moments of a continuously revised history in which new events must be symptomatically linked to the original trauma" (O'Donnell, 21).

   Oedipus the King is the quintessential tragic story, and perhaps the only one that fits Aristotle's theory perfectly (which is logical since the latter constructs his theory on tragedy primarily based on Sophocles' play). *The Oresteia*, for instance, is another example of a vicious cycle of violence initiated by a father's crime against his child—Agamemnon sacrifices Iphigenia, Clytemnestra and Aegisthus murder Agamemnon, Orestes murders Clytemnestra and Aegisthus. In *Medea*, a mother murders her own children in retaliation for her husband's infidelity; in *The Bacchae*, Agave, being under Dionysus' spell, tears her own son to pieces. In all of these stories, the causal chain of events is a product of free willed human action (with the exception of Agave) and the conspiratorial cause/effect relationships are products of homogeneous elements. In the Oedipus story there is a gap: an unexplainable deadly plague befalls Thebes. The reason turns out to be that an *entire city* is suffering because of a single man's *random* action

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[33] *Timequest* (Robert Dyke, 2002) takes on this very question. A time traveler goes back in time to Texas on November 22, 1963, and thwarts the Kennedy assassination.

(the murder of Laius is not premeditated) gone unpunished. It is not that just a family is suffering as with most Greek tragedies; the crime infests—literally—an entire city. Thebes becomes the scapegoat for Oedipus' crime; Oedipus becomes the scapegoat for the well-being of Thebes. The gap between the cause of the disease (a natural disaster) and the explanation for it is bridged by attributing it to human rather than (super)natural force. *Oedipus the King* is not a domestic tragedy and it is not just a tragedy of a man, it is the tragedy of a city-state caught in the intricate web of men who strive to maintain their powerful status.

The Oedipus story served as a point of reference for other Greek tragedies by all three great tragic poets, stories steeped in conspiratorial plots, grotesque violence, and intense fear of invisible, malevolent forces. It has also inspired a variety of authors during the modern and postmodern eras; Jerry Aline Flieger notes the works of postmodern writers such as Pynchon, Beckett, Eco, DeLillo, Abish, Perec, and Ionesco in which "…latter-day Oedipae…make an uncanny discovery, deciphering clues that are often inscribed in writing: they each finally discover that the mysterious culprit they are tracking in the encoded urban labyrinth, the suspect they suspect, is none other than themselves"[34] (Flieger). The other element Flieger identifies in postmodern fiction is the figure of the "dead or silent father…[who] presides or hovers, however absently, over the novel's events, or lack of them" (Flieger). Here one can also recall the way Moritz Schreber serves as a catalyst for his son's ruin. In the case of Oedipus, the plague is caused because Laius' murderer has gone unpunished. Nowhere does the oracle or Tiresias

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[34] Jerry Aline Flieger, "Postmodern Perspective: The Paranoid Eye" *New Literary History: A Journal of Theory and Interpretation*, Winter 1997; 28 (1), pp. 87-109.

mention the mother and son's incestuous relationship as having anything to do with the deadly plague. As with Schreber, this is strictly a father-son affair.

The cause-effect relationship established in the story rests upon the violation of the law of the patriarch with an indifference about the patriarch himself violating the law (Laius being the instigator of a cycle of violence with his intention to murder his own son). In *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* Deleuze and Guattari argue that "*Oedipus is first the idea of an adult paranoiac, before it is the childhood feeling of a neurotic*," (274) insisting on the idea that "everything begins in the mind of the father: isn't that what you want, to kill me, to sleep with your mother? It is first of all a father's idea: thus Laius"[35] (273). But this idea rests on the premise that the father himself is *not* delusional by feeling threatened by his son; he is in the privileged position of knowing a truth and *because* of that rather than *despite* it, he materializes the truth that was already there, in the form of an ironic self-fulfilling prophecy. What is more, in myth one might argue that the performative utterances of the prophet set reality in motion: the moment the event is announced it becomes an inescapable reality.

The figure of the dead father who hovers, however absently, over the events in Oedipus is manifested through the plague; the plague is the *symptom*, rather than the disease, of something else, something intangible and unseen that hovers over Thebes. The issue of visibility is central not only to the Oedipus story but in most paranoid narratives, and especially as we shall see in Hollywood cinema. The plague, just like Oedipus' feet is a *visible* manifestation of foul play and material evidence for the truth. The tendency to connect heterogeneous elements in clear cause-effect relationships is a prime feature of

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[35] Gilles Deleuze, Félix Guattari. *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. University of Minnesota Press, 2003.

paranoid narratives. Sophocles uses an actual event—the plague in Athens—and attributes it to the actions of a single individual who is as much a victim as he is a villain. The obsessive quest for knowledge—the trademark of the paranoiac—saves the city and ruins Oedipus, a self-appointed scapegoat who sacrifices his life for the public good. The closer he comes to this form of excessive knowledge, the closer he approaches to recognizing the "other" or, rather the moment his identity is revealed as the "other" he willingly assumes his new identity (which was not really new, but lay dormant). Flieger asserts that the paranoid "putting himself in the Other's place, [he] draws affinities between all knowledge of objects as such, he makes connections, he creates a plot by taking the place of the Other."[36] The last task Oedipus performs as king is to ordain himself, in a dramatic gesture of identity swapping, the Other, a pitiful exile. Bersani argues that "in paranoia, the primary function of the enemy is to provide a definition of the real that makes paranoia necessary. We must therefore begin to suspect the paranoid structure itself as a device by which consciousness maintains the polarity of self and nonself, thus preserving the concept of identity"[37] (109). In the case of Oedipus, the realization of his identity coincides with the disintegration of his identity, since the polarity necessary for the preservation of identity cannot be sustained: the self and the "other" (the enemy) are one and the same. The character of Oedipus this way reveals the structure of paranoid thought at the precise moment the structure collapses, the moment the self and the other become indistinguishable. What is more, his fluid, fragmented identity makes him, perhaps, precursor to the postmodern subject in western literature.

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[36] Jerry Aline Flieger, "Postmodern Perspective: The Paranoid Eye." Flieger explores the relation between paranoia and postmodernism, which will be addressed in Chapter Three.
[37] Leo Bersani, "Pynchon, Paranoia, and Literature." *Representations*, No. 25, Winter, 1989, pp. 99-118.

Paranoia, as we shall see in the following chapters is primarily a male affair, a condition that has been theorized through the male psyche and represented in the arts predominantly through the male hero, not through the psyche but through the *intellect,* not as a flaw but as a heroic quest for knowledge that restores order. The infallibility of the hero in Hollywood cinema and the demand for clear resolutions have given birth to heroic figures that can triumph without self-destructing.[38]

Oedipus in Hollywood: the Paranoiac Who Knows Too Much

When we speak of paranoid narratives in Hollywood what do we mean? Are we referring to stories where the central character is a delusional psychotic with a distorted perception of reality? Is a paranoid narrative necessarily a conspiratorial one? A paranoid narrative is not necessarily one with unpleasant content; rather, I wish to argue, *it is one that invites the viewer to adopt a specific mode of thought in order to understand and follow the story based on its inner logic*. Hollywood's courtship with paranoia, especially since World War II, makes for a cinema that seeks to instruct as much as entertain (or as Sidney said about poetry, "to teach and to delight"). Directors have often taken it upon themselves to try and show how things (or people) *should be*; a distinct few have tried to show them as "they are."[39]

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[38] Examples would include *The Man Who Knew Too Much* (Alfred Hitchcock, 19550, *The Matrix* (Andy and Larry Wachowski, 1999), *The Manchurian Candidate* (John Frankenheimer, 1962), and *Conspiracy Theory* (Richard Doner, 1997).

[39] The figure of the cowboy in most westerns, for instance, embodies the ideal male in his desire to safeguard the community against the "savage" Native Americans. Martin Scorsese disrupts this mythical figure in *Taxi Driver* (1976), transposes the lone defender of morality in an urban setting, and constructs a flawed and disturbed urban cowboy, a product of a corrupt environment.

The mythic figures in Hollywood often rely on familiar pre-existing archetypes—like Oedipus—that are also, however, familiar cultural figures of the time.[40] The "cowboy," for instance, is a purely American custom-made mythic hero, tailored to the romanticized image and revisionist politics Hollywood promoted not only in this continent but all around the world. Warwick Frost notes that "[t]he appeal of Western films and the West extends well-beyond its geographical area, being particularly strong in the eastern USA, South America, Europe, Japan and Australia" (Calder, 1974: xiii; Fenin and Everson,1977; McGrath, 2001; Penaloza, 2001: 369). This modern-day Oedipus, always on a quest to guard his people against the "plagued" Native Americans and restore order (a homeless wanderer occupying the liminal position between the savage and the civilized), is an example of a paranoiac, whose "justified" fear we share, whose "justified" action—of the violent kind—we condone. The Western can be seen as a distinct type of paranoid narrative similar to Cold War paranoid films, a genre that like Greek tragedy draws from socio-historical events by transposing them to a mythic dimension.[41] In "Kiss Me Deadly: Communism, Motherhood, and Cold War Movies" Michael Rogin identifies three major moments in American history of demonology: the first, he notes, is racial and stems from "a distinctive American political tradition, fearful of primitivism, disorder, and conspiracy, developed in response to people of color" (1). The second demonological moment targets class and ethnic conflict (fear of immigrants

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[40] For an elaborate analysis on this subject see *Martin M. Winkler, Classical Myth and Culture in the Cinema*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2001. Also of great interest is Joseph Campbell's *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*. Princeton University Press, 1972. In it, Campbell presents the concept of *monomyth*, a term he borrowed from Joyce's *Finnegan's Wake*. It is also often referred to as "the hero's journey."
[41] The project does not deal with the Western. The goal in including this brief section on the genre is to identify a pattern that will be explored through other types of films, all of which, I wish to argue, are informed by the paranoid style of storytelling.

seen as working-class "savages"). The Cold War initiates the third moment. Rogin, I believe, neglects to include gender as a major category and the intense anxiety over female sexuality manifested in the *film noir* of the 1930s-1940s. Films that draw from the history of American demonology are part of, what will be defined in this project as the "traditional" paranoid narratives. Genres such as the Western, *film noir*, and the political thriller both produce and are products of intense anxieties over social, racial, and political groups.

Greek drama has arguably provided Hollywood with elements for a successful storytelling recipe both on the thematic and structural levels.[42] In "The *Katabasis* Theme in Modern Cinema" Erling B. Holtsmark notes: "What is perhaps not so generally observed or consciously recognized is the astonishing extent to which the mythic patterns of classical antiquity have worked themselves into the very marrow of the cinematic skeletons that support plot, action, and characterization…Although they are not restricted to any one type, *katabasis* films tend to fall into certain genres: westerns, detective thrillers, war stories, and science fiction"[43] (24-5). In addition to art, parallels between fifth century BCE Greece and twentieth century United States history have not gone unnoticed; in *A War Like No Other: How the Athenians and Spartans Fought the Peloponnesian War* Victor Davis Hanson quotes Thomas Paine's "prophetic" words, "What Athens was in miniature, America will be in magnitude." Hanson describes the Peloponnesian War as a "colossal absurdity," stemming from an intense mutual suspicion

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[42] I am referring here to elements such as linear narrative with a beginning, middle, and end, clear resolutions that follow logically from the plot, and the elimination of extraneous material that does not fit the story in a harmonic manner.

[43] The Greek word "katabasis" means "a descent, going down." Holtsmark uses this term to define films that "…fit and draw on patterns of narrative expectation that are of great antiquity" (23).

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between Sparta and Athens, a mutual paranoid disposition that brought the great civilization to its knees. Hanson goes on to draw parallels between the devastating Greek war and twentieth century World War II, the Cold War, and Vietnam as manifestations of a similar hubristic and paranoid behavior on the part of the Americans. The Cold War, in particular, turns former allies into enemies—like with the Athenians and the Spartans after the Greco-Persian wars. The Americans and the Soviets, fighting side by side against Germany in World War II, following the re-distribution of Europe develop a mutual distrust, splitting the continent into two parts: the "good" "progressive" West and the "evil" "primitive" East.[44]

The political realities of the Cold War inspired a plethora of films that reflect a paranoia that is ideologically informed.[45] The historical realities in fifth century BC Greece and twentieth century United states, each century being respectively the nations' golden age, cultivate a paranoia that finds expression in the political and social arenas. The excess that characterizes both cultures finds expression in the figure of the hero as a man with excessive knowledge standing for truth, justice, and order. The American paranoiac does not belong to a specific genre; he goes where he is needed, although he mostly frequents the political thriller. Like a Greek god, he comes in different shapes and forms. At a time when the over-exposure to information brings about a crisis in interpretation, when the distinction between the real and the simulated has collapsed,

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[44] For a comprehensive historical analysis of the Cold War see Martin Walker's *The Cold War: A History*. Holt Paperbacks, 1994.
[45] Films such as *Big Jim McClain* (Edward Ludwig, 1952), *Red Dawn* (John Milius, 1984), and *I Married a Monster from Outer Space* (Gene Fowler Jr., 1958), employ paranoia as a propagandistic political weapon against the Soviet Communist "threat."

when all that has been known is progressively questioned and invalidated, narratives that seek to provide the comforting sense of locating meaning might just be our last refuge.

Hollywood cinema has been for the American culture what ancient theater has been for the Greeks: a "preacher" to their own and a cultural ambassador to the rest of the world. The difference is that Greek tragedies primarily read as "how *not* to behave" and Hollywood narratives prescribe more to a "how to" recipe.[46] The evil-doer in Hollywood—and there are many—is almost never the protagonist, the individual we are asked to identify with; in Greek tragedy the protagonist *is* the one who acts inappropriately and subsequently suffers the consequences of his/her actions. What is more, whereas the tragic poets drew from pre-existing myths to evaluate their reality, Hollywood creates its own myths *as reality*. Looking at the world through the lens of paranoia implies looking awry. Looking awry at paranoia through the lens of Hollywood cinema facilitates a *re-cognition* of familiar conventions whose naturalization often masks certain mechanisms at work. The goal in this project is twofold: the first is to explore the concept of paranoia as it manifests itself in postwar Hollywood cinema that takes on as its subject the conspiracy narrative and its variations. The second is to use paranoia as a critical term of inquiry, a hermeneutic tool, as a means of re-examining the relationships between other critical concepts. Adhering to a "Žižekian" methodological approach, each chapter poses a theoretical question about a familiar critical concept— Hollywood narrative, the postmodern, fetishism, the female—and problematizes it

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[46] This was also the source of the dispute between Plato and Aristotle vis-à-vis the role and function of poetry. Plato, the pessimist, feared that this type of art would inspire the public to imitate the vicious actions performed on stage; Aristotle, the optimist, believed that the plays would teach the citizens what to avoid, what *not* to do, learning through the characters' misery. Pity (for the character) and *fear* (for the self) would ensure the desired response. Hollywood's heroes, on the contrary, are predominantly role models to be emulated.

through the methodological model of paranoia. Put simply, this project is about *how to do things with paranoia*.

Chapter 2: Is Hollywood Cinema Inherently "Paranoid"? The Myth of the Male Paranoiac

"We've become a race of Peeping Toms..."
        -Stella, *Rear Window*

"You never had a camera inside my head!"
        -Truman, *The Truman Show*

The Birth of Hollywood Paranoia

When *The Birth of a Nation* (originally titled *The Clansman*) first opens in theaters in 1915, D.W. Griffith, unknowingly at the time, gives birth to much more than the first major feature length blockbuster about a nation in search of a cleansed, renewed historical identity; he gives birth to what was to become the most powerful medium of the twentieth century: Hollywood narrative and Hollywood realism.[47] Being the highest grossing film of its time (bringing in more than $10 million at the box office), *The Birth of a Nation*'s popularity with the general public and with film critics alike has made film history, a history filled with controversy, melodrama, conflict, hate, admiration, almost all of the ingredients that make a (hi)story fascinating to watch. Based on Thomas Dixon's best-selling novel, *The Clansman*, published in 1906, *Birth* initiates a long and "painful" tradition of Hollywood targeting our most basic instincts (such as fear, aggression, and sex), playing and preying on them in most effective ways. The Hollywood spectator is also born; in this early stage, he has little to no demands made on him. Rather, Griffith constructs a world in the most simplistic terms, making no demands

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[47] Griffith's *Judith of Bethulia* (1914) and *Corner in Wheat* (1909) predate *Birth of a Nation*. *Corner in Wheat*, especially, can also be described as "paranoid" in its indictment of capitalism. *Birth of a Nation*, however, is the first feature length film in Hollywood that was a *major blockbuster* where techniques that had slowly begun to gain shape (Porter used crosscutting in 1903), form the type of narrative to which audiences would be most drawn.

on the newly formed spectator other than learning how to tell the difference between black and white, good and evil.[48] No other shades of color are introduced at this point.

Hollywood cinema, thus, and the Hollywood spectator are born at the same moment in time; language has not been introduced to either one (cinema would "learn to talk" in 1927). What happens, though, when we have one *"child"* teaching another *"child"* about how to see and understand the world?[49] In a word, trouble, as one automatically assumes the authorial position of the teacher, the other of the disciple. *Birth of a Nation* has been praised for its innovative form almost as much as it has been condemned for its racist content. Since Metz, we understand better the nuances in any attempt to divorce form from content and evaluate them as two distinct entities with no impact on one another; this is largely how this film gained such prominence in film studies in the first place.

One is tempted in this respect to consider Melanie Klein's Object Relations Theory (ORT), as the point I wish to make is that early cinema often dealt in representing the world in simplistic binaries that potentially misled audiences. Klein offers a useful

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[48] The binary structure is even suggested in the opening statement of the film: "We do not fear censorship for we have no wish to offend with improprieties or obscenities, but we do demand, as a right, the liberty to show the *dark* side of wrong that we may illuminate the *bright* side of virtue—the same liberty that is conceded to the art of the written word—that art to which we owe the Bible and the works of Shakespeare." This attempt to fend off criticism implies that Griffith must have anticipated reactions to his representation of the historical past. The diction ("dark" "light" "liberty") and the reference to the Bible manifests Griffith's faith and desire to "infect" or even enlighten the viewer with "truth" and "knowledge."

[49] By referring to Griffith's audience as a "child", I do not mean to imply that early twentieth-century filmgoers lacked the cognitive capacity to process the images. The *novelty* of moving pictures and visual narratives, however, does raise the issue of audience reception of *realism* being perceived as *reality* rather than a constructed genre aiming to produce a reality effect. A sophisticated audience has more experience (an experience that only comes with time) with a specific type of narrative, *not* more intelligence; the analogy drawn here is pointing to the element of regression. According to Patricia Santoro, [t]he concept of the constructed film viewer is based on three factors: regression, primary identification, and effacement of authorship (or the concealment of marks of enunciation that point to the authorship of the film). Regression is attributed to those conditions of viewing (darkened room, etc.) that cause the viewer to return to a state of primary narcissism, one which makes manifest his or her desires to be at one with the imaginary realm (the fullness with the mother). In this state the viewing subject does not distinguish between the perception of reality and the representation of the image that takes its place. (44)

critical vocabulary in explaining this tendency in psychoanalytic terms, since her concept of "position" liberates the development of the human psyche from the more temporally rigid bonds of, say, Freud's "stages" and "structures."[50] The first position in Klein's schema is the *paranoid-schizoid position.*[51] At this time the infant only relates to part objects, especially the mother's breast. Object Relations Theory focuses on the pre-verbal phase in an infant's life, and posits that the primary motivation of the baby is to form a connection with the object. There is very little objective reality; anxiety and aggression are at their height, as we are dealing with a time of pure projection. The baby experiences tremendous anxiety and very bizarre and violent fantasies which get projected into the world. The relations between the infant and the part object are, thus, experienced as all good (with the idealization of the object), or all bad (with the demonization of the object). Defenses against the violent fantasies involved here are projective identification (where the baby tries to eradicate the evil fantasies, and the world becomes horrifying and anxiety is intensified), and splitting. It is during the *depressive* position, Klein argues, that the baby begins to perceive the mother as a whole object, where good and bad begin to occupy the same space and moderate each other, and realize that the hated, persecutory breast was one and the same with the loved, nurturing one. Hence, the term *depressive*, as the baby begins to develop feelings of guilt for the violent fantasies against the "bad" breast, and attempts to "repair" the mother/loved object whom he or she fears of losing.

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[50] The correlation of Klein's ORT with early cinema should *not* be understood as an attempt to oversimplify or be reductive. Rather, this analogy aims to point to certain tendencies in early Hollywood cinema that persisted in later times as well. Understanding the world in binary terms is a key component of paranoid thought. Klein's positions of early infancy allow identifying this element, and considering its potential effects on the viewer.

[51] See Melanie Klein, *The Selected Melanie Klein*. Juliet Mitchell ed. New York: The Free Press, 1986.

The spectator (during cinema's pre-verbal stage) similarly is confronted with *Birth*'s fantastically violent, aggressive images, experiencing the world as horrific, where the split between the whites as pure good and the blacks as pure evil is facilitated not only through simplistic representations of racial difference but also through cinematic techniques (especially continuity and parallel editing) that *reinforce* the narrative content rather than function as mere vehicles that drive and sustain the plot.[52] Film scholars have reacted to the film in a similar way. The split here is manifested in the tendency to divorce form from content, acknowledging the racist representation of African Americans but also acknowledging Griffith as a master storyteller. Only with the advent of Grand Theory does film scholarship finally reach the *depressive* position, seeking to "repair" objects (such as females and African Americans) that suffered the oppressive effects of splitting and projective identification for decades.

Some of the elements Griffith has been hailed for are his innovative use of parallel editing or crosscutting and medium shots of the characters, all of which (and many more) enhance the film's realism and paranoid attitude; eventually they become natural ingredients of Hollywood narrative structure.[53] Parallel editing is mainly understood as a technique that presents the simultaneity of action in different spaces. The result, however, grants the spectator with a surplus knowledge and presence that is ideologically contaminated, moving beyond the purpose of temporal orientation.

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[52] "The Faithful Souls" in *Birth of A Nation are* represented as the "good" blacks (another binary split *within* the black community in the film), but only in relation to their being loyal to whites. Linda Williams discusses the "Tom" tradition in film in "Melodrama in Black and White: Uncle Tom and *The Green Mile*."
[53] Again, these techniques appear elsewhere too, but the epic narrative Griffith creates was unprecedented in the United States at the time.

In *The Mask of Art* Clyde Taylor argues that *Birth*'s "…great power in manipulating formal strategies has won it voluminous attention and respect as an aesthetic achievement" (110). He goes on to say that "…virtually all of [the film's] formal achievements, its editing, the close-ups, iris shots, manipulation of crowds, camera movements, scenic set-ups, literary titles, etc., are deployed in the cause of aestheticizing and sentimentalizing his principals as White people" (110).[54] In the battle sequences, for instance, Griffith's cuts from the noble Union soldiers to the equally devoted Confederate soldiers, suggest that the division (the source of conflict) is not really between the North and the South, but between the blacks and the whites. The Stonemans and the Camerons are sympathetically portrayed; in the opening sequences, parallel editing informs the viewer of the families' blissful state and of their deep friendship. The melodramatic shot of the two young men—Stoneman and Cameron—dying in each other's arms, is another way of casting the blacks as responsible for the tragic outcomes of the war. Taylor's grievance is that "[b]ecause cinema studies has chartered its historical claim from the starting point of Griffith's movie—almost a myth of origin—there is an inclination not to burden this grand originating moment with the discourse on race relations in the United States" (105). His overall thesis is that the style of Hollywood movies carries the stigma of these racist beginnings in the tradition of continuity editing that remains the dominant style. While Taylor specifically focuses on racism as inherent in Hollywood cinema, at the same time he is implicitly describing a particular type of paranoid storytelling, one in which the "demons" responsible for the evils of war happen to be African Americans.

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[54] Taylor here is referring to Gerald Mast's treatment of Griffith's film in *A Short History of the Movies*. Taylor strongly criticizes Mast for the celebratory and reverent manner in which he reads *Birth of a Nation*, while taking a passive attitude towards Griffith's blatant racism against blacks.

Since the early twentieth century, the same narrative recipe has hosted "demons" in all shapes and forms (women, immigrants, the government, Native Americans, the Catholic church, the Communists). Every epoch has its demons.

In addition, *Birth of a Nation* employs an important element that would much later become a staple of postmodern narrative: the blending of the historical with the fictional, featuring historical figures such as Robert E. Lee—his surrender—and Abraham Lincoln—his assassination. This is one of the first successful attempts at *cinematography* posing as *historiography*. The structuring of the events together with the events themselves create, very effectively, the very first popular *paranoid* narrative in Hollywood history. As we shall see in the chapter on *JFK*, Oliver Stone, a genuine offspring of Griffith, perfects this technique. What initially began as a form of entertainment and escapism from the harsh realities of life (with the "cinema of attractions"), Griffith transformed, and others perfected, into an ideologically driven "epistemological" medium, a "wise" wizard with the power to transform and touch the human psyche at its deepest darkest levels.

This introduction attempts to set the tone in order to consider the following question: if *Birth of a Nation* sets the rules and provides Hollywood narrative with some of its most essential features, if its form is strongly implicated in producing a paranoid effect, and if Griffith does give birth to Hollywood realism, which, to this day, persistently adheres to this form, is Hollywood cinema inherently "paranoid"? Has it been training us all along to think in a "paranoid" manner? And if so, what does this mean? In order to attempt an answer to these questions this chapter will examine closely two very popular cinematic texts that epitomize self-referentiality and Hollywood cinema, and provide a direct—if

not overdetermined—commentary on both the construction of film and of the spectator:
Alfred Hitchcock's *Rear Window* (1954), and Peter Weir's *The Truman Show* (1998).
Both films have been a pole of attraction for film critics and scholars alike, as there is a
substantial body of work dedicated to the ways each director aggressively forces the
spectator to confront his/er own voyeuristic desire.

Why, out of a variety of Hollywood self-reflexive texts, pair these two specific ones?
First, their filmmaking style foregrounds and makes visible aspects of Hollywood
filmmaking destined to remain invisible. The stories themselves are informed by
paranoia's most important elements, some of which include intense suspicion, constant
surveillance, and centrality of the main character (that is, the hero stands at the center of
all activity; everything is being done *to/for* him). Each has also been discussed as
symptomatic of its respective historical context. *Rear Window* is released during the
McCarthy years, a time of extremely heightened paranoia; *The Truman Show* comes
almost at the end of the millennium, a time of intense anxiety about technology taking
over and controlling our everyday lives. Both have been read not only as relevant to
filmmaking but to television as well, postmodernism's pride and joy.[55] The fact that there
is a little less than a fifty-year span separating the two films, allows the examination of

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[55] "Postmodernism" is a multi-headed "monster" yet to be tamed by a stable or concrete definition; it is as elusive as the term "paranoia" which will be discussed in the following chapter. I regard *The Truman Show* a postmodern visual text not in terms of its aesthetic qualities, but more in relation to its subject matter. The narrative style for the most part remains within the conventional Hollywood narrative mostly informed by conservative politics, but at the same time the intense reflexivity and preoccupation with surveillance, visibility, and the simulated image taking over "the reality it is supposed to serve," echoes Baudrillard's theoretical approach to the postmodern. The idea of the image usurping reality culminates with *The Matrix* which is released after *The Truman Show* in 1999. Weir's film as we shall see addresses a consumer-driven, media-dominated postmodern society where subject and object become indistinguishable. It also poses and responds to questions about knowledge production, with Christof provocatively stating "we accept the reality of the world with which we are presented," responding to a question about Truman not knowing who or what he really is.

the gradual progression and evolution of film technology and technique and the way they produce a paranoid effect. Finally, and perhaps, most importantly, Jeffries and Truman form a powerful dialectical relationship. Even though both occupy a seemingly privileged position as the epicenter of all action, and consequently as the point of spectatorial identification, the former operates as the *subject* of the gaze, whereas the latter functions as the *object* of the gaze.

It is also important to consider two things: the cinematic apparatus itself along with Hollywood narrative's basic characteristics, and the similarity they hold to aspects of Freud's theory on paranoia. This chapter traces the origins and birth of Hollywood cinematic paranoia with *Birth of a Nation*, the growth and maturation of paranoia through *Rear Window*, and finally its climax (and impending demise?) through *The Truman Show* in the beginning, middle, and end of the twentieth century respectively.

On Hollywood's Paranoid Tendency

Cinema, in general, possesses certain essential properties which are not static. Hollywood, in particular, has a specific identifiable style which has been both normalized and perfected to the degree that anything or anyone deviating from the institutionalized recipe is often received as "abnormal," reactionary, and oftentimes undesirable. Patrick O'Donnell has stated that in postmodern times we *know* we are in trouble when we have to place the "real" within quotation marks.[56] Paranoia is not an epistemological phenomenon akin to postmodern times. On the contrary, *we have always been "paranoid."* The difference lies in the postmodern desire of bringing to center stage and

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[56] Patrick O'Donnell, *Latent Destinies: Cultural Paranoia and Contemporary U.S. Narrative*. Duke University Press, 2000.

making visible that which was condemned to remain behind the scenes. This allows for a re-evaluation of mechanisms that have constructed and sustained the paranoid subject since the beginnings of Hollywood cinema.

Hollywood cinema and the spectator—with very few exceptions—have been on a theoretical level, male[57] (both in terms of the filmmaker and the audience which is invited to identify with the male hero). The fact that Hollywood narrative knows no geographical boundaries, reaching the remotest of screens with the same success as in its home base, suggests that despite cultural differences, spectators will respond/react to this cinematic tradition in similar ways, sharing similar emotions, likes and dislikes. What are some of the ways this is achieved?

Let us recall the most basic elements of Hollywood narrative according to David Bordwell,[58] both in terms of form and content:

a) *Invisible style of editing*: no attention should be brought to cinema's technical apparatus; it is constantly present (ubiquitous) and active but has to operate invisibly.

b) *Inaudible style of sound*: no attention should be brought to the sounds (usually referring to extra-diegetic ones) that surround the plot. Sound and image have to blend harmoniously seeking to elicit emotional identification with the main character. In general, even though cinema is an audiovisual medium, the image enjoys a hierarchical superiority over sound (we "watch" a film; we do not "listen" to one).

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[57] See Laura Mulvey's "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" (1975). Feminist film theory has offered complex and nuanced readings of visual texts regarding representations of gender in cinema. This, however, does not cancel out the hegemonic presence of the male both in front and behind the camera.
[58] Some of these elements do not come from Bordwell's study on classical Hollywood narrative, but overall it is through his valuable work that certain elements are identified and described.

c) *Centrality of the character*: The *protagonist* stands at the center of the action, and is also the spectator's main entry into the fictional world, being constantly watched and followed by the latter. The *antagonist* is his nemesis, just as gifted but *not quite* the same. Furthermore, all events that do not in some way relate or connect to the main character will be eliminated as extraneous material.

d) *Spatial and temporal continuity*: At no point (unless necessary to a genre) is the spectator to feel spatially or temporally disoriented. Continuity editing assures that the "when" and the "where" are made very clear.

e) *All elements have to be part of a coherent story*: despite twists and turns in the structuring of the plot, the story unfolds linearly, with a clear beginning, middle, and end. Events have to contribute to the development and linear progression of the story. Nothing occurs "accidentally"; everything happens for a reason.

f) *Everything has to be resolved and explained*: by the end of the story, everything has to be "logically" explained (based on the inner logic of the story). Loose ends and incoherent resolutions bring about frustration and dissatisfaction, and are perceived as examples of poor filmmaking skill.

g) *The central character is confronted with a public and/or a private "threat"*: the protagonist operates in two social spheres: the public and the private. If one is out of order so will the other be. Chaos and disorder have to be restored by a single agent whose unique abilities—physical or cognitive or usually both—bring about equilibrium to his public and private life. *Conflict* lies at the core of the story. External forces (which can vary according to genre conventions; aliens in science

fiction, zombies in horror, terrorists in political thrillers, etc.) threaten to disrupt or destroy an initial state of happiness.

The list of elements is not exhaustive, but these characteristics have defined, and in many ways still do, Hollywood narrative. Let us now consider the most important ingredients of paranoid thought. Paranoia, according to Freud, involves the following elements:

a) *The mechanism of projection*: This is a defense mechanism that externalizes internal states of emotional and cognitive activity. All negativity is projected into the world, which becomes a hostile, dangerous place.

b) *Narcissism and megalomania*: the paranoid subject feels extremely special to the degree that he believes everyone wants to hurt him out of jealousy and fear. He situates himself as the focal point of interest, as the center of everyone's attention.

c) *Abnormal sexual behavior*: Freud attributed Schreber's fear and hate for Dr. Flechsig to latent homosexual desire. Through the mechanism of projection, the sentence "I love him" gets inverted to "He hates me" to fend off the forbidden feelings.

As a result, the paranoid individual experiences the world as extremely hostile, feels constantly threatened—due to his specialness—surrounded by ubiquitous and invisible forces, sees himself as the center of all activity, denies the possibility of accidental events, is able to form extremely coherent arguments—either by eliminating elements that do not fit, or by arbitrarily wedding otherwise heterogeneous elements in cause/effect relationships—and creates oversimplified stories with highly convoluted plots. Binary thought prevails (hence the oversimplified stories) as the only acceptable and, in effect, compatible to mainstream cognitive schemas. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick cites Leo

Bersani's view of paranoia: "'Paranoia is an inescapable interpretive doubling of presence.' It sets a thief (and if necessary becomes one) to catch a thief; it mobilizes guile against suspicion, suspicion against guile; 'it takes one to know one'" (6). This "doubling of presence" also speaks to the sibling relationship between Hollywood film and the spectator. The *homophrosune* that the "twins" enjoy also applies to the paranoid subject and object, between the "I" and the "other."[59] O'Donnell notes that according to Freudian theory "…the 'other' who is the *object* of paranoia is, in fact, a self-projection…" (18). The "other" of the "other" as Lacan also noted is, in effect, the self. More often than not, though, cinematic paranoia is ideological rather than pathological in nature; the central character is not paranoid in the clinical sense, but rather is only labeled as such (by diegetic characters).[60] As far as Hollywood is concerned, the white male has almost never been paranoid in the conventional sense. In his case, paranoia is usually a charisma, seldom a flaw. If the relentless pursuit of a truth the charismatic hero innately possesses (as he *senses* that something is wrong, that danger is lurking) invariably reveals instances of foul play, how can paranoid thought—the force driving the hero's actions—be perceived as anything other than beneficial?

Hollywood's paranoid methodological model is made possible, first and foremost, because of qualities inherent to the technical devices used in the making of a film. These devices, of course, are not unique to Hollywood; they are universal, forming the basis for

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[59] The term *homophrosune* is Greek for two people being of the same mind, thinking alike.

[60] Within the very large body of work on this "condition", very few characters have emerged as actual "paranoiacs," Francis in *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* being one of the earliest and rarest examples. In Hollywood cinema, ironically, some of the most famous instances of paranoia as distorted rather than excessive knowledge are represented either through female characters such as, for instance, Lina McLaidlaw Aysgarth in Alfred Hitchcock's *Suspicion* (1941), or through sexually ambiguous ones like Trelkovsky in Roman Polanski's *The Tenant* (1976).

all filmmaking styles and industries around the world. It is *how* this equipment will be put into use and how it lends itself to producing a paranoid effect. What is unique to Hollywood is the fact that it relies on these paranoid aspects of the apparatus for its effectiveness, by bringing them out in the most subtle ways.

One of the most crucial elements in film is that of editing. Stanley Kubrick has discussed this post-production process as unique to motion pictures, as opposed to other aspects of cinema (writing, photography, recording sound) that originate in other media. The editor is presented with huge chunks of "reality" (a surplus reality) which he then has to sort out, select, arrange, and put together to form a coherent, linear story. In terms of content, everything has to become transparent and clear, and everything has to make sense. In terms of form, Hollywood has persistently held to the continuity style of editing, which as already mentioned was pioneered by Griffith. Contrary to the transparency of the story, continuity editing strives to conceal itself and make the work of the editor invisible, unnoticeable. The ultimate goal is verisimilitude or "the *appearance* of truth." Other styles of filmmaking though using the same tool employ them differently; from Formalism to Expressionism, Surrealism, the French New Wave and more recently Dogme 95, filmmakers around the world have offered alternative ways of representing the world visually, none of which has been nearly as successful and appealing as Hollywood cinema. Let us take a closer look at cinema's most basic instruments.

In "Ideological Effects of the Basic Cinematographic Apparatus" Jean-Louis Baudry and Allan Williams offer a re-examination of the nature and function of the cinematic apparatus and its strong ideological effects. Early on they refer to Western science's invention of an optical apparatus that would have "as a consequence the decentering of

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the human universe, the end of geocentrism (Galileo)" (40). Ironically, it is a different optical apparatus—the camera—that would restore the huge blow Galileo inflicts on the human ego (we were not the center of the universe). In reference to the *camera obscura*, Baudry and Williams note that "this system, a recentering or at least a displacement of the center (which settles itself in the eye), will assure the setting up of the 'subject' as the active center and origin of meaning" (40). In other words, the construction of a subject standing at the center of all meaning and the subsequent identification of the spectator to this subject triggers a narcissism and egocentrism that infuse a sense of power and specialness previously shattered by scientific discoveries.

The ubiquitousness and invisibility of the Hollywood camera produce without a doubt a powerful effect.[61] The former property grants the spectator the power of omnipresence; the latter the feeling of autonomous thought. In relation to this idea, Baudry and Williams pose the following question: Does this process when the "product" is consumed "bring about a 'knowledge effect' or is the work concealed?" (40-1). They go on to state that "…concealment of the technical base will also bring about a specific ideological effect. Its inscription, its manifestation as such, on the other hand, would produce a knowledge effect, as actualization of the work in process, as denunciation of ideology, and as critique of idealism" (41). This "knowledge effect" in Hollywood filmmaking manifests itself in more than one way. Hollywood reveals by concealing and the outcome is granting the spectator a knowledge that exists but remains dormant. In psychoanalysis this comes close to disavowal—a discrepancy between knowledge and belief—that protects the spectator from himself. The camera, the spectator, and the protagonist form a

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[61] See Kaja Silverman's "Suture" in *The Subject of Semiotics*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1983.

kind of "Bermuda triangle" in which the first two usually get lost. As Laura Mulvey argues, the gaze of the camera and of the spectator is subordinated to that of the character. By the same token, Tom Gunning observes that early on in Hollywood, narrative "subordinates film form to the development of stories and characters."[62] Both are valid points, but we might add a little nuance to Mulvey's argument. One of Hollywood realism's cardinal rules, borrowed and adopted from stage theater, is the creation of the "fourth wall" an imaginary construct that forbids the character to look straight at the camera, in fear of acknowledging and thus exposing its presence, and breaking the illusion of the reality they struggled to create. This, however, means that the camera and later on the spectator function as a sort of a "panopticon" casting a controlling gaze that the character can never return.[63]

The camera's invisibility is also able to render a subjective representation in seemingly objective terms. "The movability of the camera," Baudry argues, "seems to fulfill the most favorable conditions for the manifestation of the 'transcendental subject.' There is both fantasmatization of an objective reality (images, sounds, colors) and of an objective reality which, limiting its powers of constraint, seems equally to augment the possibilities or the power of the subject" (43). The subjective vision of the director rendered in objective terms invites the audience to experience a "reality" that is false and distorted. Baudry and Williams note:

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[62] Tom Gunning, *D.W. Griffith and the Origins of American Narrative Film: The Early Years at Biograph* (University of Illinois Press, 1991).
[63] For a discussion on the concept of the "panopticon" see Katrin Kaschadt, "Jeremy Bentham: The Penitentiary Panopticon or Inspection House" and Peter Weibel, "Pleasure and the Panoptic Principle" in *CTRL (Space)*: *Rhetorics of Surveillance from Bentham to Big Brother*. Thomas Levin, Ursula Frohne, Peter Weibel eds. Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 2002.

The ideology of representation…and specularization…form a *singularly coherent system* in the cinema. Everything happens as, the subject himself being unable—and for a reason—to account for his own situation, it was necessary to substitute secondary organs, grafted on to replace his own defective ones, instruments or ideological formations capable of filling his function as subject. In fact, this substitution is only possible on the condition that the instrumentation itself be *hidden* or repressed. Thus, disturbing cinematic elements—similar, precisely, to those elements indicating the return of the repressed—signify without fail the arrival of the instrument "in flesh and blood" as in Vertov's *Man With a Movie Camera*. Both specular tranquility and the assurance of one's own identity collapse simultaneously with the revealing of the mechanism, that is, of the inscription of the film-work (my emphases, 46)

Hollywood cinema more than any other medium constructs a subject who feels connected and personally invested in this singularly coherent system. The invisibility of the cinematic apparatus does not suffice by itself to produce the paranoid effect, that is, the impression of a subjective reality experienced in objective terms. Baudry's anthropomorphic image of the camera suggests a "creator" whose powerful effect largely stems from its invisibility, from the ability to conceal its constant presence. The representation of reality, as Baudry mentions, is not unique to film; long traditions of artistic formations (literature, painting, theater) have sought to do the same. None, however, has done so on the premise of the concealment of form to the degree that Hollywood narrative has.

It's Good to be Paranoid: Alfred Hitchcock's *Rear Window*

1899 was a year to remember. Sigmund Freud writes *The Interpretation of Dreams*, a work that would make the world afraid to sleep… *perchance to dream*. The same year Alfred Hitchcock is born, a man who would also make audiences around the world afraid

not only to sleep, but even to perform the most mundane or pleasurable activities: take a shower, get married, attend a friendly dinner party, go on vacation in an exotic place, ride the train, or innocently peep outside the window into the buildings across the street. If Freud revealed verbally our deepest fears and desires lurking in our dreams, Hitchcock materialized them visually on screen in the most aggressive and horrific ways.[64]

It is no surprise that, as Belton argues, "the rise of Hitchcock studies mirrors the rise of film studies as an academic discipline"[65] (2). Cinema as the field of dreams and the portal into the unconscious has been *the* major artistic medium of the twentieth century. The critical attention, initiated by the writers of *Cahiers du Cinema* in the 1960s, that Hitchcock has enjoyed is of unprecedented proportions.[66] Starting with the auteur theory, moving to psychoanalysis, feminism, structuralism and semiotics, and more recently queer theory, theories may come and go but Hitchcock never goes out of style.[67] Why? Because cinema never goes out of style and he *is* cinema from the raw material up to the sophisticated final product, or rather he is Hollywood cinema. Hitchcock has borrowed elements from Expressionism and Surrealism and "Americanized" them (by this I mean removing the artificiality and constructedness that characterizes these traditions, transforming, thus, surreal dreams into real nightmares), but without a doubt, he has been a trend setter far more than a style borrower. The powerful imagery and oneiric ambiance that characterize many of his films are riddled with an anxiety that has been breeding armies of "paranoiac" spectators for decades. *Rear Windows*'s reflexivity, especially,

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[64] For an excellent analysis of Hitchcock's films see Robin Wood, *Hitchcock's Films Revisited* (Columbia University Press, 2002).

[65] John Belton, "Can Hitchcock Be Saved From Hitchcock Studies?" *Cineaste*, Fall 2003.

[66] See Eric Rhomer, Claude Chabrol. *Hitchcock: the first forty-four films*. Trans. Stanley Hochman. New York: F. Ungar, 1979, and Helen G. Scott, François Truffaut, *Hitchcock*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1967.

[67] John Belton, "Can Hitchcock Be Saved From Hitchcock Studies?" *Cineaste*, Fall 2003.

allows not only for an exploration of paranoia in Hollywood but also of Hollywood itself as a mechanism of paranoia or rather a type of paranoid mechanism.

Few of Hitchcock's films have produced as much, or more, scholarly attention than *Rear Window*. The film's overdetermined self-reflexivity has been already well documented, so I will refrain from offering any redundant analysis on this[68]; rather, my analysis will use the film's reflexivity as a basic premise in order to discuss not *how* it is exemplary of the Hollywood filmmaking and filmgoing experience, but rather *what* this reflexivity tells us, what it reveals and what it enables us to observe about Hollywood cinema itself. So far the focus has been on the basic ingredients of Hollywood narrative through which I try to highlight the paranoid mechanisms at work. Let us now invert this process and examine *Rear Window* by focusing on the ingredients of paranoia that highlight and inform the film which will be understood as the embodiment of Hollywood narrative.

Rear Window tells the story of L.B. Jefferies (played by James Stewart), an egocentric photojournalist who in the line of duty—trying to take a picture in a car race—breaks his leg. Unable to move and confined in his Greenwich Village apartment, Jeff spends his days looking at the neighboring apartments across the street through his rear window. Different characters capture his attention for different reasons; since he does not know their names, Jeff invents nicknames for them based on his subjective interpretation of their life situations. The only people he comes into actual contact with is a nurse, Stella, (played exquisitely by Thelma Ritter) who comes in every day, and his girlfriend, Lisa

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[68] See Joan Fawell's chapter "Hitchcock's Self-Reflexivity" in *Hitchcock's Rear Window: The Well-Made Film*. (Southern Illinois University Press, 2001), and Tania Modleski's chapter "The Master's Dollhouse: Rear Window" in *The Women Who Knew Too Much: Hitchcock and Feminist Theory* (Methuen, Inc., 1988).

Fremont (played by Grace Kelly), a beautiful and sophisticated upper class New Yorker who worships the ground he walks on. When the invalid wife of a traveling salesman disappears from their apartment, Jeff is convinced that the husband has murdered her. Jeff becomes obsessed with finding out what happened to the woman, and with Lisa's help he embarks on a "journey"—always confined in his wheelchair—that may prove deadly. Is he right or is he being paranoid? At the end, and after a near-death incident, Jefferies is vindicated; the husband did kill the wife. In the final scene with both legs now broken, Jeffries is sleeping in his wheelchair under the watchful eye of his loving Lisa.

Jefferies and the centrality and doubling of the paranoid subject

Jefferies has suffered a leg injury. Unable to move and physically disabled, this urban Oedipus, becomes the nucleus of the story. Right from the start, Jeff, the subject of a gaze the audience is to bound to, establishes his authority as a credible and lucid mind. In the opening scene we meet Stella, whose only function in the story (besides comic relief) is to act as a foil to Jeff, highlighting his cognitive superiority. Stella shares an anecdote in which while working for a director of General Motors right before the collapse of the stock market in 1929, she claims to have predicted the devastating event. Reading as nerves—and as a sign of an impending doom—symptoms that doctors attributed to a simple kidney disease, Stella proclaimed that "when General Motors has to go to the bathroom ten times a day, the whole country is ready to let go." Jeff replies in a condescending tone: "Stella, in economics, a kidney ailment has no relationship to the stock market, none whatsoever." This paranoid mode of thought as we saw in the Oedipus story—creating false cause/effect relationships between unrelated incidents—is

immediately rejected by Jeff who suggestively establishes his own clear and rational train of thought. In addition, immediately preceding this exchange, Stella offers a little bit of "homespun philosophy" which Jeff promptly identifies as a quote from the April 1939 issue of *Reader's Digest*. Clearly he is no ordinary man, possessing both a healthy mind and an excess of knowledge based on acute powers of awareness, recollection, and observation.

In *Hitchcock's Rear Window: The Well-Made Film*, Joan Fawell devotes an entire chapter to identifying moments the spectator escapes Jeff's point of view. She disagrees with Robin Wood's argument that "from the beginning of the film we are enclosed in the protagonist's apartment, leaving it only when he leaves it (precipitously through the window!)," and that "with one brief exception (when Jefferies is asleep, we see Thorwald, the murderer, leave his apartment with a woman), we are allowed to see only what he sees, know only what he knows." Fawell posits a number of instances where Hitchcock makes the spectator privy to information denied to Jeff, especially the crucial moment when Thorwald leaves the building with his "wife." This choice is understood within the Hitchcock aesthetic as the way to build suspense and keep the spectator involved and even implicated in the story. What is more, these moments form a sense of a reality perceived objectively, autonomously, free from the subjective shots, free from Jeff. Two points complicate these otherwise uncomplicated observations.

First the *kind* of information/knowledge Jeff is denied. As the subject that *knows* what fits into a story and what makes no sense, driven primarily from unconscious or intuitive forces (evident when he says to Doyle "I'm telling you. I just *know* he did it"), Jeff, ironically, falls asleep, or stops "shooting" at moments that are false, fabricated, *meant to*

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be seen. As a stage director/producer/actor of a one-act play, Thorwald performs his "wife's" exit from the building which is seen by everyone—diegetic and non-diegetic spectators—*except* Jefferies, "the subject supposed to know" or in this case "the subject supposed to know *better*." This is not privileged or excessive knowledge Jeff is excluded from; this is distorted knowledge Jefferies is spared from, adding to the credibility of his perspective.

The other point has to do with the seemingly autonomous position of the spectator during the moments the two gazes part. Do we want to part with Jeff's gaze? Do we not want him to wake up and merge his gaze with ours? Yes we do, because we learn to trust his eyes more than we trust our own. Jeff (in his role as the camera that knows what to shoot and what to ignore) is the all-knowing, all-present, all-perceiving subject, and this is where the audience desires to be. When we are left alone even for a brief moment, we are lost, easily duped, innocent prey to the rival (bad) stage director across the street. As far as the actual murder is concerned, this too is informed by paranoia's lack of material proof, as the interpretation of the external world is based on internal mechanisms (such as projection which will be discussed later on). As mentioned elsewhere, the paranoid does not believe, he *knows*, so it is not the truth he is after—for, in his mind, he is already in possession of that—but proof, evidence for his truth. Whatever element takes him closer to his goal is kept; the rest is eliminated, ignored, disavowed. Off-stage violence originates in Greek tragedy as a crucial element for the emotional and cognitive involvement of the audience. Similarly in Hollywood, the more horrific and unrepresentable the crime, the fewer the chances that it will take place on screen (the

slasher genre is an exception of course). Roman Polanski's *Rosemary's Baby* is an excellent example where the audience never gets to see the baby on screen.[69]

Leo Bersani's understanding of paranoia as a "doubling of presence" is epitomized, as discussed in the previous chapter, in the figure of Oedipus. Jeff the photojournalist, can be discussed in similar terms; film director and spectator, powerful and powerless, passive and active, "artist and technician, professional and visionary"[70] (Stam and Pearson, 138). Jeff's surplus identity is further enhanced verbally. Robert Stam notes: "The identity of Jefferies' situation and our own accounts for a frequent ambiguity in *Rear Window*; the shifter 'they' can often refer either to the characters in the fiction or to ourselves in the audience" (139).

This is, in part, how Hollywood has cultivated paranoia for decades. As already stated, paranoia has been identified primarily as a pathology of the male. It has also been agreed that Hollywood cinema has been constructed predominantly for/by the male. The male on screen occupies the center dually; everything is done to him and for him (as we shall also see with Truman Burbank).

Narcissism

The centrality of the paranoid subject begins in narcissism. In his study on Schreber, Freud insists on the primary role narcissism has in the development of paranoia. His work "On Narcissism" comes after his work on the Schreber case, in 1914, but nonetheless

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[69] When Rosemary finally sees the baby and screams out "What have you done to its eyes?" there is a brief superimposed image of the devilish eyes, but it is ambiguous whether this is the image of Satan (a flashback of the rape scene) or the child. For an excellent discussion on *Rosemary's Baby* see Lucy Fischer, "Birth Traumas: Parturition and Horror in 'Rosemary's Baby'" *Cinema Journal*, Vol. 31, No. 3. (Spring 1992), pp. 3-18.
[70] "Hitchcock's *Rear Window*; Reflexivity and the Critique of Voyeurism." *Enclitic* v7, no 1, 1983, pp. 136-145.

many of the elements had already been introduced. Freud argues that loving oneself is "the libidinal complement to the egoism of the instinct of self-preservation"[71] (546). This for Freud is an instinct all humans possess; we all love and protect ourselves, we all take care of ourselves. This is what he calls "primary" (or "normal") narcissism. "Secondary" narcissism, on the other hand, is not "normal"; it is a pathology according to which the individual's libido withdraws from external objects (the world) and towards the ego (self). This, he argues, is manifested in cases of paranoid-schizophrenics and brings about megalomania, a sense of extreme superiority over everyone else. Freud's ideal libidinal economy is one where there is a harmony, a balance between the existence of object-libido and ego-libido. In paranoia, the ego-libido (directed inward) prevails. In his analysis of healthy and unhealthy minds and their relationship to the libidinal economy, Freud uses a very suggestive mechanical metaphor. Referring to the human brain as a "mental apparatus" he describes it as a type of machine "designed to relieve the pressure of our own mental energies by channeling them into a range of outlets. If these energies get 'dammed up,'… the result can be mental illness, as the mind 'gets stuck' or channels the libido into objects that are ultimately unsatisfying, or even destructive."[72]

Hollywood cinema, one might argue, reinforces as much as disrupts the notion of Freud's libidinal economy. Character identification is central to the success of any film. One way of achieving it is by constructing characters that are not experienced as autonomous, separate entities, but rather as extensions of an audience able to relate and identify with the characters on screen. In *Rear Window*, every single character relates to Jeff (Jeff as a spectator now) on some level, as he sees aspects of himself in everyone.

[71] "On Narcissism: An Introduction." *The Freud Reader*, Peter Gay ed. New York: Norton, 1989.
[72] http://www.english.hawaii.edu/criticalink/narc/index.html

Jefferies is someone we identify with despite his being a not easily likable character. He is pompous, arrogant, condescending, and sometimes just plain cruel in most of his interactions, especially with Lisa. There is no balance between the object-libido and the ego-libido where Jeff is concerned. Lisa is an extremely idealized female whose function is limited to anticipating and fulfilling Jeff's wishes and desires. Whatever he wants he gets, and then some. Similarly, Hollywood caters to the needs, wishes, and desires of the spectator, who uncompromisingly *demands* certain things to happen in a story in order to feel satisfied and fulfilled. This pertains to "primary" narcissism; Freud also mentions primary narcissism in *Totem and Taboo*, referring to children ("primitive people") as engaging in "magical thinking" by "believing that wishing for something will make it appear, or that uttering a spell will have real effects. These behaviors reflect a sense of the self as powerful, able to have an influence on external reality." The spectator, one might argue, feels powerful by thinking and wishing things that "magically" happen on screen. Even when Jeff is hanging out the window towards the end, the spectator *knows* that he—Jeff—is going to be all right because he, the spectator, has wished it. Hollywood is (in)famous for its "happy endings" but one might say that it has rather gained power due to its "proper endings" suggested by the various genres (in a tragedy, for instance, we expect or even "demand" the protagonist to suffer or die). Stam states the following:

> In his state of inhibited motoricity and exacerbated perception, Jefferies embodies the living death of the dream-like spectatorial experience. The simulation apparatus called the cinema, for Baudry, not only represents the real but also stimulates intense subject-effects. The shadowy figures on screen, the darkness of the theater, the sealing off of everyday pressures, all foster an artificial state of regression not unlike that engendered by dreams. The cinema, in this sense, constitutes the approximate material realization of the unconscious goal of returning to an earlier state of psychic

development, a state of relative *narcissism* in which desire is "satisfied" through a simulated reality.[73] (1983,138-9)

This narcissism is not only satisfied through the simulated reality, but through the cultivation of a superior knowledge that is almost always confirmed. The paranoid subject is driven by an inner force that senses, feels, and understands far more than the average "naïve" individual. Unwilling to accept the reality with which he is presented, as in the case of Jeff, he will stop at nothing in order to prove the truth of his reality. The earlier state of psychic development Stam is referring to resembles Klein's *paranoid-schizoid* position, a time when the subject can only relate to objects not as whole entities but as part objects. Part objects in Hollywood have been the norm; stock characters, archetypes, personas are all types of part objects the spectator either learns to love or hate. Jefferies participates in this tradition by assigning "identities" to his part object neighbors: Miss Torso, Miss Hearing Aid, and Miss Lonelyheart, are all part of a discourse that produces one-dimensional entities never to be experienced as whole or complex. Jeff's narcissistic disposition also creates the treatment of these part objects as projections of his own fears and desires; Miss Torso can move her legs (Jeff is immobilized); Miss Hearing Aid can hear (Jeff can barely make out some mumbled sounds from afar).

Projection and "Abnormal" Sexual Desire

"The very use of the term 'projection,'" Juan Suarez argues, "evokes, as does voyeurism, the cinematic situation. Yet rather than the action of looking, projection

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[73] Robert Stam. "Hitchcock's *Rear Window*; Reflexivity, and the Critique of Voyeurism." (1983).

emphasizes the watcher's implication in what is seen, to the point of dissolving the distinction between inside and outside. What is seen then is not alien, but an externalized situation of what lies inside"[74] (362). Freud discusses the mechanism of projection as the main defense against latent homosexual desire, reading Schreber's fear and hate of Flechsig as a distorted, inverted message: "I love *him*" is transformed into "He hates *me*."

In *Rear Window*, at the center of this mini Greenwich Village universe stands a man that most heterosexual men on screen and in the audience would find a bit "abnormal." When we first meet Lisa, she appears like a specter, a dream girl in a close-up approaching Jeff as he is sleeping in his wheelchair. Soon, though, we find out that he not only resists the sexual advances Lisa makes, but he flat out rejects them. Instead, his object of desire is Thorwald, a man Jeff becomes obsessed with. Lisa is a woman with feminine looks and masculine ways; she performs her gender well, but not quite. Sexual aggression is a male affair, and so is treating a woman to a fabulous dinner, tipping the waiters, pursuing her, asking her hand in marriage, getting rejected a few times, trying again, succeeding. By the same token, Jeff is a man with masculine looks and traditional "feminine" ways. He is spoiled, difficult, plays hard to get, is confined at home, spends all day snooping and gossiping, and is being treated with incredulity and skepticism by his male friend Doyle (and so is Lisa but that is to be expected).

One might argue that it is, actually, the masculine aspects of Lisa that Jeff is mostly attracted to. He wants her to be adventurous, shed her feminine ways, embrace a rootless lifestyle, act like *him*, or even become a projection of him, which is quite ironic given his feminine ways. This irony is evident, for instance, when Jeff, being squeamish, loses his

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[74] Juan Suarez, "The Rear View: Paranoia and Homosocial Desire in Alfred Hitchcock's *Rear Window*." (1996).

appetite for breakfast when Stella mentions the ways Thorwald might have cut up his wife, when a couple of scenes before he was taunting Lisa about her inability to eat "jungle" food. Lisa *is* a narcissistic projection of Jeff, in an inverted form, and this is why she comes off as the ideal woman to everyone *but* Jeff. Laura Mulvey has successfully argued that Hollywood cinema is cut to the measure of the male desire, by focusing on the binary representation of women on screen.[75] In order to battle castration anxiety brought about by the female body's "lack," women are either over-valued and idealized (through fetishism) or severely punished (through voyeurism, a sadistic practice). Tania Modleski offers a counter-argument showing alternative ways of reading oppressive and controlling males: they are just as oppressed as women.[76] E. Ann Kaplan negotiates these positions by arguing that even though the gaze is not always male, in order to possess it, one must occupy the masculine position, which is still gendered but allows room for women as well.[77] In *Rear Window* the gaze is male, but Jeff occupies the domestic feminine position, which is why perhaps his authority is challenged by Doyle (the masculine protest) who stands in for the male Law.

Rear Window both idealizes (through Lisa) and punishes (through Mrs. Thorwald) the female. The *paranoid-schizoid's* split is evident in this sense (which is actually the same as Mulvey's fetishism-voyeurism binary). What is a bit less than evident is the fact that if

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[75] Mulvey's seminal essay "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" (1975) initiates a debate that is ongoing. Her binary categorization of the female on screen resembles Klein's paranoid-schizoid schema.

[76] Modleski discusses this in "Femininity by Design" which takes as case study Hitchcock's *Vertigo*. Interestingly, this chapter appears in a book titled *The Women Who Knew Too Much; Hitchcock and Feminist Theory*. In the chapter on female paranoia I return to this notion, but it seems that the title of the book is indicative of approaching (consciously or unconsciously) paranoid narratives as instances of surplus rather than distorted knowledge.

[77] Kaplan offers this analysis in her 1983 chapter "Is the Gaze Male?" The notion of "position" like Klein's theory provides a much more flexible way of negotiating the socially constructed category of gender, which up until the 1970s with the advent of the feminist theory was usually discussed in much more rigid terms. See *Women and Film: both sides of the camera*. New York: Routledge, 1988.

the female on screen signifies lack, the male signifies an *excess* also cut to the male desire. Men on the Hollywood screen serve as role models to men, fueling and reinforcing the central narcissistic position they already enjoy. But just as the *lack* of the female body threatens with castration anxiety, *so does the excess of the male body*, Santner's figure of the "surplus father." "Fathers" who know too much (patriarchal figures endowed with unique physical and intellectual abilities) are abundant in Hollywood.[78] In *Rear Window*, Hitchcock pokes fun at this notion when he has Lisa say that the dog was killed *because it knew too much.*[79]

So how does this get resolved? Mulvey claims that male anxiety about the female body is allayed through fetishism or voyeurism. With regard to the male, rather than idealize or punish, the spectator internalizes the "surplus father" (in the oedipal sense) and narcissistically identifies with him. Jeff, like Schreber's father, "knows too much about living human beings." Having been all around the world and being an artist, he can easily interpret the lives, thoughts, and emotions of his neighbors whom he observes from afar. He generously shares his wisdom with Stella and Lisa.

In *Rear Window*, in the opening scenes, Jeff is attracted to the Thorwald apartment by projecting his own anxieties about marriage and his overall relationship with Lisa. He identifies with a man whose wife is "nagging" all the time and seems to make his life miserable. So, his innermost fears are staring him in the face. Soon, though, we realize

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[78] Hutch in *Rosemary's Baby* and Malcolm Crowe in *The Sixth Sense* are examples of the popular figure.

[79] Hitchcock also makes *The Man Who Knew Too Much* twice, first in 1934, and remakes it two years after *Rear Window* in 1956, indicating a fascination with the idea of "knowing too much." In the 1956 remake, starring James Stewart and Doris Day, we have a son literally suffering because his father knows too much, when the former gets kidnapped in Morocco in order to silence the father who accidentally stumbles upon a group of conspirators planning an assassination in London.

that Jeff also sees himself in Mrs. Thorwald; both are incapacitated and depend on their partners for the most basic functions; we see Lisa mirroring Thorwald bringing food to his wife. Already Jeff establishes his surplus knowledge of understanding both what it feels like to be a man *and* a woman. As he is switching positions back and forth, as the subject of the gaze and the object of desire, he also projects his "doubling of presence" on all the neighboring apartments. Jeff's identification with Thorwald reveals fears of being dominated and controlled by the "feminine" domestic Lisa whom he punishes through rejection because, according to him, she is "too perfect." How can any kind of *excess* apply to a body that "by nature" signifies lack? The "masculine" Lisa excites him. After she drops the letter to Thorwald's apartment and rushes back, when she enters the door we get a close-up of Jeff staring at her with love, admiration, and a little bit of lust. Suarez also confirms this reading: "By performing these deeds," he notes, "Lisa becomes a narcissistic projection of Jefferies, and as a male-identified woman, she can be object of his desire" (364). One might disagree, thus, with popular readings of Lisa as the "idealized female" in the conventional sense of being beautiful, smart, and devoted to her man. She becomes ideal to Jeff *only* when she steps out of her stereotypical gender role.

Freud may have attributed Schreber's paranoia to latent homosexual desire, but Hollywood's sanitized version of the paranoid is driven primarily by homosocial desire. As already mentioned, there is evidence to support the idea that Mulvey's claim is also applicable to the male on screen. Males on screen, like females, exist primarily for the gratification and satisfaction of the male spectator. With very few exceptions (like *American Gigolo*), men signify power and authority on screen, never sex. So, it is not a latent homosexual desire that holds the spectator glued to the screen, but a socially

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constructed homosocial desire that seems to blur the rigidly imposed gender dichotomy. Lisa becomes irresistible to Jeff when she occupies the *social* position of the male, when she performs the role of the devoted "buddy" (so prevalent in Hollywood; every hero needs a side-kick) who loyally stands by the side of the hero, willing to risk his life in making possible the glorification and triumph of the hero (another good example is Trinity in *The Matrix*). "Paranoid" male characters are mainly represented as charismatic rather than diseased. Momentary lapses in judgment occur only to reinforce the hero's ability to identify discrepancies in his own thoughts, very much like Schreber does, possessing the mental endowments to document his personal delusions and identify them as such.

Subjective point of view shots predominate in *Rear Window*. Jeff has a limited view from afar, which he enhances through his phallic-shaped telephoto lens and binoculars. Hitchcock sums up the camera work in an interview with Peter Bogdanovich: He looks (Jeff), you see what he sees (the spectator), he reacts (Jeff). The spectator's gaze is guided and limited; reaction shots tell us what to think and how to feel; close-ups seek a strong emotional identification; long shots, long takes, and deep focus is admired but not frequently used. Like the paranoiac who can only see things from one angle and is unable to accept any other point of view, Jeff is literally unable to see things differently. Stuck in a wheelchair, he can only see things from a distance and since he can barely hear them he relies on his hermeneutic capacities of understanding gestures and body language.

Rear Window facilitates understanding paranoia from the position of the subject of the gaze. Peter Weir's *The Truman Show* is another self-reflexive visual text that foregrounds technical aspects of Hollywood filmmaking and the evolution of the ideology that

informs the ways we experience "reality" at the end of the millennium. In this case, however, paranoia is considered from the position of the object of the gaze. The analysis will not be as extensive as the one on *Rear Window*; rather, it has more of an auxiliary function that seeks to shed light on the way paranoia is engendered dually, that is, both by being the subject and the object of the gaze.

"We accept the reality of the world with which we are presented.": **Truman and the Paranoid Object**

The Truman Show tells the story of Truman Burbank (Jim Carrey), a thirty-year old insurance salesman living on an idyllic island called Sea Haven. This modern-day Oedipus, however, does not know that he is actually the star of a twenty-four-hour a day reality show, "The Truman Show." The island is the largest studio in Hollywood; his family, friends, neighbors, colleagues, are all actors; five thousand cameras monitor and record his every move; since birth, everyone he meets is a deliberate, scripted encounter. When a series of accidental (unscripted) incidents raise Truman's suspicions about something being awry, all efforts are geared towards keeping Truman from finding out the truth. After a desperate effort to escape and a near-death experience orchestrated by the vicious director Christof (Ed Harris), Truman finally discovers the truth about his identity. When Christof suggests he stays in the fake world where he is the star and will always be safe, Truman, in a dramatic exit, exiles himself from his unreal "kingdom" and heads for the unknown, but real world.

Let us first consider the film in terms of content and theme. Schreber's frightful universe has much in common with Truman's. Actually, one might say that Schreber

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anticipates *The Truman Show*, since both the form and the content of the film appear as unwittingly inspired by the *Memoirs*. Both men stand at the center, and every single event that takes place is being done either to them or for them; both are controlled by a higher power (God, or Christof, the director, who as his name suggests is very much a god-like figure); both are faced with a crisis that begins (at least based on Santner's analysis) with *overproximity* to the figure of the "surplus father." Truman's "hovering" father literally comes back from the "dead" having been "killed off" when Truman was a little boy (which also echoes the story of Oedipus, as Truman was conditioned to believe that he was responsible for his father's death); this surplus presence signals the imminence of Truman's breakdown.[80] Truman also hears "voices"—first through the broken radio and the control room at the end—that seek to guide and manipulate his thoughts. The primary role of technology (machines) as a direct threat to one's autonomy has advanced in the most extreme ways.

The film opens with a scene suggestive of Truman's "condition"; the latter is standing in front of the bathroom mirror, studying his reflection. He finally speaks: "...personally I think the unconquered south face is the only one worth scaling...of course it's a 20,000 foot sheer wall of ice but then when did that ever stop me before?...Naturally, I intend to make the ascent without the benefit of oxygen but also without crampons or even an ice pick...*risks?*......sure I'm aware of the risks--why else do you think I would spend seven years as an adjuster in a life insurance company...?" This "mirror-stage" moment of "mis-

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[80] *The Sixth Sense* (Dir. M. Night Shyamalan, 1999) and *Stir of Echoes* (Dir. David Koepp, 1999) are also in this manner interesting variations of the Oedipus myth. In the first case, the hovering dead "father" figure is summoned to help the young boy who "knows" too much. He is a persistent presence that participates in and resolves the crisis. In the second, a father whose hallucinations contain more than a kernel of truth, tries to solve the mystery that haunts him and his family.

recognition" and role-playing on one level indicates Truman's childlike disposition and escapist desire. When he sees himself in the mirror he sees an adventurous hero, an ideal, imaginary subject that does not really exist. At the same time, though, (and given the film's reflexivity) this is also a moment that relates, at least according to Metz, to the process of spectatorial identification with a character on screen.

In *The Imaginary Signifier* Metz declares cinema " 'more perceptual' than certain arts according to the list of its sensory registers, [and] also 'less perceptual' than others once the status of these perceptions is envisaged rather than their number or diversity; for its perceptions are all in a sense 'false'" (45). "The unique position of the cinema," he adds, "lies in this dual character of its signifier: unaccustomed perceptual wealth, but at the same time stamped with unreality to an unusual degree, and from the very outset. More than the other arts, or in a more unique way, the cinema involves us in the imaginary…" (45). Truman is a case of a man stuck in the imaginary. The reflection in the mirror is of a subject that is unreal, of an imaginary signifier in the extreme, since Truman's perception of himself (of his ego) is false from the outset. He is talking to someone who does not exist, and he is (ironically) right, since both the reflection and the man are imaginary. Metz *tells* us that the cinematic signifier is imaginary; Weir *shows* us that the subject we follow and identify with is actually an imaginary *object*.

The spectator, contrary to following Jeff in *Rear Window*, finds himself tied to a character situated on the other side of the lens, in the powerless position of the *object* of the gaze. Whereas Jeff occupies the position of the voyeuristic, surveilling camera, Truman is the *object* of voyeurism and surveillance. Either way, the paranoid mechanism is activated; in the first case, anxiety is brought about through excess, with castration

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"always being in the air"; with Truman (castration) anxiety is also in the air (or shall we say "*on* the air" broadcasting live twenty four hours a day), through the other extreme, lack (as Truman's body is commodified in a manner typically associated with the female body). The camera, however, is now made visible (only to the audience), not by showing it directly on screen, but by violating the rules of invisible editing. High and low angles, iris shots, and the placement of cameras in unconventional places such as pencil sharpeners, reveals the presence of a controlling agent that Hollywood has traditionally tried to conceal. The fact that we experience inanimate objects constantly "staring" at Truman shows how objects are turned into subjects and subjects into objects. In this sense, *The Truman Show* might be characterized as *anti*-paranoid; Truman's fake world is real (from where he stands), and this oxymoronic situation has made the film the focus not only of film scholars, but of philosophers and sociologists as well.

The Truman Show like *Rear Window* adopts a *paranoid-schizoid* position with respect to the females. On the one hand we have Meryl, the motherly stepford wife from hell. She resembles the "feminine" Lisa who wants to tame or "castrate" her man's adventurous, restless nature. She performs her gender as a woman stuck in the 1950s, relating to Truman more like a mother than a wife, which is quite interesting given the fact that the TV show supposedly takes place at the end of the millennium when the film itself was released. This point, I believe, is not without significance, even though the setting, costumes, and other aspects of the mise-en-scene, have not attracted much scholarly attention.

Lauren/Sylvia, the idealized female, is the "masculine" Lisa, and a narcissistic projection of Truman. She is adventurous, active, she refuses to act out the role she was

assigned (in the literal sense since she is an actor, a figment of the director's imagination), and wants to break with this delusional reality. When she is sent away, Truman, in what could be characterized a fetishistic gesture, is trying to reproduce the missing body and fill the lack by clipping female body parts (more precisely, only from the head) from magazines and putting them together to form an accurate picture of his missing love. In this poignantly romantic gesture, Truman reveals the woman on screen as an illusion, an unreal creature that is constructed and deconstructed at the will of the male director.

Like *Rear Window*, Weir's film besides its self-reflexivity, reads as a direct commentary on its socio-political context. It is without doubt a product of its time, a time when technological advances are increasingly threatening our autonomy and sense of self, when the split between reality and fantasy is not always clear, and a time when we put our faith more and more in visual media for knowledge and information. But it also reads as a commentary about the 1950s, as already said, a time of heightened paranoia and insane violations of basic civil rights. The costumes and family lifestyle portrayed in *Truman* pseudo-nostalgically recreate a time and a setting when family values prevailed, and little towns were seen as little heavens. At the same time, however, the picture-perfect island, aesthetically beautiful and serene, is an oppressive prison that Truman desperately wants to escape. The constant surveillance in the name of safety (nothing bad can happen to him when he is constantly watched) is reminiscent of a rhetoric that prevailed during the McCarthy years. Truman's manufactured fear of the water is suggestive of the ways various manufactured anxieties kept people in their place not only during the 1950s but in all different historical periods. Sea Haven is a mini version of a

Hollywood at a time when if one went against the official route, he or she was blacklisted, fired, ostracized from the business, and seldom worked again. This policy is evident in *Truman* with Sylvia, the liberal spirit who is "blacklisted" and sent away from the show's ideal cosmos. Meryl, the conformist, is also "appropriately" punished, being written out of the show, indicating that even the "loyal" citizens are never really safe. Ironically, while Truman seeks ways to break *out* of the sheltered island, others are desperately trying to break *into* the island, as Christof recalls incidents where outsiders managed to penetrate the impenetrable Hollywood studio.

Hollywood's predictability has been already established in terms of stock plots, stock characters, stock themes, and standardized narrative structure. Like the paranoiac who *already knows,* the Hollywood spectator enters a world where he mainly collects clues that will verify the set of expectations and assumptions he brings into the movie theater. The emphasis is placed on the "*how*" something will happen or has happened, not on the "*what*" has or will happen. It is the process, thus, that varies, seldom the product. The slogan of "The Truman Show" is "*How* is it going to end?" Truman's crisis begins with a broken light falling out of the sky (where the invisible is made visible), with natural forces targeting *him* directly (rain falling on him only), and culminates with the return of the repressed father. Hollywood's "paranoid" narrative structure allows for no accidents; nothing that cannot be explained "rationally" belongs in the story (no prop, no action, no character). *The Truman Show* highlights this through a series of unpredictable accidents that eventually bring about an irreversible and permanent crisis. The fact, for instance, that the cast performs repetitively the same daily activities is at one point noticed by Truman. Sitting in his car, he points out to Meryl that he can predict with mathematical

accuracy what will happen in the next few minutes. This surplus paranoid knowledge engenders a paranoid attitude in Truman, an attitude that the Hollywood spectator will often experience.

The amusing episode of the first *re*-cognition represents a moment of semiological crisis, a moment when familiar signs cease to make sense, as they begin to gain (in Truman's eyes) a surplus meaning. What he previously understood as an ordinary occurrence—a car passing by—becomes an uncanny site of mystery and frustration; with his newfound paranoid vision, Truman embarks on an obsessive quest to decipher clues that only a short while ago were natural ingredients of his daily life. Weir's cinematography allows for the "clues" (the constructed images) to shed their mask of "realism" revealing the latter as merely a style that requires more effort than most filmic styles. The final moment of re-cognition is a mirror shot of the opening scene (no pun intended). At this point Truman has re-united with his father and things seem to be back to normal. Getting on with his daily routine, Truman once again stands in front of the bathroom mirror. His gaze, however, is somewhat different; this immediately triggers a paranoid response from the men in the control room. "Is he looking at *us*?" they wonder in fear. Truman as if to re-assure them performs his usual childlike role play, but as he is about to leave he looks straight at the mirror and says "That one's for free." This is the moment Truman gains subjectivity moving from a state of objectification to ego formation. Soon after, he disappears and the final chase begins.

Truman, as already stated, is the object of everyone's gaze. Whereas in *Rear Window* the spectatorial gaze merges with Jeff's, in this case the spectator and the hero part ways, or rather part gazes. The irony here is that the subjective shots in *Rear Window*, mainly

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due to the establishment of Jeff (the camera) as superior authority, are experienced as objective reality (by maintaining the rules of invisible editing), and the objective shots in *Truman* (by breaking the rules of invisible editing) are experienced as subjective. The constant shift between subject/object as two sides of the same coin forces the spectator to adopt both positions of power and powerlessness, activity and passivity. Hollywood's strongest card has been perfecting the technique of transforming the subjective into the objective. The paranoid individual experiences reality along the same lines. Projective identification and splitting on the one hand transform inner subjective realities into objective ones; but this "objective" reality still revolves and is intricately connected to the subject. This fuels the narcissistic disposition of the subject whose sense of agency and specialness is so strong that he now becomes the *object* of everyone's envy and desire.

The blurring of subjective and objective representations of reality is further complicated through another Hollywood perfected mechanism, that of spectatorial identification. Hollywood editing style invites, or should we say, often extorts emotional reactions in the most subtle ways. *The Truman Show* exposes this with the self-conscious staging of Truman reuniting with his father. A close-up at the exact right moment of emotional climax dressed in a highly emotional melody with almost no dialogue (no words can capture this emotional reunion), and the spectator devours the moment with an insatiable appetite.

The Truman Show is the story of a man oblivious to his true identity. It is the story of a man who was unknowingly adopted, destined—or rather scripted—to "kill" his father and marry his "mother," a man who is the only reason this virtual world exists. In this variation of the Oedipus myth, the hero's destiny is decided by the media—the

anthropomorphized gods of the twentieth century. Meryl, like Iocasta, tries to keep Truman from pursuing the truth. Truman's controlled environment raises the question of free will and human agency at a time when media technology blurs, if not cancels out, the distinction between the subjectively constructed and the objectively experienced. But even more importantly, Peter Weir foregrounds and makes visible the Hollywood camera's—and in extension the audience's—panoptic gaze. Truman's crisis begins with the literal breakdown of his "reality" (the broken light, the broken radio, the broken weather system) and culminates with the return of the dead father. During this time period the environment remains stable, the same; it is Truman who changes by *re-cognizing*, seeing, and perceiving things differently. Objects or events he read on a denotative level, suddenly begin to connote, to assume an additional meaning to their literal one; the truth, in other words, lies in a surplus meaning that had always been there.

Paranoid thought is, in many ways, more a process of re-cognition of the known than a discovery of the unknown. It revisits an event or situation that is already there, rejects a reality that has already been established, questions a truth that has already been officially sanctioned. *The Truman Show* is an example of a metanarrative that invites the audience to re-cognize and experience (consciously this time) cinematic elements that have always been there.[81] "The perfection of vision and knowledge," Joan Copjec argues, "can only be procured at the expense of invisibility and nonknowledge. According to the logic of

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[81] Spike Jonze's *Adaptation* (2002) would be another good example of a film that reveals the paranoid style in Hollywood filmmaking. The film deals with the paranoia of a filmmaker and at the same time, as a metanarrative, it reveals paranoid aspects of Hollywood storytelling.

the panoptic apparatus, these last do not and (in an important sense) cannot exist" (17).[82]

The Hollywood camera as a panoptic apparatus ascribes to this logic with one main difference: visibility and knowledge (the "knowledge effect") are procured not at the expense of invisibility and "nonknowledge" but *because* of them. The concealed cinematic apparatus and the invisible style of editing procure a reality that is transparent, unambiguous, granting the spectator a panoptic gaze and a sense of knowledge devoid of gaps in logic and information.

Conclusions

This chapter attempts to trace the origins and evolution of Hollywood filmmaking style in order to suggest that this most popular medium largely owes its strength and powerful appeal to a mixture of technical and narrative devices that bring out the "paranoiac" is us. *Rear Window* and *The Truman Show* are two visual texts that bring to the forefront normative aspects of Hollywood storytelling that rely on elements associated with paranoia. The cinematic apparatus with its function as all-knowing and all-present and its photographic depiction of reality is unique, and combined with Hollywood's magical narrative conventions, has been training audiences to think in a paranoid manner. Omnipotence and invisibility are also central to the ways the paranoid individual experiences the world; so is the centrality and superiority of the subject, the oversimplified stories with highly convoluted plots ("plot" as a term also implies devious scheming), the rigidly defined cause/effect relationships between events, things, and/or

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[82] This particular section deals with the ways the panoptic gaze defines women under patriarchy. Copjec's ideas, however, move beyond the specificity of the woman and function as a general commentary vis-à-vis the screen as mirror.

characters, the overdetermined coherent explanations of the world, and, of course, binary thought. Verisimilitude is a term that refers to the "*appearance* of truth" which is what Hollywood strives for; invisible editing tries to hide the presence of a camera that elaborately constructs the real rather than record it.

The overall project is an effort to identify the multiple facets of paranoia in film (as practice) and the ways this mode of thought has been adopted and normalized by influential "truth makers" such as Hollywood cinema. This does not seek to "pathologize" the long-held tradition of storytelling; on the contrary, the idea behind the argument is that in our culture paranoia as a signifier for a distorted, false reality has been embraced as a way of *gaining* agency, not losing it. Cultural paranoia is ideological in nature, by which I mean that it mainly exists discursively. It is cultivated through external forces rather than internal ones. Cinematic paranoia in terms of story content, is usually a privileged condition of excessive knowledge and excessive agency. The singularity of the hero up against the whole world resonates with the disproportionality between opposing sides that paranoid thought promotes. Continuity editing, in addition to providing spatial and temporal orientation, can establish relationships between heterogeneous elements or events that provide neat explanations and clear justifications. Anything that fails to be integrated in a "rational" way rarely makes it pass the editing room.

In an age of information overload, pleasure and enjoyment presuppose meaning and understanding. In a seemingly vicious recycling of reconceptualizing the familiar, Hollywood has been repeatedly accused for subtly promoting and reinforcing the ideologies of those in power (in terms of race, class, gender, sexual orientation, etc). As with *Birth of a Nation*, Hollywood itself has been often praised for perfecting its form

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and often been condemned for the content of the stories, which frequently relies on stereotypical representations of various groups and communities. Postmodern self-reflexivity reveals the norm as a construct that is not ideologically neutral. Paranoid thought is not unique to the postmodern; it is just made more transparent, in part, due to an overall tendency to re-examine and re-evaluate naturalized elements that seldom were questioned. Paranoid narratives in Hollywood have been extremely popular in all kinds of genres (science fiction, film noir, political thrillers, horror, melodrama, and comedy). But it also seems that the basic narrative structures and narrative devices rely on the same methods that the paranoid mind employs for making sense of the world. The desire of the paranoiac lies in his strong belief that he knows something that most people lack the ability to perceive, and by appointing the self holder of truth and guardian of a single, objective reality, he embarks on the noble task of spreading this information, contaminating those around him with a surplus knowledge, a "truth" with redemptive powers which will somehow rid society of all deception and wrongdoing. Paranoid thought is optimistic in nature—much like Hollywood narrative—because no matter how hostile and sinister and horrible the world may seem, a single truth can restore any type of chaotic disorder.

The tendency to relate to characters on screen as part-objects, undermines any attempt to move beyond the *paranoid-schizoid* position. According to Klein, this position is immediately followed—if all goes well—by the *depressive* position, during which the infant begins to experience the mother as whole. The realization that the hated, evil mother is one and the same with the good, nurturing one, creates feelings of guilt and fear of losing the good object. The *paranoid-schizoid* position, on the other hand, is a time

when reality is experienced in purely subjective terms, a time of pure projection and fantasy, a time when narcissism is at its highest, when the infant feels extremely powerful as his needs are automatically fulfilled simply by wishing them or thinking about them, when the baby feels as the center of the world, and when good and evil occupy distinct, separate places. Splitting is one of Hollywood's favorite devices; from *Fatal Attraction* (1987), *Dangerous Liaisons* (1988), *Corrina Corrina* (1994), *The Natural* (1984), and *Gone with the Wind* (1939) (this is a very small sample from a very large pool) spectators have overwhelmingly been stuck in the *paranoid-schizoid* position with no way out. Even when attempts are made to repair the subject(s) as, for instance, with films such as *American Beauty*, so few are in "violation" of the Hollywood conventions that these whole subjects often read as "abnormal" as opposed to the partial, "normal" ones. Since *Birth of a Nation*, the Hollywood projector has been constructing variations of "paranoiacs" with whom the spectator is cordially invited to identify.

Paranoid thought can be described as an extremely subjective view of the world rendered and experienced in objective terms. Jefferies embodies this idea well, by revealing the subjective point the camera occupies and the objectively felt reality it conveys. As Žižek's *subject supposed to know*, Jeff is a subject who has all the answers. But, as Flieger notes, "[e]ven the *subject supposed to know* can do no more than confer an always subjective meaning on a field of vision that is by definition skewed and partial, emanating from a circumscribed a point of view" (47). Whether one assumes the position of the subject or the object of the gaze, the effect is the same, which speaks to Bersani's notion of paranoia as a "doubling of presence." The spectator, always bound to the central character, is constantly watching (as with/through Jeff, *the man who knew too*

much) or constantly being watched (as with Truman, *the man who was known too much*). Understanding how Hollywood gains power through the paranoid model does not undermine or invalidate its effectiveness; rather, it helps observe the discursive powers that render a mode of thinking and making sense of the world as "normal" (healthy, desired, legitimate), when in reality it is one and the same with the "paranoid" mode of thought (distorted, delusional, illegitimate). The notion of *knowing too much* reveals an anxiety about the ownership and control of information which have traditionally been in the hands of the powerful few. Klein's genderless theory facilitates an understanding of the paranoiac as the subject of the gaze; Freud's gendered theory based on the Schreber case is useful when considering the paranoiac as the object of the gaze. In the first case, paranoia is manifested as excessive knowledge on the part of the subject (with whom we merge our gaze and identify); in the second case, paranoia is manifested as excessive knowledge *about* the object of the gaze (with whom we still identify).

The *paranoid-schizoid* position is a time when the infant feels empowered despite forces of negative affect. Baudry discusses the ideological effects of the cinematographic apparatus; the paranoid effects of the cinematographic apparatus combined with the specific hermeneutic skills the spectator is encouraged to hone and the narrative conventions and structures, form a powerful recipe that has been, so far, unmatched. *Homophrosune* between the character and the spectator cannot by itself indicate if Hollywood invented this mode of thought or if the spectator has motivated the industry to operate in the manner that it does, and this need not be a matter of concern. The commodification of the paranoid style in Hollywood has normalized and naturalized what in the political sphere has often stigmatized individuals. With films such as *The Truman*

Show, *The Matrix*, *Total Recall*, and *Blade Runner*, Hollywood inaugurates a new style through which what could be described as paranoid modernism moves towards a type of paranoid postmodernism. Where does Hollywood go from here? If postmodernism reveals and makes visible what has traditionally worked *because* of its invisibility, are we moving towards a post-paranoid cinema? This is the question that the following chapter attempts to address.

Chapter 3: Can Paranoia Exist in the Postmodern? Deconstructing the Myth of the Male Paranoiac

"*We are paranoid because paranoia is the last refuge*
of identity so aware of itself as a construct and as
constructed by desires assembled for it that it becomes
a parody of itself."
                              -Patrick O'Donnell

Guildenstern—"*There are two kinds of paranoia: Total and insufficient.*
I am both, because if you think you are sufficiently paranoid,
you're not."
                    -Tom Stoppard, *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead*

Two of the most elusive, used, and abused concepts in postwar theory have been those

of paranoia and postmodernism. The relationship between the two, as we shall see, might

prove even more challenging to define in any definite or concrete way. As critical terms,

both postmodernism and paranoia obstinately resist clear definitions; postmodernism's

rejection of rigid categories and strict definitions could, arguably, become a paradox if

the term itself were to be tamed by language, that is, to be rendered in any specific

terms.[83] Paranoia is identified as such precisely because its claims cannot be verified or

authenticated in objective terms. Interestingly, both have been identified as conditions,

even though in each case the term is employed in a different manner.[84] "Condition," in

medical terms, implies a state of abnormality; someone is *suffering* from a medical

condition. In cultural terms, it might be understood as an existing state of being that

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[83] See Jean François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* (1979) and "Answering the Question: What is Postmodernism?" (1982), Fredric Jameson "Postmodernism or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism" (1984), Jürgen Habermas "Modernity-An Incomplete Project" (1980), Ihab Hassan, "Toward a Concept of Postmodernism" (1987), Norman K. Denzin, *Images of Postmodern Society: Social Theory and Contemporary Cinema* (1991), Brian McHale, *Constructing Postmodernism* (1992), and Slavoj Žižek, "The Obscene Object of Postmodernity" (1991).
[84] Lyotard was the one who defined postmodernism as a condition. He did not however, employ the term in any clinical sense (his writing does not refer to pathology or abnormality).

deviates—not necessarily in a negative way—from pre-existing social circumstances (new conditions of life, thought, etc.). In the case of paranoia, the pathology implicit in the term often overrides or gets conflated with its cultural meanings and usage, rendering the beliefs of the "paranoid" individual invalid.

Jean François Lyotard's *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* will be crucial in examining the relationship paranoia holds to the postmodern. First, Lyotard understands postmodernism as a condition (not an abnormal one but one newly developed), a *state* of knowledge, a phenomenon rather than a movement or just another *–ism*; second, he defines it in terms of knowledge, or more specifically, in terms of the ways knowledge is produced in the West and who gets to decide what knowledge is, who legitimizes it. He argues that for centuries modern societies have depended on grand narratives—stories societies tell themselves about their practices and belief systems—as a means for legitimizing and validating their putative practices. Postmodernism, he notes, takes a fundamentally different outlook on epistemology, or on the production of knowledge since grand narratives have lost all credibility in the post-industrial society. If we can no longer rely on meta-narratives as legitimate sources of knowledge, how do they gain legitimacy in the postmodern? Where do we seek knowledge? Lyotard argues that we have substituted little narratives for grand narratives. Little narratives privilege the local, making no claims to truth, universality or reason. Furthermore, "what legitimates knowledge in the postmodern condition is how well it performs, or enables a person to perform, in particular roles."[85] Drawing from Austin's theories on performative utterances and from Richard Rorty and Ludwig Wittgenstein's notion of "language

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[85] http://userwww.service.emory.edu/~mhalber/Research/Paper/pci-lyotard.html

games," Lyotard notes: "...the world of postmodern knowledge can be represented as a game of language where speaking is participation in the game whose goal is the creation of new and ever-changing social linkages." With respect to literature, Lyotard makes the following distinction between the modern and postmodern aesthetic. He argues that the former "…allows the unrepresentable to be put forward only as the missing contents," whereas the latter is that "which puts forward the unrepresentable in presentation itself…" (81).[86] I will be returning to the notion of presence and absence later on.

Paranoia initially emerges as a medical term in clinical psychiatry, and as already discussed, Freud later interprets it in psychoanalytic terms. In the latter half of the twentieth century paranoia crosses the nosological boundaries to become a cultural term that describes a certain mode of thought or attitude in otherwise normal individuals. Paranoia also becomes a central theme in postwar literature and film in the United States, especially in the conspiracy genre, where the world is usually represented as a vast network of interconnected events orchestrated and controlled by sinister and powerful figures. Similarly, the ambiguity of postmodernism as a theoretical concept has instigated a plethora of heated debates in scholarly circles. Some understand it diachronically, as a continuation of modernism; others as its nemesis, a condition that, at least as we have seen according to Lyotard, strongly rejects grand narratives, totalizing explanations, strict categories, rigid narrative structures, and cause/effect relationships, in other words, everything modernism is supposed to represent.

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[86] Jean François Lyotard, "Answering the Question: What is Postmodernism?" Lyotard's approach anticipates Žižek's ideas on the differences between the modern and the postmodern. My approach of postmodern paranoia will rely on both theorists, accepting as a basic premise their understanding of the postmodern aesthetic in the arts.

This chapter re-evaluates the relationship between paranoia and the postmodern by considering two cinematic texts that, on the one hand invite the viewer to adopt a paranoid position, but at the same time appear to be aggressively *anti-paranoid*: Robert Zemeckis's *Forrest Gump* and Hal Ashby's *Being There*. This paradox is mainly due to the paradoxical relationship that paranoia can hold to postmodernism. In fact, it may very well be that *the notion of postmodern paranoia has been for the most part a contradiction in terms.* One might be surprised by the choice of the two films as case studies of paranoid narratives. After all, the one thing missing in both films is "the enemy," the menacing figure(s) that the paranoiac identifies in most of his encounters. Zemeckis himself notes that in his film "there are no bad guys" and the same can be argued for *Being There* as well, which is, in many ways, the precursor to *Forrest Gump.*[87] This very fact alone, though, can raise suspicion and even a paranoid reaction: If the Other does not exist, does the self? This project overall identifies paranoia in postwar fiction primarily as a condition of surplus rather than distorted knowledge. The characters in both films, contrary to Oedipus who suffers from too much knowledge, suffer from too little knowledge, which, however, still positions them at the center of all activity. What these films reveal, in part, is that in the apparent absence of knowledge there is not necessarily a lack of meaning.[88]

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[87] In most paranoid texts, the figure of the "Other" is "the enemy;" he/she can be a visible or an invisible force. Either way, the hero's "goodness" is defined and established through the antagonist's "badness." The postmodern critique rejects binary categorizations; in the absence of the binary, the concept of paranoia is de-stabilized. In *Being There* and *Forrest Gump*, as we shall see, the apparent lack of "otherness" contributes to the hero's portrayal as an empty signifier, questioning (at least in the case of Chance) his very existence.

[88] A counter-example to this argument would be Tom Stoppard's *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead* or Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*. The characters are devoid of knowledge, and are completely alienated from their environment. The centrality they occupy as protagonists is an illusion; Rosencrantz and Guildenstern's presence is as peripheral as it is in *Hamlet*; they are scapegoats in a conspiracy they know

There will be no attempt to draw over-generalized conclusions about paranoia or postmodernism; the attempt is *to identify a distinct type of paranoid narrative that best captures and aligns itself with certain aspects of the postmodern critique.* It should also be noted that I will be not be considering persecutory paranoia, which is, by far, the most prevalent type in postwar literature and film, and the one that primarily holds a paradoxical relationship to postmodernism; Zemeckis and Ashby offer an ironic inversion of persecutory paranoia that we can define as *soothing* paranoia. Soothing paranoia still maintains the basic ingredients of centrality and causality, but at the same time, as a child of postmodernism, celebrates randomness and chance, both of which run counter to the determinacy and necessity that persecutory paranoid thought adheres to. What is more, despite the overwhelming presence of the theme of persecutory paranoia in postwar fiction, in these narratives the motivations behind the heroes' obsessive quest for knowledge and truth remain very much a product of modernist thought. Paranoia implies an unreasonable fear or anxiety that is very much warranted and validated in most cases. Put simply: cinematic paranoia has been predominantly modernist in nature partly because the strong belief in a single core truth is what drives the narratives; truth, waiting to be discovered by both the characters and the readers/viewers, still resides within the text. The slogan of conspiratorial paranoid thought is that "*the truth is out there,*" the emphasis here being on the definite article *the*. The generic and naturalized term

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nothing about. Vladimir and Estragon *are* the stage, human props in a post-apocalyptic setting devoid of meaning and understanding. They too, appear inconsequential; they know nothing, understand nothing. Forrest and Chance—as I discuss later on—despite possessing little knowledge and little understanding still acquire meaning(s). It is in this manner that we might read paranoia not as a paradox, but as a participant in the postmodern critique.

"paranoia" refers to a specific attitude that in most literary and cinematic postmodern texts emerges, predominantly, as a paradox.

Modernity, Postmodernity, Paranoia

The fact that paranoia has been discussed both in relation to modernity and postmodernity is indicative of the ambiguity that characterizes both terms, especially as cultural and artistic phenomena.[89] Part of the reason, one might argue, is that the most accepted definition of paranoia has been given to us by Sigmund Freud, one of the most important thinkers of the modern era. When he developed his theory on paranoia, based solely on Daniel Paul Schreber's *Memoirs of My Nervous Illness*, he still relied on the same framework he used for his theories on neuroses: repressed sexual desires. He attributed Schreber's mental breakdown to purely intra-psychic phenomena—latent

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[89] It is important at this point to clarify how these concepts will be understood and employed. Modernity refers to an historical epoch following the Middle Ages that champions reason as the primary means for progress and systematic knowledge in society. The principles of the Enlightenment in the eighteenth century are founded on the belief of the existence of fundamental and universal truths gained through reason, science, and technology. According to Michel Foucault, modernist thought also establishes a set of disciplinary institutions, practices, and discourses which seek to legitimate the putative hegemonic practices characterized by oppression, domination and control. One way of defining *postmodernism* is as "a set of critical, strategic and rhetorical practices employing concepts such as difference, repetition, the trace, the simulacrum, and hyperreality to destabilize other concepts such as presence, identity, historical progress, epistemic certainty, and the univocity of meaning" (Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy). Postmodernism has been described as a style, a movement, an attitude, a mode of experience, a condition. "Postmodern theory…rejects modern assumptions of social coherence and *notions of causality* in favour of multiplicity, plurality, fragmentation, and indeterminacy. In addition, postmodern theory abandons the rational and unified subject postulated by much modern theory in favour of a socially and linguistically decentred and fragmented subject" (my emphasis, Kellner and Best). I am not considering here the modern/postmodern dichotomy simply in terms of aestheticism (linear vs. fragmented narrative, etc.), even though this, too, inevitably comes up. The theorizing of paranoia in relation to the modern and the postmodern *primarily* relies on the dogmas of modernist thought and the latter's rejection by postmodern theorists. At times, the terms modern, modernism, postmodern, and postmodernism are used interchangeably; part of the reason is the lack of consensus among postmodern theorists vis-à-vis the meaning of the concepts. What is more, each concept takes on a different meaning as it moves across the disciplines (philosophy, literature, history, economics, architecture, etc.).

homosexual desire—without taking into account the interpersonal and socio-political dimensions of the text as well as Schreber's family history. Freud concluded that the paranoid individual believes that he/she is always acted upon (by malevolent agents) and is the center of attention, albeit persecutory. Freud links paranoia to the quality of passivity which, with latent homosexuality being the driving force, renders the subject emasculated, feminized, victimized. This means that Freud creates a universal model for a condition that was to become a popular "diagnosis" for those who questioned officially sanctioned truths.

In psychoanalytic terms, elements we identify closely with paranoia include narcissism, megalomania, and projection.[90] Cultural paranoia, similarly, relies on elements such as centrality (the subject stands at the center of all activity), intentionality (there is no such thing as an "accident"), omnipresence (the other is everywhere), and invisibility (the other can see but cannot be seen).[91] The *Memoirs of My Nervous Illness* employs all of the above and presents them in a factual manner. Schreber constructs his universe on non-negotiable terms, and every single object in his cosmos holds a special meaning invariably connected to him. There is one important aspect of the Schreber case that has been neglected not only by Freud but also by subsequent "Schreberian" scholars. In his "Psychoanalytic Notes Upon an Autobiographical Account of a Case of Paranoia", Freud describes Daniel Paul Schreber, as "a man of superior mental gifts and endowed with an unusual keenness alike of intellect and of observation," a description offered by Schreber himself, generously endorsed by Freud. Schreber was convinced that certain

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[90] See Sigmund Freud's "Psychoanalytic Notes Upon an Autobiographical Account of a Case of Paranoia" (1911).
[91] See Patrick O'Donnell, *Latent Destinies: Cultural Paranoia and Contemporary U.S. Narrative* (2000).

evils were perpetrated against him, yet maintained the cognitive capacity to document his own delusions, hallucinations, and fears, in a manner indicating an acute awareness of his mental condition. The notion of "I know this is not true, but still..." can be understood as a form of a *disavowal* that sustains the constant tension between the reality and delusion that tormented Schreber. Disavowal, as a defense mechanism for castration anxiety, tells us that the subject in question *is* in possession of the truth—*knows*—but yet *believes* in an alternative truth that is more acceptable and less threatening. Joan Didion, author of "The White Album," a personal piece about her struggle to cope with a chaotic and uncertain reality, speaks about her intense fear and massive anxiety as indicative of the "widespread paranoia of the time" (the late 1960s). In his discussion of Didion's essay, Timothy Melley points out that "[t]o view one's feelings as both justified and paranoid is to admit a belief in hostile forces surrounding one, while also acknowledging that the ontological basis for such suspicions cannot be confirmed" (27)[92]. The ability of the "paranoiac" to diagnose himself/herself as such implies a surplus knowledge that is there but is disavowed for the sake of justifying the individual's perception of reality. I will be returning to this point later on in my discussion of the films.

Postmodern issues appear alongside paranoia in postwar fiction, mainly in the conspiracy theory genre. In the works of Thomas Pynchon and Alan J. Pakula, for instance, the world is represented as a frightful network of interconnected conspiratorial forces where the search for meaning and truth becomes an almost unattainable goal. Characters such as Joseph Frady in *The Parallax View* and Slothrop in *Gravity's Rainbow* find themselves at the center of events that resist a singular interpretation, where

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[92] Timothy Melley, *Empire of Conspiracy: The Culture of Paranoia in Postwar America.* Cornell University Press, 2000.

contingency and chance do not exist. What accounts the most for the extreme feeling of disorientation, however, is not that they are suffering from persecutory delusions but rather from excessive knowledge that cannot be easily processed. The overwhelming number of events and characters implicated in these stories frustrates the ability to absorb and process the signs in question. Paradoxically, though, the fact that the characters' suspicions are almost always confirmed at the end, validates their perception of reality and absolves them from the stigma of paranoia. How can we think of them as paranoiacs if they are right? Truth, in other words, is always *already there* waiting to be discovered; postmodern claims about the absence of basic, essential truths, seldom finds expression in these narratives.

The break with any sense of concrete reality, the crisis of interpretation, the ambivalence, the uncertainty of signs, and the fluidity of identity and sense of self are some of the elements that define the postmodern era. Paranoia, on the other hand, as a mode of thought, or even as an episteme, is arguably aligned with the *modernist* dogma (based on the principles of the Enlightenment) of totalizing explanations of history, faith in grand narratives, need for consensus, clear delineations of good and evil, and rigid systems based on order, hierarchy and centralized control. The interpretive drive of the paranoiac "is characterized by the tendency to locate coherent motives in what others believe to be 'random' or 'chance' events" (19).[93] Interestingly, cultural and literary critics of postwar America also claim paranoia as a staple of postmodernism. Yet, I am arguing that paranoia's intensely rationalistic disposition (striving for rational

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[93] Timothy Melley. *Empire of Conspiracy: The Culture of Paranoia in Postwar America.* Even though Melley looks primarily at literary paranoia, most of his ideas find resonance with cinematic paranoia as well.

organization and rational explanations always, of course, according to their inner logic)

stands against the postmodern celebration of chaos, the irrational, the accidental, and the

contingent. If postmodernism, then, is, in certain aspects, a reaction to modernist thought

characterized, as Lyotard argued, by "incredulity towards metanarratives" (*The

Postmodern Condition*, xxiv), if there is no such thing as an essential truth, and if

paranoid narratives are a type of grand narrative—theoretical constructs that seek to offer

totalizing explanations about events—can paranoia find expression in the postmodern?

There are different ways one can respond to this question. The very emergence of

postmodern theory can be seen as symptomatic of the growing paranoid attitudes and

intense suspicion towards the epistemology of modernity and, by extension, of the

Enlightenment. "All that has been received, if only yesterday, must be suspected"

Lyotard proclaims in his essay "Answering the question: What is Postmodernism?" Ihab

Hassan notes that the word postmodernism "evokes what it wishes to surpass or suppress,

modernism itself." The term, thus, Hassan argues, "contains its enemy within."[94] Hassan,

in a long, and perhaps too neat, table of classifying modernism and postmodernism,

identifies paranoia as part of the modernist aesthetic and situates it opposite

schizophrenia (which he aligns with postmodernism)[95]. Bran Nicol, reading paranoia in

postmodernism, argues that "paranoia represents the trace of the modern in the

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[94] Ihab Hassan, "Towards a Concept of Postmodernism."(1987). The neat distinctions that Hassan draws in this essay can arguably be perceived as too neat, too uncomplicated, and by quoting Hassan I am not accepting them uncritically. Rather, I wish to demonstrate the multiple ways these critical terms are being employed in contemporary theory.

[95] Hassan's work on postmodernism comes before Lyotard's. Lyotard's work provides an implicit critique of Habermas' notion of "legitimation crisis." These important thinkers feed from each other's work and engage in a dialogue that produced no definitive answers as to what qualifies (or not) as "postmodern." The term first appears in the field of architecture in the 1950s, soon becoming a cross-disciplinary concept (in philosophy, critical theory, literature, music, and film).

postmodern" (3).[96] Understanding paranoia through the Lacanian model, Nicol describes

the condition as

> …an intensification of the projective dimension of knowledge, which involves imagining other perspectives: the paranoiac imagines himself/herself in the place of the Other and thus sees an alternative version to reality. To do so involves a loss of trust in the capacity of the Symbolic Order to represent things: the paranoiac looks "behind" the ostensible meaning of language to an alternative one. At the heart of paranoia, then, is a battle to understand/impose meaning.

In other words, Nicol argues that paranoia in the postmodern primarily differs in matters

of degree in its desire to impose meaning. This notion, however, is undermined by Jerry

Flieger who notes that

> …the celebration of the unreliability of discourse and the disbelief in a guaranteed authoritative discourse or metanarrative--may be read as consistent with a certain paranoid vision which refutes the accepted authoritative or consensual version of reality (the reality that normal people agree upon), even while sustaining an uncertain discourse (the paranoid's alternative version of events). This suggests that postmodern discourse might be considered "paranoid" insofar as it results from a fundamentally projective act where narrative is read as a function of idiosyncratic and contingent perspective rather than as transcription of any verifiable reality.[97]

In Flieger's diction one detects a more positive tone, focusing on postmodernism's

celebratory attitude and acceptance of uncertainty. Reading these statements side by side

reveals a paradox: on the one hand, Nicol stresses paranoia's intense need, in the

modernist fashion, to understand/impose meaning; Flieger, on the other hand, calls

attention to the acceptance of the unreliability of meaning in the postmodern. Both

understand paranoia as a projective type of reactionary discourse that rejects authoritative

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[96] Bran Nicol, "Reading Paranoia: Paranoia, Epistemophilia and the Postmodern Crisis of Interpretation." *Literature and Psychology* v45, no. 1-2, 1999, pp. 44-62.
[97] "Postmodern Perspective: The Paranoid Eye." *New Literary History: A Journal of Theory and Interpretation*, Winter 1997; 28 (1), pp. 87-109.

truths. The fact remains though: in what way might paranoid thought be incorporated into the postmodern critique? If postmodernism strives to de-stabilize meaning while paranoia seeks to impose it, how can we re-think the concept of *postmodern paranoia*?

If the condition is to be identified in distinct ways in the postmodern era, we have to seek it elsewhere. First, *we have to divorce it from the conspiracy genre* which, as already stated, offers a standardized and limiting perspective of paranoia, one that relies on first pathologizing the subject only to de-pathologize and validate it at the end. It would be more useful looking into texts that incorporate paranoid elements and invite paranoid readings in a different manner. Hal Ashby's *Being There* (1979) is based on the 1971 novel by Jerzy Kosinski. In this film what is considered postmodernism's quintessential visual medium, television, becomes simultaneously a source of anxiety and comfort. The film up until the end remains as much of an enigma as Chance, the main character. The story reads both as intensely paranoid and anti-paranoid; *Being There* offers a distinct way of paranoid storytelling that recuperates paranoia, removing it from the realm of conspiracy and modernism, and allowing it to re-invent itself within the postmodern.

Being There: Friend or Foe? "Chance" Encounters in the Postmodern

Žižek and Visibility

The notion of someone "being there" has more than one meaning; it can be read as a threat, a persistent presence that endangers the autonomy of the subject. It can also be read as a source of comfort, in the sense of "being there for someone" to help, protect,

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nurture.[98] Either way, "being there" always implies a presence; it can be a visible or an invisible one, which often will determine whether we perceive this presence as a friend or a foe. In "The Obscene Object of Postmodernity" Žižek points to what he perceives to be a false opposition between Habermas' understanding of modernism and postmodernism. Žižek understands Habermas' definition of postmodernism as still aligned with the modernist critique. Instead, he draws the line of demarcation between the two by examining the differences between a scene from Antonioni's *Blow Up* (which he labels "modernist") and Hitchcock's *Lifeboat* (which he labels "postmodernist"). The central premise in *Blow Up* is the obsessive quest of a body that has disappeared, a body which was photographed by chance. Towards the end of the film, we see the photographer watching a tennis match played without a ball; when the invisible ball is "thrown" his way, he reaches and "throws" it back, participating in this game that appears to "work without an object." In *Lifeboat*, however, a German sailor rescued by a lifeboat, reveals himself as a frightening object through a double reaction shot that captures his reaction to the reaction of the horrified British sailors. In other words, Žižek observes that the difference between the two categories lies in postmodernism's willingness to render the "obscene object" visible, an object that modernism chooses to conceal.

This approach also evokes Lyotard's position vis-à-vis presence and absence in the modern and postmodern aesthetic. Postmodernism, Žižek, argues, "…consists not in demonstrating that the game works without an object, that the play is set in motion by a

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[98] There are other ways this notion has been approached. At the time of the film's release, many related it to Heidegger's ontological notion of *Dasein*. Actually, Kosinski's working title for his novel was *Dasein* but he decided against it. "One has to be careful with titles" he notes. "If I had kept to that initial code name it would have connected the book, possibly, with the philosophy of Heidegger," something that he wanted to avoid. See Mary Lazar, "Jerzy Kosinski's Being There, Novel and Film: Changes Not by Chance." College Literature, Vol. 31.2, Spring 2004, pp. 99-116.

central absence, but rather in displaying the object directly, allowing it to make visible *its own indifferent and arbitrary character*. The same object can function successively as *a disgusting reject and as a sublime, charismatic apparition*: the difference, strictly structural, does not pertain to the 'effective properties' of the object, but only to its place in the symbolic order" (my emphases, 41). The "obscene object" is none other than the Lacanian "Thing," the unattainable object of desire that has now been placed within reach. This horrific object, Žižek notes, "is an everyday object that has started to function, *by chance*, as that which fills in the hole in the Other (the symbolic order)" (my emphasis, 43). The threatening proximity of the Thing is further illustrated by Žižek in Kafka's *The Trial*, arguably one of the most intensely paranoid works in the history of literature. Identifying the novel as aggressively postmodern, Žižek dismisses the understanding of Kafka's world as lawless and godless; instead, he sees that "in this universe God is *too present*" and that Kafka's "obscene" God is one and the same with the God we all understand as good and benevolent. The difference lies only in proximity; in postmodernism we just come too close. Finally, in a section titled "The superego knows too much," Žižek discusses the Freudian superego as a repository of *unconscious knowledge*, "a paradoxical knowledge unbeknown to the subject." Where, however, he asks, "can we grasp this knowledge in a palpable way?...where does it acquire material existence?" He suggests "in *paranoia*, in which this agency that 'sees all and knows all' is embodied in the real, in the person of the all-knowing persecutor, able to 'read our thoughts'" (51).

The notion of visibility and invisibility is central to paranoia; the idea of invisible forces threatening one's autonomy has been a key element, for example, in films such as

Psycho (1960) and *Vertigo* (1958). Here, Hitchcock's use of off-screen space as well as the constant use of the subjective shot, fuels the viewer's paranoia by creating an uncomfortable and frustrating space where visibility is prohibited. With no visual access to the agent who controls reality and no ocular proof of his/her existence, any speculation about the identity of the culprit is bound to be met with skepticism. Paranoia often relies on the lack of ocular poof for its existence. The vacuum that lack of concrete evidence creates, however, also enables multiple readings of a single event. Žižek's "obscene object" which, in the paranoiac's dictionary is the powerful Other, takes on a specific, rigid meaning that transforms belief into knowledge. The paranoiac *does not believe*; he *knows*, and it is in this non-negotiable knowledge where the Other resides. The "obscene object's" visibility and proximity might be one way of differentiating modern persecutory paranoia from postmodern soothing paranoia. With respect to paranoia, Žižek's distinction of modernism and postmodernism needs one modification: the proximity to the object, paradoxically, ceases to be threatening, conventional fear dissipates, and a new kind of fear takes its place. Let me explain.

In modernity, the quest for knowledge and truth is valorized, desired, possible. The urgency of assigning concrete meaning as well as the need for understanding relies on clear hierarchical models; the role and function of each stratum, from the highest to the lowest, is rendered in highly concrete terms. Bran Nicol notes that "[m]odernism invites us to make sense out of what is apparently chaotic and random. Every detail is potentially significant" (5). In postmodernism, the quest for meaning is futile, limiting, impossible. The world is as chaotic as ever, if not more so, but postmodernism invites us to accept it without the constant need to render the irrational rational. The truth-producers—the grand

narratives about who we are and why—have been invalidated. Do we not still need to know, do we not seek answers to our questions? Where do we look for them? Most often in the visual media, the truth producers of our times. Do we not have an unprecedented access to information? How far do we need to travel to possess it? Reach for the remote or type a URL. This extreme proximity to knowledge has instigated a new type of anxiety: it is no longer the fear of the unknown, the unthinkable, the invisible that torments our thoughts and feeds our paranoia. It is the fear of the known, the hypervisible, as postmodernism's efforts to de-naturalize the "natural," cultivates an awareness of the unreliability of the epistemology of the past.

Perhaps no other visual medium has been the source of more excessive knowledge and skepticism than the postmodern medium *par excellence*, television. With television no longer do we need to leave our living room in order to pursue knowledge; instead, knowledge is literally staring us in the face and, with the click of a button, ready-made reality is at our disposal. Television has instigated intense paranoid reactions about its threatening effects on autonomous thought; films such as *Videodrome* (David Cronenberg, 1983), *Pleasantville* (Gary Ross, 1998), *The Truman Show* (Peter Weir, 1998), and *The Ring* (Gore Verbinski, 2002) all deal, either directly or indirectly, with television as a "body snatcher" that attacks and gains control over the human body.[99] In *Pleasantville*, two teenage siblings literally get swallowed up by the TV set and are transported into the fictional 1950s sitcom "Pleasantville", an ironic if not oxymoronic title that masks the "horrors" of the community's life. The show is featured in black and

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[99] *Modern Times* (Dir. Charlie Chaplin, 1936) precedes the television era. The unforgettable scene, however, where the tramp literally becomes a cog in the industrial wheel (being swallowed up by the machine), is an early example of the fear of dehumanization and mechanization of the individual.

white in order to comment on the colorless life the people lead, a life that is depriving them of any "real" knowledge of the world. The film comments on the power of television as much as it comments on the desire for knowledge and its power of transforming the individual, granting him/her agency and free will. The minute someone is "touched" by the all-knowing David (played by Tobey Maguire) they begin to appear in color; the latter functions as horrifying ocular proof of their proximity to the "obscene object."[100] David, who in real life is a social reject, by chance, becomes a kind of charismatic apparition for the citizens of Pleasantville, rejecting the symbolic order, and spreading "wisdom" just by being there. The fact that he is perceived as a repository of excessive knowledge creates an interesting dialectic between the effects of TV on the individual and the effect the individual has on TV. The latter can still be seen as the powerful "idiot box" which has body-snatched David and Jennifer, but knowledge, which Foucault has taught us is inextricably linked to power, does not align itself with television; in a rather ironic twist, it is the individual who teaches television about the world instead of the other way around.

So, on the one hand *Pleasantville* remains conventional, or "modern" in representing technology as a threatening force that subsumes the human body but, at the same time, calls into the question the putative power of the machine by situating knowledge outside it. In *The Truman Show*, as discussed in the previous chapter, television is Truman's "father", he being the first infant to have been adopted by a TV show. Truman, unaware

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[100] Initially, it is David's bubbly and seductive sister Jennifer who initiates the "crisis". Some kind of transformative experience or intense emotion brings color into the people's lives (which include anger, being in love, and sudden rushes of thought). What is suggestive and relevant to this analysis, though, is the fact that the female's transformative power translates in sexual terms (sexual power), whereas the male hero's power of transformation is cerebral (he *knows too much*).

of being the offspring of a machine, and of the fact that he *is* the center of this false universe where all activity is done *to* him and *for* him, perceives the world around him as real and himself as an average Joe; when he finally discovers the "conspiracy" in play he decides to leave the safe haven where he is guaranteed safety and take a chance in the real but uncertain world. Just as with *Pleasantville*, knowledge reaches Truman from the "outside" with the advent of the resurrected father. Furthermore, television may have successfully appropriated the human body in both films, but the intellect of the heroes remains intact. "You never had a camera inside my head" Truman proclaims to Christof, the show's director, meaning that the machine did not have the power to appropriate the mind.

Significantly, the intense fear of the machine as a body snatcher has a predominant role in the *Memoirs of My Nervous Illness*. Judge Schreber, in an anticipatory, if not prophetic manner, offers elaborate descriptions of the manner in which the "rays" and the "voices" threaten to penetrate and take over his body and mind. In an insightful essay titled "Wired: Schreber as Machine, Technophobe, and Virtualist" Mark S. Roberts provides a valuable analysis on the impact the technology of the time had on Schreber. In addition to suffering from fearful delusions, Schreber's perception of his condition was deeply affected by "a kind of psychomechanics, by a theory of the body and brain as an interactive machine that is moved by mechanical impulses and drives, and electromagnetic forces…Schreber was fully convinced that certain types of filaments or wires were implanted in his body so as to make him receptive, as well as captive, to a variety of vocal messages carried by the rays" (34-5). In addition to the many passages indicating his gradual mechanization, another hostile persecutor tormenting Schreber are

"the voices," which Roberts notes are also described in electromechanical terms as a kind of "prerecorded" language. One element to consider is the function of the rays which, although carriers of information, are "essentially without thoughts." Roberts explains: "By this [Schreber] means that the rays are often without memory, devoid of any thought, and therefore of any specific human or divine intentionality. Without thoughts of their own, the rays are simply intermediary devices, intended to convey ideas and information in a wholly detached way…" (38).

Schreber's descriptions of the fearful machine bear an uncanny resemblance to some essential properties of television. In our times, television is always there; in the living room, the bedroom, the kitchen, the car, the train station, lounge bar, diner, window stores, the list goes on and on. The omnipresence of the apparatus, its *being there*, becomes, as already mentioned, a source of comfort (we are not alone; TV brings us into contact with the world), and an imposing threat to our sense of autonomous thought. Its pole of attraction is the ability to grant access to places that ordinarily would be beyond our reach. The sense of empowerment gained by experiencing the world visually, by making the invisible visible is always undermined by a sense of becoming passive in the process.

The Machine in the Garden

Being There (1979) tells the story of Chance the gardener, a man who suffers from an acute lack of intellect. He has lived all his years taking care of the garden of a Washington DC estate which he has never left up until the moment his employer dies. Since Chance has absolutely no experience of the real world, whatever knowledge he

possesses is from watching television, an activity he performs obsessively from morning till night. When he is forced to finally leave the estate, suitcase in hand, Chance roams the streets of DC until a limousine accidentally injures him. Eve Rand, the owner of the limo, offers to take Chance to her dying husband's estate where he can receive medical treatment from the team of doctors who are treating Benjamin Rand, her very wealthy husband. From that moment on, Chance, who by a misunderstanding is renamed Chauncey Gardiner, finds himself at the center of political activity, even perceived by the media as the President's "advisor." An obsessive quest for his past begins, not only by the CIA and the FBI, but by sixteen countries around the world; alas, there are no existing records of Chance's existence other than his presence, his *being there*.

In *Being There*, Schreber's paranoid fear of the nineteenth-century technoculture is materialized in Chance, as the latter acts and behaves like a machine, a detached automaton with no emotional reactions whatsoever. The "rays without thoughts" or, in his case, television, have successfully taken over his body and brain, transforming him into a blank screen upon which everyone projects their own needs and desires. Chance, as a genuine product of postmodern culture, is an empty signifier; no meaning can be attached to him. The hypnotic effect he has on everyone he encounters is suggestive of the numbing effect television has on our own intellect, as well as of the distorted and delusional realities it constructs. As the story progresses, Chance moves from being an invisible entity to becoming a hyper-visible one; he is transformed from a disgusting reject to Žižek's charismatic apparition that purely by chance began to function as the Thing, the "obscene object" of desire that has come now within reach.

Being There paved the way for a number of films that comment on the dangerous effects of visual mass media—especially television—and from this perspective a reading of the film becomes uncomplicated. But more importantly, one might argue, it problematizes, through caustic satire, paranoid thought. This is achieved by first showing paranoia in the making, how it is engendered, and making visible the discrepancies in thought; at the same time, Ashby points to the difficulty of moving beyond it as a subjective hermeneutic device that guarantees us a space of comfort, meaning and understanding. In other words, paranoid thought is not condemned as a skewed hermeneutic device but rather it is celebrated as a way of asserting that reality lies in the eye of the beholder. Even the doctor, one of the only two people in the story (the other one being Louise, the maid) who see Chance for who he is—just a gardener—chooses to withhold that information. Why? Because Chance becomes a central manipulative presence that provides comfort rather than spreads fear.

Perhaps one of the most important issues in the film is the way we produce reality and meaning. When the two attorneys visit the estate after the death of the old man, they are surprised to find Chance living there. This reality in itself becomes unacceptable. "We will need some proof of your having resided here Mr. Chance," one of the attorneys says. After a brief, awkward pause, Chance replies "You have me…I'm here." He, of course, is not enough. Chance's material body fails to function as evidence, as ocular proof in itself, precisely because he is a signifier without a signified; he signifies nothing. This free-floating body resists interpretation, occupying a paradoxical space of there and not there. Without someone else, a witness, confirming his existence, and with television being his only mentor and companion, Chance is condemned to a perpetual state of imitating

humans rather than being human. On several occasions the audience sees Chance mimicking the gestures of people on TV, which are actually not "real" people themselves. Is Chance real? Does he exist? Who gets to decide? It seems that Ashby remains conventional in aligning the control and content of information with the powerful, in this case, the Rands, who get to decide and then proceed to circulate Chance as a charismatic man whose "deep insights" and powerful metaphors become key in government policy and, in extension, in manipulating public opinion. But the apparent conventionality of aligning knowledge and the control of information with the ideology of the powerful is simultaneously undermined by Ashby's foregrounding of the process of knowledge formation, of how meaning is produced in and through its very absence. Chance can be read as the quintessential postmodern subject; he is a marginal character re-positioned at the center, there is no recorded/official history of his origins (nor does Ashby venture at even hinting at one), and there is no essence or sense of a stable identity. Consequently, he is a completely detached, disinterested, de-historicized, and de-politicized figure, the prefixes *de-* and *dis-* being, as we know, postmodernism's love children. The lack of knowledge and intentionality should, normally, cultivate an *anti-*paranoid mood since Chance is *dis*connected from everything and everyone. The fact, however, that he becomes a singular force to be reckoned with *despite* the lack of motivation becomes just as fearful because he is as unstoppable as the traditional manipulative and consciously acting agent with the power to control.

In many paranoid texts, the hero embarks on an obsessive quest for knowledge and truth, a truth he believes he possesses already, so the quest is not really for truth but

rather for evidence to support it.[101] Things are never what they seem, and it is only the "paranoiac" hero who, possessing surplus knowledge (seeing beneath the surface), is able to discern deception and eventually expose it. In the case of Chance once again we meet with an ironic reversal of this popular motif: knowledge is "pursuing" *him*. Consider how Chance and Eve meet. The former is mesmerized by watching his own reflection on a store screen, perplexed about the simultaneity of being here and there at the same time. This moment recalls Lacan's Mirror Stage;[102] Chance sees himself for the first time on a TV screen that functions as the mirror. Up until that moment, the audience experiences a man that, as far as the external world is concerned, does not exist.[103] Interestingly, *his* self-discovery coincides, or rather, is immediately followed by Eve discovering *him*. As the limo is backing up it stumbles upon Chance injuring him in the leg. From then on, the "chase" begins. Chance is "baptized" by Eve Chauncey Gardiner, and through this symbolic gesture of being given an identity, is "pursued" by the media—the official source of knowledge in the postmodern culture—by the government, and by sixteen countries around the world. Chance is a "Teflon" man; no knowledge can stick to him.

In addition, in most conventional paranoid narratives anxiety is fueled mainly through negative terms such as lack, loss, and absence. In Costa-Gavras' *Missing* (1982), for instance, the missing body of Charles Horman constantly asserts its presence, its *having been there* through its absence, as we never actually get to see the body, to experience his death visually. His disappearance, the missing body, cannot function as evidence in itself,

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[101] Examples would include films such as *The Parallax View* (1974), *The Conversation* (1973), *Blow Out* (1981), *Conspiracy Theory* (1997), *The Manchurian Candidate* (1962).

[102] See Christian Metz, *The Imaginary Signifier: Psychoanalysis and the Cinema* (1975).

[103] With regard to this point, Kaja Silverman's chapter "Lost Objects and Mistaken Subjects" in *The Acoustic Mirror: The Female Voice in Psychoanalysis and Cinema* (1988), is also of great interest.

and it is this central absence that fuels and drives the paranoid storytelling. Both *Missing* and *Being There* deal with a hostile take-over; in the first case, a military junta gains control over an unidentified Latin American country; in the other, television gains control over American culture. There is one main difference. In *Being There* all of the sudden a body *appears* with no proof of ever having been there, but as in *Missing* we realize that absence in itself does not guarantee meaning or understanding, here presence fails just as miserably to establish any kind of understanding. Now, rather than being confronted with a fearful lack we are confronted with a fearful excess which despite its materiality cannot be effectively handled.

In psychoanalytic terms, it is the female body that evokes the very first paranoid reaction also known as castration anxiety. The little boy, destined according to Freud, to be a "paranoiac" as part of his "normal" development, misconstrues absence for loss and, in extension, lack of the missing penis. Ashby constructs Chance as completely asexual; he has no sexual drive. We also learn from Louise, the maid, that Chance should better try and find an old lady to take care of him: "You ain't gonna do a young one any good, not with that *little thing* of yours," she advises him as she leaves the estate. Ironically, though, this asexual body becomes a pole of sexual attraction for both men and women. In one of the film's most celebrated scenes, Eve masturbates and climaxes in the presence of Chance watching television. His blank statement "I like to watch" is interpreted as a sexual perversion that liberates Eve's sexually repressed body. Right before, she and Chance had attended a formal gathering in honor of the Russian ambassador, during which a homosexual man makes explicit sexual advances on Chance. The sexual potency of the asexual body is also asserted through the sudden sexual impotence of the most

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powerful man in the world, the president of the United States. On separate occasions as Chance is mesmerizing his audiences, there is a cut to the Presidential bedroom, TV on, where a frustrated and confused, "castrated" President cannot understand why this is happening to him. We, the audience, are able to make the connection, establishing a cause/effect relationship between Chance and the President's condition. The constant tension between the lack of intentionality on Chance's part and the central position he occupies both in the private and the public sphere is where the paradox lies and where postmodern paranoia emerges. Since meaning is no longer possible but the desire for it is as strong as ever, meaning will be produced in the most unlikely places, in the most marginal figures which have now moved to the center. No longer do we need an active agent pulling the strings; in the absence of one, we construct the agent ourselves. Patrick O'Donnell describes paranoia as "…an effect without a cause, a post hoc, sliding signifier of identity…" (18). Chance can be seen as the embodiment of O'Donnell's paranoia, an effect without a cause. Causality resides in the president's paranoid reaction to Chance, as he feels his power being threatened by this foreign body.

Another important aspect of postmodernism in this film is the function of the spoken word. *Being There* reveals language as unreliable, slippery, deceiving. Chance can only use language in the most literal terms, which highlights the limitations of words as a reliable means of communication. Chance is an empty signifier; his words can only denote. Everyone else, on the other hand, understands his words to be metaphors, to connote, the central one being the metaphor of the garden. Chance's empty words are enthusiastically received as pearls of wisdom because no one can realize that there is nothing really there. Chance *must* mean something. Dressed in the old man's clothes, he

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has the appearance of an aristocrat. Eve and her social circle accept uncritically the reality of Chance without the slightest inquisitiveness or skepticism. The government, on the other hand, initiates a frantic search for any type of information about him. Just as with castration anxiety, absence is perceived as loss; it is not that there never were any official records, but rather that those that *were there* have now been destroyed. The perception of lack of evidence becoming evidence in itself is a quintessential element of paranoid thought.

The above elements help illustrate how paranoia can be engendered, what ingredients are necessary, and what needs to be missing. At the same time, though, Ashby frustrates a paranoid reading of the film, in part, by a "…continual foregrounding of the hermeneutic process."[104] Despite Chance's ambivalent state, the viewer still accepts that with paranoia's greatest ally, intentionality, lacking, the centrality he maintains throughout cannot be a product of a power-hungry "evil" man. The effects of his in(action), though, are still very much at work. In his discussion of Francis Ford Coppola's *The Conversation* (1973), Norman Denzin notes that the film demonstrates "that technological prowess can only detect, it cannot comprehend or feel or form moral judgments. It produces a pornographic ecstasy of communication in which the invisible (the private) becomes visible (public), and nothing is any longer secret or sacred" (167). Chance, as an anthropomorphized machine cannot feel or comprehend, which, from this perspective, renders him powerless. His power lies in the others' desire for him to mean something, something big, important, profound.

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[104] Bran Nicol is not discussing Hal Ashby; the quote is drawn from his discussion on postmodern paranoia.

Being There builds on the tension between four main areas associated with paranoid thought: intentionality vs. randomness, visibility vs. invisibility, ambiguity vs. rigid meaning, and centrality vs. periphery. The film takes an ontological approach towards these concepts but gives no answers. There is no core truth to Chance's identity or action. At the very end, as Chance leaves Rand's funeral, we see a Christ-like figure walking on water. Was he ever real? By ending the film with a theological image of Chance, Ashby seems to be saying that any attempt at rationalizing this presence is futile, impossible, and even undesirable. Flieger argues that "...the postmodern text more often than not reflects a free-floating paranoia." In the film itself, perhaps with the exception of the government agencies who frantically investigate Chance, there is no conventional paranoiac. There is also no "enemy," no sinister figure orchestrating grand schemes for his own personal interests. There is only Chance. Ashby relies on the paranoid structure of centrality and cause/effect but frustrates it at the same time since causality is divorced from intentionality. So, where does paranoia lie? Paranoia lies outside the text, it lies with the viewer who is asked to engage in a paranoid reading which is, nonetheless, constantly undermined by Chance's persistent, yet unwitting presence and visibility. *Being There* offers one way of negotiating paranoia within the postmodern condition. Žižek's analysis becomes useful in understanding the film as an example where elements that in modernist texts disrupt paranoid thought (transparency, visibility, presence), are now engendering it. As an individual Chance cannot be analyzed in the conventional manner we examine characters and the psychological motivations driving their actions or indecisions. There is no truth or essence waiting to be found.

Forrest Gump relies on another tendency of postmodern narratives: the blending of the fictional and the historical. This film, despite its adherence to the familiar Hollywood recipe of storytelling, adopts a paranoid attitude, where history is not rejected (historical and cultural events did occur) but rather re-invented. Soothing paranoia here re-assures the viewer that we *can* be and *are* part of our national history. If Chance is a completely de-historicized subject, with no past, present or future, Forrest is the embodiment of American history.[105]

"What's my Destiny Mama?": Forrest Gump and the Rebirth of a Nation

In a chapter of his book *Latent Destinies*, titled "Postmodernity and the Symptom of Paranoia," Patrick O'Donnell argues that in most aspects of late capitalist culture,

> …paranoia manifests itself as a mechanism that rearranges chaos into order, the contingent into the determined. As such, it is a means of (re)writing history…When the self is transformed into an empty screen of an exhausted, but hypertechnical culture,[106] the paranoid subject resurrects these standards and foundations by taking advantage of the very fluidity of relations and contingency of events that mark the postmodern. Through the arbitrations of narrative, the subject restructures the real as the historical; using the very materials, as it were, that cause paranoia, s/he converts the arbitrary and contingent into the determined fatalities of 'history' and the stories of the nation. (11-2)

In this book, O'Donnell offers a very insightful look into contemporary American literature and film "as symptomatic representations of paranoia in contemporary culture" (viii). O'Donnell perceives history under paranoia as what he calls, "latent destiny," meaning that contingent events are interpreted and rendered in a compressed manner "into a singular story that manifests the real of self or nation around a central, paranoid

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[105] On the topic of history in/and cinema see Mark Carnes, *Past Imperfect: History According to the Movies* (1995), and Robert Toplin, *History by Hollywood: the use and abuse of the American past* (1996).
[106] The first part of this quote is actually O'Donnell quoting the *Panic Encyclopedia*.

'truth': that [this truth] is always, and has always been, at the focal point of historical processes rather than on the periphery" (20). The tendency to conflate personal and national histories has been a most popular narrative device in postwar literature as well as in Hollywood cinema. As analyzed in chapter one, the first mythical figure whose destiny was most pronouncedly tied to the destiny of the state was Oedipus. With *Forrest Gump*, the "son" of Chance, a new kind of mythic hero emerges in popular culture; a hero whose destiny and history are tied to the history of the United States, a hero who stands at the center of some of the most significant socio-political and cultural events of the century, a hero who, unlike Oedipus and just like Chance, suffers from *too little* knowledge.[107] Yet, he manages to become a wealthy businessman, a war hero, a great philanthropist, a national sensation in ping pong, a guru, a football champion, a college graduate, a husband, and a father, all wrapped up in a box of chocolates. What makes this film interesting as a case of postmodern paranoia is the fact that, as in *Being There*, *Forrest Gump* is a celebration of contingency, a tribute to randomness and chance. The (anti)-hero is once again devoid of any kind of intentionality of action, something that stands against everything conventional paranoid thought asserts; according to the paranoid worldview, there are no accidents.

Film critics agree that *Forrest Gump* is much more than a feel-good, Oscar favorite film; it is a phenomenon, an event that swept the nation, a money-making machine that grossed more than $300 million at the domestic box office alone. *Forrest Gump* is loosely based on a 1986 novel by Winston Groom. The film's phenomenal success stirred

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[107] In *The Man Who Knew Too Little* (Jon Amiel, 1997), Wallace "Wally" Richie (played by Bill Murray) is mistakenly taken for a spy by a group of international conspirators plotting to assassinate Russian dignitaries in an attempt to instigate a second Cold War. He thinks it's all part of a live interactive TV show "Theater of Life." The tagline of the film is "He's on a mission so secret, even he doesn't know about it"

a lot of controversy in political, artistic, and academic circles alike. Forrest Gump the

hero comes off as a benevolent yet omnipresent figure; *Forrest Gump* the film, on the

contrary, was equally omnipotent but not as benevolent as the man. Critics were baffled

to witness a Gump mania, a "gumpification" of culture where people would often quote

Forrest saying "Life is like a box of chocolates" or "stupid is as stupid does." What was it

about this character and his story that audiences identified with so strongly?

David Lavery sees the film as a tribute to capitalism and the glorification of the

American Dream, a Horatio Alger from-rags-to-riches fantasy come true. He also notes

that the dramatic changes from the novel to the film are "…central to not only an

understanding of the film's tremendous popularity but to any assessment of the current

state of artistic culture, and go right to the heart of our postmodern era"[108] (18). Thomas

Byers attributes the film's success to its strong conservative messages with a re-

affirmation of strong family values, an employment of anti-feminist and racist ideology, a

right-wing historical revisionism, and all in all, a how-to manual for the "progressively

challenged."[109] In " 'A Struggle of Contending Stories': Race, Gender, and Political

Memory in *Forrest Gump*" (2000), Jennifer Hyland Wang takes it even a step further in

examining exactly how the conservative party appropriated *Forrest Gump* and utilized it

as a springboard in the 1994 congressional elections. She perceives the Gump

phenomenon as a "discourse event" and as a "continual struggle over the meanings

ascribed to Forrest Gump and his story." Steven Scott's "Like a Box of Chocolates:

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[108] "'No Box of Chocolates': The Adaptation of *Forrest Gump*." (Lavery, 1997).
[109] "History Re-Membered: *Forrest Gump*, Postfeminist Masculinity, and the Burial of the Counterculture" *MFS*: Modern Fiction Studies, Summer, 1996; 42 (2): pp. 419-44.

Forrest Gump and Postmodernism" (2001) reads the film as a postmodern visual text, "an embodiment of postmodernism that Fredric Jameson has described as symptomatic of late capitalism"; In fact, Scott argues, the film "exemplifies postmodernism at its seductive and subversive best."

One might also argue that the reason for the film's great success is the celebratory paranoid stance it adopts both in terms of personal and national histories. The narrative is modeled after a paranoid structure of storytelling, where everything is connected and attributed to a single agent pulling the strings. The film very effectively negotiates our paranoid desire of feeling powerful and powerless at the same time, of being at the center of major historical events, of being tied to these events in a cause-effect relationship, of providing meaning and justification to the tumultuous twentieth-century American culture. It does so, however, in the most innocuous way, by positioning at the center of politics, war, and corporate moguls, not the typical threatening and powerful figure of a man with the power to control and manipulate, but rather a simple, benevolent, and, certainly, non-threatening figure (to neither men nor women) with whom we can identify comfortably. The fact that Forrest has an IQ of 75 does not seem to act as a deterrent for audience identification; he still comes off as "everyman" and that is why we root for his successes and overlook his flaws. The film is riddled with ironies, the most important one being that Forrest does not succeed in life *despite* his lack of knowledge of the world and world events, but rather, as I shall discuss, *because* of it.

The story of Forrest Gump comes to us straight from the horse's mouth in the framing narrative that has Forrest sitting on a bench at a bus stop. As the story unfolds, we learn that he is unwittingly responsible or an active participant in some of the most exciting

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and traumatic historical events that shaped US culture as well as US politics. Despite the narcissistic ubiquitousness of the hero—Forrest being in almost every single scene in the film—*Forrest Gump* is less about the story of a person than it is about the history of a nation, or, rather, the re-birth of a nation. O'Donnell's work on "…the paranoid subject under postmodernism interpellated into collective narratives of nation, history, and destiny along with the construction of history as narrative…" (19) best highlights the manner in which the film blends the private and the public. The hero functions as a vehicle whose "significant" personal accounts build a metanarrative of history that is trivialized but not diminished. "The past really did exist," Linda Hutcheon suggests, and "postmodernism returns to confront the problematic nature of the past as an object of knowledge for us in the present"[110] (92). In other words, the film does not seek to erase history, or to interrogate historiography; what it does is embrace the narrativization of history as human discourse through an "imaginative reconstruction" that relies on the paranoid model of assigning meaning and understanding of the world.

The narrative structure can be read along the lines of a long psychoanalytic session, with the viewer occupying the position of the analyst and Forrest that of the analysand, engaging in a discourse of free association or *anamnesis*. Like Schreber's *Memoirs*, *Forrest Gump* employs first person narration; the framing narrative has Forrest sitting on a bench at a bus stop offering his memoirs to whoever happens to be sitting next to him. Most of the story relies on an episodic structure in the form of flashbacks, filtered through the consciousness of Forrest, just as in the Schreber case. But whereas in the *Memoirs* every single event is analyzed and (over)interpreted by the narrator, Forrest

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[110] Linda Hutcheon, *A Poetics of Postmodernism.* Routledge, 1988.

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offers no interpretation or personal evaluation of his memories and, by extension, of the historical past. Forrest inserts himself into history but he does so with such obliviousness of history itself, making no judgments, no evaluations of "what happened" or "why it happened" that history reads as but a series of contingent events by no means orchestrated by self-conscious agents with the power to control. As Stephen Brockmann aptly put it, "if Bill Clinton had once famously declared, when asked if he had ever smoked marijuana, that he smoked but did not inhale, and if history is the film's drug of choice, then one could say that Forrest Gump is someone who smokes American history but does not inhale it."[111] The narcissistic tendency of positioning the self at the epicenter of all activity is, of course, a key characteristic of paranoid thought. The fact that Forrest does not actually perceive his participation in the socio-historical events of the time does not alter the fact that history is still attributed to a single individual. Through Forrest's personal account of trivial episodes that shaped his life, it is *we*, the audience, who are asked to interpret the "deeper" historical significance behind his "innocent" personal memories. In one of his many encounters with destiny, Forrest becomes responsible for unveiling the Watergate scandal during the Nixon administration. The irony in this episode is not only that he notifies security, being disturbed by the flashlights of the conspirators, but mainly because it is Nixon himself who unwittingly places Forrest in the position to reveal the truth. In other words, for the film to work, we have to *already know* but at the same time, in order to identify with Forrest, disavow this knowledge and surrender into an innocuous, lighthearted version of history that guarantees a feeling of

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[111] "Virginal Father and Prodigal Son." *Philosophy and Literature*, 27: 2003, pp. 341-362.

comfort and understanding, as well as a sense of agency in that we, too, participate in history merely by "being there."[112] But there is a catch.

On one level the audience occupies the privileged position of the analyst with the hermeneutic capacity to tease out the constant discrepancies between image and text. Consider how Forrest introduces the man he was named after: "When I was a baby, mama had named me after the great civil war hero, General Nathan Bedford Forrest. She said we was related to him in some way…But what he did was he started up this club called the Ku Klux Klan…They'd all dress up in their robes and bedsheets and act like a bunch of ghosts or spooks or somethin'…Mama said the 'Forrest' part was to remind me that sometimes we all do things that, well, that *just don't make no sense…*" The intertextual images accompanying the voiceover narration are taken from D. W. Griffith's *Birth of a Nation*, which, as discussed in chapter one, is one of the first paranoid films in US history. Here, the members of the Ku Klux Klan are depicted as white knights on a mission to protect the white people from the "evil" hypersexual African Americans. Forrest makes no moral judgments or evaluations of the past; he simply states that sometimes things happen that "just don't make no sense." The refusal of the film to assign any concrete meaning to the historical past while at the same time acknowledging its existence captures the paradox of embracing history and questioning it at the same time. The idea of things happening "for no particular reason" is Forrest's motto throughout the film. This is the main reason why the story reads on the surface as

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[112] Vivian Sobchack, " 'Shit Happens': *Forrest Gump* and Historical Consciousness." (1997). In this extremely insightful piece, Sobchack takes issue with the oversimplification of history in the film, reading it as a paradoxical "meta-text" that both "makes a sharp distinction between the personal and historical event, the historically trivial and significant action, and it simultaneously collapses this distinction, pointing to the conflation and confusion of personal and historical, trivial and significant." Even though she does not actually use the term "postmodern" text, her treatment of the film is in accordance with the way postmodernism has been related to representing the historical past.

being aggressively *anti-paranoid*. Soon after Gump goes to Washington with the all-American football team to meet President Kennedy, we see a clip from the infamous Zapruder film capturing Kennedy in his car right before his assassination in Texas. Forrest notes: "Sometime later *for no particular reason* somebody shot that nice young president when he was riding in his car. A few years after that, somebody shot his little brother too." The Zapruder film, just like Chance's material body, has failed to function as evidence of *the* truth regarding the assassination of JFK. It has been a persistent presence that became, on the one hand, a source of anxiety and frustration in its inability to mean something concrete, but at the same time it has also been a source of comfort in maintaining the illusive promise of a decipherable enigma. Here, this failed ocular proof is inserted as part of an indifferent, if not detached, archival footage. O'Donnell refers to the Zapruder film as the Lacanian "Real": "[the latter] …fails as representation partly because it has become the "Real" in the narratives constructed about it, the contradictorily determining and radical determinate image-event that marks the crossing between utter contingency and historical conspiracy" (22). Causality dissipates, in other words, and historical events that shaped the political and cultural identity of the nation are rendered as mere unfortunate incidents devoid of rational explanations.

In *Being There* Chance's mere presence functions as guarantor of meaning for those around him. The same can also be said for Forrest. After Jenny abruptly leaves his house, Forrest remembers: "That day, for no particular reason, I decided to go for a little run…" Two years later Forrest is on the news (again), identified as a *gardener* from Greenbow Alabama; the journalist is reporting that this man has been running across America for two whole years and still going strong. As Forrest is running, the media frantically pursue

him and desperately try to assign meaning to this meaningless activity: "Sir, why are you running?" a reporter asks running alongside him. "Are you doing this for world peace? Are you doing this for the homeless? Are you running for women's rights? Or for the environment? Or for animals? *Why* are you doing this?" "They just couldn't believe," Forrest recounts, "that somebody would do all that running for no particular reason." Soon after, he begins to have a following, as a growing group of people join in his "inspirational" running. "For some reason," he says, "what I was doing seemed to make sense to people." It is also during this episode that, thanks to Forrest's "insights," two great capitalist ventures materialize: the extremely successful bumper sticker "shit happens" and the "Have a nice day" T-shirt. After running for three years, two months, fourteen days, and sixteen hours, Forrest, all of the sudden, stops. The crowd behind him awaits: "Quiet, quiet, he's gonna say something," one of his devoted followers shouts. The camera zooms in on Forrest, in a mockingly climactic moment, as he says "I'm pretty tired; think I'll go home now." As he turns around and begins to walk back, someone shouts "Now what are *we* supposed to do?" This amusing episode pokes fun at mob mentality, but more importantly it becomes a manifestation of the desire to find meaning in the most meaningless activities. Forrest's running is interpreted as a deep spiritual journey, and this distorted belief in an effect without a cause can be understood on the one hand as anti-paranoid. On another level, however, we are also asked to engage in a more conventional *paranoid* understanding of history that invites us to define it as a rigid and clearly delineated system of cause/effect relationships, with Forrest standing at the center, denying us the hermeneutic flexibility we are simultaneously invited to engage in. Forrest is inserted—digitally and spatially—into history but is simultaneously

excluded as a passive-aggressive agent (just like Chance) who can be read as both implicated and not implicated in the turnout of events.

If there is one thing that postmodernism and paranoia have in common it is their intense suspicion of the historical past, recent and distant. The difference lies in the degree of this suspicion that grants postmodernism license to interrogate history and historiography. The blending of historical and fictional figures is a prominent feature of postmodern fiction. Fredric Jameson views this as anathema, condemning the tendency of emptying out history, and claiming that postmodernism's de-historicization and de-politicization of the past has no important value or function. Linda Hutcheon, on the other hand, offers an alternative viewpoint; she suggests that "historiographic metafiction" (a concept that describes literary postmodernism's proclivity to tamper in an often playful manner with the historical past),

> …refutes the natural or common sense methods of distinguishing between historical fact and fiction. It refuses the view that only history has a truth claim, both by questioning the ground of that claim in historiography and by asserting that both history and fiction are discourses, human constructs, signifying systems, and both derive their major claim to truth from that identity. (93)

Once again, the film relies for its success on this very tension. Forrest Gump, the hero, is admittedly an apolitical character; his lack of intellect denies him any kind of understanding of events he not only participates in, but often instigates as well. A good example of this attitude occurs soon after Forrest returns home after running across America for more than three years. The scene fades in on a TV set reporting the breaking news about President Reagan's assassination attempt; Forrest is sitting close to the

television *with his back turned on the TV set.* He is enjoying a nice wholesome meal without the slightest interest or concern about an event as important as the near death of the head of the state. History is remembered in a disengaged, neutral manner. The fact that Forrest stands at the center of so much activity but is oblivious to it simultaneously grants and denies him agency. The paradoxical position he assumes does not only function on the macro level; on the micro level, too, Forrest is a social outcast living on the margins. His position in the social structure is offered in the "scientific" chart the principal at school shows to Mrs. Gump when she pleads for her son's admittance. The politics of inclusion and exclusion become evident in the strategic blocking in this scene; in the foreground, the little boy is sitting outside the office; in the background his mother and the principal are negotiating his future. Forrest is almost always present when others are talking about him but he always remains on the margins of the shot despite the central position he occupies in all discussions. The constant re-negotiations and "re-writing" of his identity, an identity that is always decided by others, grants and denies him presence: In every decade, from the 1950s to the 1980s, Forrest comes to mean something different to different people. He himself never really changes, yet he becomes a renewed signifier that is interpreted according to the demands and desires of those around him.

The two constants, thus, are Forrest's nature and the central role he plays each decade in socio-political events. The events too are often presented in an undifferentiated manner. The assassinations that take place during this period, for instance—John F. Kennedy, Robert F. Kennedy, John Lennon—are rendered with the same justification mentioned earlier; they all happen, according to Forrest, "for no particular reason." The detached, disinterested disposition to historical events is one of the main criticisms

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against postmodern fiction. The fact that Forrest recounts some of the most controversial assassinations as hapless events with no political resonance does not mean, however, that this is an apolitical text. On the contrary, Zemeckis captures the senselessness of the aforementioned assassinations, the irrationality of history, as well as the absurdity of any attempt to rationalize it. *There was no reason why these men had to die* and historical accounts that produce reasons and explanations could be viewed as examples of a paranoid discourse that, to quote O'Donnell, "rearranges chaos into order." In this sense, we can understand *Forrest Gump* as exemplary of "postmodern historicism" or, according to Linda Hutcheon, of "historiographic metafiction" where the film "…reinstalls historical contexts as significant and even determining, but in so doing, it problematizes the entire notion of historical knowledge" (89). Hutcheon argues that "to elevate 'private experience to public consciousness' in postmodern historiographic metafiction is not really to expand the subjective; it is to render inextricable the public and historical and the private and biographical" (94). One might claim, thus, that this type of historiographic metafiction is a form of paranoid discourse for two main reasons: first, because of the suspicious disposition and questioning of the past and, second, because of the neat signifying system it creates, a system that has its own inner logic and meaning but can never be thought as anything other than the subjective rendition of historical events. All this is made possible for one main reason: Forrest, just like Chance, is a free-floating signifier, an empty screen where everyone can project and write their desires. Recall O'Donnell's comment regarding history under paranoia: "…it is a means of (re)writing history…when the self is transformed into an empty screen of an exhausted, but hypertechnical culture, the paranoid subject resurrects these standards and

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foundations by taking advantage of the very fluidity of relations and contingency of events that mark the postmodern."

Forrest Gump is *not* as indifferent to politics and history as is the title character. Stripping the hero from any political consciousness or political motivation does not in any way mean that this film serves no political purposes (at least not in the way Jameson criticizes the blurring of the fictional and the historical in postmodern fiction). Forrest is the product of a conservative upbringing in the deep South. In the DVD commentary Tom Hanks notes: "Forrest really only believes in three things. He believes in God, and he believes in his mama, and he believes in Jenny. And anything other than that has to be filtered through those three things." Forrest fights in Vietnam, disapproves of Jenny's hippie lifestyle, and never questions authority.[113] He achieves extraordinary things while maintaining his innocence and purity of heart. Jenny, on the other hand, is punished for her "sins" (political activism, prostitution and drug abuse); she falls victim to AIDS. In a discussion with Tom Hanks, Zemeckis says: "this [film] breaks every rule of moviemaking that I know of. There's no quest that anybody is on; there's no bad guy. It's just the spirit of Forrest Gump that's the backbone of the movie." Hanks sees the film as non-political and, therefore, as non-judgmental. If this were the case, however, why did CNN's "Crossfire" hold a debate in 1994 on whether this "non-political" and "non-judgmental" film had a right or a left wing agenda?

One reason is because history, filtered through Forrest, becomes an empty signifier; the very same events hold no stable meaning; they adjust to one's specific need for a specific interpretation. Another reason is that events in the story can support different

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[113] Two times Forrest *does* disobey Lt. Dan's orders: when he tries to save Bubba and when he saves Lt. Dan.

readings. Forrest shows indifference to the Black Panther's words; the KKK is reduced to a "club"; Forrest's speech about Vietnam is suppressed (which is actually understandable in staying consistent with his apolitical disposition). His friendship with Bubba and the decision to offer his family part of his fortune is undermined by the fact that he profited from the black community's misfortune when hurricane Carmen hit. Ironically, when he wants to "prey for shrimp" he goes to a black church and joins the choir. The two women in his life, his mama and Jenny, stand on opposite sides: the conservative, pious mother and the rebellious, liberal girl. Forrest succeeds in life by following the advice of *both* women. Furthermore, the "virgin/whore" dichotomy is problematized. Forrest's mother has sex with the school director so that her son can attend the regular school. She also introduces Forrest to the concept of "white lie" in order to get the endorsement money from the ping pong racket company. Jenny's acting out is attributed to her being a victim a sexual abuse (her father sexually molested her). By the time she finally embraces the life of a mother and a wife it is too late.[114] Thomas Byers notes that Forrest

> …is, in sum, a (fantasy) refiguration of the hegemonic male subject's masculinity, particularly in his relationship with others and in his relation to sex and violence. Sweet, innocent, polite, and chivalric child-man; devoted son to his mother; brother of the nice Black male (Bubba's bubba); best friend and savior of the disabled veteran…Forrest represents a liberal myth (in Barthes's sense in "Myth Today") of the boomer as the "new man," egalitarian, sympathetic to the marginalized, and in touch with his "feminine side."

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[114] In the novel, Forrest Gump differs greatly and is often a politically "incorrect" character. David Lavery identifies the many ways Zemeckis transforms the hero. In the novel Forrest is not a devoted son; even when his house is burned to the ground and his mother ends up in the poorhouse, he does not seem to care; he is sexually active and uses profanity. Bubba is white in the novel and they are both on the football team at the University of Alabama. Jenny is not the victim of sexual abuse; she does not die, and Forrest does not raise their child. Forrest is drafted, he does not enlist. Zemeckis equivocates on Forrest's opposition to the Vietnam War. Forrest and Lt. Dan do not become lifelong friends; Forrest does not save his life. These are only some of the many significant changes of the film adaptation. All are very suggestive of the conservative politics at work and in extension of the fact that this film is anything but apolitical despite the humor and playfulness at work.

As in *Being There*, *Forrest Gump* maintains the element of centrality (Forrest stands at the center of defining historical events), but causality is simultaneously asserted and undermined.

Conclusions

This chapter takes a different approach to the way cinematic paranoia finds expression in the postmodern. Taking as a premise that the goals and structure of paranoid thought predominantly align with the dogmas of modernity, this has been an attempt to situate paranoia in the postmodern as something other than simply the remains of modernist thought or the necessary ingredient of conspiratorial thought. Adhering to Žižek's notion of cinematic postmodernism which, relies primarily on the elements of visibility and presence as sources of anxiety, and Lyotard's take on the function and role of knowledge, I tried to re-evaluate how paranoia can find expression not just within but *according to* the postmodern. Both films rely on a paranoid structure of storytelling, where the main character stands at the center of all activity: at the same time, they also invite an anti-paranoid reading since the stories rely heavily on contingency rather than intentionality. Here, paranoid thought becomes a comfort zone; the same "threatening" elements that characterized modernist paranoia are now embraced and even celebrated. Centrality and omnipresence are no longer sources of fear. Consider Žižek's take on postmodernism:

> What characterizes postmodernism is…an obsession with Thing, with a foreign body within the social texture, in all its dimensions that range from woman *qua* the unfathomable element that undermines the rule of the "reality principle" (*Blue Velvet*), through science-fiction monsters (*Alien*) and autistic aliens (*Elephant Man*), up to the paranoiac vision of social totality itself as the ultimate fascinating Thing, a

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vampire-like specter which marks even the most idyllic everyday surface with signs
of latent corruption.[115] (122)

In paranoid thought the Thing, the object of desire can arguably be the Truth, a truth that
can never be attained. If Chance and Forrest function as the Thing, now visible and
within reach, a transcendental power that resists rigid definitions, and if they embody a
reality that cannot firmly be grasped, paranoia no longer stands in opposition to the
postmodern critique. This type of storytelling relies on elements commonly found in
paranoid narratives which often go unnoticed since the story makes no claims to truth and
knowledge. Understanding the paranoid condition in postwar fiction as a state of
excessive knowledge automatically assumes that the latter's lack or absence constitutes
the opposite of whatever paranoia stands for (abnormality, distortion, inauthenticity,
delusion). This, of course, does not apply here, since the worlds of Ashby and Zemeckis
are anything but "normal." On the contrary, delusion, distortion, and abnormality reign
and are embraced as ways of coping. At a time when everything seems to be within
reach, when hyper-visibility is becoming the norm, and when doubting and questioning
has become chic, is paranoia the latest *pharmakon*?

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[115] Slavoj Žižek, *Looking Awry: An Introduction to Jacques Lacan Through Popular Culture*. MIT Press,
1992.

Chapter 4: How to Do Conspiracy Theory With fetishism: The Myth of the "Slain King"

"It's a mystery wrapped in a riddle inside an enigma."
   -David Ferrie, *JFK*

Conspiracy Theory, Paranoia, Fetishism

Conspiracy theories have been an endless source of fear, fascination, and frustration, especially during the latter half of the twentieth century. In an age defined by a growing tendency to re-think, revise, and re-articulate the historical past, recent or distant, conspiracy theories have been, by far, the most appealing and popular way of interrogating history and, in effect, historiography. Although they have been around for centuries, their renaissance in the United States began to make its presence felt in the early 1960s, with the assassination of President Kennedy.[116] The hyper-production of an exponentially growing body of conspiracy texts literary, scientific, theoretical, and cinematic, raises questions about the reasons that give rise to such conspiracy theories, as well as about the underlying mechanisms of their practice.[117]

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[116] The Center for Conspiracy Culture was launched in 1998 by Peter Knight, a professor at the University of Manchester and Alasdair Parks, a professor at the University of Winchester. The collaboration was inspired by an international conference held at the University of Winchester (King Alfred's College at the time) that same year. The conference invited papers "on any aspect of the culture of conspiracy, paranoia & alternative knowledge, focusing predominantly - but not exclusively - on the United States, and on the period 1945 to the present." Their main goal is to "examine the role of conspiracy in contemporary world, and especially the United States." The Center perceives the Kennedy assassination as the "primal scenario in contemporary conspiracy thinking." For more information go to
http://www2.winchester.ac.uk/ccc/index.htm

[117] See Patrick O'Donnell's *Latent Destinies: Cultural Paranoia and Contemporary U.S. Narrative*. Duke University Press, 2000, Art Simon's *Dangerous Knowledge: The JFK Assassination in Art and Film*. Temple University Press, 1996, Timothy Melley's *Empire of Conspiracy: The Culture of Paranoia in Postwar America*. Cornell University Press, 2000. Also films such as *The Conversation* (Francis Ford Coppola, 1973) and *Blow Out* (Brian De Palma, 1981) have been approached as an indirect commentary of the Zapruder film and its failure to provide concrete answers about the Kennedy assassination. See Art Simon, "The Parallax View/Winter Kills/Blow Out" in *Dangerous Knowledge: The JFK Assassination in Art and Film* (1996).

What is a conspiracy theory? Adrian Quinn sees it as "a contradiction in terms." He defines theory as "a body of principles that attempt to develop clear, logical explanations for things," but at the same time sees conspiracy as "necessarily a highly selective and convoluted model finding evidence anywhere, even in the very lack of evidence"[118] (Quinn, 2001). Hence, he feels that conspiracy is less a theory than "a hunch or a suspicion." Jane Parish argues that what conspiracy theory does is "take on what Englund and Leach call the meta-narrative of modernity" (cited in Parish, 2001). Parish notes, "the popularity of the 'traditional' conspiracy lies in its function to provide neat explanations in an untidy and big world where there is no great center anymore" (6). In other words, conspiracy theory becomes a source of comfort in an anti-determinist fashion, as conspiratorial thinking asserts that no one acts alone and things never accidentally happen; people make them happen.

This last assumption has inextricably linked the practice of conspiracy theory to the pathological condition of paranoia. The two have been so tightly bound in a cause-effect relationship, it would seem almost impossible to come across a text on conspiracy theory that is *not* informed by the theoretical framework of paranoia. This chapter introduces a third concept into this relationship whose long pejorative connotative and denotative meaning has stigmatized both individuals and practices in a manner similar to that of conspiracy theorists: that is the concept of fetishism. Historically, all three terms have been employed in a rather overgeneralized and negative manner to describe practices

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[118] In *The Age of Anxiety: Conspiracy Theory and the Human Sciences.* Jane Parish, Martin Parker Eds. Blackwell, 2001.

standing against dominant ideologies of normalcy and rational behavior.[119] This overgeneralized use, however, can often mask the heterogeneity that characterizes conspiracy, paranoia, and fetishism, both in terms of structure and function. Indeed, there are some basic elements to be found almost invariably in conspiratorial and fetishistic practices; still, though, they do not suffice to warrant homogenizing the putative practices to the degree that they have been. The previous chapter on postmodern paranoia posed the question of whether we can have paranoia *without conspiracy*, exploring this "condition" in non-conspiratorial cinematic texts. A colleague once asked if we could have conspiracy theory *without paranoia*; in other words, he was asking whether we can practice conspiracy theory without engaging in paranoid modes of thought, or whether we can perceive it as anything other than a symptom, a manifestation of a person suffering from paranoia.

This chapter attempts to respond to these questions by suggesting that in a *specific type* of conspiracy theory, such as conspiracy narratives about John F. Kennedy, the *primary* mechanism that gives birth to these theories is not paranoia but rather fetishism, whose performative aspects get *translated* and interpreted as paranoia. A key assumption for this is that none of these concepts is monolithic; there are different types of fetishism, paranoia, and conspiracy theory, and with each type certain mechanisms become more dominant that others. In order to do that, we will first consider the similarities between conspiracy theory and fetishism, both as practiced and perceived. Although I will be

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[119] In *Conspiracy Theories: Secrecy and Power in American Culture* (University of Minnesota Press, 1999), Mark Fenster offers an insightful discussion about conspiracy theory as "an interpretive practice" that works "as a form of hyperactive semiosis in which history and politics serve as reservoirs of signs that demand (over)interpretation, and that signify, for the interpreter, far more than their conventional meaning" (xvii). The underlying mechanisms of paranoia at work inform Fenster's discussion especially in the political arena. Popular definitions of paranoia and fetishism are included in this chapter.

using the generic term of conspiracy theory (CT), the focus still will remain on one specific type, namely the conspiracies dealing with historical figures elevated to the status of sacred objects of special devotion, such as Princess Diana and John F. Kennedy. We will then proceed to investigate both the clinical and cultural definitions of paranoia, and finally, use Oliver Stone's controversial film, *JFK* (1991), as a case study of the primary role fetishism appears to have in this particular type of conspiracy theory.

The most basic common feature that CT and fetishism share is that both carry the stigma of inauthenticity, being characterized as false relationships between subject and object. From a psychoanalytic perspective, both seem to originate in loss, and both involve processes of disavowal, as there is a direct conflict about knowledge and belief.[120] For the classical conspiracy theorist, loss pertains mainly to "truth"; in this case, however, as we shall discuss later, a conspiratorial text seeks to compensate for a different kind of loss. Both appear highly selective and arbitrary in nature; in CT and fetishism objects attain special meaning largely through the manner in which they relate to other objects, as both, by definition, describe a relationship; both function as defense mechanisms for coping with an unacceptable reality and strive to allay anxiety; and, finally, both practices despite social condemnation are still going strong.

In addition, CT and fetishism are largely faith-based. In *Empire of Conspiracy: the Culture of Paranoia in Postwar America,* Timothy Melley notes that "[b]ecause [conspiracy theories] are so difficult to confirm, they require a form of quasi-religious conviction, a sense that the conspiracy in question is an entity with almost supernatural powers" (8). Similarly, fetishism cannot confirm or validate the special power an object

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[120] Sigmund Freud, "Fetishism" (1927).

holds for the individual, whose personal relationship to the putative object is usually perceived as irrational by society.[121] David Shumway asserts that, *"'Fetishism' in all its uses describes the attribution of strange powers to objects"*[122] (my emphasis,7). From Melley's assertions, we can argue, accordingly, that *conspiracy theory describes the world largely through the attribution of special powers to objects* (be it in the form of individuals, social or political institutions, religious sectors, etc.). Or, perhaps, we can substitute and say that *conspiracy theory describes the world largely through fetishism.*

Paranoia, the third part of the equation, is not monolithic, even though the generic application of the term has made it almost impossible to differentiate among the various types, or divorce it from conspiracy. The subject of Freud's major study of paranoia was Dr. Daniel Paul Schreber's *Memoirs of My Nervous Illness* (1903), based on which Freud linked overt persecutory delusions to latent homosexuality. Schreber, as mentioned in the previous chapters, was convinced that the world was out to get *him*, yet maintained the cognitive capacity to document his own delusions, hallucinations, and fears, in a manner indicating a frighteningly lucid awareness of his mental condition. In cases such as this, paranoia is defined as a condition where individuals "wrongly believe that other people are trying to harm *them*, or believe *themselves* to be much more important than they really are" (my emphases, *Collins English Dictionary*). A somewhat different type of paranoia is what Melley calls "operational paranoia," a condition marked by an intense "self-critical *suspicion* of the world" (Melley, 18). This latter type is much more frequent and much less severe, and has often been the force that drives characters in literature,

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[121] See Emily Apter and William Pietz's *Fetishism as Cultural Discourse*. Cornell University Press, 1993.
[122] "Fetishizing Fetishism: Commodities, Goods, and the Meaning of Consumer Culture." *Rethinking Marxism*, Vol. 12, 2000.

film, and everyday life. Schreber's diagnosis, however, is not as clean-cut as it might seem.

The Greek literal meaning of paranoia, as already stated, also refers to an *excess*, a surplus of knowledge. Melley's analysis of conspiracy narratives in relation to these two distinct types of paranoia finds resonance with this use of the term. Melley notes:

> This distinction [between operational and schizophrenic] would be of use in isolating cases…that arise frequently in postwar narrative: cases where individuals not only *suspect* an array of invisible determinants to be at work but also *suspect their own suspicions.* The secondary suspicion seems to indicate the process of a rational, self-effacing, skeptical mind-precisely the opposite of irrational or delusional self-inflation. (19)

Louis Sass' seminal work on Schreber's *Memoirs* successfully argues that the latter's condition might be characterized as one of hypercognitivity and excessive self-reflection, and even goes on to say that the *Memoirs* is a work of a brilliant mind.[123] Niederland links paranoid response to three basic elements in the human psyche: "sexual conflict, fear, and the need for causality"[124] (33). Finally, in *Paranoia: New Psychoanalytic Perspectives,* Oldham Bone cites DSM III-R's official criteria for the diagnosis of paranoia:

A. A pervasive and unwarranted tendency, beginning by early adulthood and present in a variety of contexts, to interpret the actions of people as deliberately demeaning or threatening, as indicated by at least *four* of the following:

(1) expects, without sufficient basis, to be exploited or harmed by others.

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[123] See Louis A. Sass. *Madness and Modernism: Insanity in the Light of Modern Art, Literature, and Thought*. New York: Basic, 1992.
[124] *The Schreber Case: Psychoanalytic Profile of a Paranoid Personality*. Quandrangle/The New York Time Book Co, 1974.

(2) Questions, without justification, the loyalty or trustworthiness of friends or associates.

(3) Reads hidden demeaning or threatening meanings into benign remarks or events, e.g. suspects that a neighbor put out trash to annoy him.

(4) Bears grudges or is unforgiving of insults or slights.

(5) Is reluctant to confide in others because of unwarranted fear that the information will be used against him or her.

(6) Is easily slighted and quick to react with anger or to counterattack.

(7) Questions, without justification, fidelity of spouse or sexual partner.[125] (4)

The above references reflect why conspiracy and paranoia often go hand in hand. Most of the diagnoses overlap and all agree that one of the primary elements of the paranoiac is the feeling of grandeur and megalomania, a condition which is also similar to narcissism. Megalomania is a necessary ingredient, without which it would be difficult to account for an individual feeling so special or important that his or her specialness become a threat to the rest of the world. At the same time, though, all clinical definitions of paranoia have been somewhat generic, failing to account for *specific* types of conspiratorial thinking. The cultural appropriation of the term as an interpretive tool for "abnormal" thought and behavior draws from such clinical definitions, and as such, it also fails to capture the specificity of conspiracy as a cultural phenomenon. In CTs revolving around religion or political systems, one can observe the "they're- out- to- get- me- and- mine attitude" with much more ease. Political and religious propaganda has

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[125] Oldham and Bone. *Paranoia: New Psychoanalytic Perspectives,* 1994. This is a very insightful study of paranoia, which partly employs Melanie Klein's object relations theory of the paranoid-schizoid and depressive positions. Although this chapter will not be employing Kleinian psychoanalytic theory, I still believe Klein's theory can also be related to fetishism

cultivated paranoia for centuries; there are a plethora of texts dedicated to "exposing" the "real" motives of Catholics, Jews, Communists, Conservatives, Liberals, and the like. In CTs, however, where the subject is not implicated—directly or indirectly—paranoia takes on a different role.

The types of CT dealing with entire social, religious, or political groups can be usually explained through the aforementioned clinical and cultural definitions, even though there are still specific aspects that fail to be accounted for. What happens, however, when CT is not a product of a megalomaniac narcissist driven by grandiosity and self-importance? How can we account for the ways the individual relates to the world? Freud introduces the concept of narcissism in his paper on Leonardo da Vinci in 1910, just before he writes on the Schreber case, in which he strongly emphasizes the role of narcissism in paranoia.[126] His essay "On Narcissism" follows in 1914. In the cultural fixation with figures such as JFK and Princess Diana, however, the attitude ceases to be "they're all out to get *me*" and becomes "they're all out to get *him* or *her*." This form of conviction still contains the paranoid element of intense suspicion of the world, but at the same time, narcissism and megalomania become difficult to sustain as driving forces behind conspiratorial thinking. Here, one might argue that narcissism gives way to *fetishism* becoming the dominant element, both in anthropological and psychoanalytic terms.

William Pietz's groundbreaking work on anthropological fetishism identifies four themes informing the idea of the fetish:

(1) the untranscended materiality of the fetish: "matter," or the material object, is viewed as the locus of religious activity or psychic investment;

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[126] Sigmund Freud, "Leonardo da Vinci and a Memory of his Childhood." The Freud Reader, Peter Gay ed. New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1989.

(2) the radical historicity of the fetish's origin: arising in a singular event fixing together otherwise heterogeneous elements, the identity and power of the fetish consists in its enduring capacity to repeat this singular process of fixation, along with the resultant effect;

(3) the dependence of the fetish for its meaning and value on a particular order of social relations, which it in turn reinforces; and

(4) the active relation of the fetish object to the individual: a kind of external controlling organ directed by powers outside the affected person's will, the fetish represents a subversion of the ideal of the autonomously determined self.[127]

Almost all of the above themes resonate with themes related to CT; this practice also depends "for its meaning and value on a particular order of social relations, which it in turn reinforces," it also arises in a singular event fixing together otherwise heterogeneous elements, and the mechanisms of belief it entails also involve a religious-like belief and psychic investment. Seldom, however, would a conspiratorial thinker be accused of being a fetishist *instead* of a paranoiac. Indeed, very often people will use the expression, "you're being paranoid," but almost never would a conspiracy theorist be confronted with the accusation "oh, you're being such a fetishist." This is not to say that fetishism and paranoia can never be seen interacting with one another; fetishism can contain paranoid elements, just like the classic fetish for the paranoiac has traditionally been the "truth." The fact that fetishism is not as commonly used as a cultural term as we see with paranoia, though, is largely due to the fact that, as a term, the former is usually employed to describe abnormal sexual behavior or fixation with parts of the human body and/or

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[127] William Pietz, "The Problem of the Fetish," pt. 2, *Res* 13 (Spring 1987).

articles of clothing. Paranoia, on the other hand, despite Freud's conviction that it also originates in "abnormal" sexual behavior, is broadly used as a hermeneutic tool for unorthodox behavioral modes of thought. The truth might be the classic fetish for the typical paranoid mind, but for CTs revolving around the assassination of JFK, and specifically with Oliver Stone's version of the event, we need to consider a different set of questions in order to identify the mechanisms at work. Truth in conspiracy is always "already lost," because "it exists only as a delusion of the paranoid who imagines it; the truth in conspiracy is ambiguous and in the eye of the beholder, while the experience that is fetishized and constantly called into question is the existence of conspiracy itself."[128] As we shall discuss, Stone's *JFK* is one example where one can observe that the structures behind Kennedy's deified representation as well as the questions the film poses, open up a space where the motivations for putting together this elaborate theory can be *primarily*—but not exclusively—explored through fetishism instead of paranoia. The latter is still a functional mode of operation, but its role appears complementary.

In all its uses, fetishism describes a mediated relationship between a subject and an object. In anthropological fetishism, in particular, Pietz notes:

> The fetish is always a meaningful fixation of a singular event; it is above all a "historical" object, the enduring material form and force of an unrepeatable event. This object is 'territorialized' in material space (an earthly matrix), whether in the form of a geographical locality,…or a medium of inscription…This reified, territorialized historical object is also 'personalized' in the sense that beyond its status as a collective social object it evokes an intensely personal response from individuals.[129] (12)

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[128] Jason Dick, "Zoolander as a Parable and Parody of the Classic Conspiracy Narrative and Contemporary Western Popular Culture" *Mediations:* Volume 1, Number 1-22. This is one of the very few texts I came across that employs the idea of the fetish as an element of conspiracy narratives.
[129] William Pietz, "The Problem of the Fetish," pt. 2, *Res* 13 (Spring 1987).

The plethora of literary and cinematic texts fixated on the Kennedy assassination is a case in point. The "unrepeatable event" is repeated over and over again in an almost religiously ritualistic manner, seeking for rational explanations in order to exorcize the demons of the past. In "Three Types of Fetishism," Gammon and Makinen point out that a social purpose of fetishism is "to allay anxieties of the individual and group, and to promote social cohesion through joint rituals and common belief" (17). This idea is very similar to those describing the social purpose of CT. Melley argues that the increasing tendency to attribute causality to events stems from what he calls "agency panic," a feeling of losing a sense of autonomy and self-control. Conspiracy theories allay these types of anxieties by creating a coherent narrative that eliminates ambivalence about the world, even if it means exposing it for an evil and sinister place. All this can be understood as a reaction, a defense mechanism towards an increasingly hostile world, in which the individual experiences his or her subjectivity being under attack by external forces beyond his or her control. In a somewhat similar manner, fetishism is understood as a strategy for negotiating loss, and as Charles DeBrosses has noted, there are national fetishes (shared delusions) and individual fetishes.[130] The term may have originated as a cross-cultural word about a cross-cultural relationship; contemporary cultural scholars such as Gammon and Makinen employ anthropological fetishism to discuss the behavioral modes of fans. The overwhelmingly popular conspiracy theories about figures like Kennedy and Princess Diana resonate with Gammon and Makinen's study on fans and fandom. Why are so many people interested and fixated on finding out the "truth" about something that does not directly concern them and has no effect on their own life?

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[130] Charles De Brosses, from *On the Worship of the Fetish Gods* in Burton Feldman and Robert Richardson's *The Rise of Modern Mythology*: *1680-1860.* Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1972.

What kinds of mechanisms drive and sustain this desire? Can paranoia account for it sufficiently?

In "Paranoia, Terrorism, and the Fictional Condition of Knowledge," Alan Nadel describes Dealy Plaza, the site of President Kennedy's assassination, as a sacred space that "pilgrims" and tourists will visit every year. Nadel describes the place as "the sacred center of a ritual sacrifice…and yet inundated by pedestrian traffic…It is the site of several commercial enterprises, many of the most significant relying on texts that *invest the quotidian with historical excess"* (my emphasis, 407). The Texas Book Depository hosts on the sixth floor the Kennedy Museum, as well as the Kennedy Museum souvenir shop. Nadel points out that, "[w]hile the plaza itself reads tragedy and conspiracy, the souvenir shop invests Kennedy's life (and by implication his death) with a Mount Rushmore-like normality. Kennedy there becomes the figural stuff of ashtrays, coffee-table books, and postcards; his words can be purchased in cassette, CD, and print formats; his image in varying qualities of reproduction can be taken home for private display" (408). As the visitors move from display to display, Nadel suggests that there is one thing missing: the shooter.

> When one looks out the fateful window and sees how sharply Elm Street cuts its parameters, common sense suggests that the *shooter had to be missing*, that is, no one using a (damaged) bolt-action rifle could get off three accurate shots through that small window of opportunity. The shooter, like the target, in other words, is missing not only visually but also logically, historically, spatially, temporally. In the shooter's *absence* we have an overabundance of narratives. (my emphases, 409)

This is what most would agree to be, the "healthy" way of bringing the "true" event closer to the self. For the conspiracy theorist, however, the 'window' is much more than a mere historical site. The Museum encapsulates the "official" story of "what happened"

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that fateful day on November 22, 1963. All he or she can feel is what is missing, the *lack* of what should have been there but it is not. Conspiracy texts come in to mediate and fill this perceived lack; they become a way of negotiating the absence of the coveted shooter. In the process, though, they overcompensate for the absence by producing an excess of "shooters." This obsessive need to restore the past and the object of special derision cannot solely be attributed to paranoia. As was mentioned early on, paranoia is a form of surplus knowledge, and based on this premise, we can understand why the conspiracy theorist is readily identified as a paranoid individual. Excess of meaning, though, is not only related to paranoia but to fetishism as well, and since one of the basic diagnostic elements of paranoia is an intense fear for the self standing at the center of evil activity, how do we account for the fact that the self is displaced in a periphery of safety and someone else, is now at the center, the object of intense persecution and hostility?

The traditional paranoid conspiracy theorist obsesses over "*what* happened" since the fetish object in this case has been traditionally the truth.[131] The conspiracy in question might be taking place in the present, the recent past, or the future. In the *specific* type of conspiracy theory vis-à-vis JFK, however, the relationship between the individual and the CT he creates is primarily fetishistic in the Freudian sense, and secondarily paranoiac, in that the individual tries through the putative conspiracy to produce not only the missing victim but the missing villain. Freud has the tendency to employ the terms absence loss and lack interchangeably. In his essay on fetishism, he locates its origins with the little boy's realization that the mother is missing a penis. Failing to perceive it as absence (nothing was ever there), the boy experiences it as a loss (it was there and now it is not)

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[131] Examples include *Conspiracy Theory* (Richard Donner, 1997), *All the President's Men* (Alan J. Pakula, 1974), *The Conversation* (Francis Ford Coppola, 1973), and *Blow Out* (Brian De Palma, 1981).

and translates it as a lack (it should be there). Castration anxiety (fear for the self) emerges--which could be seen as a form of paranoia on the unconscious level-- and the boy substitutes for the lack a random object of his choice. The same can be said for CT; it originates in an inability to accept that something was never there; in the attempt to fill the "empty" space, the individual overcompensates through the hyper-production of a conspiracy text that entails seemingly randomly chosen villains.

Disavowal can be defined as a discrepancy between knowledge and belief; "I know the killer stood at the window perch, but I don't." This is somewhat different from what happens with fandom, but the mechanisms underlying the behavior of the conspiracy theorist and the fan appear similar. Gammon and Makinen argue that the cultural phenomenon of fandom can be better understood through anthropological rather than sexual fetishism in the manner in which the fans worship their idol of choice. The two scholars cite John Fiske's article on fandom: Fiske argues that, "…fandom is characterized by 'discrimination', and since it involves choice, 'productivity', since fans produce their own 'texts,' for example their bedrooms or hairstyles" (Gammon and Makinen, 19). Here, it is obvious that the fans will create these shrines of worship and acquire memorabilia such as posters, ticket stubs, in an attempt to evoke, through them, the presence of their absent idol.[132] Kennedy "fans" operate on a similar mode; they too, are characterized by discrimination, choice, and productivity, but in this case the "texts" they produce are not bedrooms or hairstyles, but conspiracy texts that evoke the presence of the absent villain. In the case of fans, the object of desire is more obvious; in the case of Kennedy conspiracies, the object they are trying to evoke is not Kennedy, but the

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[132] Gammon and Makinen. "Three Types of Fetishism" *Female Fetishism*, 1995, p. 20.

object of derision, the villain. Do not both practices seem to be driven, though, by a similar desire? There does not seem to be a specific mention of the fetish as *only* an object of positive affect. If we accept Shumway's assertion that in all its uses, fetishism describes the attribution of strange powers to objects, then we can say that conspiratorial texts attribute special powers to "evil" objects responsible for the loss of the worshiped object, and seek to evoke and produce their presence in order to alleviate anxiety, not to get closer in the manner that fans strive to produce texts that will bring them closer to their idol.

JFK: How to Do Conspiracy Theory with Fetishism

Oliver Stone's *JFK* has been held as the ultimate cinematic conspiracy text of the 1990s, and, for some, of the twentieth century.[133] Since Kennedy's assassination in 1963, a variety of cinematic texts dealing, either directly or indirectly, with the "seven seconds that broke the back of the American century,"[134] attempted to comment, interpret, and revisit this highly traumatic event. Oliver Stone is no stranger to controversy, having directed films such as *Platoon* (1986), *Born on the Fourth of July* (1989), and *Nixon* (1995). Stone's bombastic and vitriolic attitude towards political activity, always reflected in his historical interpretations of postwar American politics, has stirred public opinion in unprecedented ways for a film director. Soon after the film's release in 1991, and spurred into action by a community of Stone "followers," Congress passes, and

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[133] See Mark Fenster, *Conspiracy Theories: Secrecy and Power in American Culture* (1999), Art Simon, *Dangerous Knowledge: The JFK Assassination in Art and Film* (1996), and George Lardner, "Dallas in Wonderland: Oliver Stone and JFK's Assassination," *Washington Post*, National Weekly Edition, 27 May-2 June 1991, pp. 23-23.

[134] Don DeLillo's famous quote in *Libra* (1988).

President George Bush signs into law, the President John F. Kennedy Assassination

Records Collection Act of 1992. According to Michael L. Kurtz, the act "mandated the

appointment by the president of an Assassination Records Review Board (ARRB), whose

responsibility was to locate, identify, review, and release all assassination records as

expeditiously as possible."[135] Film critics and historians alike vehemently condemned the

film as an egregious example of moral relativism and liberal propaganda, a contaminant

of history infested with historical inaccuracies, an example of a sheer manipulation of the

cinematic apparatus and its essential photographic properties.[136] With the front cover of

Newsweek, for instance, featuring the title "The Twisted Truth of *JFK*: Why Oliver

Stone's New Movie Can't Be Trusted," the media began reacting to Stone's paranoia

with a similar rhetoric characterized by the very paranoid elements they were trying to

attack. Norman Mailer sees *JFK* as the classic of the conspiracy genre and unique in its

treatment of "the great paranoid myth of our times"[137] (40, cited in McArthur). It would

be useful to first look into the various films preceding *JFK* that also took on as their

subject the Kennedy assassination. This will highlight some of the ways Stone, albeit still

working within, and even perfecting, the conspiratorial narrative, engages in a distinct

discourse that may still contain the paranoid element, but relies *primarily* on fetishizing

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[135] Michael L. Kurtz in "Oliver Stone, JFK, and History" notes that Congress held "public hearings during the spring and summer of 1992 and discovered, to their astonishment, that there was indeed a voluminous amount of documentary and other evidence relating to the assassination that various agencies had deliberately withheld from the public record." See Michael L. Kurtz, *Crime of the Century: the Kennedy Assassination from a Historian's Perspective*. Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1982.

[136] Oliver Stone blends historical footage with dramatic footage in a manner that makes the two hard to distinguish. Montage sequences, flashbacks, and rapid cuts form a narrative that conflates the fictional and the historical. The Zapruder film, in particular, and the way Stone incorporates it into the narrative, has been a source of criticism. For an excellent discussion on the Zapruder film see Art Simon's chapter "The Zapruder Film" in *Dangerous Knowledge: The JFK Assassination in Art and Film* (1996).

[137] Benjamin McArthur, "'They're Out to Get Us': Another Look at Our Paranoid Tradition." *The History Teacher*, Vol. 29, No. 1 (Nov., 1995), pp. 37-50.

both victims and villains. This is in part why these films are grouped as belonging in a single category while *JFK,* despite dealing with the same historical event, stands in a category all by itself. Ironically, when discussed in relation to other directors, Stone is, and might always be, the "lone shooter."

JFK before the "Stone" Age

Executive Action (Dir. David Miller, 1973) is the first feature film to deal in a direct manner with Kennedy's assassination, and the first to go against the official "lone gunman" theory representing it instead as the outcome of a conspiracy. The story is told from the perspective of a wealthy group of powerful oil men who feel that JFK's foreign and domestic policies pose a direct threat to their power and wealth, so they hire mercenaries to assassinate Kennedy. The film is less than memorable and had little to no impact despite its controversial subject matter, offering neither a compelling narrative nor stylistic innovation; it remains within the "conventional" model of the conspiracy genre, with a straightforward plot, clear delineations of good and evil with identifiable villains, "rational" cause/effect relationships, and, above all, paranoid individuals who are convinced that the elimination of a single individual will guarantee their financial and political prosperity. All in all, a relatively "harmless" fictional story inspired by an actual historical event. The following year, *The Parallax View* (Dir. Alan J. Pakula, 1974) comments on the Kennedy event in a different manner. The film follows an ambitious but mediocre reporter, Joseph Frady (played by Warren Beatty), who, while investigating a senator's assassination, finds himself caught in a vast conspiracy led by a multinational corporation, the Parallax Corporation. A series of mysterious deaths of those who witness

the crime begins, and Frady, the lone crusader, is eventually destroyed by the evil powers he was trying to expose. Even though the story is purely fictional and it does not deal directly with Kennedy, it can been read as an (in)direct attack on the "lone gunman" theory, the faceless Warren Commission, and its poor as well as suspicious handling of the investigation of Kennedy's death.[138] In this case, and contrary to *Executive Action*, the story is now told from the perspective of the reporter/detective. Miller offers a localized, identifiable group of ruthless capitalists whom he generously exposes on screen; they are visible, concrete, "real." Here, paranoia aligns itself with the villains who as we said, feel extremely threatened by the actions of the president. In Pakula's case, the villain has grown in size and is, paradoxically, invisible, beyond reach, invincible, unstoppable. Now, paranoia resides not with the aggressors, but with the victims, who, as the story progresses, it turns out are not paranoid at all.

In 1979 director William Richert finishes shooting *Winter Kills*, although, due to its sensitive subject matter, the film would not be released until 1983. As with *The Parallax View, Winter Kills* is a fictional story inspired by the Kennedy assassination. Nick Kegan, brother to President Timothy Kegan who was assassinated nineteen years ago, discovers a dying man who claims having been the assassin. This time, however, the story is told from the perspective of the Kennedy-like dynasty family; it is a scorching political satire, and is quite critical of the "Kennedy" clan, especially of the shady patriarch, Pa Kegan. Contrary to Stone's deification of the presidential figure, Richert constructs a much less kind and lenient representation of the "Kennedy" figure, unwilling to paint Timothy

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[138] It should also be noted, that Frady, constructed as a "patsy," offers a suggestive commentary about Lee Harvey Oswald and his role in the Kennedy assassination. *The Parallax View* deals with what can be seen as the postscript in *Executive Action*: the mysterious death of eighteen witnesses to the events on November 22, 1963 in Dallas, Texas.

Kegan with the rigid colors of the sacrificial lamb slaughtered at the alter of political interests and government corruption. The film is based on a novel by the renowned author Richard Condon whose elaborate conspiracy theories on the Kennedy assassination would later explode in Stone's *JFK*.

Finally, *Interview with the Assassin* (Dir. Neil Burger, 2002) is one of the latest projects on Kennedy. A low budget pseudo-documentary, this film is, in my opinion, most intriguing because of its reluctance to give into the "typical" paranoid narrative recipe, as well as because of its ironic commentary on the cinematic apparatus. Almost forty years after Kennedy's death, unemployed cameraman Ron Kobaleski is approached by his reclusive neighbor, Walter Ohlinger, a former marine, with a most shocking revelation: the latter claims to have been the second gunman and the one who actually killed Kennedy! Diagnosed with cancer and with only five months to live, Ohlinger wants Ron to record his confession on camera and hold on to it until he receives further instructions. As Ohlinger and Ron embark on a quest for proof of the veracity of the "assassin's" claims, the line between reality and fantasy, sanity, madness, and paranoia becomes indistinguishable. Is Walter telling the truth? We do not know.

The point Burger tries to make is that he could be, but we will never know for sure. The fact that Kobaleski is a cameraman and not a reporter introduces an interesting twist in what, so far, has been a popular motif in conspiratorial narratives: the protagonist, the truth seeker, the "subject supposed to know" is now a man whose symbolic function is merely that of the basic cinematic apparatus itself, the camera. Mark Fenster also comments on this point by observing that "[m]any central characters in fictional conspiracy narratives are professionals in some kind of knowledge industry" (112),

referring to examples such as *Three Days of the Condor*, *All the President's Men*, and *The Parallax View*. Typically, the figure of the reporter assuming the active role of the detective, the charismatic hero with excessive cognitive capacities, is the spectators' point of identification, the main portal into the fictional world, and the only one who can and will discover the "truth."[139] The passivity of a camera which can only (in its most simple function) record but not react or think materializes in Kobaleski who, literally merges with the camera (having placed one in his eyeglasses), and passively records a series of violent acts performed by Ohlinger. Most of the time Kobaleski is invisible, he does not appear on screen. Paranoia, in this case a free-floating agent that does not align comfortably with either side, is not a manifestation of excessive knowledge that assumes a culturally performative and productive role (as we shall see in *JFK*); rather, it is an example of the rare occasion in conspiratorial texts where we might actually be dealing with a real psychotic individual who instead of trying to prove his innocence—as most killers do on screen—is desperately trying to prove his guilt! Narcissism and grandiosity, paranoia's most basic ingredients, are Ohlinger's faithful advisors; when Ron asks him why he did it, why he agreed to kill Kennedy, he replies (in a highly pompous tone) that if he was able to kill the most powerful man in the world, that would make *him* the most powerful of all. In other words, the demons guiding and controlling his actions were primarily *internal* as opposed to the army of external "demons" (CIA, FBI, Pentagon, oil-men, etc.) we encounter in the aforementioned films as well as in *JFK*.

Other films referring directly or indirectly to Kennedy's death include *Timequest* (2002), *Blow Out* (1981), *Flashpoint* (1984), *Ruby* (1992), *In the Line of Fire* (1993),

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[139] Mark Fenster, *Conspiracy Theories: Secrecy and Power in American Culture* (1999).

Ruby and Oswald (1977), *The Price of Power* (1969), *The Trial of Lee Harvey Oswald* (1964), and *The Package* (1989). Only *The Trial of Lee Harvey Oswald*, a courtroom drama, supports the Warren Commission Report and the lone gunman theory. All the other films belong to the conspiracy genre, sharing many common features despite the fact that each tells the story from a different perspective.

A key component in such conspiratorial narratives is the disproportionality that characterizes the opposing sides: A single individual (the hero) up against a gargantuan community of villains, whose combined powers can only be matched by the hero's excessive mental endowments and relentless determination. These narratives rely on the tension between an Orwellian dystopic society of corruption and centralized control, and the utopia that the uncovering of truth implicitly promises. "Truth" as panacea has proven an irresistible motif, as very few filmmakers have resisted it. *The Parallax View* is a good example of justified paranoia—which automatically cancels the pathology the term implies—where good does not triumph over evil, with the eventual destruction of the tragic hero by the sinister forces at play. In the chapter on female paranoia, I will be discussing Roman Polanski's *Death and the Maiden*, which is probably one of the best examples of de-mystifying truth as feasible and/or therapeutic. In *The Parallax View* truth appears as destructive rather than redemptive in the Aristotelian tragic fashion of Sophocles.[140] The elements of *anagnorisis* (discovery/recognition), *peripeteia* (reversal), pity (for the character), fear (for the self), and *catharsis*, form the basic structural model for most conspiracy narratives. Sophocles and Aeschylus both, blending history and

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[140] This project is informed by the figure of Oedipus, whose study as the paranoid subject *par excellence* first appears in Chapter One. Consequently, frequent references to elements of Greek tragedy, in general, and Oedipus, in particular, occur throughout the chapters. For a detailed analysis on the relevance of Greek tragedy to Hollywood refer to chapter one.

myth, produced great conspiratorial stories, but stood on diametrically opposite sides in their treatment of knowledge. The former believes, as we see with Oedipus, that through knowledge/wisdom comes suffering (*mathei pathos*); the latter that through suffering comes knowledge/wisdom (*pathei mathos*), as in the case of Orestes. Today, conspiracy theory as narrative aligns itself, in general, with Aeschylus: truth holds redemptive powers.[141] Another important point is that conspiracy theory is, in essence, the most aggressive form of semiotic theory. Its logic and coherence relies on investing objects/subjects with surplus meaning. This becomes both its strength, in the sense that it enables the establishment of clear and "rational" explanations, and its weakness in that its inner logic is subject to intense skepticism due to the seemingly arbitrary nature and over-rationalization of its claims. To refer once again to the structure of Greek tragedy, conspiratorial narrative, similarly, does not allow for extraneous elements; whatever does not fit harmonically will either be eliminated as irrelevant or, more often, somehow integrated in a plot that because of the need for rigid and over-determined meaning becomes over-simplified and highly convoluted at the same time.

In almost all aforementioned narratives about Kennedy the structure consists of many of the tragic elements (the tragic hero, recognition, reversal, catharsis). Paranoia as a form of knowing (knowing *too much*) does not find expression as a pathology that distorts reality but rather as a rare "gift" through which the unearthing of a singular truth by a singular person is made possible. In terms of spectatorship, spectatorial paranoia is cultivated by a "Hitchckokian" use of off-screen space, long shots that hinder visibility,

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[141] In *The Oresteia*, Aeschylus treats the acquisition of knowledge and truth as a positive force that eventually restores order (achieved in *Eumenides*). In Sophocles' *Oedipus the King*, knowledge eventually destroys Oedipus. *The Parallax View* can be seen as an exception to this rule, since the closer Frady comes to truth the closer he moves towards his death.

sounds that signal an impending danger that remains invisible, and a play on various scenarios that all seem plausible. The fact that, in some cases, two thirds into a film paranoia dissipates and the hero is vindicated does not mean that the narrative structure does not conform to the paranoid model. In films such as *The Parallax View* and *Interview with the Assassin*, where the hero does not triumph over evil, we experience cases of justified paranoia that bring about a sense of anxiety rather than a sense of catharsis. Truth is not magnanimously revealed, and ambiguity leaves the audience in a state of bewilderment and confusion. Fear of the unknown, of the invisible, paranoia's greatest ally, is what the audience takes away. Despite the rigidity that characterizes paranoid thought, what generates fear is the feeling "truth" cannot be revealed and that the sinister forces are still "out there."

What is it, though, about Oliver Stone's film that separates it from the rest? He is certainly not the first filmmaker in the postmodern to blend the fictional and the historical by using fictional and actual newsreel footage. And why is Kennedy the prince that will not go away? Conspiracy theory as practice, despite its oversimplified nature, is a much complicated affair. This particular type of conspiracy theory appears as the most idealist and utopian of all, because its sole purpose is the acquisition of "truth," truth for its own sake. The much sought knowledge has no practical utility, no promise of a better, safer world, no pre-emptive or redemptive powers.

JFK in the "Stone" Age

No other film has quenched the spectators' thirst for knowledge and information as much as *JFK*. Balancing the focus of the perennial question of "What happened?" with

that of "Why it happened?" also changes the relationship of the individual to the world. Moreover, it also shifts the focus from the victim to the villains, even though, the ritualistic elements of CT still evoke the presence of the victim as well. A text that focuses on the "why" as much as on the "what" operates on two assumptions: first, that the victim embodied unique powers that made him both special and especially dangerous; second, that a community of villains joins forces to obliterate the worshiped object in question. What is most "fetishistic," however, about this film, as we shall see, is the discourse and the representational modes of Stone's CT.

Stone opens the film in a highly provocative manner, constructing his own personal historical trajectory of events leading up to and culminating with Kennedy's death, by using actual footage and voice-over narration of the historical context. Thus, he basically begins at the end, since the exposition he provides is supposed to allude to the reasons as to why the president was assassinated. Stone opens with Eisenhower's famous farewell address of 1961 where the latter "prophetically" warns the nation about the potential threat posed by a growing military-industrial complex. This "crash course" in postwar American history comprises of shots of Martin Luther King, Malcolm X, Fidel Castro, Teddy, Rose, and Joe Kennedy; Jackie, John, and their children in intimate family moments (the only shots in color in this opening sequence; all other shots are taken from real footage in black and white); the Cuban Missile Crisis, the Bay of Pigs invasion, shots of J. Edgar Hoover, images of Laos and Vietnam, all in all everyone and everything that, according to Stone, contributed to Kennedy's death. This montage sequence relies primarily on the paranoid style of establishing clear and simplified cause/effect relations, and understanding history as a linear chain of interconnected and interrelated events. The

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"Eisensteinean" brush is evident in this montage sequence, not only because of the rapid rhythm and violent cuts of the juxtaposing images, but also because of the insertion of suggestive extra-diegetic elements such as a poster of Kennedy reading "Wanted for Treason." Ambiguity is eliminated in the same manner that Eisenstein made sure that his images would be read in a very specific way.

As already mentioned, Stone establishes Kennedy, right from the start, as much more than just a new president; he is "the symbol of the new 1960s, signifying change and upheaval to the American public," as voice over narration informs the audience. The multiple facets of Kennedy as father to the nation and to his children, as a much anticipated "messiah" who would "magically" bring America into a new era of politics that promised the eradication of corruption and injustice, the elimination of war and conflict, and the potential of a utopian society, humanize Kennedy as much as de-humanize him. Let me explain. In *The Sublime Object of Ideology*, Slavoj Žižek offers a valuable analysis as to the reasons why the *Titanic* became the source of such deep cultural trauma: "…the wreck of the *Titanic*," he explains, "made such a tremendous impact not because of the immediate material dimensions of the catastrophe but because of its symbolic overdetermination, because of the ideological meaning invested in it: it was read as a 'symbol', as a condensed, metaphorical representation of the approaching catastrophe of European civilization itself" (70). He goes on to note that "[t]he *Titanic* is a Thing in the Lacanian sense: the material leftover, the materialization of the terrifying, impossible *jouissance*, a kind of petrified forest of enjoyment…the wreck of the *Titanic* therefore functions as a sublime object: a positive material object elevated to the status of the impossible Thing" (71). *JFK* paints Kennedy with the idealized colors of a symbolic,

benevolent presence whose destruction changed the direction of history and politics on a global scale. What makes, thus, *JFK* stand separate from most conspiracy narratives on the same subject is Stone's determination to not only represent the villains as a ruthless conglomerate of sinister powers, but more importantly to absolve Kennedy of any wrongdoing whatsoever, elevating him to the status of a Žižekian sublime object. Kennedy's re-invention as the apotheosis of virtue and selflessness is as excessive, if not more, as the villains' degeneracy. *It is the deification of Kennedy that is unique in Stone's film and not the multiple conspiracy scenarios in question.* This representation cannot be adequately explored through the paranoid model; it is rather a manifestation of an extreme form of anthropological fetishism.

In addition to this construction of hyperbolic binaries of extreme good and evil, what becomes also a source of frustration is the fact that "…Stone's 'history' reflects a desire for multiple alternative histories and a single plot."[142] American history 101, by Oliver Stone, is immediately followed by a black and white dramatic sequence of a hysterical woman being thrown violently out of a car; a cut to a hospital bed where the woman frantically pleads with a policeman to do something because "They've gone to Dallas…Friday…they're gonna kill Kennedy…call somebody!…stop them!…these are serious fucking guys!…" Then, a cut to Dallas, Texas, November 22, 1963. President Kennedy's motorcade reaches Dealy Plaza; violent editing suggests or, rather, signals the

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[142] Patrick O'Donnell, *Latent Destinies* (pp.22). This point also speaks directly to my discussion on postmodern paranoia in Chapter 3. O'Donnell discusses *JFK* as an example of a paradox where "the contradiction resides in the formation of the assassination in the cultural imaginary as a discrete moment that arbitrarily anchors history while, at the same time, serving as the origin of a chain of events whose significance becomes clear only in the aftermath and in a determined relation to the original event" (22). Paranoid thought is characterized by the desire to transform the multiple and heterogeneous into a singular homogeneous, which in turn translates into the paradoxical relationship it holds to modernism and postmodernism.

violence that is about to happen. When we come to the fatal moment of the shooting, we hear three shots, and the screen suggestively fades to black. This is the first indication that something/someone is missing; soon after, though, the screen begins to overspill with villainous figures acting suspiciously, mincing their words, betraying guilt. The film reads not as "Who killed Kennedy?" but rather as "Who didn't kill Kennedy?"; Oliver Stone, overcompensating for the perceived loss of the shooter, does not spare anyone; from chiefs of police, to common crooks, to male prostitutes, to Lyndon Johnson, Fidel Castro, the CIA, the Pentagon, everyone shares part of the guilt, everyone wanted Kennedy dead for their own personal purposes. The multiple villains are stereotyped as such in a number of ways, the most obvious being the manner in which their "otherness" is communicated visually through grotesque representations: David Ferrie's ludicrous painted eyebrows and ridiculous wig; Clay Shaw's comical mannerisms as an elderly active homosexual; Willie O'Keefe, the male prostitute, and his perverse personality. The fact that Clay Shaw and David Ferrie are not fictional characters and were actual homosexuals is not to be overlooked. Willie O'Keefe, however, is a fictional character made up by Oliver Stone.[143] In an interview to Mark C. Carnes, Stone discusses Kennedy as a man that "pissed off 'the Beast,' the Beast being a force (or forces) greater than the presidency"[144] (4).

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[143] In an interview to Gary Crowdus, Stone notes: "…Willie O'Keefe, who was played by Kevin Bacon, is a fictitious character. I used him because there were about five homosexual characters involved in the relationship of Clay Shaw with Oswald and David Ferrie. It was impossible, however, given the length of the movie and the complexity of the relationship, to describe five characters, and there was not one significant character from the five who stood out. In my mind, that necessitated a fictitious character to represent all five, to represent the basic conclusions of the five homosexuals that Garrison involved in the trial, and some of whom he'd gotten to testify" (2). See "Clarifying the Conspiracy: An Interview with Oliver Stone." *Cineaste*, May 1992.
[144] See "Past Imperfect: History According to the Movies (interview with film director Oliver Stone)" Cineaste, v22, n4, (Fall 1996): 33.

Garrison's fixation on Kennedy, as is the case with most "lone" crusaders, is deeply affecting his relationship with his wife, Liz Garrison (played by Sissy Spacek). In *The Desirable Body: Cultural Fetishism and the Erotics of Consumption*, Jon Stratton notes that

> …the key experience of cultural fetishism is a male pre-occupation with his perceived phallic lack…the desire for women becomes secondary…the desire for the phallus translates into a complex form of male-male desire which excludes women as women, their bodies marked by the 'lack', even, of the penis, including those bodies remade as phallic fetishes…[T]his male-male desire takes two forms. One is a scheme of narcissistic identification with a man considered to have the phallic, patriarchal quality. The other constructs certain males as phallic substitutes who may, then, be 'consumed' in the hope that they will provide the missing phallus. (116)

Garrison's "paranoia"—which manifests itself as excessive knowledge and cognitive hyper-productivity (through the use of flashbacks) that validate Garrison or discredit the army of villains—is the first element to cause a rift between him and Liz. Paranoia, according to Freud—is primarily a product of a male latent homosexual desire. In 1915, Freud discusses briefly a case of female paranoia through the same theoretical framework he used for Schreber.[145] From a psychoanalytic perspective, women might or might not have what it takes to be paranoid, but they certainly *do not* when it comes to fetishism. According to Freud fetishism is strictly a male affair. Stratton's observations are useful in exploring how Stone constructs Jim Garrison in his private domain. When Liz tries to "seduce" him suggesting a romantic night of sexual (but always wholesome) delights, Garrison prefers to spend the night with Kennedy and voraciously consume all twenty-six volumes of the Warren Commission Report, a feat that Liz tells us only *he* has done; no

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[145] See Sigmund Freud, "A Case of Female Paranoia Running Counter to the Psycho-Analytical Theory of the Disease." (1915) in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*. Ed. and Trans. James Strachey. London: Hogarth Press, 1955-57.

one else has ever read the "virginal" Report cover to cover before. Time and time again Garrison will refer to Kennedy as the "slain king" or to the jury/audience as "children of a slain father." His obsession cannot be read as homosexual desire on any level, which means that, at least from a psychoanalytic perspective, it is not primarily paranoia that drives and guides his actions. Garrison fetishistically "consumes" the Report in hopes of providing/evoking the missing phallus; his noble quest for justice mirrors Kennedy's noble causes for which he was eventually destroyed. Kennedy as the benevolent Patriarch, whose death completely and utterly disrupts the symbolic order, is re-incarnated in Garrison, whose narcissistic disposition seeks to identify with the president's "phallic, patriarchal quality." As long as Liz refuses to acknowledge Garrison as the "subject supposed to know" the couple shares no sexual intimacy; if anything, they are drifting further and further apart. She, of course, being excluded from fetishistic desire, cannot even begin to relate to her husband's state of mind. Interestingly, order is restored in Garrison's private sphere/bed immediately following a moment of sheer *dis*order in the public sphere: the assassination of RFK captured on television. As soon as Jim informs Liz of the tragic event (which he, incidentally, had prophesized only a few hours before!), Aristotelian *anagnorisis* kicks in and the couple, now basking in *homophrosune*, share an intimate night of passion. No longer feeling the threat of being a "castrated man," Garrison is able to find his way back into his wife's bed once again.

The camera work in the film is also highly suggestive of the "fetishization" of the villains. On various occasions, the camera zooms to extreme close-ups of the villains' body parts. After JFK's death, as we see documentary footage of Johnson being sworn president, the camera closes in on his hand in a suggestive way of saying that he had his

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"hand" in it too; as Garrison interviews the characters played by John Candy and Jack Lemmon, we get extreme close-ups of their mouth and eyes respectively, which suggest the synecdochical relation they might be holding to the "Beast."

Perhaps the most frustrating object in the Kennedy affair has been, and still is, the Zapruder film, the visual document that accidentally captured the truth but obstinately refused to reveal it. As in real life (the Zapruder film was not released to the public until 1975), Stone withholds the home video from his audience until the trial sequence at the end, when Garrison is unfolding the "Truth" about what really happened, and successfully postponing our long awaited (*JFK* is almost three-and-a half hours long) gratification. Zapruder is portrayed as a *deus ex machina*, the fourth "shooter" no one saw coming. In the opening sequence, Stone dramatically re-enacts Zapruder "shooting" Kennedy, juxtaposing his image with the invisible presence of the three other shooters. This parallelism also aligns "truth" with the figure of the filmmaker, the benevolent "shooter" and the possessor of historical accuracy.

Stone makes Zapruder himself visible on screen and the conspirators invisible right from the start, playing on the tension between visibility (as good) and invisibility (as a threat), what is missing and what is not. "The inability of the documentary photographic image," Marita Sturken argues, "to reveal the reasons for the Kennedy assassination constituted a kind of cultural trauma. A film such as *JFK* responds to the inability of the image to provide answers by 'filling in' what the image could not tell, and attempting to complete the fragmented images of memory"[146] (73). The Zapruder film contains a "truth" we believe is *there* but have no access to. It has to be another film, *JFK*, that

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[146] See Marita Sturken, "Reenactment, Fantasy, and the Paranoia of History: Oliver Stone's Docudramas." *History and Theory*, Vol. 36, no. 4, Theme Issue 36, Dec. 1997, pp. 64-79.

comes in to magically fill in for this essential lack, taking on the role of a metanarrative. Despite its inability to bring closure to the cultural trauma, or perhaps because of it, the home video has gained a kind of sacred status in American culture. The Zapruder film is shown in *JFK* as evidence that supposedly disproves the "magic bullet" theory. The Warren Commission's "historiographic" legitimacy is put under the microscope, becoming vulnerable to such attacks, precisely because the weaving of the events that eventually prevailed as the official history was done in a manner that assigned almost supernatural (magical), or to borrow Stone's epithet, "ridiculous" properties and abilities to an object—a single bullet—that went beyond the realm of the rational, the logical, the commonsensical.

O'Keefe's embodiment of five male homosexuals, Stone's rhetorical choices, aspects of the work itself, and Garrison's fixation with Kennedy are manifestations of a discourse driven primarily by fetishism. Borrowing again from Gammon and Makinen, the linguistic implications are not without significance; in "Three Types of Fetishism," they argue that, "fetishism is itself a synecdoche (a part for the whole substitution)" (44). Each body part stands in for the role each individual had in the Kennedy assassination: one is the hand, the other is the eyes, another is the mouth, and so on and so forth. The parts of each make up the whole of the Beast, a supernatural force standing against everything that is holy and moral. The representation of brutish, non-Christian "otherness" culminates with the elaborate orgy scene; the villainous men are dressed up in eighteenth century aristocracy costumes, while one of them has his entire body painted in a shiny gold color that resembles a statue of a Greek god. Immediately after, there is a cut to the Garrison family enjoying a nice, wholesome dinner on Easter Sunday, establishing an

even more obvious dialectic between the virtuous nuclear family and the perverse group of homosexual villains.

Another interesting instance of a fetishistic representation of otherness is David Ferrie's apartment. After his murder, the team of crusaders led by Garrison visits Ferrie's apartment. The camera pans through the entire space which is filled with articles we associate with mystical religious rituals; we enter a dark-lit room hosting a skeleton, a cross, a picture of the pope, beads, mice, needles, cigarette buds, and pills; moving to the next room, we see a boudoir covered with different kinds of make-up, wigs, and a picture of a naked man from the waste up. Stone's attempt to establish the "other" by creating a shrine-like space of paganistic or even 'voodoo' practices is similar to the manner Western Europeans imagined the ritual practices of the African people of the seventeenth century. Of course, Mr. X, the film's *deus ex machina*, appears out of nowhere to consolidate Garrison's theory; for many, this mystical nameless figure stands for the director himself who, through this character, is able to unravel his own unconfirmed but highly compelling story.[147] It is Mr. X who asks the question: "Why did *they* want Kennedy dead?" Oliver Stone produces an elaborate response to the question of "What happened?" but leaves the key question "open" for the audience to decide, or, so he claims. Most would agree that there is nothing "open" about *JFK*; if anything, the film eliminates all ambiguity, something that becomes a source of both pleasure and unpleasure. When at the end of his elaborate closing arguments Garrison looks straight at the camera—automatically placing the spectator in the position of the diegetic jury—and

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[147] Mr. X is a fictional character based, in part, on an actual person, Col. Fletcher Prouty, who had been chief of special operations during the Kennedy years. Prouty has stated that Kennedy was, indeed, planning to withdraw the troops from Vietnam, but most of Mr. X's "soliloquy" is Stone's elaborate interpretation of Prouty's statements.

says the, now, infamous "It's up to you", Stone violated much more than the cinematic rules of realism: by breaking down the "fourth wall" he managed to erect a much stronger one between the characters and the audience. How does Stone create such a compelling story? What is it that has caused such an emotional reaction (of both positive and negative affect)? I believe that it is Kennedy's representation as a sacred object that places the film in a category by itself. And, how does he achieve this? Put simply: the "what happened" is addressed through *paranoia*; the "why it happened" through *fetishism*. Since Kennedy's death, cinema has been an active participant in what I would like to call the *Kennedy Complex*, a love-hate relationship of the American public with its most beloved "Father" who died prematurely by the hand of one (or many more?) of his own "children," materializing the Oedipal fantasy.

Most of the other films dealing with this subject abstained from two things: creating an overarching, *all*-inclusive community of villains—which speaks directly to fetishism's excess—and portraying Kennedy as a Christ-like figure—which speaks to fetishism's tendency to infuse objects/subjects with special meaning. Instead they remained within the conventional conspiratorial narrative modeled after the paranoid form of storytelling. Paranoia may also be characterized by excess, but in this case it is the worship of another man that produces this alternate universe, not the worship of the self. What is more, by weaving *all* conspiracy theories (CIA, the Pentagon, Castro, FBI, Lyndon Johnson, etc.) about JFK into a single narrative, Stone ends up canceling them out and closing up the subject. What can anyone say that has not already been said by Stone? His treatment of Kennedy as a sacred object makes the harsh criticisms against him almost sacrilegious. Paranoia emerges as ideological rather than pathological, mainly because the same

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rhetoric is employed by both sides, but whereas with Garrison it translates as the words of a brilliant mind, with Ferrie, for instance, it translates as the words of an irrational psychotic. Just like Kennedy, Garrison is an infallible man, the only "genuine" son to recognize his "Father's" specialness as well as his enemies. This form of rhetoric so deeply invested in religious imagery and religious parables, stands against the secular Warren Commission Report as a sacred document that "infidels" might question but loyal followers will religiously and, above all, unquestionably embrace. One might say that *JFK* is a manifestation of anthropological fetishism at its best and worst.

Conclusions

This chapter identifies and introduces fetishism as a third component, an active participant in the formation of conspiratorial texts that have previously been examined primarily through the theoretical framework of paranoia. This distinct mode of representation we might call *fetishistic paranoia*. One might wonder "why is this important?" After all, CT and, especially, Stone's film whether a product of fetishism or paranoia still remain, for most, the products of a "distorted" mind. This is important, I believe, for the following reasons: first and foremost, conspiracy theory in general, and in film in particular, is far too popular a phenomenon to be ignored. More and more we have come to rely on and understand history through the conspiratorial lens, to the point where paranoid thought is gradually becoming "naturalized" rather than exceptional. Second, when a phenomenon becomes so prevalent, engaging in an over-simplified dismissive discourse can be as dangerous and narrow-minded as the narratives in question. Third, when the pathological condition of paranoia is perceived invariably as the sole (or main)

justification for the emergence of such theories, and the only theoretical model through which they can be explored, this attitude tends to homogenize them in an over-generalized, limited, and monolithic manner. Conspiracy equals paranoia is as rigid a cause/effect relationship as those that the putative narratives establish. Finally, in order to gain a deeper and better understanding of the underlying causes and structures that give rise to this popular mode of thought and introduce other dimensions that contribute to its formation, we need to evaluate these narratives within their respective socio-historical contexts if we are to avoid essentialist and universalizing claims. In Kennedy's case, fetishism works on multiple levels; it can be seen as both the driving force that compels individuals to remain fixated on an event that took place more than forty years ago, and a way of structuring and representing the Beast, the supernatural entity with the power to destroy the object of special devotion. We can identify elements of both anthropological and psychoanalytic fetishism. The former is employed as a mode of representing otherness, whereas the latter seems to explain the force that drives the production of conspiratorial texts.

Commodity fetishism cannot be ignored either, since as already mentioned, there is a huge industry feeding on the people's desire to get closer to Kennedy by purchasing artifacts that somehow evoke his presence.[148] One cannot help but ask why people get obsessed with figures such as Princess Diana and JFK: What fuels this desire? Both may have been perceived as physically attractive and sexual beings, but so have many other public figures, so this would not suffice as an explanation. Paranoid elements are certainly present, but can they account for this cultural phenomenon in a sufficient

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[148] See Karl Marx, "On the Fetishism of Commodities and the Secret Thereof" in *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*. Trans. Samuel Moore, Edward Bibbins Aveling, Ernest Untermann. (New York, 1906).

manner? What these types of CT texts seem to be doing is mediating and negotiating a perceived loss, and it is this relationship between the *text* itself and the man which operates as the fetish, not the "truth" which has been held as the classic conspiratorial fetish. Kennedy has stood as a symbol of freedom and virtue for four decades and these beliefs are still going strong. These texts both keep him alive for the communities of adoring "fans" but, more importantly, fill the lack that is felt with regard to the missing "villains." This type of CT cannot *solely* be attributed to paranoia, because the individual does not stand at the center of it anymore. Narcissism and megalomania do not seem to fit comfortably in this structure; paranoia remains an active element, but the continuous pursuit of acceptable exegeses can be better explored through both anthropological and psychoanalytic fetishism. David Ferrie sums up the Kennedy assassination in a very suggestive manner: "It's a mystery wrapped in a riddle inside an enigma."

Richard Hofstadter, in his seminal work *The Paranoid Style in American Politics and Other Essays,* identifies a pattern in political rhetoric which he describes as "the paranoid style" that "…represents an old and recurrent mode of expression in our public life which has frequently been linked with movements of suspicious discontent, and whose content remains much the same even when it is adopted by men of distinctly different purposes" (6). In establishing the reality of the style, Hofstadter uses excerpts from political speeches taken from intervals of half a century, illustrating the fact that people may come and go but the discourse always stays the same. Examples include a speech delivered by Senator McCarthy in June 1951, a manifesto signed in 1895 by leaders of the Populist party, a Texas newspaper article written in 1855, and a sermon preached in Massachusetts in 1798. I would like to argue that we also have adopted a "fetishistic"

style of relating to the world, both through patterns of discourse (language) and through a "naturalized" perception of the social order which masks the fetishism at work. The paranoid style might be a popular way of *making sense of the world*, but the fetishistic style becomes a way of *relating to it*.

Chapter 5: Polanski on Female Paranoia: Challenging Hollywood's Female

"*I do not believe that the clock ever ticked
or that any noise was to be heard at all. The
woman's situation justified a sensation of
throbbing in the clitoris. This was what she
subsequently projected as a perception of an
external object.*"

<div align="right">-Sigmund Freud (1915)</div>

Introduction

"A Case of Paranoia Running Counter to the Psycho-Analytical Theory of the
Disease" (1915) is arguably one of the most problematic texts Freud would produce
among his extremely gendered theories of the female psyche. Surpassed perhaps only by
his work on Dora in 1905, this minor essay confirms Freud's social biases as well as his
unwillingness to see the female condition as anything other than an aberrant version of
the male. Like Dora, this unidentified female's *case* (a term that is part of both the
medical and the legal jargon) is frightfully exemplary of Foucault's harsh criticism of the
role the medical and the legal professions have played in promoting and maintaining an
oppressive patriarchal model.[149] Even though this essay can be considered as one of
Freud's minor works, it bears consideration more as a *social* rather than a scientific

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[149] In *The Birth of the Clinic: An Archeology of Medical Perception* published in 1963, Michel Foucault
traces the birth of clinical medicine and its oppressive nature. In *Madness and Civilization: A History of
Insanity in the Age of Reason* published in 1965, he offers an archeology of madness in Western societies.
Foucault begins in the Middle Ages noting the freedom of movement the insane enjoyed in the social
sphere. The Enlightenment—the Age of Reason—puts an end to this, forcing the insane to a life of
isolation and confinement The rise of the scientific method introduced modern and more "humane"
methods of treatment which Foucault identifies as anything but humane. In *Discipline and Punish: The
Birth of Prison* published in 1975, he takes on the development of the penal system in the West focusing on
the evolution of disciplinary methods that targeted the psyche rather than the body.

document, one that is symptomatic of the re-presentation of women by men in science, fiction, the arts, and in culture at large.

This chapter seeks to investigate the following hypothesis: if Hollywood cinema depicts paranoia primarily as excess of knowledge and if Freud is, at least, partially right that female paranoia runs counter to "normal" male paranoia then women must be excluded from any access to this form of surplus knowledge. Does female paranoia even exist as anything other than distorted knowledge? Have there been female "paranoiacs"? Or, as Naomi Schor asks, can female paranoia "…include the prestigious intellectual (hyper) activity associated with the male model?"[150] (206). Tania Modleski's book title *The Women Who Knew Too Much* suggests that it can. In this seminal work, Modleski provides a new theoretical framework and a close analysis of seven of Hitchcock's films in an attempt to recuperate and rethink both Hitchcock's female characters and female spectatorship. Even though the female characters Modleski examines vary tremendously in character and circumstance, from the nameless second Mrs. de Winter in *Rebecca* to Lisa Fremont in *Rear Window* and Madeleine Elster in *Vertigo*, she labels them all as *women who knew too much*. Why? What exactly did they know? Indeed one might find the book title somewhat puzzling, or even a mismatch to the content of her work. I shall return to this point later on.

Beginning with a reading of Freud's essay, this chapter will consider two films as "case" studies that both confirm and challenge Freud's theory: Roman Polanski's *Death*

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[150] Naomi Schor, "Female Paranoia: The Case for Psychoanalytic Feminist Criticism." Yale French Studies, No. 62, Feminist Readings: Feminine Texts/American Contexts. (1981), pp. 204-219. Also see Sianne Ngai's "Bad Timing (A Sequel): Paranoia, Feminism, and Poetry." *Differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies.* 12.2 (2001). Ngai opens her article by asking: "Has 'conspiracy theory,' both in its academically legitimized and pop-cultural manifestations, been quietly claimed as a masculine prerogative over the last decades of the twentieth century?" (1).

and the Maiden (1994) and *Rosemary's Baby* (1968). Women and madness have gone hand in hand for centuries;[151] if paranoia has been predominantly a male affair, mental illness has been a female one usually attributed to "essential" traits such as oversensitivity, frailty, and weakness.[152] As mentioned elsewhere, Hitchcock has often painted women with the colors of paranoia as distorted knowledge, *Suspicion* being perhaps the best example. Polanski complicates this idea, or, in a way, makes an appeal for a woman's right to be "paranoid." There is, I argue, one main difference: here female paranoia as excess is written on the *body;*[153] whereas the male "truth" is immaterial, incorporeal, spiritual, Polanski materializes this excessive "truth" in the female body, making it visible, tangible, and real, commenting on the female body's "inscription of language and simultaneous exclusion from language" (Schor, 210). If we can, thus, speak of Freudian "abnormality" and the "frightening" female body, then, a body that has traditionally signified *lack* is now a site of *excess*, or as Hélène Cixous aptly put it, certain female bodies seem to "lack lack."[154]

The Lawyer, the Doctor, his Patient, and her Lover

In his essay, Freud begins recounting that some years ago (he writes this in 1915) "a well-known lawyer" had asked him to meet with a client of his who had asked the

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[151] See Elaine Showalter, *The Female Malady* (Virago Press, 1987), and *Hystories: Hysterical Epidemics and Modern Culture* (Columbia University Press, 1997).

[152] See Shoshana Felman's "Women and Madness: The Critical Phallacy." *Diacritics*, no. 5 (Winter 1975): 2-10.

[153] In "Female Paranoia: The Case for Psychoanalytic Feminist Criticism" (1981) Naomi Schor attempts to "outline a new feminist thematics grounded in feminist hermeneutics" (205). Schor uses Freud's essay on female paranoia not to comment on the gendering of the disease but rather to point to what she calls "militant" materialism of the female body.

[154] In her essay "Castration or Decapitation?" (1981) Cixous discusses women and the silence imposed on them by the oppressive patriarch.

attorney to protect her against a man who, she claimed, abused her. The thirty-year-old woman—who remains anonymous—was romantically involved with a man she met at work and who she believed, after hearing a clicking sound, had some witnesses taking pictures while they were making love at his apartment, with the intent to circulate these pictures and force her to resign her position. Freud states with confidence that "[h]er legal adviser was experienced enough to recognize the pathological stamp of this accusation," but that he would also "appreciate the opinion of a psychiatrist in this matter." When the lawyer and the patient/plaintiff visited Freud (he frequently refers to the woman as "the plaintiff" or as "the patient") he recalls that she was distrustful and that "only the influence of her legal adviser, who was present, induced her to tell the…story." Freud also points out that "neither in her manner nor by any kind of expression of emotion did she betray the slightest shame or shyness, although some such state of mind would naturally arise on such an occasion in the presence of strangers." The lover, on the other hand, Freud describes as a "cultured and attractive man" despite the fact that he never met or saw him in person. Freud's theory on paranoia based on the Schreber case—whom he had never met either—could not comfortably be applied to this case of female paranoia since the persecutor was not of the same sex as the victim, and there was no "sign of the influence of a woman, no trace of a struggle against a homosexual attachment." During a second meeting with the patient/plaintiff (I will not go into a detailed description of the second meeting), he concluded that the persecutor *was* a woman after all, an older lady at her workplace who resembled the victim's mother.[155]

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[155] Again, the diction Freud uses as he unfolds the outcome of the second visit suggests a conflation of the medical and the legal. Bewildered by the inability to link female paranoia to homosexual desire, Freud

As for the clicking sound the paranoiac female claimed she heard and thought it was the click of a camera, Freud concluded it was nothing other than her own clitoris throbbing from sexual desire.[156] As in the case of Dora Freud constructs love/hate triangles where the victims' condition is driven by an unconscious sexual desire that has its origin in homosexual desire. Dora supposedly bore a repressed desire for Frau K., whom she was jealous of, in addition to her sexual desire for her father and, let us not forget, Herr K.

The nuances in Freud's theory on female paranoia have not gone unnoticed, especially when he cites former hysterical female patients and discusses female paranoia in terms of hysteria which had been historically recorded as primarily a female condition.[157] As in Dora's case, this nameless woman is a victim of male bonding at its worst. The lawyer gets together with the doctor and in a self-congratulatory manner they absolve the lover of any wrongdoing and, by virtue of their professions, officially declare the woman paranoid, with the lawyer playing doctor and the doctor playing lawyer. Never once did it come up that the woman might have been actually telling the truth, that the "cultured and

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struggled until he finally "saw another way out, by which a final verdict could for the moment be postponed" (153).

[156] In her chapter "Reading Counterclockwise: Paranoid Gothic or Gothic Paranoia?" Judith Halberstam offers an insightful comparative analysis of Freud's work on Schreber and his work on female paranoia. She observes that "Schreber's tale of paranoia sounds extremely heroic through Freud's storytelling…" (109). "Male paranoia, within this reading," she goes on to argue, "becomes a *rational* defense against the corrupting influence of homosexual desire…" (my emphasis, 110). See *Skin Shows: Gothic Horror and the Technology of Monsters*. Duke University Press, 1995.

[157] Freud does develop a theory on male hysteria towards the end of the nineteenth century, and Charcot had already developed an elaborate theory on hysteria in males and children. In 1886 Freud publishes his "Observation of a severe case of hemi-anaesthesia in a hysterical male." He delivered a lecture to the Vienna Society of Physicians on male hysteria, focusing mainly on the somatics of the disease rather than examining it in terms of gender. What is worth noting, however, is that despite this apparent interest in male hysteria, all the cases he describes in *Studies on Hysteria* were solely about females. In Draft K he notes: "Hysteria necessarily presupposes a primary experience of unpleasure—that is, of a passive nature. The natural sexual passivity of women explains their being more inclined to hysteria. Where I have found hysteria in men, I have been able to prove the presence of abundant sexual passivity in their anamneses" (96). This statement suggests that even though male hysteria exists, it is still discusses in terms of female passivity and feminized males. Furthermore, both Charcot's hereditary theory and Freud's seduction theory identify the female as responsible for male hysteria. For a more elaborate discussion of Freud and hysteria see *Freud's Women* (Lisa Appignanesi, John Forrester, 2001).

attractive man" whom Freud had never met might have actually been guilty, or that the "well-known lawyer" had *not* been "experienced enough to recognize the pathological stamp of the accusation." What is more, whereas in Schreber's case Freud respectfully describes the judge as "a man of superior mental gifts and endowed with an unusual keenness alike of intellect and of observation," *nowhere does he mention in this essay the cognitive hyper-activity that characterizes paranoia as a condition*, being so pivotal in the Schreber case. Paranoia in this case seems to be a corporeal affair as Freud locates "truth" in the woman's body; it is not her "diseased" mind being manifested in the form of a bodily symptom, but rather her throbbing-with-desire body that is contaminating her thought. And since intellectual hyper-activity is hardly relevant, all we are left with is the *sexual* hyper-activity of a woman with no "shame or shyness." Hollywood has participated in gendering paranoia along similar rigid dichotomies where male paranoiacs are driven by hyper-cognitivity and female paranoiacs (if we can even call them that) by irrational thought.

Freud titles this essay "A Case of Paranoia Running Counter to the Psycho-analytical Theory of the Disease." What is unusual for Freud, since he "successfully" applied the repressed homosexuality theoretical explanation, is the following: "*the subsequent progression from a female to a male object*…is unusual in paranoia," he observes. "As a rule we find that the victim of persecution remains fixated to the same persons and therefore to the same sex as before the paranoiac transformation set in." Here, of course, Freud fails to specify that what he is referring to is persecutory paranoia, which is not the only type. In "Female Paranoia: The Case for Psychoanalytic Feminist Criticism", Naomi Schor cites one of Freud's favorite female students (whom Freud also cites in "Female

Sexuality"), Ruth Mack Brunswick. In "The Analysis of a Case of Paranoia (Delusion of Jealousy)" (1929) she states the following:

> The usual persecutory paranoia with its elaborate ideation, its excessive intellectuality, and its occurrence in individuals with a high power of sublimation, is essentially a highly- organized and masculine psychosis, and is, as a matter of fact, much more common in men than in women…I should like at this point to make a possible differentiation between two of the types of true paranoia, the jealous and the persecutory. The latter, as we have seen, is an elaborate psychosis of an essentially masculine nature, and is the commonest form of paranoia in men. The jealous form, on the other hand, is par excellence the paranoia of women…In contradistinction to the philosophic, systematizing persecutory paranoia, the delusional jealousy is both feminine and rudimentary and, as it were, closer to the normal and the neurotic. (207)

Brunswick's differentiation between male and female paranoia participates in excluding the female from the seemingly "privileged" intellectual model of persecutory paranoia, assigning her instead with the demeaning and petty type of jealous paranoia. The rhetoric is suggestive of the desire to classify and define paranoia in terms of gender based primarily on socially constructed characterizations of both men and women.

So the questions arise: is there such a thing as female paranoia? What are the implications of gendering this condition, a condition that has so obstinately resisted clear definitions from the start, a condition that has so often been appropriated in discourses that are ideologically informed? How has Hollywood cinema participated in gendering paranoia? Male paranoiacs in film have been predominantly gifted individuals with unique abilities to read signs that most people cannot, heroes who know too much by virtue of an acute sixth sense and a relentless determination to restore order and truth.[158]

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[158] Male characters in *film noir*—a distinct genre of paranoid narrative—do not fit comfortably into this characterization. The flaws and weaknesses in men in *film noir*, however, are often intricately connected with the figure of the *femme fatale*, the hypersexual female who like a vampire suck the masculinity out of the man.

Women have not been as fortunate; if paranoia is ever portrayed as the distorted knowledge of a delusional mind, this has frequently found expression in female characters. When we talk about women and excess it is usually in negative terms that pertain to "transgressive" behaviors that defy socially assigned gender roles. Excess in women (whether in the form of emotion, action, or sexual behavior) is a vice that seldom goes unpunished in Hollywood. Hitchcock's women are a prime example of this tendency. Much has been said about the love/hate relationship the director had with the female sex, an ambivalence that is strongly reflected in his films.[159] It is this very ambivalence, Modleski argues, "which explains why it has been possible for critics to argue with [similar] plausibility on either side of the issue" (3). Despite this, Hitchcock, has not produced female paranoiacs in the same or even similar way as he has their male counterparts. As far as paranoia is concerned (always as excessive knowledge) there is no ambivalence as to the limited presence of women in film, which is also reflected in the limited scholarly texts on the subject.

Roman Polanski shares a similar preoccupation with Hitchcock vis-à-vis the female condition. The controversial director's fictional women are often victims of extreme violence, usually of a sexual nature, by men whom they trust, whom they love, men who betray them and sacrifice them to the altar of personal interest. Polanski's women are often neurotic, unhappy, and oppressed, but at the same time they are resilient, betraying

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[159] In *The Women Who Knew Too Much*, for example, Modleski argues for this ambivalence, claiming that "time and again in Hitchcock's films, the strong fascination and identification with femininity revealed in them subverts the claims to mastery and authority not only of the male characters but of the director himself… what I want to argue is *neither* that Hitchcock is utterly misogynistic *nor* that he is largely sympathetic to women and their plight in patriarchy, but that his work is characterized by a thoroughgoing ambivalence about femininity—which explains why it has been possible for critics to argue with some on either side of the issue" (3). Molly Haskell in *From Reverence to Rape: The Treatment of Women in the Movies* also observes a "complex interplay of misogyny and sympathy in Hitchcock" (32).

an inner strength that is often missing in Hitchcock's more fragile characters. Both directors rely heavily on camera work and on the mise-en-scène—as both are heavily influenced by surrealism—for the symbolic representation of the characters' inner emotional states. The electric atmosphere their filmmaking style creates (low/high angles, wide-angle lens, lighting techniques, use of off-screen space, characters moving in and out of the frame), reveals much more than the dialogue usually does, bringing about a dizzying, disorienting effect, an intangible presence of evil, a frightening feeling of danger and impending doom. Clearly their world is not a safe or a happy place. Before delving into an analysis of *Death and the Maiden* and *Rosemary's Baby*, I would like to first look briefly into two other Polanski films that will help illustrate the director's intervention and unique approach to paranoia, and, in particular, to female paranoia.

The main argument here is that whereas paranoia in Hollywood has been predominantly a male affair that celebrates rather than stigmatizes the male intellect while excluding women from similar representations, Polanski complicates that: he moves beyond rigid gender dichotomies by creating female characters that defy the unwritten rules of how women and men think, feel, and act in Hollywood cinema. As in Hitchcock, Polanski's women are also a product or even a side-effect of oppressive patriarchal environments; they too meet with gruesome violence but they are also capable of committing violent acts against men themselves. They may be victimized but they are not victims, at least, as we shall see, not in the way Hitchcock's women are. What is more, Polanski's paranoia (a theme he obsessively treated) is a multi-faceted and multi-headed monster that *cannot* be comfortably discussed in terms of gender. His paranoid women range from highly deranged to highly perceptive, shattering the monolithic and

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gendered treatment (pun intended) of the condition. His male characters, despite maintaining the privileged position of power and control, are weak and un-heroic individuals with whom the spectator cannot easily empathize, much less identify. And, contrary to Freud, who saw female paranoia as a self-inflicting "punishment"—absolving men of any role in their acting out, as we saw in the case of the anonymous woman—in Polanski's cosmos there is always a man, an external force, responsible for any female erratic behavior. It is not, thus, that Polanski fetishizes (over-values) or punishes (de-values) women the way Hitchcock often does; nor does he attribute irrational behavior to qualities inherent in women. Nor is it a woman (the figure of the matriarch) who is to be held accountable for mental instability—as, for instance, in *Psycho*, *Marnie*, and *Rebecca*. If Hitchcock and Freud have been accused of being misogynists, Polanski might be seen, through his work, as a *misandrist* both before and after tragically losing his own wife and unborn child by the hand of the psychotic Manson gang. Put simply: women gain agency in Polanski not through their mystification but rather through the *de*mystification of the male anti-heroes.

Polanski on Paranoia

Repulsion (1965) and *Le Locataire* (*The Tenant*, 1976) are two psychological thrillers that deal with paranoia in its purest form. Viewed by critics as an unofficial trilogy about the horrors of apartment dwelling (the third one being *Rosemary's Baby*), these films are intensely psychoanalytic and have been received as accurate depictions of delusional paranoia. Both Carole Ledoux and Trelkovksi are figures that destroy and self-destruct and whose demons appear to be as much external as internal. In both cases reality is

filtered through the disturbed consciousness of the protagonists and seen through the distorted lens of their paranoid vision, not as excessive knowledge this time (rare occasions in Hollywood film), since in neither case are their suspicions and intense fear validated. Polanski's paranoiacs seem to jump out of the pages of psychoanalytic texts, even though the director has claimed to have done absolutely no research while constructing the characters. Rather than consulting science, he stated, he relied solely on his own visions of mental deterioration and hallucinatory violence.

Repulsion situates the spectator in the confines of a claustrophobic and eerie London apartment where Carole Ledoux, a sexually repressed and deeply disturbed manicurist, lives with her sister and her sister's lover (a married man). When her sister goes on a trip to Italy with her boyfriend, Carole, alone in the apartment, begins to withdraw from reality, and progressively gets lost in dreams and hallucinations of murder and rape. Carole suffers from an inexplicable repulsion and hatred for men which, combined with her gradual mental collapse, result in her killing a man romantically interested in her, as well as her sleazy landlord who offers to waive the rent in exchange for sexual favors. The film ends with the camera zooming in on an old family photograph with the two sisters and a man—presumably the father—whom Carole is looking at angrily. This closing image is Polanski's way of pointing fingers at the *real* culprit, the familiar "hovering" father who presumably had sexually molested his daughter, ultimately responsible for the bloodbath Carole's childhood trauma brought about.

This somewhat over-simplistic Freudian explanation might be the only flaw, in my opinion, in this otherwise flawless film. *Repulsion* is a brilliant pastiche of expressionism (with the distorted mise-en-scène), surrealism (with the dreams and hallucinatory

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fantasies), and realism which, with minimal dialogue, visualizes the internal mayhem of Carole's psyche in a very immediate manner. Polanski's tendency to shoot Carole from behind elicits the impression of an invisible presence that fuels spectatorial paranoia. His misandrism is manifested in both the gruesome violence inflicted upon the male characters and in the identification of the father as the ultimate perpetrator. Polanski, however, passes no judgment on Carole, leaving the audience numb and unable to sympathize with or to criticize her. The spectator is not invited to think, to engage in the hyper-cognitivity associated with paranoia and the desire to assign concrete meaning to actions, thoughts, or events. The spectator is only invited to inhabit a diseased mind and experience sheer insanity that defies rationalization. This might seem a contradictory statement when one considers the potential role of the father; after all, if Carole was indeed a victim of child sexual abuse cause and effect is established and her paranoia is rationalized if not justified. *Repulsion*, however, leaves little room for the spectator to adopt an investigative approach, and to focus on what caused Carole's psychotic behavior.

Le Locataire follows a meek, Bartleby-like clerk, Trelkovsky (played exquisitely by Roman Polanski), who takes up residence in a Paris apartment building from hell. The apartment becomes vacant when the previous tenant, Simone Choule, commits suicide under mysterious circumstances, since everyone who knew her claimed that she had absolutely no reason to kill herself. In his desperate attempt to get the apartment, Trelkovsky pays a visit to the dying girl at the hospital where he meets Stella, Simone's beautiful friend. Stella (played by Isabelle Adjani) mistakenly takes him for Simone's friend, and he, embarrassed to admit the real reason for being there, plays along. Once

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Trelkovsky moves in he is confronted with a group of cruel and unreasonably irritable neighbors, especially his landlord, Monsieur Zy (played by Melvin Douglas) and his wife who also live in the building. Gradually Trelkovsky begins to suspect that Monsieur Zy and the other occupants drove Simone to commit suicide and now they are trying to do the same to him by transforming him into Simone Choule! In an extremely grotesque final scene Trelkovsky, dressed in Simone's clothes jumps from his apartment window only to crawl back up and jump again. The film ends with a mirror shot of Trelkovsky in a hospital bed (like Simone in the opening scenes) letting out a scream filled with horror.

If one has read Schreber's *Memoirs* it is difficult not to notice the similarities between the judge and Trelkovsky. Both are convinced of a grand conspiracy against them led by powerful men who want to transform them into a woman. *Le Locataire* is also told exclusively from the point of view of Trelkovsky, who is present in every single scene; not once does Polanski allow the spectator to part with Trelkovsky's gaze, which is why up until the very end we are not sure whether his suspicions are justified or not. Contrary, to Schreber, though, Trelkovsky is a man of low social status and low self esteem, unable to stand up for his rights and wishes. There are no narcissistic tendencies guiding his fears, no sense of specialness in question. His gradual descent to madness is communicated, as in *Repulsion*, primarily through form. Both films adhere to the clinical notion of what it means to be paranoid as both characters in one case a man, in the other a woman, are equally consumed by persecutory delusions and experience a purely projected reality that is false. Interestingly, when looking at these characters through the Freudian lens, it would be hard to believe Polanski was operating on instinct alone

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without having been exposed to Freud's theories on paranoia if it were not for the fact that, contrary to most filmmakers, he refuses to gender the condition.

The reason why these films should be briefly mentioned is first to establish Polanski's obsessive treatment of paranoia, a theme that informs most of his work, but, at the same time, to identify the difficulty of grouping his films on paranoia in a holistic manner. Carole and Trelkovsky are deeply flawed characters; Polanski does not judge them, accuse them, or sympathize with them. Their fictional worlds are devoid of any kind of humanity, sympathy, love, understanding, intimacy, trust, communication. This inability to connect with another human being is also transmitted to the spectator, as it is very difficult to sympathize or identify with either of them. Polanski's goal is to attack and disturb the spectator with grotesque and violent images that cannot be deciphered; it is not enough that we merely witness the mental disintegration of the characters; we also have to experience it on a visceral level in its most raw, instinctual form by inhabiting a world made up of surreal images of sex, rape, and murder. Paranoid thought is driven by a deep desire for meaning and rests on the conviction that appearances are deceiving. It is a purely subjective state of being where living is intolerable due to the belief that powerful and sinister forces are constantly threatening one's autonomy and well being. In *Le Locataire* Polanski resists offering any explanation as to Trelkovsky's mental breakdown; there is absolutely no rationalization or justification for his psychotic behavior, no moral lessons to be learned, no path of righteousness to follow. True, the commentary about the alienating and dehumanizing effects of urban living is powerful and suggestive of Polanski's paranoia towards urban settings, but there is no moral pedestal on which he stands and preaches for truth, meaning, and order in the typical

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Hollywood manner. . In *Repulsion* and *The Tenant*, as already mentioned, Polanski confronts paranoia in its clinical form; Carole and Trelkovsky are psychotic individuals manifesting similar symptoms that move beyond gender categories.

Death and the Maiden and *Rosemary's Baby* differ greatly both in form and content. The theme of paranoia is also the driving force but the treatment is different. These films come closer to the conventional Hollywood recipe where paranoia becomes excessive rather than distorted knowledge. But whereas paranoia's intellectual hyper-activity has been predominantly a male prerogative, here is a rare occasion where it becomes a female affair, an affair written on the body.

Death and the Maiden is based on a play by Ariel Dorfman, a Chilean playwright and political activist. Dorfman began thinking about what was to become his most celebrated play while still in exile. After he returned to Chile in 1990, and in the midst of the formation of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, *Scars on the Moon* (later renamed *Death and the Maiden*) was completed. This play became part of a trilogy titled *The Resistance Trilogy,* which also included *Widows,* and *Reader.* To Dorfman's disappointment, the play was not well received in Santiago; Chileans found it too painful to watch, and most reacted negatively.

Death and the Maiden: from the play to the film

Paulina Lorca Escobar, is one of the hundreds of thousands to have suffered extreme torture in the hands of trained torturers during the time of a dictatorship in an unspecified Latin America country (though Dorfman made no secret that the play is based on the events in his birthplace, Chile). As a young student she was arrested as a subversive,

interrogated for weeks, during which time among much inhuman torture, she was raped fourteen times, always to the sound of Schubert's musical piece "Death and the Maiden," by the doctor whom initially she believed was there to alleviate her pain. Paulina endured, never revealing any information about Gerardo, her boyfriend at the time, who was running an underground resistance newspaper. For many critics, *Death and the Maiden* is not a very complicated play: a woman comes face to face with a man she identifies as having been her torturer fifteen years ago, and, with the very reluctant help of her husband, she decides to put him on trial. The suspense lies in the fact that up until the very end we are not sure whether this man *is* actually guilty or if Paulina's traumatic memory of the events is causing her to be paranoid. Dorfman makes no claims to truth; if anything, the main question posed is, can we ever get to the "real" truth?

Throughout the story Paulina exhibits all the symptoms of a hysterical female whose claims to truth cannot be easily validated. Her profile fits well with conventional representations of female paranoiacs as delusional and irrational. The scars on her body—this form of excessive, tangible truth—fail to provide evidence in the eyes of her composed husband, Gerardo. Dorfman's triangle ironically echoes Freud's account of the female paranoiac he treated. We have the lawyer, Gerardo, the doctor, Roberto Miranda, and the female in distress whose claims are challenged by both males. This obscene case of male bonding at its worst exacerbates Paulina's erratic and violent behavior, a behavior treated as the acting out of a crazy woman out for revenge.

Polanski's adaptation remains faithful to the play except for one important difference: at the very end Miranda *is* exposed as the perpetrator, and Paulina *is* exonerated from the stigma of delusional paranoia. Polanski grants Paulina an excessive knowledge that

Dorfman denies her, elevating her status from a neurotic victim to an assertive agent who manages to prove her truth, male style. Polanski also maintains the theatrical formal qualities; the entire action is confined to Gerardo and Paulina's isolated home, there is minimal use of editing, only three characters appear, and the dialogue is delivered in such a heightened and inflated tone that it almost seeks to reiterate the theatricality of the action itself, to bring forth the idea that all three characters are, in fact, performing a role. Miranda is *acting* as the "innocent" victim of an unfortunate case of mistaken identity; Paulina is *acting* as the "cruel" torturer in a Kafkaesque universe; Gerardo is acting as the "rational" liaison between two diametrically opposed "truths" that cannot be confirmed.

This can also be read as a direct commentary on the theatricality of the implied subject matter itself, the formation and function of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in Chile. The TRC was established on April 20, 1990, investigating civil rights violations and other abuses of power during Pinochet's seventeen-year authoritarian regime. The problem was that "the commission's powers were…doubly limited. It could neither name (let alone judge) those who had committed or been responsible for the abuses, nor could it investigate any cases other than ones that had ended either in death or in the presumption of death."[160] This meant that there were degrees of eligibility when it came to testimonies; it was poignantly ironic that to be considered an "official" victim in Chile,

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[160] This website-www.truthcommission.org- is a comprehensive research project. Its purpose is to provide information that will assist 'designers of future commissions' to address a nation's 'unique needs.' The five examples provided are Chile, Argentina, Guatemala, South Africa, and El Salvador. The fact that they include Chile as one of the most successful examples is a point of contention here. Most of the information I use comes from this project.

to be given a "voice" through testimony and to be granted a "license" to heal, one had to be either dead or presumed dead.[161]

Paulina's erratic behavior begins when she hears on the radio that her husband, Gerardo Escobar, has agreed to chair the TRC despite the limitations imposed, despite the theatricality and hypocrisy involved. This form of betrayal culminates with the arrival of Dr. Miranda and with Gerardo's unwillingness to believe in the doctor's guilt. The problem lies in that during Paulina's torture sessions she was always blindfolded, eliminating, thus, the eyewitness credibility she could have had. Truth, however, is not only written on her body but on Miranda's as well, since she makes a positive

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[161] The Chile Commission on Truth and Reconciliation, also known as the Rettig Commission, consisted of eight members. The four basic tasks were: providing an overview of how the repressive system worked, accounting for every person who died or disappeared between September 1973 and March 1990, proposing measures of reparations, and proposing measures of prevention. The freedoms and limitations of the Commission are best summarized by the Project's researchers:

"The Rettig Commission was given nine months to complete its investigations and write a report. It *did not have subpoena powers* or the ability to compel testimony. It was also explicitly stated in the document creating the commission that *it did not have any judiciary powers,* but was purely an information-gathering instrument. One result of this limitation is that the report does not name the names of those responsible for the crimes that it describes. Thus no new information about those responsible for the past crimes was made available by the Commission's work. All information uncovered by the Rettig Commission was handed over to the courts… The Commission received testimony from over 4,000 complainants as well as a few members of the military who came forward voluntarily. The Commission also used information provided by Chilean Human Rights groups and the Catholic Church. [It] was overtly concerned with meeting the needs of the victims of state violence. The Commissioners took the responsibility of taking testimony very seriously, and considered it a critical part of helping victims reclaim their faith in the State. Victims were politely ushered into state offices, previously the site of violence and fear, and offered coffee. A Chilean flag lay on the desk. Testifiers' stories were listened to with respect and sympathy. Testifiers were permitted to tell the story in whatever form they wished, and they were not cross-examined. The Commission uncovered very little new information about the fate of the disappeared. This failure was due both to the fact that it was not given access to military records and because it did not have any ability to compel evidence from members of the military. Another significant limitation of the Commission's work was that *it only addressed human rights violations resulting in death.* Thus while the Commission's report details the cases of 2,115 individuals killed by government forces and 164 victims of left-wing violence, and names each victim, *it does not provide any information about the estimated 200,000 victims of gross human rights violations. Nor were these individuals given the opportunity to provide testimony to the Commission…*"

One of the reasons for the many limitations was the fact that even after the transition to democracy, the perpetrators' powers still ranked high, as opposed to ranking low-medium in countries such as Argentina and South Africa. One of the most important issues concerned the focus on either justice or healing. In Argentina, for instance, the weight was placed on justice and in South Africa primarily on 'healing through forgiveness;' in Chile the attempt to address both equally ended up canceling each other out.

identification by the sound of his voice and the odor of his body. This excessive presence of bodies seeped in a historical truth unable to be integrated in the historical present in any form of legitimate narrative brings about a crisis in discourse that initiates a vicious recycling of violence, a re-enactment of the past with the key players now in inverted roles. No meta-narrative can articulate the past, no words can tame Paulina's rebellious body when she screams out at Gerardo "I don't exist!" a paradoxical statement that captures the tension between her being there and her just being. Gerardo's inability to intervene in any effective way is symbolic of the breakdown of the relationship between power and knowledge; he is weak and confused, powerful and powerless. The knowledge and truth that the TRC is trying to produce is ideologically contaminated, a staged reconciliation that seeks to restore order by actually burying the "real truth" which resides in Paulina's living body.

Freud argued that female paranoia is an instance of pure female sexuality, a manifestation of a repressed desiring body: "I do not believe that the clock ever ticked" Freud argues, "or that any noise was to be heard at all. The woman's situation justified a sensation of throbbing in the clitoris. This was what she subsequently projected as a perception of an external object" (158-9). Guy Rosolato notes that "Freud views the projection as emanating only from a corporal excitation and from nothing else" (cited in Schor, 210). Throughout Miranda's interrogation Paulina's body emanates a strange eroticism, a mixture of desire and disgust towards both men. When she violently captures Miranda and ties him in a chair, she takes off her panty and shoves it in his mouth sealing it with a duct tape. Whereas verbal language fails to convey truth, body language betrays a twisted sense of intimacy and familiarity between the two, as Paulina, now from a

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position of power, taunts Miranda's body with love bites, whispers in his ear, and all kinds of little perverse private gestures they had allegedly shared in the past. Gerardo and Miranda are unable to control her physically—this excessive body cannot be contained— but both are trying to subjugate her mind. The performativity of language—an attorney's strongest weapon—aims at convincing Paulina she is wrong. Gerardo repeatedly tells her "Paulina, you're ill!" and Miranda will shout on occasion "she's crazy!!" This typical male reaction to a woman's claims forecloses any possibility of an effective use of language as producer of truth; every time Paulina tries to form a coherent narrative of the past, she encounters doubt, skepticism, and condescension.

In *Read My Desire: Lacan Against the Historicists*, Joan Copjec refers to the concept of the "pleb" first proposed by André Glucksmann. "The 'pleb,'" Copjec notes, "as she or he was embodied in workers, students, immigrants, all those made poor, sorry, worthless, or marginal by the society in place, was conceived as endowed with 'the immediacy of a knowledge (*connaissance*) which springs from the realities of suffering and existence'" (1-2). Michel Foucault, not quite comfortable with the concept, argues that "[t]he 'pleb' undoubtedly has no sociological reality. But there is indeed always something which in some way escapes the relations of power... 'The' pleb, undoubtedly, does not exist; but there is 'plebness'…" (2). Copjec points to the similarities between Foucault's claims echoing the Lacanian notions "'The woman does not exist [*La femme n'existe pas*]" and "There is some of One [*Il y a d'l'Un*]" (3). Copjec understands Foucauldian "plebness" as "the notion of an existence without predicate, or, to put it differently, of a *surplus existence* that cannot be caught up in the positivity of the social" (my emphasis, 4).

Paulina, a marginalized pleb, is caught up at this precise threshold of *exister* and *Il y a*. She exists but she cannot be integrated in the Symbolic order because she is denied language, and as Copjec notes, "[t]he existence of a thing materially depends on its being articulated in language, for only in this case can it be said to have an objective—that is to say, a verifiable—existence, one that can be debated by others" (8). In Lacanian terms, Paulina is forcefully asked to inhabit the Real, to regress to a realm that resists representation since it cannot be verbally articulated or symbolized by language. She becomes an empty signifier desperately trying to claim a meaning and sense of identity. The truth she embodies, however, cannot be completely diminished; the indexical scars (female corporeal truth as opposed to the male spiritual one) on her body are represented visually on screen. When Paulina, naked from the waist up, is talking to Gerardo while standing in front of the mirror, her back—filled with scars—is turned on him as he is speaking not directly to her, but to her image in the mirror. In this suggestive blocking, the mirror serves as a mediator between a woman drowning in the Lacanian Real, a floating signifier, and a man who fails to integrate her into the new Symbolic order.

Paulina might be perceived as a difficult character to identify with. This becomes interesting since both Dorfman and Polanski de-historicize and de-contextualize the play/film in a manner that the story almost reads as a myth, a parable free from spatial or temporal specificity. This kind of storytelling tends to build symbolic rather than historical subjects that are supposed to be relatable irrespective of context. What is it, though, about Paulina that might impede spectatorial identification? On a social level her gender reads with ambivalence; she has boyish looks, a boyish haircut, and a masculine

physique (tall, slim, and muscular).[162] The violence against Miranda and her physical strength (especially evident when she pushes Miranda's car off the cliff) are paradigmatic of the stereotypical male. Her mental breakdown and erratic behavior, her irrationality and excessive emotionality, however, are all characteristic of the stereotypical female (even though Gerardo treats her more like a child than a wife). Paulina's dual performativity as both male and female, victim and perpetrator, sane and insane, being and non-being possibly alienates both male and female spectators since she embodies excessive qualities that are undesirable—excessive violence as a man, excessive emotionality as a woman. Paulina is a flawed character just like Gerardo and Miranda, there is nothing noble or heroic about any of them. Reason and meaning are purely subjective; there can be no consensus about *the* truth for Dorfman, whereas for Polanski truth does exist but it is no panacea. This for the traditional paranoiac would be a devastating realization: truth, even if it exists, has no transformative powers, no magical capacities to resolve crises. The Truth *and* Reconciliation Committee should be more appropriately called Truth *or* Reconciliation Committee, since these two objectives appear totally irreconcilable.

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[162] Weaver has often portrayed female characters that exude strength, admiration, and survival, such as Ripley in Ridley Scott's *Alien* (1979). Polanski is also able to maintain the feeling of ambivalence by casting Ben Kingsley as Dr. Roberto Miranda. Only a year before *Death and the Maiden* was released, Kingsley was cast as Stern, Schindler's Jewish accountant in Spielberg's *Schindler's List* (1993)*, not to mention Kingsley's Oscar-winning performance as Gandhi in 1982. Since *Death and the Maiden*, Kingsley has undertaken roles of disturbed, evil characters--*Sexy Beast* is one of them--but audiences up until the mid-1990s the actor was primarily associated with reliable and heroic historical figures. In the Broadway production of the play we experience a very different version of Paulina thanks, in part, to the casting of Glenn Close. Close's role as Alex Forrest in the 1987 blockbuster *Fatal Attraction* contributes to the way audiences, voluntarily or involuntarily, are asked to judge Paulina's state of mind and accuracy of memory. Morace informs us that Dorfman and Nichols (the director) "'locked horns' over the latter's 'Americanizing' of the play" (Morace, 16).

On a psychoanalytic level, identification is hindered because Paulina has no function or meaning in the symbolic order. Let me explain. Lacan perceives lack as always being related to desire. "Desire," he notes, "is a relation to being to lack. The lack is the lack of being properly speaking. It is not the lack of this or that, but lack of being whereby the being exists" (Seminar *The Ego in Freud's Theory*). Lacan also distinguishes the notions of "privation" and "castration" relating the former with the Real and the latter with the Symbolic. In the real, he posits, there is no lack, there is only difference, and the female body is perceived as whole (simply put: women have a vagina, men have a penis). This, Lacan calls privation. "Only with the advent of the symbolic — when language dissects the real, designates an organ as an isolated entity, transforms this thus-designated entity into a signifier, and therefore becomes capable of marking an 'absence' of a penis (i.e., a 'phallus,' insofar as the penis is elevated to the level of a signifier) on woman's body — can individuals be said to be 'castrated'"[163] For Klein privation is the basis for the paranoid-schizoid position. She notes: "Persecutory anxiety, therefore, enters from the beginning into [the baby's] relation to objects in so far as he is exposed to privations" (Klein, p.199).

This is Paulina's paradoxical situation: in the Symbolic, she is absent, she cannot exist, and she cannot be verbally articulated as an entity. The government's decision to exclude living victims from providing testimony and being acknowledged as historical subjects has Paulina ironically seeking entry into the Symbolic *as* castrated, as a symptom of the patriarchal social structure. In the Symbolic, however, this body does not signify lack, as her surplus presence cannot fit neatly into the required social schema.

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[163] Adrian Johnston, "Non-Existence and Sexual Identity: Some Brief Remarks on Meinong and Lacan"

These three characters cannot communicate because each belongs to a different order, as each is desperately seeking to re-define the self and (re) construct a new identity. Gerardo, the quintessential narcissist, is stuck in the Imaginary order. He is so caught up in his idealized image as a mediator between Paulina and Miranda (the Law and Desire) that he cannot move beyond the deceptive surfaces or beyond his own selfish needs. Gerardo arbitrarily assigns *a* meaning (fills the sign) to his wife's state of being, a meaning that is distorted and polluted by his own narcissistic self-image. Paulina, as already mentioned, represents the Real; she resists symbolization and resides outside language, being an object of anxiety, and embodying a truth that is unchangeable and fundamental, a material entity with no signification. Miranda stands for the Symbolic, the linguistic dimension that is unwilling to perform its function. Paulina is demanding that Miranda integrate her into the Symbolic through language, by verbally articulating the historical past in a coherent narrative—not in search of justice but in search of truth.[164] How does (surplus) knowledge work here? Paulina's "paranoia" operates discursively: she is "crazy" because Gerardo and Miranda say so and treat her as such, which is a typical response by the legal system towards rape victims.

Paulina as a vibrant agency, a living subject, died fifteen years ago during excruciating torture sessions; as her body continued to exist she runs back to Gerardo, the man whose life she saved, only to find him in bed with another woman. His excuse: he thought she was dead. Paulina's body represents the "undead," or the "living dead," a horrific creature caught between two worlds and belonging in neither. As such, she breaks the

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[164] Paulina's sole demand is for Miranda to verbally articulate what he did to her, confirm her truth. She is not interested in pressing charges, or making sure that Miranda is punished for his crimes. This mirrors the role and function of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in Chile, which had no judiciary powers and its sole purpose was to gather information.

barrier that separates the real from reality, which as Žižek notes, is "the very condition of a minimum of 'normalcy': 'madness' (psychosis) sets in when this barrier is torn down, when the real overflows reality…or when it is itself included in reality (assuming the form of the 'Other of the Other,' of the paranoiac's prosecutor, for example)" (20). Žižek identifies the motif of the return of the living dead in horror films such as *Halloween*, the George Romero trilogy, and the *Friday the Thirteenth* series, as well as in *Hamlet*, *The Terminator*, and *Robocop*. What brings this disparate body of works together (except for *Hamlet* since the father is an apparition, a specter) is the materiality of bodies that continue to exist even after their death, and their demand to settle unresolved crises that will recuperate an historical reality. Žižek points to the popularity of the fantasy of the return of the living dead: "the fantasy of a person who does not want to stay dead but returns again and again to pose a threat to the living" (22). In these films, he concludes, "…the 'undead' are not portrayed as embodiments of pure evil, of a simple drive to kill or revenge, but as sufferers, pursuing their victims with an awkward persistence, colored by a kind of infinite sadness" (22-3). *Death and the Maiden* also plays on this fantasy; Paulina recalls her symbolic death when she tells Miranda about her life prior to her capture: a beautiful girl with long, curly hair, who wanted to be a doctor, filled with hopes and dreams for the future. What is destroying her now is that she *knows too much*.

Gerardo is trying to shield himself from the destructive knowledge that will shatter his ideal ego. Contrary to the typical Hollywood male fervently pursuing knowledge and truth, Oedipus being the prototypical archetype, Gerardo is running away from it. In a section titled "Knowledge in the Real" Žižek argues that "[a]s soon as the subject comes to 'know too much,' he pays for this excess, surplus knowledge 'in the flesh,' by the very

substance of his being. The ego is above all an entity of this order; it is a series of imaginary identifications upon which the consistency of the subject's being depends, but as soon as the subject 'knows too much,' gets too close to the unconscious truth, his ego dissolves" (44). Paulina is paying for her surplus knowledge in the worst possible way: for the men to continue to remain intact she has to die all over again, remain in the land of the living as "undead," as a material entity devoid of substance or meaning. Whereas Dorfman "sacrifices" Paulina by insisting on a forced and staged reconciliation among a devastated victim, a remorseless perpetrator, and a clueless bystander, Polanski drastically shifts the focus from reconciliation to truth; it might not bring justice or happiness, but it does resuscitate Paulina's fragmented body and it does restore her perceived "damaged" intellect. In the final scene, all three are at a concert hall; the orchestra is playing Schubert's "Death and the Maiden"; Paulina and Miranda exchange suggestive glances; no one will be punished, no one will be forgiven or forgotten, but everyone *knows*, and this shared knowledge (*the* truth) allows them to co-exist.

Death and the Maiden has been characterized as a revenge story and a morality story without a moral; this is not the case. Paulina is not out for revenge; it is not the atrocities of the past she is reacting to but the atrocities of the present. In order for her to become a survivor first she has to be acknowledged as a victim. A survivor is a former victim; as long as her past cannot find expression through language, through her own voice, and since the TRC privileges reconciliation over truth, what Paulina seeks is the restoration of the historical truth, the "real real truth" as she repeatedly states. Dorfman leaves Paulina stuck in a lingering state between the Real and the Imaginary, since the play ends without knowing whether Miranda was guilty or innocent. Her existence is not validated, her

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voice is drowned, her truth denied. The question the play poses but leaves unanswered is *can we ever really get to the truth*? Polanski changes the question to, *once we have the truth what do we do with it*? Miranda goes unpunished, leaving the audience reflecting on the disfunctionality of the law, the fine line between law and ethics, as well as on Paulina's closure as an acknowledged official victim. But, more importantly, Polanski restores Paulina's sense of self, re-integrates her into the Symbolic by endowing her with a surplus knowledge—one that Miranda confirms in his own words—that may first appear as corporeal but finally at the end moves into the domain of the intellect.

Death and the Maiden, as Orit Kamir notes, must, above all, be viewed as a Polanski film.[165] The claustrophobic mise-en-scène, the unspeakable violence against women by weak and un-heroic men, and the paranoid view of the world, are elements that have defined Polanski's body of work. But, more than any other film, this particular one reveals the director's tormented and split psyche, as he identifies equally with all three characters. Perhaps this is partly why the audience keeps shifting positions too, and is unable to maintain a single point of identification: We have:

> Polanski the guilt-ridden husband, who has to come to terms with the savage killing with his own young wife, Sharon Tate, by Charles Manson and his gang in 1969; Polanski the man himself accused, eight years after that, of statutory rape [of a thirteen-year-old girl], who, like the doctor, steadfastly continued to maintain his innocence,…and before either of those events, Polanski, the young Jewish victim of a Fascist regime during the Nazi occupation of his native Poland (cited in Kamir, 69)

This neutrality, however, dissolves when Miranda finally confesses. If, indeed, this film was Polanski's way of negotiating and reflecting on his own flirting with paranoia, his

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[165] Orit Kamir, "Cinematic Judgment and Jurisprudence: A Woman's Memory, Recovery and Justice in a Post-Traumatic Society (A Study of Polanski's *Death and the Maiden*)" *Law on the Screen*, 2005, pp. 27-81.

own personal battle with inner and outer demons, the fact that a woman's paranoia is finally vindicated (in most Polanski films, women may not be stereotypically portrayed but they do suffer due to stereotypically violent men) reflects a wish—conscious or unconscious—to repair the female psyche in a manner quite uncharacteristic of Hollywood cinema. Paulina does not fit into any of the stock female types; she is light years away from the hypersexual *femme fatale*, the passive victim, the innocent and naïve damsel in distress, the spiteful desperate housewife, or the typical "crazy" woman.

A little less than thirty years before *Death and the Maiden* was released, Polanski directed *Rosemary's Baby*, a film that also deals with female paranoia but of a different kind. In retrospect, the film reads as a tragically ironic foreshadowing of the fate that would await Polanski's wife, Sharon Tate, and their unborn child in 1969.

Rosemary's Baby: **Giving Birth to Truth**

We have all heard the expression "selling my firstborn to the devil" in order to fulfill a wish of a professional or personal nature. *Rosemary's Baby* is, in a nutshell, exactly about that; in this 1968 "indecent proposal" (literally) from hell, an unscrupulously ambitious actor, Guy Woodhouse (played by John Cassavetes), cuts a deal with the members of a devil-worshipping cult in order to advance his career: he offers up his wife, Rosemary (played by Mia Farrow), to mother Lucifer's offspring. The film is based on the 1967 best-selling novel by Ira Levin.

The story begins when the young couple moves into a new apartment in New York City. Soon after they move in, Rosemary meets an older couple, Roman and Minnie Castevet, a stereotypically "cute" childless and nosy duet. After accepting a dinner

invitation from the Castevets, Guy's career begins to take off. Rosemary soon becomes pregnant and Minnie becomes a surrogate mother figure. Instead of a glowing mother-to-be, however, Rosemary is confronted with a very peculiar pregnancy that causes her unbearable pain and weight loss. Guy's incomprehensible attachment to the Castevets arouses Rosemary's suspicions that something is wrong; as her pregnancy progresses, she becomes increasingly paranoid about herself and her child's safety. When she confides to her close friend Hutch about the Castevets, he mysteriously dies. When she eventually has the baby she is told that it died. In the final scene Rosemary, with a knife in her hand, discovers the truth about the conspiracy against her. In a somewhat grotesque and dubious ending, Rosemary, surrounded by the satanic cult, is rocking her baby to sleep.

Despite its different subject matter *Rosemary's Baby* shares the same basic theme with *Death and the Maiden*: a woman betrayed in the worst possible way by the man she loves more than anything. The story is told *purely* from the perspective of Rosemary, as she is present in every single scene. The subjective storytelling renders the spectator stuck and limited to whatever information Rosemary is trying to collect about the Castevets. We never get to see Roman and Guy conspiring, Guy outside Rosemary's range, or Hutch (the actual "father" who knew *too much*). But, like Paulina, Rosemary's truth is written on her body or, rather, growing in her body. Her body is rebelling against this extreme form of violence, she *knows* something is wrong but words fail her. Like Gerardo, Guy is weak, ambitious, extremely narcissistic, and more than willing to sacrifice his wife for the advancement of his career. He also treats Rosemary like a child more than a spouse; on numerous occasions, he tries to control her actions, her thoughts, and her behavior, without acknowledging any of her concerns or suspicions about the conspiracy at play.

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Ira Levin's Rosemary is an intelligent and rational woman. Guy's shadiness is much more subtle in the novel and the same can be said for the Castevets. Polanski's cinematography reveals, as we shall see, the suspicious activity in more overt ways. As with Dorfman, Levin's story allows for more ambiguity, more uncertainty about Rosemary's mental state.

From the opening credits, Rosemary's "infancy" is established as the camera pans over New York City and we hear her singing in her childlike voice Krzysztof Komeda's "Lullaby." Like children, Rosemary is endowed with a disarming honesty and an adorable naiveté, as well as a cheerful enthusiasm about life. But she is also a keen observer with an eye for detail. When they arrive at the apartment and the building manager is showing them around, Rosemary notices a little note written by the former tenant that reads "I can no longer associate myself." We see that she knows all about plants, and has a natural curiosity about everyone and everything. Guy, on the other hand, is completely the opposite: unenthusiastic, indifferent, and self-involved.

When Rosemary begins to act "paranoid" about her peculiar pregnancy and Guy's peculiar attachment to the Castevets, Hutch is the only person she can turn too. This benevolent "hovering" father figure, who echoes Hamlet's father in his attempt to expose foul play, is the only one who *knows* the truth and is able to pass this knowledge on to Rosemary even if he has to do it from the grave. But, contrary to Hamlet who feigned madness in order to get to the truth, Rosemary is made to believe she *is* paranoid in the traditional manner women have suffered the stigma of mental disease. As already mentioned, the story is told purely from Rosemary's point of view with one exception: the memorable rape scene. This is the only instance where the spectator's gaze parts with

Rosemary's, since she has been drugged by the satanic cult. Polanski shoots the rape scene in a surrealist style that has the audience wondering if this is a dream or if this unspeakable violent act is actually happening. The scratches on Rosemary's body the next morning, however, reveal that which Guy is trying to conceal: the misappropriation of the female body in the most egregious manner. Throughout the rape scene the only sound heard is the ticking of a clock, a sound that resembles a time bomb ready to explode. The moment the wounds on Rosemary's body become ocular proof of foul play is the moment when "female" paranoia begins to dissolve to "plain" genderless paranoia.

Contrary to Paulina who is a more difficult character to identify with (mainly because she does not conform to "traditional" gender categories), Rosemary is initially portrayed in accordance with the Hollywood typical female: sweet, kind, trusting housewife, in short, a perfect target for male abuse. Most of the time she is confined in the apartment under the controlling gaze of Minnie who will show up uninvited at all times of the day. This intrusive constant presence frustrates Rosemary (and the audience) who seems unable to do anything or enjoy any privacy outside Minnie's watchful eye. The peculiar neighbors can be seen as the predecessors of those in *The Tenant* as the atmosphere is just as tense, chilling, and ominous, indicating once again Polanski's paranoid disposition towards city dwelling. What induces more fear, though, is that in Polanski's universe—as in Hitchcock's—horror resides in the ordinary, in everyday people, not in monsters (vampires or werewolves) but in the monstrosity of regular human beings.[166]

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[166] The elderly Dr. Sapirstein (who is part of the satanic cult) is played by Ralph Bellamy, an actor who has traditionally played ordinary and harmless characters. Polanski's choice to cast Bellamy as the shady doctor could be seen as a deliberate attempt to represent horror in the ordinary.

The uncanny representation of pregnancy, however, renders the female body a host for the birth of evil, a source of horror, not as a signifier of lack this time, but as a frightening excess.[167] The fact that Rosemary becomes convinced that everyone is after her baby (her doctor, her neighbors, even her own husband) and she desperately tries to protect it, is also an ironic commentary on the woman nurturing evil, oblivious to the actual reality or meaning of her actions. In some ways, Polanski seems to set up the story in a manner that Rosemary is partly to blame for her own misfortunes. *She* persuades Guy to take the apartment, *she* pushes for the dinner with Minnie and Roman, and let us not forget, *she* is the one who wants to get pregnant and start a family. As ludicrous as this reasoning may seem in the twenty-first century, it has been the paradigmatic way of assigning blame to female victims, especially rape victims: "*she was asking for it*." The rape episode also resonates with Schreber's fantasies of sexual abuse, after being transformed into a woman. He, of course, believes himself as the target of God rather than the Devil. Read side by side, the two rape scenes suggest a necessity for sexual violence against women as a means of bringing about an "new order of things."

Critics have commented on *Rosemary's Baby* as a story where, due to its subjective narration, the spectator cannot be sure whether Rosemary is delusional or not.[168] This is not exactly the case. Polanski's camera, as well as a series of "clues," communicates that which cannot be spoken of or validated in any concrete manner from the very beginning. On more than one occasion, Polanski likes to shoot the characters from behind in medium close-ups, creating the feeling of an invisible presence following the couple from up

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[167] The uncanny imagery of pregnancy is also prevalent in Schreber's *Memoirs*. The irony lies in Schreber's delusional fear of being impregnated by God, as opposed to Rosemary's body hosting the seed of Satan.

[168] See Lucy Fischer's "Birth Traumas: Parturition and Horror in 'Rosemary's Baby'" *Cinema Journal*, Vol. 31. (Spring, 1992), pp. 3-18.

close. This, coupled with the hyper-visible, omnipresent neighbors, conveys to the viewer a sense of imminent danger that, even though it cannot be verbally communicated, is always there. The series of "coincidences" where something happens at the precise moment Rosemary is about to receive information are not meant to be perceived as random events. They are self-consciously rendered suspicious cultivating the type of paranoia typical of Hollywood, where, like the protagonist, the audience *knows* something is wrong, already in possession of the truth, and what is pursued is material evidence that will confirm what is already known.

As in *Death and the Maiden*, doctors do not fair well in *Rosemary's Baby*. When Rosemary finds out she is pregnant, the Castevets, with Guy's support, insist she go to Dr. Sapirstein, a close friend of theirs, rather than Dr. Hill. The former, we eventually find out is part of the conspiracy; but when Rosemary turns to Dr. Hill for protection by confiding in him her most private thoughts about the safety of her child, he immediately dismisses her claims, and calls her husband and Dr. Sapirstein to come and pick her up. The medical profession runs once again to the rescue of the "sane" patriarch, by arbitrarily declaring the female "insane." Just as Freud locates female paranoia in the body, Polanski does too, but he transforms distortion to truth, intangible violence to tangible violence, irrational suspicion to justifiable suspicion. How often are women's suspicions confirmed in Hollywood, and how often do they live to say "I told you so"? The tendency to discredit the female intellect is a common occurrence, and Polanski plays on this stereotype but does not give in. One might wonder how Rosemary can be seen as anything *but* as the typical female victim.

This is where the dubious final scene comes in. After Rosemary is told that her baby died, she begins to hear a baby's cry coming from next door. She gets out of bed grabs a kitchen knife and enters the Castevet apartment through the connecting door (the one the former tenant had suggestively sealed with a wooden piece of furniture). As she enters the living room where all the members of the cult have gathered, she spots Guy and a black cradle where the cry is coming from. When she looks at the baby she lets out a scream of horror and says: "What have you done to it? What have you done to its eyes?" The audience never sees the baby; Rosemary's reaction shot captures the unrepresentability of the baby's horrific image; all we get is a short superimposed shot of the devil's eyes (a form of flashback of the rape scene). This is the second time the spectator's gaze parts with Rosemary's, but contrary to the rape scene, now it is the audience being deprived of the visual dimension of reality. As with Paulina, Rosemary's truth cannot be confirmed until someone else, the perpetrator, verbalizes it; Roman proudly "confesses" the truth and announces the arrival of the devil's offspring, the anti-Christ *she* brought into the world.

How are we to read Rosemary rocking her baby to sleep? One possible reading of Rosemary is as the defeated victim surrendering to the will of the powerful men. In that respect, the film remains with the traditional representation of female victimization. I believe, however, that Polanski also allows for a different interpretation. Rosemary's suspicions are justified; when she birthed "evil" she also birthed the "truth," a material entity that is evidence of the conspiracy against her. Guy cowardly stands in the background, avoiding any eye contact with Rosemary. When he finally approaches her it is only to add insult to injury by trying to explain how all this is going to work to their

advantage. The discrepancy between image and word is so profound, that no image or word can reconcile Rosemary with reality. Lost for words, Rosemary spits in his face. Again, Polanski privileges truth over punishment or reconciliation, and integrates Rosemary into this new Symbolic (dis)order as the primary caretaker of the unrepresentable Other. There is no morality lesson involved, no consequences for foul actions, no revenge; just the inclusion of Rosemary who refuses to suffer the politics of exclusion any longer, even if that means joining the group. Critics have noted this preposterous ending being more appropriate perhaps for the black comedy subgenre instead of the horror film, which is a legitimate claim. But as in *The Tenant*, Polanski's black humor and grotesque characters simultaneously cultivate and mock paranoia in the sense that if reality is far more horrific and unspeakable than any delusional fantasy, are we living in a post-paranoid era? In both *Death and the Maiden* and *Rosemary's Baby* Polanski ascribes to the Greek tragedy tenant of off-stage violence (in this case off-screen violence) assigning the audience the difficult but creative task of visualizing it on their own. Contrary to Hitchcock, Polanski does not like flashbacks. In a typical Hollywood suspense film truth is usually revealed through the use of a flashback, as in *Vertigo*, for example, where violence against Elster's wife takes place off-screen, and only towards the end does Hitchcock allow the audience to actually witness her murder. Hitchcock, in other words, often defers visibility, whereas Polanski prohibits it altogether. We have to rely on Paulina's words, on her own memory, and we have to rely on Rosemary's gaze for identifying the truth. The men are not only un-heroic but completely irrelevant, incapable of any kind of meaningful intervention (just like Polanski himself was incapable of being there to protect his wife and child).

Conclusions

Female paranoia exists in Hollywood as a condition that not only crosses the boundaries of reason in terms of a culturally defined sense of normalcy, but also in terms of gender stereotypes. Female "paranoiacs" differ from their male counterparts in that when it comes to women, paranoia will usually remain within the conventional pathological state of a distorted knowledge. Polanski's intervention rests on two basic premises: women are victimized by men, and men are weak and narcissistic human beings. The very notion that a mental disorder manifests itself differently in men and women is, at the very least, problematic not to mention culturally biased. The cultural bias that informed all of Freud's writings is common knowledge, so engaging in a debate with a text that screams sexism is not only intellectually counter-productive, but almost impossible to analyze as anything other than one more social document that sought to maintain the patriarchal status quo and celebrate the cognitive superiority of the male.[169] Hollywood has hardly been impervious to the gendering of paranoia; Brunswick's remark about paranoia being essentially a masculine psychosis, as well as Schor's comment on the intellectual hyper-activity associated with the male model, point to a rhetoric that treats paranoia as a privileged condition not based on the discourse itself, that is, not on *what* is being stated or claimed but rather on *who* makes the claims to truth. Women have been traditionally excluded from the authoritative position of "the subject supposed to know." In film, contrary to the male paranoiac who stands out in a crowd of naïve individuals as the sole possessor of truth, and whose ordeals stem from this excessive

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[169] Julia Kristeva's essay "Is there a Feminine Genius?" *Critical Inquiry*, Spring 2004 v30 i3 p. 493 (12) offers an insightful inquiry vis-à-vis the female intellect.

knowledge, the female paranoiac is burdened with the stigma of inauthenticity and excessive irrationality.

Roman Polanski's *Death and the Maiden* and *Rosemary's Baby* are two rare instances where the women are portrayed as subjects who *do* know too much.[170] The dichotomy of masculine/feminine is blurred; it is not that women possess this surplus knowledge male style, it is not a matter of simplistically swapping positions (women acting as men, men acting as women). What Polanski achieves in these films is *the construction of the female paranoiac as a woman*, with all the vicissitudes and the suffering women have endured. Rosemary and Paulina transgress gender boundaries as much as they remain within them, and so do Guy and Gerardo, Miranda and Roman. The women are victimized, they are over-emotional, they are treated as crazy and hysterical, and their statements are discredited by men who seek to control their reality. At the same time, though, it is the women who actively seek the truth, and pursue it relentlessly. Whereas their intellectual integrity is constantly called into question, their bodies assert their presence as repositories of truth, as material evidence that cannot be suppressed. The men still occupy the privileged position of power in the social hierarchy but in a cowardly way they strive to uphold a false reality that will safeguard their current social status. Polanski demystifies the male hero but does so without a forced glorification of women. The fine line between reason and irrationality, truth and deception, perpetrator and victim is not defined along gender parameters; Rosemary and Paulina are not examples of *female*

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[170] Francis D. Lyon's *The Girl Who Knew Too Much* (1970), is an independent film where the female heroine is portrayed as *too* smart for her own good. Her superior intelligence results in her death. Even though this is not a Hollywood film, the woman's tragic fate (on account of her extreme intelligence) is still worth noting. Another film bearing the same title comes from Italy. *La Ragazza che sapeva troppo* (*The Girl Who Knew Too Much*, Mario Bava, 1964) is a rare occasion where the woman's claims are supported by a doctor, the only man who believes her not to be delusional.

paranoia in the manner Freud gendered the condition; neither are they "paranoid" in the popular way Hollywood has gendered paranoia as an exclusive boys' club into which somehow they managed to sneak from the back door. These women deviate from the stock archetypes that spectators have learned to identify and identify with, and this is partly why Paulina can be seen as an unrelatable character and Rosemary catches us off guard at the end.

Consider Madeleine/Judy in Hitchcock's *Vertigo*. This film can also serve as an example where the excessive presence of a woman's body becomes material evidence of *the* truth, the conspiracy at play. Judy is a victim as much as a perpetrator and so is Scottie (he indirectly drives Judy to plunge to her death since he forces her up the tower), Elster is the archetypical villain, and Madeleine the archetypical victim. In Hitchcock's case, however, "justice" is served by the brutal double killing of the women, and the disposal of the miasmatic bodies that pose a threat to the patriarchal order; neither Elster nor Scottie suffer any consequences for their actions. Scottie relates to Madeleine and Judy as partial objects, regressing to the paranoid-schizoid position where the former is experienced as all good (idealized) and the latter as all bad (demonized), but when he finally realizes that they are one and the same—entering the depressive position—he is faced with the realization that the loving partial object was only a fantasy and instead of seeking to repair it he sets out to destroy it. The motif of death as a ritual of purification and restoration of order is certainly not unique to Hitchcock; we can trace it all the way back to classical antiquity in the works of Sophocles, Aeschylus, and Euripides. The construction of the male paranoiac as charismatic and of the female as diseased, however, is another identifiable Kleinian split that Hitchcock was unable or unwilling to move

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beyond. The ambivalence—the love/hate relationship—that Hitchcock scholars have identified regarding the director's disposition towards women conspicuously dissipates when it comes to paranoia and paranoid characters.

Modleski's *The Women Who Knew Too Much* reflects the desire to read women on screen as well as female spectators as active subjects rather than simply "…passive objects of male voyeuristic and sadistic impulses" (2). Modleski reads Hitchcock's heroines against the grain by arguing that "…time and again in Hitchcock films the strong fascination and identification with femininity revealed in them subverts the claims to mastery and authority not only of the male characters but of the director himself" (3). What is of particular interest in this case, however, is the title itself: Modleski uses the notion of *knowing too much* symbolically rather than literally, as way of transforming these female characters into repositories of an essential knowledge that empowers them, a surplus knowledge that neither the male characters nor Hitchcock himself could contain.

When seen in its entirety, Polanski's body of work on paranoia cannot be comfortably discussed in terms of gender, or at least as comfortably as Hitchcock's films. Rather than simplistically situate women in the coveted masculine position, he deconstructs the very idea of a male and a female paranoid as two separate and hierarchically structured domains making it, thus, possible for women to gain access to the privileged surplus knowledge they have been traditionally excluded from in Hollywood cinema. From a psychoanalytic perspective, the female body signifies lack and that becomes a source of anxiety that needs to be dealt with if the male is to enjoy women on screen. But it also seems that *excess* elicits an anxiety that ignites a different type of "castration" threat, the fear of the castrated Phallus as a signifier of power, control, and domination. Paulina's

and Rosemary's bodies as material manifestations of truth are terrifying because they simultaneously stand as the castrated, silenced victims *and* as the possessors of truth, the latter being almost always a male privilege. These meaningful bodies, lacking lack, reveal (just by being there) all that language tries to distort. Hollywood has hosted a plethora of paranoiacs most of which have been men, gifted men. The implications of gendering paranoia mainly pertain to the perpetuation of the naturalized perception of women as intellectually inferior, driven by emotion rather than intellect. Polanski complicates and problematizes the rigid dichotomy without relying on traditional representations of female or male archetypes commonly found in the horror/suspense genre. When Freud's theory is seen through Polanski's lens paranoia is indeed located in the female body, not as a form of repressed sexual desire that contaminates the intellect but as a tangible truth asserting its reality. From this perspective, these films indeed might be "cases of paranoia running counter to the psychoanalytic theory of the disease."

Epilogue

Paranoia, in addition to its clinical definition, defines a cultural phenomenon, a film genre, and a political style. It is a distorted mode of thought that seeks to impose causality and clear, rational explanations, by relying primarily on binary categorizations. Clinical and psychoanalytic definitions have infiltrated the artistic domain—as we saw with *The Tenant* and *Repulsion*; Hollywood, however, has consistently relied on the paranoid model as another means of celebrating the male intellect. The difficulty of classifying paranoia in the medical field perhaps contributes to the easily appropriation of the term by cultural and political agents. Paranoia fixes meaning; but, ironically, meaning has also been fixed regarding paranoia. In this project I have tried to illustrate the various ways it operates, and the heterogeneous texts it informs. Rather than focus on conspiratorial texts, which is traditionally where paranoid thought resides, the focus was mainly (but not solely) on texts that have not been approached as cases of paranoid storytelling. Paranoia is not specific to the conspiracy genre; the latter only offers a limited insight about paranoid thought. When considered independently, paranoia rears its head in narratives that are seldom if ever experienced as "paranoid."

Furthermore, when considered alongside other critical concepts, paranoia becomes an even more complex, and multi-faceted affair. When divorced from conspiracy, it allows the observation of other mechanisms at work (as we saw with fetishism and *JFK*). When considered along gender lines, it reveals the wide discrepancies in the representation of male and female paranoia. When situated within the postmodern condition it highlights the paradoxical relationship it holds to an epoch that has been defined as the "age of

paranoia." When considered as a structural model, one can observe how paranoid elements surreptitiously contribute, if not define, both the construction of the Hollywood hero and the Hollywood spectator. When considered in relationship to Greek myth, it reveals itself as an epistemology of re-assurance, a means of providing the comfort of meaning and understanding. As a political weapon, it often provides the basis for action (usually right wing politics) and *re*action (predominantly left wing agenda). Either way, paranoia has been a popular means of discrediting an opponent's claims and beliefs, as well as defending one's own. It is seldom, if ever, a self-proclaimed condition: the paranoid individual never perceives himself as such; the pejorative connotation of the term naturally prohibits perceiving one's reality as false and distorted.

The Schreber case complicates this last statement. Freud stresses the hyper-cognitivity at work and Schreber's unusually keen intellect, a brilliant mind with the capacity for Orwellian double-thinking (that is, the ability to simultaneously hold two contradictory beliefs as both being true).[171] The same does not apply to women. Hollywood ascribes mainly to *this* aspect of the male paranoiac; his excessive intellectual ability.

Why is it important to identify this pattern? Paranoia as a signifier for abnormality, irrationality, and delusion automatically invalidates claims or thoughts that cannot be substantiated, and this can certainly be the case. Paranoia as a pathology *does* exist. But

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[171] In *Nineteen Eighty Four*, Orwell notes: "To know and not to know, to be conscious of complete truthfulness while telling carefully-constructed lies, to hold simultaneously two opinions which cancelled out, knowing them to be contradictory and believing in both of them; to use logic against logic, to repudiate morality while laying claim to it, to believe that democracy was impossible and that the Party was the guardian of democracy; to forget whatever it was necessary to forget, then to draw it back at the moment when it was needed, and then promptly to forget it again: and above all, to apply the same process to the process itself. That was the ultimate subtlety: consciously to induce unconsciousness, and then, once again, to become unconscious of the act of hypnosis you had just performed. Even to understand the word 'doublethink' involved using doublethink" (176-7).

at the same time one can observe—at least in Hollywood—that the same patterns of thought, storytelling, and narrative structure, can re-define paranoia as normative behavior. On the thematic level, the notion of paranoid narratives cancels out the pathology implied the moment the hero's beliefs are confirmed. The ideological implications are not to be ignored: in conspiratorial narratives danger and corruption exist; recent films such as *The Da Vinci Code* (Ron Howard, 2006), and *National Treasure: Book of Secrets* (Jon Turteltaub, 2007), suggest that the world is infested with hidden historical truths we are not aware of (which cultivates fear and uncertainty). At the same time, though, these films construct and promote the idea of the male paranoiac as the ultimate figure with an unmatched intellect and the ability to reveal truth and restore order (which cultivates comfort and hope). The films optimistically re-assure that meaning and truth do exist and so does the *man* who has access to them. The primary function, thus, of Hollywood paranoia is not to just question the past or present, nor is it to simply instill anxiety in the viewer. Rather, Hollywood reiterates that evil exists (in all shapes and forms), instills anxiety, and then appeases it.

In *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920), Freud relates a story about a game his grandson loved to play. Little Ernst had a reel attached to a piece of string; he would toss it away from him and yell "fort!"(where he could no longer see it), then he would pull it back and joyfully make it re-appear. Freud interpreted the fort/da game (gone/there) as a mechanism for the little boy to manage his anxiety about being separated from his mother. Ernst's ability to control the presence and absence of objects symbolized the ability to control the mother's absence (the reel standing in for the mother). D. Willbern notes: "In human psychological development, symbolism coincides with the emergence

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of language, or the child's entry into the field of culturally symbolic sounds and words. Language is one way we give presence to (or re-present) people, ideas, events, and feelings. It's how we recover the past, or make what is gone, there."

Hollywood, one might argue, functions in similar ways. It tosses "truth" where it cannot be seen, only to recover it and make it re-appear. The ability to control presence and absence is one way of recovering what is perceived lost or absent. In this symbolic game, Hollywood in one grand gesture simultaneously instills and allays anxiety.

A Final Thought

It would be difficult to explore cultural expressions of paranoia without at least briefly address the events on September 11th, 2001. The destruction of the twin towers—which stood proudly as a symbol of American power and capitalism—is the most devastating blow in the history of the United States. Conspiracy theories immediately began to question the official version, the 9/11 Commission Report, that proclaimed Al Qaeda as solely responsible for the attacks. The main theory is that the government *knew* about the attack and chose to ignore that knowledge. *Loose Change* directed by Dylan Avery is a controversial documentary that claims that the 9/11 attacks were orchestrated and carried out by elements *within* the United States government. Michael Moore's *Fahrenheit 9/11* makes a controversial statement about President Bush, his relations with the Bin Laden family, the War on Terror, and his failure to *re-cognize* signs that were already there. Moore constructs Bush as a *man who knew too much* (despite his lack of intellect) and did nothing.

Hollywood has been less inclined, so far, to join the conspiratorial bandwagon. Even Oliver Stone rather than "attack" his audience with one of his usual anti-government visual tirades (*JFK*, *Born on the Fourth of July*, *Nixon*), he, instead, directs *World Trade Center* (2006) a melodramatic story of survival and endurance. *United 93* (Paul Greengrass, 2006) narrates the heroic sacrifice of the passengers who averted the terrorist plot when their plane crashed in Pennsylvania. Both films on the most devastating conspiracy of the twenty-first century approach the event in a very safe and unprovocative manner. Neither tries to interrogate history, to reveal information, to interpret or criticize. Neither makes claim to excessive knowledge about what, how, or why it happened. Neither is a political statement. Both celebrate and honor American endurance, bravery, and perseverance. The inconceivable trauma of 9/11 is so profound and so recent that any attempt at this point to rationalize according to the Hollywood "logic" would most probably meet with resistance and even hostility. Not since World War II and the Holocaust, did a people experience such terror and helplessness, such a massive attack on nation and national identity.

Part of the Hollywood appeal has been inviting the viewer to vicariously experience danger and emerge unscathed (compliments of the male paranoiac with whom we identify). But if scenarios of total catastrophe and total conspiracy have been long surpassed by reality, can we still be talking about paranoia as unfounded fear, as an unreasonable reaction? Since 2001, paranoia is not merely an attitude, a mode of thought, or a condition; it is becoming a way of life. If there is no poetry after Auschwitz, perhaps there is no paranoia since 9/11.

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