(un)real (un)realities:
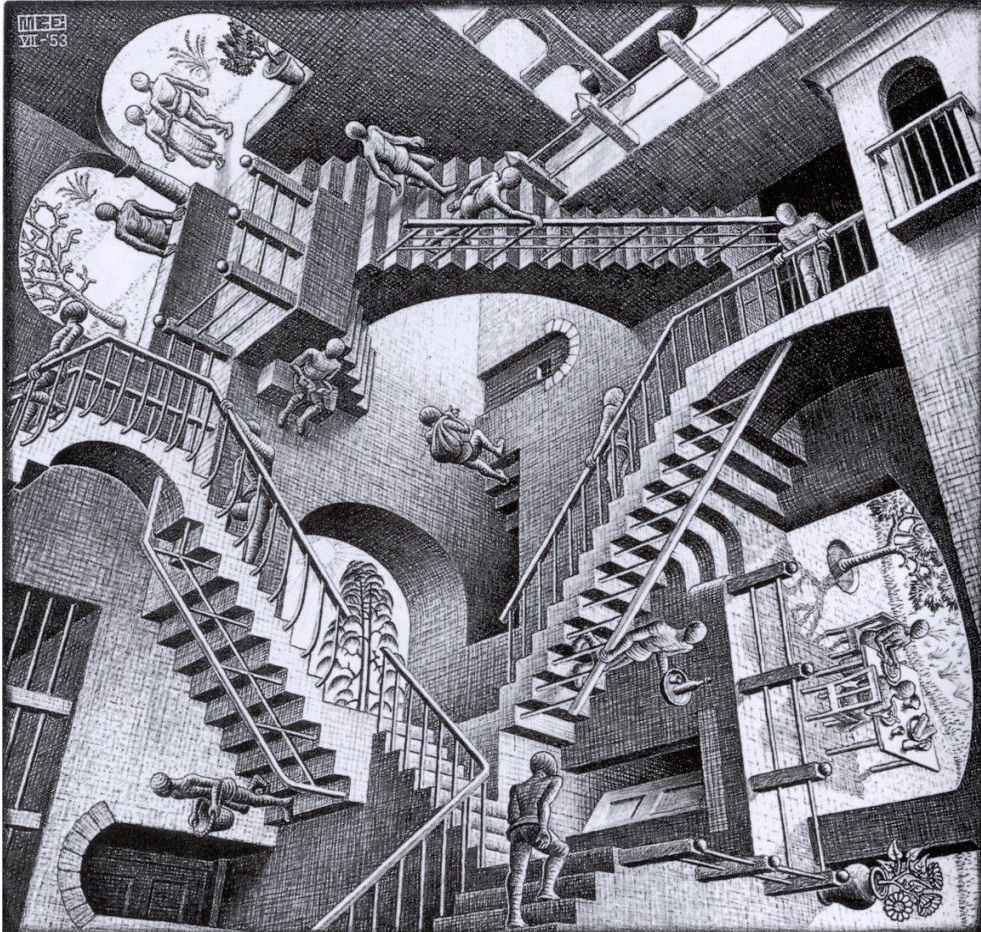
Exploring the confusion of reality and unreality through cinema

VICENTE DIAZ GANDASEGUI

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'Te llaman porvenir porque no vienes nunca'

(Gonzalez, 1997)

A Lesley, por ayudarme a última hora cuando más
lo necesitaba.
A Linda por dedicar multitud de horas a hacer
esta tesis mas britanica.
Mas que nunca (y ahora que es mayor) a mi familia,
por vuestro apoyo incondicional.
A mis amigos, que desde España o Gales siempre han
creído en mí.
Al fútbol, que ha sido la única escapatoria que ha
sobrevivido todo este tiempo.
A mi fiel Toshi.
Por último, pero por encima de todo, a Gosia, por tu
paciencia, ánimos, infinitos sacrificios y quedarte a mi
lado todo este tiempo.

Abstract

This thesis examines the confusion of reality and unreality in contemporary media discourses, and focuses specifically upon the medium of cinema. The art of our time, cinema reflects the postmodern fusion between machine and culture. As such, a crucial concern of this work, which addresses the impact of digital and visual technological developments in western societies and examines how such advances have come to supersede the historical and cultural imperatives, is precisely this resultant confusion/fragmentation. The thesis analyzes how audiences interpret the current cinematic evolution, based on computer generated imagery, and how their subjectivity influences and impacts upon knowledge, ideology, culture and society as a whole.

The creation of (un)realities in fictional spaces is most apparent in such concurrent places as the Internet, videogames and Virtual Reality, spaces which are certainly of interest to this thesis. However, it is also crucial to note that recent years have seen a proliferation of films based on the confusion between reality and unreality; and, further, that these have enforced a fear of being deceived by technology. Indeed, such post-classical films as *Total Recall* (Verhoeven, 1990), *The Lawnmower Man* (Leonard, 1992), *The Matrix* (Wachowski and Wachowski, 1999) and *eXistenZ* (Cronenberg, 1999) materialize this fear cinematographically; a fear which is arguably then assimilated by the spectators because this fear is projected onto their lives. In this respect, it is essential to be aware of the creation of new spaces, identify related boundaries and understand our own creations in order to have control over our destiny. Concepts such as (un)reality, a hybrid of reality and fiction, are essential to refer to the inventions, contexts and information that appears in a world where atoms and a binary of 0s and 1s constitute a dual code to which our lives conform.

The production of an original film, *Luna* (Diaz Gandasegui, 2007), works in synergy with the written text to illuminate the complexities of (un)reality and the vital influence of technology on its confusion.

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Introduction

The confusion between reality and unreality is not a new phenomenon exclusive to the moment in which we live, but it has certainly acquired of late emergent and distinctive characteristics that shape it in a particular manner. The influence of technology in this process is undeniable. Thus, the introduction of new visual technologies that profoundly affect our observations of reality, communication, expression, knowledge and entertainment in a society governed by the principles and structures created during the Enlightenment, has produced a rupture between what we know and what we think we know. This research will not specifically refer to a crisis in western knowledge, but, rather, to a potential crisis of the social structures that conform to what we understand today as Western Society.

There are as many interpretations of the confusion between reality and unreality as stages in different cultures. Relevant philosophical authors in the history of western culture such as Plato, René Descartes, David Hume and George Berkeley, writers such as Jorge Luis Borges and cultural psychoanalysts such as Jacques Lacan have tried to illustrate, in a diversity of forms, the relationship between reality and unreality. Today a vast canon of authors such as Jean Baudrillard, Slavoj Žižek, Frederic Jameson, Manuel Castells, Scott Lash and Paul Virillio strive to analyze, understand and explain the world around us, a world of 0s and 1s that is immersed in, and connected to, a material reality. Virtuality and reality have fused and, in the process, we have been dragged into an *unknown region,* a zone that has received different names including Cyberspace and Hyperreality and that I denominate *(un)reality*. It is this wholly intriguing region that is explored in this thesis.

It is undeniable that technology has assumed a fundamental relevance in the perception of reality. The digitalization of the image, the virtualization of the media, and the relevance attributed in our lives to videogames and the Internet have changed the way that we observe and, most significantly, participate in the world. The technologically mediated perception and experience of today is heading towards a virtual and/or interactive

relationship with the world, whereby we can select, transform, copy or erase that which we wish, or do not wish, to see or become part of. Cinema, which is simultaneously affected by and a witness to this process, is a perfect medium to observe the effects and 'reflects' of technology and its consequences. The use of the 'mirror' or the 'dream' as a metaphor to explain the properties and capabilities of cinema is recurrent in this research. Indeed, through the existing technology, films can be seen to filter and condense the social imagination and unconsciousness; and, like a (occasionally distorted) mirror or a dream, to reproduce our present and future fears, hopes and confusion.

Cinema not only reproduces the disorientation of reality and unreality with its exhibition, but it also foregrounds and fetishizes this phenomenon via a trend of films that have appeared in recent years which aim precisely to confuse the audience about the reality of their perception. The genre of Science Fiction (henceforth denoted by the abbreviation 'SF') is predominant in this trend as it hypothetically anticipates what might one day be history. And this tendency is illustrated throughout this research by way of films such as *The Matrix*, *Total Recall*, *The Lawnmower Man*, *eXistenZ*, *Videodrome* (Cronenberg, 1983), *12 Monkeys* (Gilliam, 1995), *Abre los Ojos* (Amenábar, 1997), *Dark City* (Proyas, 1998), and *The Thirteenth Floor* (Rusnak, 1999). The films studied here are not exclusively SF films, but they nevertheless attend to pertinent characteristics of the confusion between reality and unreality. So films including *Memento* (Nolan, 2000) and *Waking Life* (Linklater, 2001) explore metaphysical or psychological perspectives of this phenomenon by way of a visually confusing and technically innovative cinema. Often these films are characterized by a dark, pessimistic aesthetic that draws upon the use of special effects and other visual innovations with which the image is created, manipulated, transformed or erased. The 'bullet time' made famous in *The Matrix*, for example, has today become common in films such as *Wanted* (Bekmambetov, 2008), which also makes use of the zooms (or reverse zooms) which are able to transport us from a general perspective to microscopic detail, and to show us the world from unconventional perspectives and angles. What we find in these films is the

use of artificial positions and movements of the camera to paradoxically simulate reality. It is a cinema that appeals to the fascination of the spectator by adopting visual spectacle to commandeer their attention. It is a cinema that offers special effects that are pleasurable in their own right, although they are often 'artificial' means to aid narration. Simultaneously, these films transmit ideas about the confusion between reality and unreality and/or distort the spectator's image of what he is watching. The protagonists of these films such as Neo (Keanu Reeves) in *The Matrix*, Quaid (Arnold Schwarzenegger) in *Total Recall* and Allegra Geller (Jennifer Jason Leigh) in *eXistenZ* are frequently lost between a reality and an unreality that are interwoven, and this sensation is arguably transferred to the spectator who abandons a passive attitude in front of the screen to become an active and willing participant in such disorientation. Contemporary cinema is therefore a perfect tool and medium through which to investigate the major concern of this research.

My hypothesis is that we are witnessing an emerging situation where the confusion of reality and unreality is becoming more apparent and has acquired new forms based on the culture of the copy and the simulation. This is a culture that is spread through the visual technological media that produces/facilitates the creation of (un)realities. This has relevant individual and social influences that must be analyzed and understood in order to prevent negative repercussions such as identity crisis or the de-socialization of our society. Within this context, the recent spate of a range of films based on the confusion of reality and unreality seems a particularly useful focal point for examination of the disorientation we are experiencing nowadays.

The following research into pertinent visual and written texts concerned with the confusion between reality and unreality should be considered alongside the production of an original film, *Luna*, that simultaneously researches the characteristics of this technologically motivated confusion and its consequences. The theoretico-practical nature of this thesis suggests an intentional and consistent election for the creation of a philosophical and sociological discourse, cinematographically contextualized. Thus, the written text is intended to be a personal position in

the technologically produced confusion between reality and unreality, and a critical application of relevant thinkers, mostly, and necessarily contemporary, such as Baudrillard, Jameson, Žižek, Lash, Jean-Luc Godard, the Wachowski brothers, Paul Verhoeven and David Cronenberg who, in books, journals, on web sites or through cinema, have considered the philosophical, sociological, technological and visual aspects relevant to this investigation. It is important to note that the recurrent use of recent authors and electronic sources is indicative of a peculiar characteristic: this phenomenon is emerging now and thus it is appropriate that its extensive social, psychological, economical and political relevance receives in-depth investigation with not just established, canonical discourses, but also with the most up-to-date critical and analytical tools.

The selection of these authors and theories, such as those that refer to Hyperreality, Simulation, Cyberspace, the prospects of society in a technological mediated world, visual media, the development of Virtual Reality and the present and future of cinema, have helped to guide and establish a discourse to create critical perspectives and conclusions about the current confusion of reality and unreality, its sources, anatomy and potential. This thesis intends to be analytical but also has the characteristic of being a provocation; a provocation as it proposes to provoke a reaction to the phenomenon of the confusion of reality and unreality through a multi-angular analysis. With this in mind, the film that accompanies these words, *Luna*, becomes not only a practical illustration of the confusion of reality and unreality but a subjective examination of the use and influence of technological development in such disorientation. Theory and practice, text and film, are not only compatible; they produce a homogeneous and unique body of work. The objective is to create an 'interactive' text; a work which is concatenated through all its extension.

In addition to confusion, *paradox*es are a key element in this research, both in theory and practice. In this way *Luna* is outlined within the paradox and conflict of choosing to be confused. The film is intentionally narrated from the subjective point of view of someone who is (un)consciously

confused, thus supplementing the 'objectivity' of the text with a personal and abstract perspective.

Crucially, the intention of this study is not to distinguish reality and unreality, to separate them, or indeed to ultimately join them as a desperate measure, but to understand the technologically mediated characteristic of the confusion between them. It is not possible or, indeed, useful to define these concepts as 'static', as this would only serve to both limit and undermine the research. Instead, it is argued that we need to understand reality and unreality as dynamic, fluid, and shifting concepts. Therefore, this research does not intend to uncover what is real or what reality is, but may be understood as a useful guide to approach and dissect the social and psychological circumstances that we are living in today, and to consider these concepts in and through cinema. In other words, the goal is an understanding of these 'new' notions of reality and unreality, rather than obtaining an accurate definition of them.

The first chapter provides a brief background to the confusion between reality and unreality, and proceeds to contextualize this confusion in visual technological terms. The second chapter analyzes the crucial role of new technologies such as media, digital imagery, videogames, Virtual Reality and particularly visual and cinematographic techniques in today's society. Specifically, it examines the protagonist's/user's participation in two interconnected elements: cinema and the confusion of reality and unreality. The third chapter examines the connections and relationship of cinema and (un)reality in both directions, that is how cinema intercedes in the confusion between reality and unreality and how this disorientation affects cinema's themes and forms. Finally, the fourth chapter, through the analysis of *Luna*, connects film practice with the theoretical discourse, showing the links, the invisible bridge that connects images with words. This thesis as a whole will thus demonstrate new perspectives, an original approach to the understanding and analysis of the confusion between reality and unreality provoked by technology.

Chapter I

(Con)fusing (un)reality

The difficulty in distinguishing between 'reality' and 'unreality' has been a significant concern in western philosophical thought throughout its history. Nevertheless, in recent years the phenomenon has acquired peculiar characteristics. In short, the rapid development of technology has complicated our understanding of our own creations and the consequences that they invoke. Current technology has provided us with new visual, digital and virtual sources for the creation and perception of realities in fictitious spaces; yet our culture seems unprepared to assume, with its cultural baggage, these transformations concerning all social and psychological scopes. It is in this gap between our existing technology and our understanding and knowledge of this technology that the current confusion between 'reality' and 'unreality' resides. It is important, then, to be conscious that a *new* reality is being produced. In order to understand this distinctive new space between what we know as 'reality' and 'unreality', the solution may be to find how to live with and within the coexistence of both. The discrepancy between these complex entities of 'reality' and 'unreality' will be the territory explored in this short introductory chapter.

1.1. (Un)reality in context

According to the Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy, 'reality' relates to 'the states of things as they actually are, rather than they are imagined to be' (Audi, 1999: 677). In this sense, what has true and effective existence is what we perceive through the senses. However, from a philosophical point of view, and following Descartes, the founding father of modern observational science, the senses are deceptive and serve to distort reality. Descartes (1977: 19) suggests that we cannot trust in our own senses when perceiving reality. We rely on our five senses to transmit information to the brain and consequently we create a construction in our mind that is classified as real.

However, what we perceive as real is not necessarily what is 'there'; it is just an approximate interpretation by our brain of the information available.[1] Our senses are too coarse to be able to capture all the manifestations of reality; rather they filter reality. As Christian Doelker writes, our 'perception is necessarily selective, limits reality and selects what is significant for us' (Doelker, 1982: 27).

The selection of reality becomes doubly complex when we perceive reality through the images and information provided by the media. Indeed, it is through the media that reality becomes more diffused and the concept of what is real varies inexorably: the reality we perceive will not only be exogenously configured by the media we are observing, but it will also be consciously selected by that company or institution. Thus, media becomes the central antagonist of a technologically mediated reality. As Neil Postman observes:

> We do not see nature or intelligence or human motivation or ideology as 'it' is, but as our languages are. And our languages are our media. Our media are our metaphors. Our metaphors create the content of our culture (Postman, 1985: 15).

It is clear that the influence of technology is such that the reality in which we are living today, 'our reality', is no longer the same reality that was experienced by our ancestors. Centuries ago reality was based on everything that was experienced through our senses and transmitted by those who surrounded us. Nowadays, however, the circumstances of mass media and technological communication mean that something that is happening in another part of the world seems as close as if it is happening in our own town. Everything can be reduced to a question of *trust*, as has been indicated by Antony Giddens (1990: 29-36); and it is crucial that this trust has varied substantially in recent decades. In this respect, Paul Virilio dates the critical

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[1] In this sense, Morpheus (Laurence Fishburne) defines reality in *The Matrix* saying: 'what is real? how do you define real? If you're talking about what you can feel, what you can smell, what you can taste and see, then real is simply electrical signals interpreted by your brain'. This definition has a strong connection with the theory of 'Brain in a Vat', according to which if the brain is suspended in a vat only receiving electronic impulses from a computer, there will be no possibility of differentiating the virtual experiences from real events (Putnam, 1982: 1-21).

moment at which we could no longer believe our eyes and when faith in perception became slave to faith in the technical sightline, citing the images that were created and distributed in the First World War as a discernable turning point (Virilio, 1989: 16-17).

Today, and despite the fact that society is arguably becoming increasingly media literate, we give credibility to events that are narrated by mass media, and we ignore, in most cases, who is behind the information that we are receiving and the political or economical intentions of showing (or not showing) certain things. In this way, we can build an opinion about certain facts based on information that is shown partially, that is somehow transformed or translated, or is simply an invention. The mass media are thus a fundamental part in today's socialization process: the symbolic bases of our lives, they tend to work on our conscience, behaviour, attitudes and opinions in a similar way that the experience of reality influences dreams. What currently exists is a feedback system between distorting mirrors, as Manuel Castells states with particular reference to the medium of cinema:

> Mass media are the expression of our culture and our culture penetrates basically by the materials provided by mass media. Consequently, when cinema, which is the most suitable support for the elaboration of dreams, is full of science fiction, it corroborates that we are living a stage in which fantasy and reality are confused, mixed in an indifferent way (Castells, 1999: 369).

Because we are living in a time in which technology is able to simulate what our imagination creates, it is not necessary simply to rely on our imagination, or to differentiate for ourselves what is real and what is not, as technology can do this for us. Specifically, videogames and the development of Virtual Reality embody this ability with their continuous technological innovations and their (potential) offer of a total interactive immersion within which we can live a different or better life. Today we can identify a parallel world of bits, not necessarily opposed to the world of flesh, but complementary and sometimes substitutive.

If the term 'reality' implies certain difficulties in its application due to the ambiguity of its definition and the disparity of interpretations that it

attracts, then 'unreality' seems to be a more extreme case, as is demonstrated by the multitude of labels that it receives: virtuality, fiction, dreams, invention or simply 'not real'. 'Unreality' is therefore everything that is not real, a concept without boundaries defined in opposition to something abstract. It is surely not possible to mention one of these terms without involving its inverse and thus invoking the weak line that separates the two. Crucially for this thesis, technology has blurred this indistinct line further and consequently transformed and fused the nature of both concepts, creating spaces such as Virtual Reality or Cyberspace in which both notions can coexist. Precisely the confusion of reality and unreality is therefore an intrinsic element of the dependent relationship of these ambiguous, fluid concepts. The confusion between both can certainly be explained as an involuntary disorientation about the nature of our perception and existence or the consequence of a specific, usually traumatic, event; but it can also mean a voluntary escape (consciously or unconsciously), in which we play with the ambiguity between reality and unreality to intervene in the knowledge of certain facts. Today, technology facilitates and produces both states. Thus, although the perception of reality and the confusion with unreality are modulated by (further fluid) cultural, educational, social, ideological, political and economic factors, the confusion of reality and unreality takes place frequently and tangibly in our daily lives: the introduction of virtuality and digital media in our society through videogames, films and televisual products has been decisive in this phenomenon, playing a fundamental role in the creation of alternative (un)realities and exacerbating the confusion of reality and unreality.

The wide use of the Internet, providing us with an incredible amount of information, means that, in many situations, what we should and should not believe is extremely disconcerting to us. Such technology has not only changed and hidden the sources of information; it has also multiplied them and facilitated the expression and communication of individuals across the globe. As a result, personal identity has been exposed to old and new crises. The election of a different identity through means such as the Internet, videogames or Virtual Reality can produce an enormous and uncontrollable

confusion that extends to the rest of our existence, altering our personalities. In this respect, Stephen Frosh observes that:

> The reality of modernity is one of fragmentation and the dissolution of the self, then belief in the integrity of the personal self is ideological, imaginary, fantastic. Whatever illusions we may choose to employ to make ourselves feel better remain illusory, deceptive and false (Frosh, 1991: 57-58).

Such deception is something that we can see in *Total Recall*, a film set in the future, in which technology facilitates the implantation of memories, a satisfactory 'virtual past experience', in the brain of the consumer. However, in Quaid, the implantation of memories produces, instead of satisfaction and entertainment, confusion and loss of identity. Quaid chooses to be someone different, to be who he wants to be, but by doing this he faces an identity crisis: he confronts himself with his ideal self and the result is a crisis and a total disorientation about who he is and the reality in which he is immersed. The character of Quaid is a perfect example of how the most powerful tool to fight against the deconstruction/destruction of the self is to maintain a 'historical' consciousness, an anchor, a constant knowledge of who we think we are in spite of who we are 'playing' at being. The alternative is schizophrenia, as Jameson indicates: in present society we live our lives submerged in multiple personalities that sometimes can get closer to a schizophrenic feeling (Jameson, 1996: 33-34). These multiple personalities coincide at a given time, functioning, in many cases, in opposition to each other. Our identities are thus constantly being challenged by continuous fragmentation, and exposure to fiction and technology, primarily virtuality, is actively contributing to this phenomenon.

New technologies such as the virtual world of *Second Life* (2003), which is a reproduction of our world in an immaterial universe, enable us to adopt identities far from what we really are: class, ethnicity and gender are no longer a problem in social relationships conducted in Cyberspace. Although it is in the hands of consumers to manipulate social categories in such fictitious spaces, a potential consequence of these spaces can be a deep confusion about who anyone really is; in other words, a disorientation of our

reality itself. Technology has created the concept of 'no-space' (Castells, 1999), the non visible space where institutions, social status and relationships are not observed under social criteria. Nowadays, the act of meeting somebody, even at an intimate level, does not necessarily imply a 'face to face' relationship. The new space that the Internet has opened through chat rooms, e-mails, on-line videogames, instant conversations and even on-line dating has caused our faith to 'become blind'. It is 'blindly' how many people manage to build effective or professional relationships, reading characters on a screen or observing images sent to them. In such situations, confidence in the other person becomes a matter of pure faith. These 'technological relationships' are almost exclusive to the current time. Nowadays, we know and deal with more people remotely than we actually interact with personaly. The result, when our knowledge about something or someone is entirely based on faith, is the evocation of doubt; doubt about the information we have and about the reality of certain social relationships. Faith and doubt are confronted in virtual relationships and consequently we have been increasingly obliged to pause and reconsider the reality of certain experiences (Loader, 1997: 27).

In this sense, Cronenberg's *eXistenZ*, an SF film based on a virtual game which is connected to the nervous system and that has the ability to reproduce reality with total fidelity, is an intriguing case study. With this film, he hyperbolizes the present incapacity to separate reality and fiction in a schizophrenic labyrinth of the mind set up by technology and which reveals the potential threats of such confusion. *eXistenZ* fictionalizes a deep confusion between reality and virtuality: within the overarching game the characters play, they play further successive games that remind us of the old sensation of dreaming that we are dreaming, of the immersion of unrealities inside unrealities. Thus *eXistenZ* illustrates technology's active role in the provocation of our disorientation. Indeed, how do we know then when we are awake? As occurs in *Luna*, when we really wake up, there are brief moments when we cannot differentiate dreams from reality: we rub our eyes, we touch the walls, we look at the clock, but nothing provides a definitive answer to our confusion. If we were dreaming in our dreams, how could we know for

sure that this is the definitive awakening? As Descartes considers, given that when we are dreaming we think that we are living something real, is it possible to find any criteria to distinguish the reality from dreams? Descartes uses the figure of a 'malicious demon' to represent the manipulation that can be suggested in the confusion of reality and unreality, and the idea of being manipulated whilst we are in our dreams. Indeed, in *The Matrix*, Morpheus questions Neo in the same way when he is introduced to the virtual world of The Matrix and explains the unreality of his life:

> Have you ever had a dream, Neo, that you were so sure was real? What if you were unable to wake from that dream? How would you know the difference between the dream world and the real world?

Today, the same question can be applied to visual virtual technology: how can we differentiate the virtual world from reality? What is perhaps useful is the reflexive, Cartesian and convincing thought that we create in order to demonstrate to ourselves that we are indeed awake, in the 'real world'. After this, our life proceeds as normal. But what would happen if we were still dreaming? *Total Recall* and *eXistenZ* end with the same open question, related to virtuality in their case, when the characters, unsure of the level of (un)reality they are inhabiting, ask if they have abandoned the artificial world of bits.[2]

1.2. Jean Baudrillard: Simulacrums and Hyperreality.

> A propos the cinema and image in general (media images, technological images), I would like to conjure up the perversity of the relation between the image and its referent, the supposed real; the virtual and irreversible confusion of the sphere of images and the sphere of reality whose nature we are less and less able to grasp (Baudrillard, 1987b: 13).

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[2] In *Total Recall* Quaid queries: 'I just had a terrible thought… what if this is all a dream?' Similarly one of the protagonists in *eXistenZ* asks of the rest of the players: 'Hey, tell me the truth… are we still in the game?'.

The work of Baudrillard is particularly useful in identifying and analyzing the tangible confusion of reality and unreality examined in this thesis. Baudrillard's work conveys a particular interest in the technological causes and consequences of this confusion, and so has important repercussions today. His provocative ideas are expressed through examples, myths and illustrations taken from popular and historical culture, and their resonance can clearly be seen in films such as *The Matrix* which fictionalize and make palatable his ideas of the Simulacrum, Hyperreality and the transformation of the relationship between the object and the referent. Simulacrum is, according to Baudrillard, something that replaces reality with its representation:

> Simulation is no longer that of a territory, a referential being, or a substance. It is the generation by models of the real without origin or reality: a hyperreal.(…) It is no longer a question of imitation, nor duplication, nor even parody. It is a question of substituting the reality for the signs of the real (Baudrillard, 2001a: 166).

Defining Simulacrum, Baudrillard seems to provide the synopsis of *The Matrix.* Indeed, the release of *The Matrix* seems to constitute a crucial moment in the social understanding about the (un)reality that surrounds us and the (defensive) mechanism of doubt that we should use. Just as Morpheus asks Neo in *The Matrix* if he wants to know reality or live in the Simulacrum, offering him a blue or a red pill,[3] our society is facing the dilemma of discovering what the representations hide or (un)consciously immersing ourselves in Simulacrum, ignoring the consequences.

Baudrillard understands the reality of today as being produced from miniaturized units, matrices, memory banks and command models. In this respect, he sees in Disneyland the perfect illustration of a Simulacrum, the fabrication from the cultural industry of the absolute fake:

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[3] Morpheus: 'This is your last chance. After this, there is no turning back. You take the blue pill - the story ends, you wake up in your bed and believe whatever you want to believe. You take the red pill - you stay in Wonderland and I show you how deep the rabbit-hole goes'. In other words, the 'red pill awakens the individual to reality and the blue pill puts it back into the sleep of self-centred illusion' (Irwin, 2002: 143).

> Disneyland is presented as imaginary in order to make us
> believe that the rest is real, when in fact all of Los Angeles
> and the America surrounding it are no longer real, but of the
> orders of the hyperreal and of simulation. It is no longer a
> question of false representation of reality (ideology), but of
> concealing the fact that the real is no longer real and the
> means of saving the reality principle (Baudrillard, 1983: 25).

Therefore, Baudrillard argues, most of the world is now an artificial hyperreal construction, an 'irradiating synthesis of combinatory models in a hyperspace without atmosphere' (Baudrillard, 1983: 23). Consequently, what we understand as reality only exists in remote and degraded pockets.

In this light, SF writer Philip K. Dick, with 'paranoid visions' about the potential danger of technology in the future, offers up pessimistic technological labyrinths in which we cannot exit the simulation of reality. *Total Recall*[4] is based upon this fear of the incapacity to discern reality when technological reproductions (implanted memories) become as real as the reality we have known. The use and resultant danger of virtual and digital technology to manipulate our life, choices and identities is also shared by Žižek, who suggests that it is the awareness of living in an insulated artificial universe that generates the notion that some ominous agent is constantly threatening us with 'total destruction' (Žižek, 1999: 5).

Baudrillard also observes further (dangerous) implications for the individual in the Simulacrum of reality as it implies a strategy of disappearance. The 'desert of the real' is created from the indifferentiation of the map and the territory, the virtuality and the 'real reality' (Baudrillard, 1983: 1-5). Baudrillard draws upon the fable of Borges' 'The Rigour of the Science' (1960: 103) to illustrate what represents, for him, the world of simulation, affirming that we now live within the map, not in the territory. We live in a world of reproductions of The Matrix, not in 'the desert of the real' that conforms to reality. One of the dangers produced by the fascination for the representations, for the creations of simulations that replace reality, is what Baudrillard names '*narcissistic* refraction' (Baudrillard, 1988b: 34). Narcissus failed to recognize his own reflection in the water as he could not

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[4] Based on Dick's short story 'We Can Remember It for You Wholesale' (1966).

fathom any difference between himself and the surroundings. Indeed, we are currently in a similar situation where we are not able to differentiate between reality and its representations. The risk of destruction implied in the Narcissus myth, when he fell in love with his reflection, is an apt metaphorical threat regarding the time of the Simulacrum in which we live.

Indeed, today we are achieving a moment in the reproduction of reality in which a map does not represent abstraction, the double, the mirror or the concept; today 'the mirror has given way to a screen and a network' (Baudrillard, 1988b: 12). Now, Baudrillard is skeptical and distrusts the benevolent effect of the reproduction of reality where 'there are no longer exact images of the world, no more mirrors - only trick mirrors' (Baudrillard, 1987b: 25). In this sense, when the images become more convincing, truthful and more in conformity with reality, they become more diabolical, more immoral and perverse. Baudrillard exemplifies the diabolical nature of the reproduction of images with *Zelig* (Allen, 1983), a film in which Leonard Zelig (Woody Allen) becomes a 'human chameleon', a man with the ability to transform his appearance in accordance with the people who surround him. *Zelig* illustrates for Baudrillard the image, not only in its role as a mirror, as a reflection of the real, but also in its evocation of a false reflection that 'contaminates' reality (Baudrillard, 1987b: 13, 16).

Indeed, behind the naïve resemblance and fidelity of the reproductions is hidden their real danger: we are deceived by the confusion of the Simulacrum and reality, and our incapacity to discern their nature provokes our incapacity to identify their intention. The responsibility of the 'diabolic power' of the image resides in the society of consumption in which we live and the sovereignty that this society concedes to the Simulacrums. In the dialectical relationship between reality and images, the latter have imposed their immanent, (un)real, immoral and superficial logic, and we are accomplices to this event. We are currently embracing a magic occultation of reality by 'excess'. We feel such fascination for the increased number of signs that they ultimately block the real thing; not in an aseptic subtraction, but by the saturation that it produces. Simulation and the saturation of copies

threaten the difference between 'true' and 'false', between the 'real' and the 'imaginary'.

Baudrillard suggests that the 'impossibility of rediscovering an absolute level of reality unleashes the hopeless act of defining an illusion' (Baudrillard, 1983: 38-39). In this sense, power today consists of investing in, and reinventing, (un)reality; persuading society of the existence of certain economical and social issues and (strategically) ignoring other matters. If technology has facilitated the realization of imagination in an (un)reality of bits, then the mediums and the ideas, informational material elements, are the basic components of power. For Baudrillard, this explains why 'contemporary production is Hyperreal in itself' (Baudrillard, 2001a: 167):

> This also means the collapse of reality into hyperrealism, in the minute duplication of the real, preferably on the basis of another reproduced medium – advertisement, photography, etc. From medium to medium the real is volatilized; it becomes an allegory of death, but it is reinforced by its very destruction; it becomes the real for the real, fetish of the last object – no longer object of representation, but ecstasy of degeneration of its own extermination; the hyperreality (Baudrillard, 1983: 141-142).

Taking the example of the events of 11th September 2001, Baudrillard determines how the 'technological image' consumes the events, in the sense that it absorbs and transforms it into an article of consumption. This kind of terrorist violence is not *real*, but it can be defined as symbolic: it means more than the events themselves (Baudrillard, 2001b: 2-3). There is a resurgence of *reality* and its violence in a virtual environment. If reality exceeds fiction, it is because it absorbs its energy and uses fictional sources.

Baudrillard's work (1996) reveals a constant concern about the future effects of technology on society and the individual. He proposes that, in the short term, the possibilities offered by new technology produce a greater variety of individuals, where each one creates their own identity. But paradoxically, the absolute presence of technology has the potential danger of rendering the representation empty, the consequence of inhabiting new spaces without having a profound knowledge of the technology that produces

them. In this way, identical human beings will be created, preventing the possibility of becoming original. In his pessimistic conception of the future, this will be the characteristic of 'the age of Hyperreality'. Baudrillard's theories of the future constitute a particularly useful vision and premonition concerning the confusion between reality and unreality and the future of our society in the time of the technology of reproduction, hence the recurrence of his writings in this thesis. Furthermore, it is apparent that it is the medium of cinema that is simultaneously immersed and a participant in this process. As a visual technological medium it is clearly affected by technological innovation, but, at the same time, it is a medium that filters and expresses the ideas, fears and hopes of our societies. Thus, cinema and technology, the confusion of reality and unreality that they produce and reproduce find themselves at the crux of this thesis and of *Luna*.

Chapter II

Technology and (un)reality

Today, in western societies, our general expectations of the technology we create and use go further than entertainment, leisure or comfort, as we are increasingly eager to be free from work or from engaging in any 'unnecessary' effort as much as we chase immortality. These are not new and original desires, of course, but they are more apparent and present nowadays than at any other time since the advent of modernity. However, there are grounds for questioning the modern myth that technology will set us free. Indeed, the fear is that technology will make us slaves (literally or metaphorically) of our own creations. In this sense, we can observe the social consequences of technology in two well differentiated stages of technology through two influential films, *Metropolis* (Lang, 1927), which shows the potential effect of mechanical production in society, and *The Matrix*, which illustrates the hypothetical repercussions of digital reproduction.

From the beginning of modernity there has been a belief in continuous technological evolution and the production of a powerful *technoscientist* human being, stronger and wiser than ever before in the history of human kind. However, this belief clashes with reality. The reality is that the individual is often impotent when facing and understanding technology. For most of us technology becomes similar to magic when we try to understand its mechanisms or endeavour to fix one of the machines we use daily. This inability to comprehend the devices that we use in many aspects of our lives is at odds with our feeling of superiority when using machines: the illusory control over technological functions is uncovered when it becomes apparent that we are completely illiterate in the use of 0s and 1s and strangers to the cables and metal components of our computers. The potential dangers of technology are hidden in this paradox.

The impact of technology on society is not only possible to establish in marginal moments and locations such as virtual experiences or 'visits' to the Cyberspace, but is experienced in the context of extended systems, affecting

everyone in one way or another. This technological development was produced by the accumulation of several consequent technological innovations in different fields, resulting in a huge and global impact on western societies with effects that are still waiting to be deciphered. Marshall McLuhan (2001: 76-81) uses the example of the car and roads to explain such a phenomenon: technology brought the car and the resultant necessities created the roads. This is a useful metaphor for our current situation: we invent new technology following our needs and the social adaptation it requires will produce an impact that is as yet unknown, although we certainly suspect its dimensions. The allegory of cars can be applied to the technology of today if we consider devices like a GPS which can, on one hand, be very useful for orienting us, but, on the other, can find us constantly looking to the map on the small LCD screen, to the reproduction of reality instead of through the window, where we would find the reality of the roads surrounded by the natural and urban environment. Indeed, technology truly fascinates us and has the potential to absorb our attention and produce the contrary effect of what was intended: we get lost in the world of bits by not paying attention or believing in the world of atoms through which we are driving. We have created tools that today are *re-creating* us. The paradox is that humans have to adapt and learn from technology and not technology from humans as might be expected. In a cyclical and feedback process we create inventions but then our own productions shape our society and our way of understanding and perceiving the world.

The consequence of the technological society that we have created is that today we can intervene in our future but we will not be able to stop technological progress. Technological development is our 'destiny'; it is the consequence of overcoming the precedent stages in the evolution of humans. There is a certainty and an uncertainty about technology: it will continually progress but the direction and intensity of this progress is unpredictable. John Smart explains that there is a part of our future that seems experimental and unpredictable, and another part that looks predictable and

progressive. Our challenge consists of inventing the first part and discovering the second (Barca, 2008: 45).

Margaret Mead points out that the fast evolution of technology can drag society into a movement that can be too fast for its structures (cited in McLuhan 2001: 91). However, instead of an inconvenience, this can be an advantage if the social, educational and political transformations result in a better scenario. The shake of social, economic and political bases can reconstruct a system with more fairness and equality for all the members of the society. There is perhaps no need to be so pessimistic about our future, but just be cautious, conscious and in control of the journey we undertake, thus retaining a forward and a backward glance; that is to say being aware of what is about to come and also mindful of the evolution and history of the technology we have created. Continuing the example of cars, McLuhan argues that in understanding the actual situation of technology we find the same dangerous experience we might have if we drive only looking through the rear-view mirror: then we only can see what we have already left behind us, not what is coming in the future.

Historically, human beings have used technology to be freed from the tasks that we do not want to do and, in this way, have more time to spend on other things. Indeed, today we delegate our memory to hard drives, and, thanks to the programmes we have created, we do not need to calculate certain scientific problems or imagine solutions. The density of data nowadays is doubling approximately every eighteen months and this is an increasing tendency.[5] With such a development in technology, it should not surprise us that the prediction regarding this phenomenon is that machines will soon achieve self awareness. The experiment to produce quantum computers, with the ability to go further than the combination of 0s and 1s and to be able to process notions and abstract terms, is currently an incipient and ongoing investigation, but it hints at the future (awareness) of technology. There is even an estimation of the moment when human mental activities will be a hybrid of biological and technological functions: it is

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[5] This is a prediction made by Gordon Moore, one of the co-founders of the Intel Corporation, in 1964, and one that has been so accurate that his prophecy has been named 'Moore´s Law' (Woolgar, 2002: 55).

known as Singularity and is expected to happen around 2030. Singularity will be a phase in which humans will be surpassed by technology and was probably inaugurated when Deep Blue, the computer chess simulator, beat Garry Kasparov, the reigning chess world champion in 1997. In other words, what Singularity is implying is the beginning of the post-human era.[6]

The fears that this new post-human era provokes in us have been reflected in a variety of films in recent years that have reflected the control acquired by machines over human destinies. These films have reflected this from different perspectives: the assumption of decision and control of the computer Hal in *2001: A Space Odyssey* (Kubrick, 1968); the technological submission of humans to slavery in *The Matrix*; and the rebellion of humanized robots in *I, Robot* (Proyas, 2004). Indeed, the feeling of creating something that runs contrary to our aim of having a better and more pleasant life is present in all of these films. However, the worst possible potential consequence in the development of technology comes from computer dependency in military systems and the delegation of decisions that impact upon the lives of millions of individuals. In this sense, *War Games* (Badham, 1983) demonstrates how the extinction of the human race depends on a multitude of 0s and 1s that are slowly slipping further from our control.

In *The Matrix*, as in *The Terminator* (Cameron, 1984), the extinction of the human race is a real danger. In *The Matrix*, Artificial Intelligence creates an alternative world in which machines have absolute control over everything that happens. We can see in this film the culmination of the era of simulations that Baudrillard describes: machines substitute reality for the signs of the real, producing the perfect and total Hyperreality. The Matrix is, in this sense, a computer programme able to simulate reality with all its positive and negative components, a parallel unreality of bits. The domination of machines over humans in *The Matrix* metaphorically represents a current dilemma: developments in technology, and specifically in visual media, mean that any image or sound can be accurately and easily

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[6] For further explication of Singularity see Kurzweil's *The Human Machine Merger: Are we Headed for The Matrix?* http://kurzweilai.net/meme/frame.html?main=/articles/art0552.html and Vinge's: *The Coming Technological Singularity: How to Survive in the Post-Human Era* http://wwwcse.ucsd.edu/users/goguen/misc/singularity.html

manufactured and reproduced. Thus, as Baudrillard (1994b) points out, the distinction between the original and the copy has disappeared irreversibly. Digitalization is the perfect way to reproduce the general, the repeatable and the representable, the quantifying characteristics of objects and people; in short, everything that can be expressed with 0s and 1s.

The film *AI: Artificial Intelligence* (Spielberg, 2001) offers a different perspective, a more humanistic vision of the future of technology. In the film, a perfect reproduction of a child is discriminated against and persecuted by humans because of his artificiality. The film describes a future where the ability of machines to interact with humans has developed to such an extent that we can admit the presence of feelings and 'uniqueness' in them. Ironically, this is not an obstacle for most of the humans in the films who hunt the replicas as they recognize in them a danger to humanity.[7] Hence, according to the interpretation of the future that we find in *AI*, machines are merely servants and entertainment for humans. *AI* and *The Matrix* have diametrically opposed connotations, yet, paradoxically, the moral of the story is similar in both: the extinction of humankind (almost successfully extinguished in the Wachowski brothers' film) and the survival of the machines. Probably the most notable difference between these films is that in *AI*, machines are portrayed from a benevolent perspective: they are artificially human, with their feelings, fears, desires and memories, while humans are revealed as cold beings who want to defend the status quo and refuse to accept and understand their own creations.[8]

Today, the form of technology that has gained most relevance in western societies and is producing a profound social impact is the Internet and the 'universe' it has created, Cyberspace. Cyberspace is an artificial 'no-space', inhabited by humans but technologically mediated that appeared in our lives in the 80s when William Gibson created it in *Neuromancer* (1984). Cyberspace is a world where, in theory at least, everybody can enter without prejudice or privilege, where ethnic origin, religion, economic power or

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[7] There is a parallel with *Blade Runner* (Scott, 1982), where the artificiality of the replicas is being persecuted despite the machines being certain about their own humanity. This blurs the boundary between machines and humans.

[8] We can find similar conclusions and visions of machines in the film *The Bicentennial Man* (Columbus, 1999).

nationality are irrelevant factors, and where democracy has a new definition together with the freedom of expression. There is no matter and therefore there are no properties or identities in the actual definition of these concepts. The self is understood in Cyberspace as a fluid and diversified entity, able to be constructed, transformed and modified. Although there is a clear connection between Cyberspace and the negative vision of the no-space of *The Matrix*, according to John Perry Barlow in his *Declaration of Independence of Cyberspace* (1996), Cyberspace has the potential of being a positive virtual environment. It can create a new civilization of the spirit, more human and fair than in the real world. However, it is important to note that on-line identities created today in Cyberspace are not necessarily free from the real world constraints in the opinion of some authors. Thus, Rodney Jones points out that 'for the most part, on-line identities are not purely reflections of off-line identities nor complete reconstructions, but convenient hybrids of both processes whose uses often have as much to do with what is happening in the off-line social life of users as their on-line social life' (Jones, 2001: 13). For authors such as Michael Hardey on-line identities are irremediably anchored to the off-line lives of the consumers (Hardey, 2002: 581). This way of seeing identities in Cyberspace implies the assumption that our identity is a solid construction that we drag into our incursions into the non-space even if we are 'dressed up' with a different identity. The potential to create more consistent and continuous identities in Cyberspace in the future can make this connection of real and cyber identity disappear, thereby achieving a cyber-civilization closer to the idea exposed by Barlow.

We are at the beginning of a process, yet we feel completely immersed in it, almost without having undergone any transition. Nonetheless, we have to understand that the 'virtual age' has just started and until we can address the anxiety and fears that new technologies produce in us, technological changes will not be completed and we will not fully control machines. Therefore, this is a feedback process: we do not understand technology because we fear it, and we fear it because we do not understand it. This is a critical moment in the history of western societies to manage, transform, control and influence the technological development and the creation of

alternative/virtual worlds. This is the moment in which this world and this technology are being formed and created. This is the moment to be conscious of what technology is:

> To be unaware that technology comes equipped with a program for social change, to maintain that technology is neutral, to make the assumption that technology is always a friend of culture is, at this late hour, stupidity plain and simple (Postman, 1985: 157).

Since the beginning of modernity, and very much associated with the development of technology, western civilization has shown an increasing inability to come to terms with, and understand, the reality of the world. Warren Bennis and Ian Mitroff describe this situation in these terms: 'we do not only lose interest in dealing with reality per se but we invented substitute realities. Somehow, we became more adept at dealing with these substitute realities, or unrealities as we call them' (Bennis and Mitroff, 1989: 6). These technological unrealities to which the authors refer are sometimes easier to control and deal with than the reality in which we live. According to these authors, the human mind is not only prepared to perceive reality, but also to recreate simulated realities in the form we want them to be.

Consequently, a combination of modern works such as Einstein's Theory of Relativity, the influence of Baudrillard's ideas about simulation, the questioning that we can find in the skeptical novels of Philip K. Dick and the power of the images in contemporary films such as *The Matrix,* with its visions of futuristic virtual societies, has positioned the examination of (un)reality as a cultural and social phenomenon. In this sense, the inability to control our creations produces doubt about everything that surrounds us, and the search for conspiracy has become symptomatic of contemporary societies. Our time is characterized by bringing together contrary poles, a time of reality and unreality, the fragment and the global; a time where we believe and disbelieve in absolutely everything. We even have doubts about our doubts and skepticism becomes an ideology in itself.

The ideas about the confusion of the nature of reality together with a fear of the arrival of new technologies were anticipated by authors such as

George Orwell and Aldous Huxley in two dystopian works: *Nineteen Eighty-four* (1949) and *Brave New World* (1932), respectively. Postman indicates that what we find in *Brave New World* is that 'in the age of advanced technology, spiritual devastation is more likely to come from an enemy with a smiling face than from one whose countenance exudes suspicion and hate' (Postman, 1985: 155). In this sense, the confusion provoked between reality and unreality is produced by the same media entertainment technology that we create to afford pleasure. These devices that promise endless hours of entertainment have the danger of confusing us, the audience, and (directly or indirectly) controlling our decisions.

Today, the fact of technology means that virtuality occupies some of the places that were inhabited by reality not so long ago. This is illustrated by the words of Ecclesiastes with which Baudrillard begins his book *Simulations* (Baudrillard 1983: 1): 'the Simulacrum is never what hides the truth, it is truth which conceals that there is none. The Simulacrum is true'. We are achieving a stage where real experiences can be judged in relation to their corresponding experience in media products, films and videogames. Paradoxically, the artificial measures the real, reality becomes the simulation and, in the confusion, reality loses its meaning. Consequently, one of the risks that we are experiencing with the development of visual technological procedures is the tendency of the spectator to either believe everything or not believe anything at all. Complete faith or absolute skepticism seem to be the alternatives and both block the perception of reality. Perhaps we should find a half way, a third direction, in which we question what we perceive. In this respect, Richard Gerrig points out that 'resisting our susceptibility to stories is a useful skill in a media and advertising saturated world' (Gerrig, 2004: 268). Indeed, we need to reposition ourselves and our perception in relation to the new circumstances of technology. It is clear that our brains do not only respond to personal and bio-psychological effects, but also to cultural and technological conventions about realism that are constantly changing. Therefore, as visual technology has changed substantially in recent years, we have to adapt to the new conventions and perceptions that this

development has created in the notions of reality, unreality and the relationship between both:

> The brand-new problem of the simulation is mistaken with the very classic problem of the illusion, already mentioned by Plato. Here lies the mistake. The world as a complete illusion is the problem that faced all great cultures and they solved it thanks to art and symbolization. What we did invent in order to put up with this pain is a simulated real, a virtual universe cleansed of everything dangerous or negative and which now overrides …., Now the Matrix is totally that! (*Le Nouvel Observateur*, Interview with Baudrillard, 2003).[9]

Today in western societies we cannot be 'neutral' to technology and its effects. Particularly, technology determines the way we perceive, represent and reproduce (un)reality. In this sense, cinema is a 'double mirror' to technology: it manifests, and is influenced by, its effects, becoming a perfect medium to analyze the present and future of technology and our society. According to Norman K. Denzin (1991) cinema is responsible for creating a parallel reality, an 'unofficial' version of civil society. The director, through the film, will reproduce dominant social values, hopes and fears. In this way, cinema organizes and gives sense to the world, the same world that 'feeds' cinema, completing the circle. The appearance of new technologies which drive the plot and are the subject matter of many recent films such as *The Matrix*, *The Lawnmower Man*, *Total Recall*, *eXistenZ*, *Dark City*, *Abre los Ojos* and *The Thirteenth Floor* suggests that these films are trying to tell us something about our technological society. In these contemporary films there is a patent inability to deal with present reality, its reproduction and the development of technology. These films share common characteristics concerning the computer and electronic reproduction of reality and the theory of Simulacrum or Hyperreality. In all these productions, we find an argument for multiple alternative realities, and the anxiety of the protagonist to discern which is the real one. This is presented to the audience in the form of a problem that requires a solution. The question of 'what is reality in the time of the Simulacra, Cyberspace and

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[9] The interview is available on-line at: http://www.empyree.org/divers/Matrix-Baudrillard_english.html

Hyperreal productions?' is moved from the characters to the spectators. In this way, the characters (Neo in *The Matrix*, Quaid in *Total Recall*, Allegra Geller in *eXistenZ* and César (Eduardo Noriega) in *Abre los Ojos*) question the reality that they live/experience and this doubt is assumed by us as we (un)consciously share the same feeling. Indeed, the unrealities or alternative realities discovered by the protagonists of these films are simultaneously, and in parallel, being revealed to us, the spectators, as something we did not consciously imagine before. In particular, alternative reality films reflect the inability to separate the positioning of humans in relation to the virtual world produced by machines and simultaneously the increasing fusion of human and machines. This paradox is illustrated in *eXistenZ*, in which the cyborg achieves a new conception. Here, the human/machine goes further from *The Terminator* and closer to a fusion with the virtual world: a human being that is half way between reality and virtuality.

Virtual/alternative realities will be bridged to reality through us, the spectators, transforming, in this way, the distance between both. Developing the already alluded to famous metaphor of Baudrillard about a map that is a perfect reproduction of a referent, we can predict the future independence of the map. As a result, Virtual Realities will be stranger to reality, the sign and referent will break their relationship and the reproduction of reality will begin to change reality. The notion of 'reality' will be completely modified when we will be able to generate a total and convincing reality using only information resources. This constitutes the next stage of the *Hyperreality* described by Baudrillard: when life happens in the simulation and not in the terrain known today as real, thereby creating a chaotic map.

2.1 (Old) Media

> We are in the situation of an actual image and its own virtual image, to the extent that there is no longer any linkage of the real with the imaginary, but indiscernibility of the two, a perpetual exchange (Deleuze, 2005: 273).

Visual media are intended to be an (artificial) extension of the human eye. We live in a visual culture in which there is a tendency to visualize our

existence, a culture 'concerned with visual events in which information, meaning and pleasure is sought by the consumer in an interface with visual technology' (Mirzoeff, 1998: 3). The influence of media today is fundamental in the social construction of reality and the associated cognitive processes. Therefore, the cultural patterns, the identity and the experience of (un)reality of millions of people are sustained by the images that emanate from technological media including cinema, videogames and television screens. It is actually here, within the production processes of cinema and television, and in videogames content, that contemporary history and life are not only being reflected, but more importantly, are being (de)constructed. Gradually we have started 'to see the world by means of mediated vision and doing so we have increasingly been able to distance and detach ourselves from contact with its reality' (Robins, 1996: 21).

In this sense, Bennis and Mitroff (1989: 11) distinguish two different kinds of generations of unreality. *Unreality one* is an artificial reality where a person and an image can interact on a screen and the viewer is unable to differentiate which one of the images is real. *Unreality two* is a deliberate distortion of reality, and one of the most illustrative examples of this is the information that we receive from the television news: it can make unreality look so entertaining that we do not care about reality anymore. Both unrealities involve some dangers, but whilst *unreality one* can be used and manipulated to obtain certain entertainment and educational benefits, *unreality two* is only used to manipulate us.

Today, visual media generate a bidirectional product as it allows the spectator, through the use of technology, to cross from the side of reality to the side of fiction without encountering any barrier on the journey. This can be illustrated in the popularity and proliferation of reality television shows such as *Big Brother* (Endemol, 1999 – present) and the satisfaction of audiences in perceiving a supposed reality. Indeed, it is not only often the fans/members of the viewing public themselves who become contestants/participants on shows such as *Big Brother*, but the audience also determines the fate of the contestants by voting them out via text and e-mail, and even suggesting to the producers tasks for them to undertake. Thus

the pleasure found by audiences in reality shows is also a result of the 'spectacle of the real' (King, 2005), the paradoxical fascination of the spectators with the mundane. Indeed, its simple projection onto screens is what makes reality (un)real.[10] Yet cinema has duly reflected the fears of such double reflexivity introduced by new television formats with films that express how far the simulational mode of experiencing reality has gone in the contemporary age. Films such as *The Truman Show* (Weir, 1998) and *Edtv* (Howard, 1999) project the possible negative consequences of these television productions on the audience*. The Truman Show* is indeed the ultimate reality show, in which the life of Truman (Jim Carrey) is directed and manipulated without his knowledge in order to create a television program. Truman represents the perfect manipulation of media: his life is successfully broadcast to the world and is voyeuristically observed by the diegetic audience who enjoy watching him from 'the other side of glass'. Therefore, what we find in reality shows is a technological twist of reality and unreality in which both sides, participants and spectators, do not have to directly interact with one another (but often, of course, actually do) in order to maintain the confusion and produce fascination and pleasure.

Audiences perceive themselves through media like a mirror in front of a mirror, a never-ending process that produces an ecstasy of simulated communication in the audience. Reality shows have thus transformed the perception of reality and fiction in mass media; and *Videodrome*, a film about the future of visual technology, the potential development of reality shows and the influence that they have over the audience, metaphorically illustrates the link of media and humanity with a psychical and physical transformation of the spectators through technology and media consumption. The power of the television screen which 'has become the retina of the mind's eye' (*Videodrome*) has the potential to absorb the audience in the same (un)reality that is broadcast. Nowadays, reality can be shown as fiction and vice versa. The audience must continually decide what is real and what is artificial; spectators must choose what to believe, and ascertain for

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[10] While the pleasures of viewing these shows is widely documented (see especially Holmes and Jerymn, 2003), ironically the contestants themselves often comment how 'bored' they are within the *Big Brother* House.

themselves where the manipulation of the audience and participants ends and where the 'truth' begins. And this constant doubt, this questioning and skepticism may well result in a pleasurable, simplified perception in which everything is merely spectacle. Indeed, in the Opening Ceremony of the 2008 Beijing Olympic Games, the fireworks that amazed the world were actually computer generated images of a display produced six months previous to the live event itself. Thus, simulated fireworks were broadcast to an audience of millions, thereby alleviating any possibility of embarrassment for the organizers due to mis-timings or accidents. This made possible the impossible broadcast of all the fireworks that simultaneously exploded in the sky over Beijing (Reinoso, 2008). In this way, the reality perceived by spectators, both diegetic and extra-diegetic, was an unreality that simulated the reality that they expected to take place at the stadium. Indeed, the technological ability to simulate reality 'live' has achieved such accuracy nowadays that the computer generated display was only discovered five days later when news of it was filtered to the media by members of the visual special effects team.[11]

The dilemma that the media and audiences have to face is access to the truth. Nevertheless, today, truth is more likely to be replaced by either the plural, truths, which are moving, fluid, concepts constructed through discourses and representations, or by credibility, which alludes to the reality believed by each individual. Although there is a common and shared interest in the message transmitted by the media, with a consumerist and ideological intent the multiplicity of information that we receive produces a personal de-codification and consequently an individual perception of the (un)reality in which we live. This is the duality that for Henry Jenkins constitutes the phenomenon known as media convergence, in which 'both a top-down corporate-driven process and a bottom up consumer-driven process' converge (Jenkins, 2004: 6). Jenkins writes:

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[11] Also revealing is that the opening ceremony featured a photogenic child, a strategic substitution by the organisers of a less attractive girl (whose audio was retained). Further, spectators were transported to venues in droves to fill seats, a similar move to enhance the spectacle unfolding. Indeed, this is the Olympics of the simulacrum or the simulacrum of the Olympics.

Media environment is now being shaped by two seemingly contradictory trends: on the one hand, new technologies have lowered production and distribution costs, expanded the range of available delivery channels and enabled consumers to archive, annotate, appropriate and recirculate media content in powerful new ways; on the other hand, there has been an alarming concentration of the ownership of mainstream commercial media, with a small handful of multinational media conglomerates dominating all sectors of the entertainment industries (Jenkins, 2004: 2).

Today, media are controlled by powerful economic holdings that, with the broadcast of images, are producing the (un)reality that we are assuming and therefore are (in)directly guiding ideological and consumerist behaviours. In other words, this phenomenon allows multinational corporate control over the flow of information that the individual receives about the world in which we live. To achieve this, the most important factor used by media in the construction and transformation of (un)reality is the immersion of the audience in the entertainment and spectacle displayed on the screens. In this sense, the discourse first developed by Guy Debord (2000: 51-61) in the 1960s about the society of spectacle is still valid today. According to Debord, our media and consumer society is organized around the production and consumption of images in which the real is presented as spectacle and the spectacular as credible; the (con)fusion of reality and unreality thus becomes characteristic of both spectacle itself and of the reception process. Consequently, 'everything that was directly lived has moved away into representation' (Debord, 2000: 37). Spectacle is the end and the medium through which audiences, via the use of visual technology, perceive the (un)reality of the world and simultaneously block the perception of what is not satisfying their perception: an unbalanced society with economic inequality and political control.

The paradox that we find is that media were invented by humans and, once they are developed, are re-inventing the perception of reality: 'in films and television we can find a curious and paradoxical phenomenon as they are the perfect expression of a reality transformed with its own experience' (Baecker, 1996: 567). Nowadays, with the introduction of digital imagery that facilitates the transformation and generation of images, media use visual

technology to confuse reality and unreality, generating fascination in the spectator and producing a 'modern hypersensitivity' (Camarero, 2002: 91) that reflects the search for pleasure simply by observing artificially created (un)reality. According to Baudrillard (1996: 5-12), we live in the time of the image and this is reflected in the plenitude of signs that shows 'obscene' and 'cruel' evidence, but without consequences. Our society of spectacle has almost achieved sensitive immunity to the effects of the image. In spite of the impact that they can produce, our minds do not suffer considerable damage from the horror of certain scenes. The shock of the images of the Gulf War or 9/11 are perfect examples of world events that, presented in a spectacular way, are perceived more as fiction than reality, and therefore their effects are cushioned. The cruelty and realism of media are paradoxically producing the opposite effect of what was intended: the feeling of unreality. This is the phenomenon that Baudrillard terms the 'perfect crime': there is no crime scene, no guilt and no trace in our memory. In Linda Hutcheon's words, 'it represents not just liberal humanism's assertion of the real but the apocalyptic murder of the real' (Hutcheon, 1989: 229).

Indeed, Hyperreality, as mentioned previously, refers to this phenomenon of simulations generated from models of something real but without any origin or reality (Baudrillard, 1983: 12-13 and 146). Hyperreality absorbs reality, thus the negation of reality is incorporated into reality itself: it is the principle of non-reality based on reality. This is symptomatic of the evolution of the perception of reality and the crisis of realism as a method of representing reality. Media are a source of Hyperreality as they have gained the technological ability to produce an 'unreal reality' based on matrices and models. Thus, the metaphysical distance between the thing and its appearance is technologically abolished. Visual media are not necessarily a 'window on the world' (Ellis, 1992: 51), but they exercise the ability to be a simulation of it.

The multiplication of visual media and the information they generate, creates, according to Baudrillard (1983: 2-12), an abundance of image, a complete saturation that leads towards (un)reality through the excess of reality. Reality disappears, for Baudrillard, when we are not able to interpret

the extreme amount of signs that we have constructed. In Denzin's words: 'members of the contemporary world are voyeurs adrift in a sea of symbols' (Denzin, 1991: vii). This multiplicity of representation is illustrated by the fact that the reality reproduced by new formats of television is being perceived by audiences through the filter of other media, such as cinema and videogames. In this sense, Cronenberg's highly intertextual work reflects the effects of technological media on humanity, paradoxically using technological media to communicate with his audience. Ambiguity is indeed a key concept in Cronenberg's productions. The technological anxiety portrayed in *Videodrome* is evoked by something that is not already present and identified, but that represents the terror of what we may become. Concerning this, Scott Bukatman discusses *Videodrome*, observing: 'initially the image functions as a reflection of a basic reality. Cleary until the hallucination begins, the viewer trusts the image as the sign of truth' (Bukatman, 2002: 90). This is a fear of mutations of the human form and psyche, as well as of the future of the individual once economic institutions other than the state command humanity. The protagonist of *Videodrome*, Max (James Woods), loses control of his own will at the end of the film. This is a useful metaphor for identifying the enemy of our advanced technological society: it is not a particular entity but the 'totalitarian' influence of economic agents in our decisions, and the loss of individuality as a consequence of the development of technology, specifically visual media.

2.2 Digitalization

In the last decade digital media has gained remarkable relevance as a new way to produce audiovisual material. The influence and potential of this new medium is only just beginning to become apparent, yet, with the ability to transform, modify and erase reality, the digital medium undoubtedly has a marked effect on the portrayal and perception of reality amongst audiences. Recently, predictions about the rapid development of digital technologies have provoked a split amongst analysts, similar to the historical technological polarity generated with the introduction of the telegraph, photography,

cinema and television; in short, a split concerning all the innovations that influence our lives and the way we perceive the world in which we live. Thus, today we can find a division between *apocalyptics*, who believe that new technologies will come with the arrival of a dark period, the end of civilization and rationality, and those who uphold an optimistic and positive mode of thought that considers the appearance of the digital era as the opening up of a new and better world. Nicholas Negroponte and Giovanni Sartori are two authors who represent this dialectic and dual argument. Negroponte (1995: 230) believes that the digital era cannot be denied or halted as it has qualities that will make it successful over time: it is decentralized, global and has the facility to be accessed almost everywhere at all times. However, Sartori believes that the audiovisual culture is uneducated and therefore it cannot accurately be considered as culture. According to Sartori (1998: 47) the predominance of the digital image weakens our ability for abstraction; in other words, our capacity to understand. The consequence, for him, is obvious: digitalization will produce illiterate, uneducated and ignorant human beings. This, however, is refuted by Negroponte (1995: 232), who believes that once new generations appropriate global information resources, we will find new hope and dignity in places where we currently do not expect them.

Such critical and, conversely, enthusiastic observations clearly lack the advantages of an ambivalent, moderate, middle ground position. A digitalized society with a global ability to understand and interpret the world will surely benefit from access to culture, transforming the traditional educational patterns: books will be substituted by audiovisual inter-textual material and knowledge and memory will be replaced by acute understanding of the information in a world in which 'no one knows everything, everyone knows something, all knowledge reside in humanity' (Lévy, 1997: 20). We need to know how to socially utilize and manage technology to take advantage of the digitalization of the world and create a better society. In this sense, a society composed of illiterate or perfectly educated individuals is either a utopia or dystopia; we should shape a future, as we have the instruments to do so, in

which there will be a significant increase in the quality and quantity of education, information and culture in our society.

In parallel with the digitalization of our society, today we are experiencing what can be called a *virtualization process.* This can be understood through the reconfiguration of space and time which transforms our conception of reality. The virtualization and 'acceleration' of our society affects the image in a process that it is not yet complete and has an uncertain future. The facility to access the image and the diegetic worlds of the unrealities that we have created, almost without clear limitations of time and space, renders the connections and boundaries of our lives and the unrealities more and more blurred. Simultaneously this is represented today by the fact that we have even disposed of the wires that previously connected our devices to these technological unreal environments, no longer needing special locations or occasion to immerse ourselves in virtual experiences, becoming, in this way, like 'nomadic' audiences. The limitations are diminishing as fast as the virtualization is advancing and vice versa. In the same vein, Baudrillard describes the acceleration of modernity as one of the main characteristics of our time which is directly related to the acceleration of technology, events and media: 'we have flown free of the referential sphere of the real and the history' (Baudrillard, 1994a: 1). The acceleration of our world reaches a point where, in some ways, we find the disappearance of the boundaries of reality and unreality a consequence of its inertia. In Baudrillard's words, we can describe it as the end of an illusion, the end of the world as we wanted to know it.

For authors like Negroponte, to 'become digital' is the only possibility remaining in order to survive in a world where information moves at the 'speed of light' (Negroponte, 1995). Indeed, the most relevant characteristic of our present time is the massive presence of information. Information is everywhere and everything is information. Information is power and control today and this is illustrated in *Johnny Mnemonic* (Longo, 1995), a William Gibson story[12] that describes a world in which some individuals such as Johnny (Keanu Reeves) have become 'data traffickers' who store and transport

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[12] Longo's film is based on Gibson's 1981 short story of the same name.

information without any knowledge of the information that is contained in their brain. Today, we do not only need to understand and filter the information that we receive, but perhaps more important is the 'process of production' of that information. The social need to understand the digital world is comparable to the learning process of Neo about the virtual world of The Matrix. When Neo learns how to read and decipher the codes of information of The Matrix, perceiving the world through the green composition of binary codes on the screen and also the world of simulation transformed in information, his achievements are an illustration of what our digitalized society must do: understand the information, comprehend the roots, the systems, and have the ability to transform it.

Computer hackers have the ability to intervene in the information system and 'play' with it. In films such as *Hackers* (Softley, 1995), *War Games* and *The Matrix*, Dade Murphy (Johnny Lee Miller), David Lightman (Matthew Broderick) and Neo are hackers presented with positive associations: glamorous sub-cultural heroes, sophisticated rebellious nonconformists who fight the system. In fact, today, hackers have become the terrorists of the information system. When information is the main source of power and control, their 'crimes' are not aimed at actual economic or political institutions but at virtual entrepreneurs who hold the (un)real loot. Hackers also have the ability to transform the reality we perceive and this renders them simultaneously powerful and dangerous to the maintenance of the information system.

We live in a world based on information, intimately linked to a binary code in which the messages that we receive through digital media are transformed into 0s and 1s before we receive them. Between emissary and receptor there is always a 'computerized censorship' of 0s and 1s that subtly and imperceptively interferes with our message. The 'purity' of the message may well be influenced, but the context of its reception will certainly affect the meaning of the communication. The neutral screen of a computer will not reflect the emotions that we are trying to convey in an e-mail or an instant conversation; rather the interpretation of the message will depend on the receptor, on his mood, on his environment. Therefore, it will be conditioned

by factors external to the sender. The relationship of the message between the receptor and the emissary becomes more and more estranged from the latter who sees with impotence how the meaning of his message is modified. Now, this is not a new experience in western societies as epistolary and telegraphic communications have existed for centuries, but the intensity of this phenomenon has increased considerably since digital and virtual technologies have become integral to our lives as a means of communication.

It is clear that if we are not to be disconcerted by the information we receive, we must gain consciousness about the relationship between reality and the devices that we use to observe it. Hence, computers must be understood as a tool, a simple medium. Digital technology has transformed the perception of reality with the high fidelity of its copies, but, in spite of the ability to simulate reality, there is always a distortion, not always identifiable, between the sign and the referent, in this case, between reality and the simulacrum. Following a classical semiological example, we can illustrate this with a photograph of a cat: although the cat on the print is the one captured by the camera, it may not be perceived as the same cat: the lighting, colour, camera angle and lens may influence the viewer's perception (Yuen, 2000: 3). Therefore, the perception of the content may be modified by the context, in other words, by the devices we use to capture, edit, send, receive and reproduce the object. In this sense, Negroponte suggests that 'the medium is not the message in a digital world. It is an embodiment of it. A message might have several embodiments automatically deliverable from the same data' (Negroponte, 1995: 71). Technology is still producing a filter in the reproduction of reality but it seems that we are on the way to achieving a perfect reproduction of the original copy and, in this process, originality will lose its value and will become an irrelevant concept, reminding us, once again, of Baudrillard's (1983) state of the Hyperreal.

The effect of new technologies is exemplified by the way in which we interpreted the messages produced by digital images in the Gulf War. Suddenly, the analogical image that we perceived by way of photography and cinema became obsolete and was transformed into bits of an abstract reality. It was the inauguration of a sterilized war in which the information, being

digitally (re)created, was (un)naturally filtered. The consequence of the introduction of a different kind of technological image produced in the spectators 'an ontological uncertainty about the status of the real, creating a considerable anxiety' (Niedeffer, 2005: 3). Indeed, sophisticated new technologies often tend to provoke skepticism and naïve speculations about their ability to be manipulated, and this is what we are experiencing today with digital imagery and Virtual Reality. It is, in fact, the same process that we experienced more than a century ago with the introduction and spread of cinematic technology, a phenomenon that will be examined in the next chapter. Paradoxically, this 'fear' of the appearance of new visual formats contrasts with the social belief in technological progress.

Nowadays, aesthetic elements assume an important relevance in our culture through the use of technology and so displace ideology to a hidden but equally influential position. In fact, the ideology of the digital and interactive era is 'economic control' of the audiences through technology and spectacle. Consequently, and to be discussed later in this thesis, digital and interactive visual technologies redefine the concept of cinema. Indeed, in digital video or images in real time, interactivity means that there are no antecedents in the secession of images: what we see is what it is. The spectacle in front of our eyes does not require a deep understanding of what we perceive; there is no mystery, no history, in the gaze of the object. Baudrillard accounts for the success of this cinema of 'immediacy' and fascination in the lack of interest in the 'definition or richness of imagination in these images: we look for giddiness of their superficiality, for the artifice of the detail, the intimacy of their technique. What we truly desire is their technical artificiality and nothing more' (Baudrillard, 1988: 43-44).

A collateral consequence of the development of new visual technology and its abilities is the presumption that old films, especially SF films of the pre-digital era, are no longer very convincing and are observed with incredulity by audiences. Yet this is refuted by the fact that films such as *Star Wars* (*Episodes IV*, *V* and *VI*) have been digitally remastered to update the impact of the special effects. The original astonished reaction of the audience to the technology of films of the pre-digital era has given way today

to comical skepticism, and this is something that we observe in the reception of SF films from the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s, such as *Destination Moon* (Pichel, 1950), *The Incredible Shrinking Man* (Arnold, 1957) and *Silent Running* (Trumbull, 1972).[13] The conclusion is that the fast development of visual technology means that what we believe today will likely not be believed tomorrow.

Computers and digital imagery achieve a level of realism similar to mimesis that has facilitated the creation of hybrid forms with the combination of synthetic and existing images. Paradoxically, digital media have the capability to reproduce and imitate 'old' visual media formats with the intention of producing credibility in the imitation. We can observe this in *Titanic* (Cameron, 1997), in which the recreation of old footage intends to contextualize historically and give credibility to the fiction that follows. Indeed, and as we find in *JFK* (Stone, 1991), realist codes can be technologically simulated to confuse the audience and immerse spectators in the plot of the film. In *JFK* the images become 'historical' and gain veracity with the imitation of original old footage. The consequence for the spectator is that there is no concrete evidence to verify the facts we are watching. In this way, an unsteady camera, the use of sepia or black and white, the intentional use of unframed, unfocussed and uncorrected colours and the resultant pretence of amateurism produces a credibility in the audience; and the feeling of not knowing if the images are real or an imitation consequently generates a distortion in their perception. Such technological simulation of real footage can be observed in films like *Zelig*, *The Blair Witch Project* (Myrik and Sanchez, 1999), *Open Water* (Kentis, 2003) and *[REC]* (Balagueró, 2008), films in which the feeling of realism of the image amplify the credibility and anxiety of the spectator. This is a hybrid cinema characterized by 'total (un)realism' in which reality is digitally reproduced using the simulation of unprofessional techniques. Consequently, as audiences, we need to differentiate between the 'realistic thematic', referring to the

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[13] Reviews of these films often make recourse to this way of interpreting special effects in SF films. See
http://scififantasyfilms.suite101.com/article.cfm/scific_movies_from_the_early_1950s
http://classicfilm.about.com/od/earlysciencefiction/fr/ShrinkingMan.htm,;
http://www.hometheaterinfo.com/silent.htm;

veracity of the content, and the formality of the production that we perceive, that is to say how a work achieves the representation of the world, the appearance. The differentiation of both aspects can be a complicated and ambitious act as they are intrinsically linked, but we need new tools, a reinvented position in front of the screen to filter and analyze events in which, thanks to technological visual developments, unreality can simulate reality and reality can be presented as fiction.

One of the visual technologies that has most efficiently confused the perception of reality and unreality is Rotoscope. Rotoscope is the process of drawing over the lens generated image, and the result is a (con)fusion of the animation and lens generated image. Though invented in 1915, the Rotoscope has gained increasing relevance in recent years with the incorporation of digital techniques and its use by Richard Linklater in his films *Waking Life* and *A Scanner Darkly* (2006). The technological hybridization of real images with animation and, simultaneously, digital and analogical techniques, creates a feeling of confusion in the audience, of not being able to identify the reality/unreality of the footage. This visual confusion produces a film that most likely unfolds entirely in the mind of the spectator who is constantly questioning the images that he perceives. As a result, Linklater integrates two films in one: a real one and an artificially generated one. Linklater uses technological devices to connect the form of the film with its content and to facilitate the spectators in the immersion in the plot with the visual aesthetics displayed. In this sense, *Waking Life* captures the twisted illogic of a dreaming state, being visually incoherent. *A Scanner Darkly*, a film based on Philip K. Dick's 1977 novel of the same name, is more consistent in the use of Rotoscope techniques: the images become regularly irregular, but the film incorporates a story of paranoia and hallucination, of confusion, that is visually reinforced by rotoscoping the image. The reaction to rotoscoping and other technologically generated imagery in the spectators is explained by neuroscientists with respect to the way our brain responds differently to real images and cartoons. Animation has a special ability to be perceived and processed into ideas by our brain as it produces more activity in the area called the bilateral orbitofrontal cortex, which responds to rewarding stimuli

(Witfield, 2006: 3-4). In this sense, the rotoscope technique aims to merge the qualities of perception of cartoons with the authenticity of real footage.

In recent years we have experienced a fast assimilation of the digital image in animation, where there is no direct and necessary relationship with the image and reality. Films such as *Final Fantasy: The Spirits Within* (Sakaguchi, 2001) signal an increasing interest in an alternative to Disney cartoons. This film was the first serious attempt to produce photorealistic CGI (Computer Generated Image) humans. The pleasure and fascination in observing how real we look in our technological creations has become symptomatic of the time of reproduction in which we are living. The influence of technology on the image and its perception is usefully illustrated if we consider the radical difference between computer generated images and lens generated images. The computer generated images are synthetic, as opposed to the analytical nature of lens generated images. Therefore the lens generated images are, in some sense, reflective of the reality they represent while computer generated images are always 'medium-generated'. Another opposed characteristic is that the lens generated images are deductive because what we see is a portion of the landscape, whereas the computer generated images are inductive, a large combination of numbers being translated into pixels. Therefore, while lens generated images have instant access to the world, the computer generated images have to create the world and objects with the 'atemporal' sequence of 0s and 1s. Paradoxically, as Herbert Zettl (1996: 83-91) points out, the final goal of the computer generated image is not to recreate the world but to recreate the lens generated image. Ironically, and as Lash notes, 'cinematic signification in the age of hi-technology and the 30 million dollar film, comes closer than other forms of signification to resemblance of reality' (Lash, 1990: 186).

The perfect coexistence and harmony of lens generated and computer generated images come together in films such as *Toy Story* (Lasseter, 1995), an interesting hybrid of the two. *Toy Story* demonstrates unprecedented imaging in which the light, colour and movement have the most extraordinary detail, although they have no direct correlation with real life, creating a 'moving photographic image of the impossible' (Darley, 2000: 110). *Toy Story*

and, more recently, films such as *WALL-E* (2008, Staton) demonstrate how 'perfectly real' the artificial image can be, comparing it, simultaneously, with lens generated images.

The distrust that animation and computer generated images promote in audiences should not deny the potential benefits that they imply if we can be in control of their confusing, perverse effects. In fact, technologically created images promote the creation of unrealities that facilitate a possible escape from the frustrating aspects of our reality; further, they function to reveal things that are ordinarily hidden or unnoticed by our perception. Computer generated images are able to express what is inexpressible by lens generated images: the unreal aspects of reality. The paradox is that once we overcome the distrust of the 'new image' there will be an open possibility to reveal fears related to our society, technology and future. A film like *WALL-E*, over and above its status as a commercial, family entertainment product, is a useful incipient example of this. In *WALL-E* the most developed visual technology is used to recreate the future, a future in which the environment has been destroyed and the earth is inhabited only by machines. In this space, in the non-place, humans live a passive life that technology has physically degenerated, converting them into unthinking consumers who simply assume the mandates coming from technology without questioning them.

In *WALL-E* we can observe how digital media have now achieved pre-manufactured and fabricated images with a similarity and fidelity to the original never expected before. The direct consequence of the ability of technology to create simulacra is that reality and fiction have been (con)fused and the concept of authenticity is becoming irrelevant. In this respect, we have to be aware that even if artificially generated images offer us a more attractive version of reality, they are not 'harmless'. The mere substitution of reality means something in itself: it indicates that we are not as far as we thought towards finding a habitable alternative to our world, replacing 'standard' reality by its representation. We are in the process of pronouncing that virtuality is the new reality.

When the spectator's belief in the visual (un)reality and the diegetic story of the film is increased, an 'hallucinatory' process is turned on: the spectator will be confused and will accept the (un)reality of the film. The danger of technological visual developments is that we can be at the mercy of technology and the worlds we create. However, we do not necessarily have to be 'apocalyptic' about our future and its technology, as mentioned previously, just remain cautious and conscious of the potential threats implied in technology in order to obtain the maximum possible benefit from it.

2.3. Videogames

> We seem to enjoy escape into fantasy and reverie almost as much as we enjoy 'reality' and the modern agencies of mass communication are calculated to stimulate those worlds with such an extraordinary vividness that we are hardly aware that there has been any change in our status. The signals are so taken for granted, we are taken by stealth as in dreams (Berger, 2002: 11).

There are obvious analogies in the genesis of cinema and videogames. Both media have grown from being a 'segment' of other arts to become independent and relevant forms of entertainment. Like cinema, videogames were the result of several experiments and socio-political conditions that facilitated their development; and, like film, videogames are being created in a society which often reflects its beliefs, fears and value systems.

It was in the 1960s when technology and art converged to create a fertile field where new media could grow. In the 1970s videogames were culturally integrated and found their place in the arcade next to the pinball machine and in homes alongside the TV. By the end of the 1980s, videogames started to compete with cinema and television, providing an alternative source of diegetic worlds, worlds that are seen on screen, which are an artificial production of image and sound, but ones with which the player could interact (Wolf, 2002: 29-30). The influence of this technological entertainment in western societies created a significant impact that is

reflected in films such as *Tron* (Lisberger, 1982) in which the protagonist Kevin Flynn (Jeff Bridges) is literally absorbed by the game. Today, videogames are the perfect example of a global, post industrial cultural product, a product that represents the fusion of digital technology and the culture and economy of the late 20th and early 21st century.

Videogames can certainly be observed from different perspectives, and although they have a strong 'disconnection' component they are not necessary asocial. Using a 'Jungian'[14] theory of videogames culture we observe that videogames are strong active agents in the creation of the archetypes and myths of our society, thus representing the 'storytelling' of today. Indeed, videogames have an inestimable power to draw us into an alternative reality and simultaneously to teach us to think and interact with others in a different way (Wolf, 2002: 174-176). In this sense, we should see the competition element intrinsic to many games as a way, as sports were originally created, of 'blocking out competing stimuli of a more threatening kind' (Robins, 1996: 120).[15] Videogames also facilitate players in understanding and assimilating rules. The intrinsic rules of the virtual games do not necessarily have to be extrapolated to the reality, but 'the process' is useful to live and interact in the real social world. Paradoxically, videogames, which can be used as an escape from our society, can simultaneously help us to adhere to our society. However, videogames are not simply an escape from the reality of daily life: they may also constitute, when playing the game, an alternative to the world in which we live. They are able to create worlds that 'are 'self-contained' and completely independent from the complexities of the real world outside, where we are playing' (Robins, 1996: 48). In this sense, Bob Hodge and David Tripp (Hodge, 1996: 105) use the term 'modality' to define the (un)reality of a videogame. 'Modality' refers to the level of certainty or belief that one can find in a videogame, and is therefore a very useful concept in terms of differentiating the duality reality/unreality.

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[14] See *The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious* (Jung, 1968) for a Jungian theory of the construction of archetypes.

[15] Indeed, the concept 'e-sport' has been created to refer to games in which the competition is more important than the plot, graphics, realism or any other factor.

However, and in spite of the importance of the virtual and diegetic aspects of videogames, we cannot ignore the physical and tangible factors that they imply. Playing a computer game is as much a physical activity as it is a mental one, and nowadays this affirmation is more patent with video consoles such as the Wii that simulates movements in the virtual world of the game with similar physical movements in the players. The games played with this console require mental interactivity and simultaneously physical dexterity of hand-eye coordination. Wii players project into virtuality through the parallelism of their movements with those of the avatar. In this way, brain and body assimilate the player with the virtual world.[16] The interface is the link that bridges the existing gap between the diegetic world and the world/life of the player (Wolf: 2002: 3). Indeed, the player's control over the interface and dominion over the virtual world is one of the sources of pleasure that videogames provide. A good level of skill with the controls and a near automatic response to the 'virtual stimulus' of the games is not only essential to play the games, but fundamental to players' intense enjoyment of them. The challenge for the future is to create a connection between technology and the nervous system, producing a perfect symbiosis between both elements. This is the dream/nightmare that Cronenberg shows us in *eXistenz*, making visible the potentially dangerous aspect of this technology.

Before the advent of videogames, a generation that was brought up (remarkably socialized) with television and films, with images and sounds coming from the screen, lacked the quality of 'visual dynamism' as the spectator could not influence the image. Videogames are the first medium to combine visual dynamism with active participation and this has had a significant influence on the generations that are now brought up playing videogames (Greenfield, 1984: 101). Observational and anecdotal evidence would seem to suggest that some children, at very early ages, are able to deal with situations of a virtual world before they can read or write, and this is apparent from my own experiences watching family members engaged in

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[16] This works in such a way that, paradoxically, sometimes simulated activity becomes a very similar copy of what would be the 'real' activity and the consequential effects (tiredness, sweating, injuries etc). Increasingly Wii is capitalizing on this very recreation of physicality with the release of games such as *Tiger Woods PGA Tour 08* (2008), *Wii Fit* (2008) and *Wii Dancing Stage Hottest Party* (2008).

gaming. This is a clear sign that the generations that are growing up at the same time as the development of virtuality are conceiving virtuality and reality in a different way to previous generations. This is demonstrated by the relevance that they give to what happens to them in the fictitious dimensions created by the games, something that was difficult to conceive in the past. It is actually by listening to children speaking about these games that we may understand this phenomenon. Young videogames consumers sometimes comment with the impetus of a 'lived' experience on what has happened to them the day before: whilst in front of the computer, they have conquered places that many of us have never heard of before. It can be argued that the suggestion that these generations have developed a higher imagination or superior capacity for creation than their predecessors is possibly false, because children in preceding generations had other fictions that engaged them. However, the important point is that these fictions were not absolutely based in technology. In short, new generations have developed a sense of virtuality and technological escape from reality that was not granted in the past. This is a sign of how the world is changing. Indeed, further evidence of the influence of technology in the creation of fictions may be found in the fact that previous generations often lived the secondary experiences of the characters of television's Soap Operas, whilst today what we find in new generations is the tendency to live the first person experiences of virtual interactive environments. These new generations have also replaced the physical environments where these collective, social experiences were previously shared (the office, the staff room, the pub) with virtual environments such as Messenger and Facebook, indicating the distinctly technological nature of these fictions and their reception.

Nowadays, computer games also constitute a relevant source of entertainment in adults' leisure world, and the fact that many adults live the virtual life that games provide with such intensity reinforces the theory of an increasing *necessity* to escape the existing reality in which we live. The classic argument often heard from games consumers, and substantiated by personal observation of friends and work colleagues, is that it helps them to 'disconnect' from their life, and especially from their preoccupations and

feelings of stress. It is therefore a sign, on a small scale, of what society is experiencing today: a frustration with our way of life that, in spite of its benefits, is full of dissatisfactions and dangers.

Cinema, another contemporary 'storytelling' medium, is not only assuming plots taken from videogames, but is also reflecting the consequences and fears provoked by the relevance acquired by them in contemporary society. Thus, many films adopt the visual and narrative conventions of videogames, and a film such as *Run Lola Run* (Tykwer, 1998), with its exploitation of a videogames aesthetic within a filmic structure, is a perfect example of this. In much the same manner, *The Matrix,* with its use of computerized special effects, slow motion movement of the camera and the creation of a device with multiple cameras placed in a circle that gives the impression of freely moving around an object or a person, originated a new videogame-filmic aesthetic that has important repercussions for the audience. Indeed, the Wachowski brothers' work has been particularly influential on recent cinematic output, not only with respect to the SF genre with films such as *I, Robot*, but also in terms of martial arts output like *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* (Lee, 2000) and action films such as *Wanted* (Bekmambetov, 2008)*.*

It is true to say, then, that the filmic apparatus has been very much affected in recent years by the electronic culture of video and the computer generation of images, based on the formula of temporal simultaneity and freedom of movement of the image. Taken from the three dimensional worlds of computer games, where it is possible to choose an angle from which to perceive the action, cinema has developed a way to approach the 'infectiveness' of virtuality beyond animation films (King, 2005: 158). After all, a substantial amount of the pleasure experienced when playing videogames comes from the delight of observing (and 'participating in') the development of technology. Cinema has found a way to share this amusement and can be summarized, much in the same way as the cinema of the beginning of the 20th century was, via the notion of 'fascination' (King, 2002: 37). Tom Gunning explains this first fascination of the cinema spectator:

Rather than mistaking the image for reality, the spectator is astonished by its transformation through the new illusion of projected motion. Far from credulity it is the incredible nature of the illusion itself that render the viewer speechless (Gunning, 2004: 866).

The connection between cinema and videogames has also now become an economic matter. The clearest examples are *Lara Croft: Tomb Raider* (West, 2001), *Final Fantasy* and *Resident Evil* (Anderson, 2002), blockbuster films based on the success of videogames and which illustrate the transition from the small screen of the monitor to the big screen of the cinema, exposing the permeable boundaries existing between both media. Today, many Hollywood productions intentionally include CGI action scenes, as seen in films such as *Star Wars Episode III: Revenge of the Sith* (Lucas, 2005) and *The Matrix*, in order to sell the videogame and, at the same time, videogames trailers include cinematographic conventions, montage and narration to gain currency amongst videogames consumers (Chien, 2007: 26). In this way, games adapted from films, and films inspired by videogames, acquire an advantage as they allude to diegetic worlds that very often are familiar for the spectator/player, facilitating, in this way, their 'immersion' within these worlds. The *Enter The Matrix* (2003) game, which was released on the same day as *The Matrix Reloaded* (Wachowski and Wachowski, 2003), is an illustrative example of the transmedia storytelling of today: 'media conglomeration provided a context for the Wachowski brothers' aesthetic experiment - they wanted to play with a new kind of storytelling and use Warner Bros blockbuster promotion to open it to the largest possible public' (Jenkins, 2006: 108). Game and film thus constitute at once alternative but entirely complementary mediums for audiences to follow the story of The Matrix. Acutely aware of the existing link between games and films, as well as videogame players and cinema audiences, Warner Bros secured the economic success of the game and film with the simultaneous release and mutual promotion of both products.

Hybrid forms of videogames and films have now started to appear following the aesthetic principle of verisimilitude facilitated by the supremacy of the digital image. Today we can find experimental films, not

only based on computer games or that adopt their aesthetics, but actual games recorded and dubbed in order to provide them with a 'filmic plot' to attract videogames consumers. This phenomenon is known as 'Machinima'. Irene Chien remarks on the self-reflexivity of machinima and points out that 'the way these game-movie hybrids use cinematic narrative to challenge video-game logic, and game culture to question filmmaking paradigms is what makes them, for the moment, so arresting' (Chien, 2007: 24). Machinima develops an entirely new film language, one that is not necessarily restricted by the real world. A pertinent example of Machinima is the aptly titled short film *Deviation* (Griggs, 2006). Released to the public at the 2006 Tribeca Film Festival, this virtual film was created by players/actors on-line who were not present at the Festival and did not even meet each other or the director in the *real* world (Chien, 2007: 24-25).

Mackenzie Wark summarizes the current difference between cinema and videogames stating that the latter 'represent a significant step away from the intensity of cinema and the simultaneity of television. Its aesthetic depth lies firstly in the complexity of possible interactions between the audience and the media text' (Wark, 1994: 23). Indeed, in spite of the common characteristics that are shared by films and videogames (plots and aesthetics, fundamentally), time and space are managed in a different way in them. In cinema the camera is a window on the world which can be explored from a given position (or more than one, as occurs in films such as in *Time Code* (Figgis, 2000)), but videogames go a step further and allow players to explore and have an active role in the environment. We watch films but we are active participants of videogames. Indeed, in a videogame we are simultaneously the spectator and the protagonist. The keyword to understand the current difference between film and videogames is interactivity. This can be the future of cinema: interactive films with active spectators. In this sense, the appearance in the last decade of a videogame genre that recreates worlds and periods that are played in the first person or FPS (First Person Shooters) is crucial. Thus, games like *Halo* (2001), *Half Life* (1998)[17], *Quake*

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[17] In a review of this game, Ron Dunlin writes: 'A major goal in any game is to create the illusion of reality, a fact that is especially true for first person shooters. The whole point of the genre is to put you,

(1997), *Unreal Tournament* (1999), *Grand Theft Auto* (1998) and *Grand Theft Auto San Andreas* (2004)[18] offer the possibility of reducing the physical and symbolic mediation necessary in order to translate the actions of the user into activities within the synthetic environment. In other words, these games increase the freedom of movement and actions of the players within the game.

Realism in videogames decisively contributes to the enjoyment of the game, although consistency and playability are fundamental factors that make a game successful. Andrew Darley observes that 'the increasing sense of presence in a three-dimensional world that the best games offer comes when interactivity and visual realism combine to augment the impression of kinaesthetic presence or involvement in the image' (Darley, 2000: 159). However, it is important to point out that totality of realism and involvement is not desired by every videogame player as maintaining a certain 'distance' from the diegetic worlds of the videogames is often essential to enjoy a variety of videogames genres. Realistic games produce more intense behavioural and emotional responses in the player and sometimes these feelings can exceed the limits of enjoyment as can be the players' experience of games such as *Bully* (2006) and *Grand Theft Auto IV* (2008). The grade and quality of the involvement of the player in videogames depends on several factors: the actual game is obviously an essential one, but the personality and contextual moment of each individual are also fundamental contributory components. Nonetheless, from a global perspective, it is possible to observe that whilst in traditional narratives (print media) readers use imagination to be involved in the text, technological media 'immerses' the player with an elevated level of participation, becoming an 'extension' of our central nervous system. *eXistenZ* certainly reflects the potential development of videogames when the game converges in the player. Cronenberg expresses his intentions in *eXistenZ,* saying:

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literally in the role of the protagonist. *Half Life* creates a reality that is self-contained, believable and thoroughly engaging' (King, 2002: 40).

[18] This example is particularly interesting because, apart from offering the possibility of choosing your own virtual actions, the game is not only limited to the missions the players have to complete: it has games that can be played inside the game, being an incipient idea of the phenomena described in *eXistenZ.*

It seemed to me that what people are really doing in
computer and videogames is trying to get closer and closer to
fusing themselves with the game. The idea that a game
would plug right into your nervous system made perfect
sense to me, because putting on glasses and gloves is a crude
attempt to fuse your nervous system with the game. I went a
little bit further – if I want to be the game, the game will
also want to be me (King, 2002: 150).

In this respect, it is useful to observe the appearance in Japan of a new phenomenon named *Otakuism* which designates the life of computer games consumers who live almost permanently in the virtual worlds generated by technology (Mandosio, 2001: 10-11). This *style* of life has certainly already been described in novels such as Miguel de Cervantes' *Don Quixote* (1605-1615) and Gustav Flaubert's *Madame Bovary* (1856). Nevertheless, the difference today is the crucial development and involvement of technology in the establishment of these kinds of worlds.

Technology has created what has been named 'virtual communities', social groups, with no corporeal/material contact, that form webs of personal relationships in Cyberspace. In social terms, technology has simultaneously united and divided virtuality and reality, creating two societies in one or dividing one society in two. Virilio expresses this sociological phenomenon, commenting that:

One is a society of 'cocoons' and home offices where people
hide away at home, linked into communication networks,
inert. (…) The other is a society of the ultra-crowded
megalopolis and of urban nomadism.(…) Some people, those
in the virtual community, will live in the real time of the
world-city, but others will live in deferred time, in other
worlds, in the actual city, in the streets (Virilio, 1993: 75).

In recent years the appearance of virtual environments created to live a parallel existence like *Sims* (2000) and *Second Life*[19] have assumed special relevance. *Second Life* is a 3D world where the users live and socialize as

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[19] Following the line of other machinima productions, January 2007 saw the release of *Molotov Alva and his search for the creator: A Second Life Odyssey* (Gayeton, 2007), a film made entirely in the virtual world of *Second Life* that presents a diary of a citizen, Douglas Gayeton, who disappears from the real world to inhabit the virtual environment of *Second Life*. The diaries can be found at http://www.molotovalba.com

they would in the ordinary world. The difference from reality is the opportunity to choose, without living and risking the choices. The facilities of virtuality are exploited in this game, combined with certain real elements: the users can create their own businesses, buy and sell objects, properties or even perform arts (famous groups such as *Red Hot Chilli Peppers* have performed concerts and charged for them in the virtual world). The currency in *Second Life* (Linden dollars) can be exchanged for US dollars and therefore the game becomes a real source to make (and spend) money. Recently the environment has become the target of many multinationals and institutions that do not want to lose their portion of the market even in the virtual world. Therefore, they invest in advertising and they virtually sell their products (although the money paid is real).[20]

Second Life illustrates perfectly the current situation of virtuality: the escape from reality, paradoxically, drives us to the real in a circular process. The virtual meets the real and the real is prolonged in the virtual. Perhaps the only difference in the virtual world is that we do not have to suffer the consequences of our actions and we can turn off the computer with a click, something that is not an option within our real lives, quite possibly accounting for the success of these kinds of games.

2. 4. Virtual Reality

> By the turn of the millennium a technology known as Virtual
> Reality will be in widespread use. It will allow you to enter
> computer generated artificial worlds as unlimited as this
> imagination itself. Its creators foresee millions of possible
> uses – while others fear it as a new form of mind control…
> (*The Lawnmower Man*).

In every period in the history of humanity since modernity there has been a revolution in art. In the Renaissance this revolution related to perspective, in the 20th century to movement through the cinema and in the 21st century we find technological interaction, manipulation and culture of

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[20] However, this may urge us to question the freedom of this virtual world, because when the agencies that hold power and influence in the real world transfer this control to the virtual world, the latter becomes a replica of the real world and less an alternative to it.

the copy that allows the spectator to become an active part in the production of art. Virtual Reality will not perhaps help us to tell new stories although it will certainly affect the way in which we tell them and the nature of perception. Virtual Reality offers the opportunity for consumers to become immersed in a world that looks simultaneously different from and similar to the world in which we live. During this process we can become aware of not being in our world and therefore our perception of artificiality is increased, or we do not retain such a level of consciousness in this respect and therefore it is the feeling of immersion that is increased. Interactive and Virtual Reality technology is thus more effective if we believe we are immersed in the virtual environment, and this situation is reflected in recent years in a proliferation of films concerned precisely with the confusion of reality and unreality within the Virtual Reality context. This is perfectly illustrated in *eXistenZ*, a film with no real narrative resolution; a film where the actors and audience constantly doubt if what they are living/watching is real or virtual; and where virtuality is introduced into virtuality several times, reproducing the old feeling of dreaming that we are dreaming, and the consequent confusion/anxiety this evokes. *eXistenZ* represents both the potential qualities of Virtual Reality and also our fears about it.

Virtual Reality is a fictional world constituted between a magical reality and realism. It is a 'technology of miracles and dreams that allow us to play God' (Dovey, 1996: 2). Jaron Lanier, a pioneer in Virtual Reality and a 'techno-romantic', explains that Virtual Reality is (imagined to be) 'a combination of the objectivity of the physical world with the unlimitedness and the uncensored content normally associated with dreams or imagination' (Lanier, 1990: 188). Nonetheless, behind the initial amazement produced by Virtual Reality there is an unconscious or unconfessed fear; the fear of a potential future in which artificially generated virtual worlds will offer 'better' realities, more in conformity with our desires and dreams, worlds that people will choose instead of the real one. In this sense, Cesar in *Abre los Ojos* elects to live the virtual life he could not live in the real world just as Cypher (Joe Pantoliano) in *The Matrix* chooses, hedonistically, to be immersed in the artificial virtual life offered by technology as the virtual

satisfactions are better than the frustrations of reality: 'Ignorance is bliss' he says. Cypher's choice raises the dilemma of questioning reality through its comparison to a technological utopia, yet, as Lanier points out, Virtual Reality is something totally different to the physical world. The physical world allows you to be lazy, it always remains there, while the virtual world is dependant, existing thanks to the power of our nervous system: this is the only possible way to transform virtual things into 'real things' during our interactions. Therefore in the virtual world laziness is not permitted: the virtual world will disappear if we do not act upon it.

Lanier observes the qualities of reality comparing it to the virtuality we experience today. According to him, when we leave a virtual world we can observe a curious phenomenon: the real world that surrounds us has a 'superreal' condition, a special texture and beauty. When we observe the real world after a visit to the virtual world we can perceive more details, and everything is more transparent and clear than in the virtual environment where the main characteristic of the elements, besides their artificiality, is their simplicity. However, Lanier is positive when predicting the future of Virtual Reality. He believes that it will become similar to language, or at least, a different version of it. It has the potential to be a kind of communitarian service where we can share our dreams and where ideas develop in social collaboration. He defines this as post-symbolical communication, a time that will come in the future when a new generation will adopt the habit of inventing virtual worlds and will acquire the ability to improvise 'new realities' (Leeson, 2000: 23-27). Virtual Reality is therefore certainly more than a language. It is a conglomeration of languages where the novelty is not the codes that are being used, but their utilization: the peculiar relationship between signs, referents and users. In this sense, virtual knowledge denies the possibility of stable semantic limits able to fix a certain meaning. Barrie Sherman and Phil Judkins share this vision and explain that 'Virtual Reality can transmit a universal language. It is a perfect medium through which to communicate in what will be difficult times. Common symbols will emphasize common humanity, expose common difficulties and help with common solutions' (Sherman and Judkins, 1993: 134). Technology

has the ability, not only to improve the quality and dimension of communication among humans, but also to give form to our dreams and fictions. J.G. Ballard talks of the 'qualities of expression' of technology commenting that:

> In the past we have always assumed that the external world around us has represented reality, however confusing or uncertain, and that the inner world of our minds, its dreams, hopes, ambitions, represented the realm of fantasy and imagination. Today these roles have been reversed (Ballard, 1973: 5).

Michael Heim suggests that the key to deal with new technologies such as Virtual Reality is to be aware that these are our creations and are perfect tools for entertainment, education and communication. Heim observes that the essence of Virtual Reality can be better established when related to art rather than technology (Heim, 1993: 82-108). Hence, every artist needs a medium to express his or her imagination and, in this sense, art and digital new technologies are able to complement each other. New technologies such as Virtual Realities are certainly very intriguing devices with fewer restrictions regarding what it is possible to do and express. In this respect Ralph Schroeder suggests that 'new forms of human self-expression will release human beings from the material constraints of their current lives' (Schroeder, 1994: 524). The potential freedom of expression of Virtual Reality has to be managed to create something that will not be turned against us, but will facilitate a pleasurable and educative medium that will satisfy, instruct and encourage communication for consumers. The role of the artist in this process of creation is understood to be fundamental.

Technology is important for art and art has to be fundamental in new technologies, otherwise there is a risk of it becoming boring or mundane if it merely imitates the real world. New technologies supply the artist with the ultimate illusion maker, providing new ways to change the nature of the relationship between the artist and the audience through the interactive possibilities of the digital. In this respect we find a significant extension of

the intertextual[21] experiences promoted by such other art forms as post-classical filmmaking which, with their modernist techniques, similarly implicate the spectator within the fiction.[22] Thus, the contemporary spectator will become a participant, will get closer to the artist as they will both share the production of the work. In consequence, when the audience gradually becomes more involved in the work, it is increasingly difficult for them to differentiate between the artificial world that is being co-created and their personal experience.

Today, Virtual Reality is a technology that offers us certain social solutions (such as flight simulators and similar learning devices), promises of a 'better life' and what is not promised, their reverse: the creation of labyrinths of confusion between virtual worlds and reality. We have to accept that Virtual Reality is something new and therefore it involves various problems in our understanding of it. One of the difficulties that an analyst has to face nowadays when examining Virtual Reality is intrinsically methodological: how can we evaluate new realities when our tools for analyzing these realities are obsolete? It is important for us to pretend that we are confident about our conclusions and analysis; in some sense we need a stable and fixed point to establish our knowledge even though our pillars can paradoxically be *virtual*. We are aware of our 'paralysis'; we have the certainty of not being able to solve the problems that new technologies are demanding and not even to find names for them, able only to employ an inadequate theoretical language to deal with this new phenomena. Sherry Turkle provides a useful definition of our current cultural context and the influence of virtuality in our lives. It is one, she says, based on:

> The erosion of the boundaries between the real and the
> virtual, the animate and the inanimate, the unitary and the
> multiple self, which is occurring both in advanced scientific
> fields of research and in the patterns of everyday life
> (Turkle, 1997:23).

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[21] For useful explication of intertextuality in cinema, see Robert Stam (1992).

[22] Robert Kolker offers a valuable reading of the modernist techniques of directors such as Scorsese and Altman (2000). For a useful account of the emergence, economics and aesthetics of Post-Classical filmmaking more widely, see Geoff King's *New Hollywood Cinema: An Introduction* (2002).

Nowadays, the current technological efforts concerning Virtual Reality are conducted in a double direction: to improve the polysensorial images and at the same time to create interfaces for total immersion. In theory, and in the opinion of the most optimistic experts, in the future it will be possible to conceive a virtual experience, a perfect hologram that would be identical to reality to the point that it would not be possible to differentiate one from the other. What Virtual Reality thus changes is the dichotomy between reality and unreality, the thin line that separates them. We can find new hybrid forms composed simultaneously by these two notions, because Virtual Reality, as the name indicates, is indeed configured with a mixture of both spaces. In Virtual Reality consumers live inside the simulations and therefore their 'virtual' lives depend on the possibilities offered by such (un)reality.

The duality of the real self and virtual representations finds an answer in films like *The Matrix*. Paradoxically, this film reconciles both spheres: the world of flesh and the world of virtuality through their opposition. Neo leaves his body in the chair, in the real world, to immerse his mind in the technological world of The Matrix, but the connections with both are obvious: his body maintains the same appearance in the virtual world and suffers in reality when it is attacked in the technological environment. *The Matrix* does not offer a pleasant possibility but a link, a reason to accommodate both elements in our lives. Virtuality and reality do not necessarily need to be opposed; indeed Virtual Reality opens the doors to many fused interpretations of both spheres and the possibility, as is illustrated in *Luna*, to simultaneously inhabit both dimensions with the metaphorical separation of mind and body: a body that is attached to the real world and a mind immersed in virtuality.

Jameson (1996) and Pierre Lévy (1999) belong to a group of authors who believe that we are currently affected by a general movement of virtualization that is something other than mere 'computerization'. According to them, virtualization is a moment, a particular stage in humanity. In this sense, virtualization is not necessarily good or bad, rather it is just a specific moment through which technological devices experience 'otherness' and this state proffers its advantages: if we are careful and aware of the risks, we can

find in virtual technology useful educational tools for the population; learning, for instance, to be empathic, whilst enjoying a pleasurable source of entertainment. In this respect *The Lawnmower Man* demonstrates both the advantages and dangers of psyche stimulations through Virtual Reality, which, after altering the intellect of Jeff Fahey (Jobe Smith), produce devastating effects on his personality.

For Lévy there is no such opposition between real and virtual; the antagonism that we can appreciate is between *virtual* and *actual*:

> The virtual, strictly defined, has little relationship to that which is false, illusory or imaginary. The virtual is by no means the opposite of the real. The virtual should, properly speaking, be compared not to the real but to the actual (Lévy, 1999: 16).

Therefore, according to Lévy, Virtual Reality is a complement to, and not a substitute for, real activities and existing social organizations. We should understand virtual worlds as realities expressed in bits rather than atoms, as signified and informational realities. Virtuality extends reality, rather than eliminates it. In the same vein, Virtual Reality is not necessarily opposed to cinema. Indeed, Virtual Reality offers an interesting opportunity to expand cinema with new prospects and capacities. The idea of using digital and virtual technology to create films with which the audience increases their sense of immersion and interactivity to produce a personal experience cannot be denied by traditionalism or technological fears. Moreover, it should be accepted that 'the marriage' of cinema and technology has achieved a different stage in their relationship. Nevertheless, even if we assume nowadays that cinema can create anything that we can imagine, we have to be aware that we firstly have to conceive it before we can make it into fiction.

In this respect, and according to Jacques Aumont (1992), a further stage in the development of cinema will come when the spectator will have the ability to generate unique and original images, 'produced' by each person but always from previous and recognizable ones. Nowadays digital and virtual techniques can be applied to cinema and therefore, even being embryonic, it

is possible to introduce the notion of interactivity in films. In this sense the film *Time Code* splits the screen into four and gives the spectator the chance to choose the point of view that he would like to watch. However, the freedom of the audience is not absolute, as it is not possible to choose the angle and move freely within the screen, and also because the soundtrack emphasizes the relevance of a particular screen over the other three. *Time Code* is just an incipient 'sample' of what interactive films can offer to us.

Indeed, the ultimate goal of interactive cinema will be a fully immersive film, which will blur the distinction between reality and the virtual world of the film, isolating the user from any signals outside the system. In other words, when 'the experiences are cognitively similar 'a belief in the reality of' or the clear distinction between 'real' and 'unreal' becomes not just blurred but irrelevant' (Irwin, 2002: 183). Before the advent of digital and virtual technologies, the closest we were to a stage of total immersion was the 70mm formats. There were also further attempts to produce a more immersive cinema with systems such as Cinerama, bicolour 3D glasses and Omnimax, but they never achieved the sense of reality, interactivity and confusion obtained by Virtual Reality (Westlake, 2005). However, in the last year, the release of a new digital visual technology called 'Real D' has significantly improved the capability of producing a notably credible feeling of immersion in the spectators, as demonstrated in *Beowulf 3D* (Zemeckis, 2007). 'Real D' creates a 3-Dimensional cinematographic image through an electro-optical modulator, a unique projector that circularly polarizes the frames and is also perceived by the spectators with 3-D polarized glasses. The resultant effect satisfactorily makes the audiences believe that they are involved in the image projected on the screen, although it is not yet a truly personal experience.

The characteristics that a film (or other technological product) should have to be lived as a personal experience and reach a believable level of reality can be summarized in the combination and balance of cognition and sensation, form and content. Then, of course, the personality of each individual and the enjoyment found in the film are crucial in the impact of every film on the spectator. In technical terms, virtual/interactive films are

more efficient and increase the sense of presence in the spectator when they are simple, coherent and seem 'natural'. In other words, the more difficult the interface is, the more barriers we will find preventing our immersion in the simulation of reality and our ability to forget the physical links of our world. Indeed, the biggest obstacle that Virtual Reality finds today, in order to engage with society and immerse consumers, is the development of its interface. The devices are very present, very obvious; it is not easy to isolate the mechanical elements from the perceptual and personal experience, and this effect prohibits the virtual experience, making it impossible to avoid the feeling that the environment is moving and not us.

However, the combination of the existing technologies of cinema and interaction introduces the audience to the ability to influence the film and create a different film, transforming, in this way, traditional understanding of cinema. In this sense, experimental short films such as *Textual @traction* (Morris, 2005) and *Watch Me* (Morris, 2007) produce an active interaction between the film and the audience through SMS and Video Messages. *Textual @traction* connects the audience to the film through SMSs that they receive on their mobiles phones, sharing the information contained in the SMS of the diegetic characters and extending the plot from the screen to the mobile phones of the audiences. In *Watch Me*, the audience receives the first scene of the film on their mobile phones in the form of a video message before entering the cinema. They then watch the main body of the film in the cinema until the penultimate scene, when the film pauses and the inter-title 'to be concluded elsewhere' appears on the screen. Thirty minutes after leaving the cinema, the spectators receive the final scene on their phones. As a form of 'expanded cinema' *Watch Me* combines two technologies to explore new ways of telling stories and break the time and space traditionally associated with cinema (Morris, 2008).

The question that surely arises from this point is: are Virtual Reality and computer generated images the future of cinema? Will the old cinematic concept of cinema be replaced by the mobility and control over the image of the new media environment? The answer is probably not. The reflexivity, the ability to transmit thoughts, experiences and feelings, the 'active passivity'

of cinema, makes film a unique and different medium from Virtual Reality, although both mediums are naturally complementary. Certainly, the relationship of the spectator to the film in the 'pre-interactive era of cinema' is a very special one and, in spite of the awareness of the audiences about the unreality of the stimuli, the film has the ability to maintain the spectator's empathy in direct connection with the content. Cinema and Virtual Reality will coexist and mutually reinforce one another in the future. There will no doubt soon be an effective and satisfactory fusion of both elements, but the end of cinema has not yet arrived. In fact, cinema has always, and will always, change in form and content. Technology is helping to develop this new stage of the cinematic image but it has not suppressed the cinematic notion: it merely introduces new and interesting ways of expression.

2. 5. Technology and/in Cinema

Generally we may see image technologies as still being 'in touch' with reality. But they may also be mobilised as intoxicating and narcotic distraction or defences against the vicissitudes of reality. And, at their most extreme, they may be used to construct alternative and compensatory realities (Robins, 1996: 123).

As this thesis has described thus far, throughout the history of humankind art has always found new ways of creating the impression of (un)reality. From its origins, cinema, in particular, has always been an art of illusion and paradoxically an art that is committed to the discourse of reality. Thus, the reality of film is a reproduced and/or simulated reality. The aim of cinematic techniques can therefore be summarized as the recreation of reality and/or the fascination of the spectator. There are two different yet common aspects regarding technology in cinema. Firstly, audiences generally observe the action from a designated point of view that reproduces our eyes: the camera. Secondly, they observe the place where they physically perceive the action: the screen. Therefore, our perception is guided twice in a certain

direction through technical artifacts, creating a 'synthetic world perceived by the spectator' (Eisenstein, 2002: 44-45).

Technological innovation in cinema should not only be understood as an altruistic or artistic outcome to improve film technology; it is essentially a capitalist impulse that combines the generation of profit with the fulfilment of human needs. Sound, colour or digital imagery would not have succeeded had the audience not enjoyed them. The conclusion is double, both economic and social: new technology cannot succeed unless the economic system requires it and, on the other hand, new technology must fulfil a social need. In the particular case of cinema, this need can be identified with the creation of (un)realism (Buscombe, 1978: 5).

In parallel, we find that the use of cameras and the reproduction of films have changed substantially in recent times. Digital cameras are affordable for a significant majority of society, offering good quality for making films and consequently 'democratizing' the concept of cinema. Today everybody can potentially make a film and show it on the Internet or through mobile phones. Cinema is not such a privileged art anymore; it is open to the public. Therefore, technology has contributed to opposing stages in the history of cinema: making the creation of cinema first an elitist and then an open, democratic medium.

Filmmakers such as Jordan Belson and Stan Brakhage suggest that technology in cinema works as an extension of human psychology and physiology. The images projected on the screen are, in some sense, an appendix of the inner human mind. In fact, the rhythm of a film is 24 frames per second in accordance with the cadence of the brain waves, imitating, in this way, human perception. A similar observation can be made about the editing process because it can be seen to emulate the structure of memories (Hendriks 2004: 3). After all, the mere act of watching a film means 'abandoning our body' and accepting an experience without corporeal satisfaction of our senses. Cinema has the ability to 'evade' us from ourselves and consequently facilitates the feeling of confusion about the reality/unreality of our perception.

Films by themselves are curious artifacts that take advantage of the psychological characteristics of humans. Imagination connects the fiction and reality of the films, and all the technology used, artifacts and creative work of the crew just push in the same direction: to either make the film realistically fantastic or fantastically realistic. The most efficient techniques in cinema are those that are not easily noticeable by the spectator; those that, after watching a film, audiences need an explanation about to realize that what they have perceived was not real. Films like *Jurassic Park* (Spielberg, 1993) perfectly represent this repercussion because its innovative visual techniques, specifically the accuracy in the reproduction of dinosaurs, meant that when it was released the spectators felt a confusion about what they saw in the film. In this sense, the social habits, the education of our perception plays an important role in the acceptance of cinematic innovation in audiences. We learn to watch and understand films and their technology precisely by watching films.

As mentioned previously, cinema, together with videogames, is currently fulfilling some of the functions that in the history of humankind have been met by storytelling: films provide a system of symbols, myths and feelings that unite groups of people who share the same experiences and anxieties about the future. Paradoxically, cinema, invented by humans, is in some ways reinventing humanity with its storytelling abilities. Cinema is in the epicentre of current technological development; visual technologies and the 'technological ideology' of today meet in cinema. Today we find a cinema with an ever increasing perfection, expressed in its 'veracity' and the pretension to be real, the immediate, the unsignified. Cinema is fascinated by itself as we are fascinated by its ability to create unrealities. Cinema becomes 'more cinema than cinema as images become more real than the real' (Baudrillard, 1987b: 33).

Cinema is thus a key, fluid and influenceable element that connects art and technology. McLuhan observes that 'the artist is the person who invents the means to bridge between biological inheritance and the environment created by technological innovation' (McLuhan, 1992: 98). The artist, the filmmaker in this case, then, is not only someone who uses technology, but

one who can explain to society, to the audience, the effects and meaning of new technology upon traditional conceptions. In this respect, Cronenberg uses many of his films to express an anxiety about the current state of the human condition provoked by technology. His vision of technology is dual and contradictory: enthusiastic and pessimistic about the future of human society in relation to the development of technology. Thus, Cronenberg's films *Videodrome* and *eXistenZ* develop the notion of technology as the main impulse in the transformation of the human body, mind and social relations. He believes that technology has become an extension (sometimes literally) of the human body and that it also has an extraordinary effect on human interaction. In *Videodrome* and *eXistenZ* television and videogames respectively create a constant fluctuation between objective and subjective reality in the main protagonist, blurring the boundaries between the psychic world and the physical one. These two films supersede the classical metaphysical dichotomy mind/body which is dissolved and deconstructed by the 'trichotomy' consistent in mind/body/machine.

The characters of *Videodrome* and *eXistenZ* feel confused distinguishing between reality and hallucination, and, on a parallel level, the disorientation of the audience comes from the identification of the objective and subjective, diegetic, filmic representation. Cronenberg suggests the fear of technological media is based on the lack of understanding of their danger and potential. *eXistenz*, in this sense, evidences a potential future where the Virtual Reality distorts the possibility of discerning what is reality and what belongs to virtuality, to the game. The film suggests that if we go a step further in the evolution of such technology, this can render return to reality an impossibility. The formation of a variety of 'layers' of virtuality can produce the 'disappearance' of reality, which can be indistinguishable in the chaos of the stratos of (un)reality. So, if reality remains there but cannot be differentiated from the artificial version of it, we can finally feel indifferent defining the status of the real.

The Matrix trilogy (1999-2004) is another filmic SF illustration of the impossibility of differentiating between reality and unreality, a fear that is directly linked to the evolution of technology and its effect in our society.

The Matrix is, in this sense, a perfect cinematic embodiment of our fears of modernity, the efficiency achieved by technology and science that turn against us when humans are reduced to energy sources for the machines. For Žižek, *The Matrix* is the ultimate American paranoia: to find out that the world in which we live is false. Paradoxically, in Žižek's opinion, the function of this state of paranoia is to preserve our ideology, to keep everything under control. He views *The Matrix,* not as an original and revolutionary film, but as a late capitalist version of the concept that it tries to enact (Žižek, 1999: 3). The best way to understand a film such as *The Matrix* is to be conscious of the implication of its (hidden) consumerist message without blocking its value as a very useful medium to examine the effect of technology on the confusion between reality and unreality. Indeed, the control exercised by products such as *The Matrix* is denounced by the film itself, as The Matrix represents a programme created to maintain everything under its control. Neo, then, can be read as an apt metaphor of the situation of western societies: he lives an unreal life but is unaware of his real life, immersed in a pod in a destroyed environment. As with the many other humans beings located in pods, he is forced to believe a certain reality. The conclusion is that understanding of the technology we create and develop is absolutely necessary if we want to be aware, and in control, of our reality.

Chapter III

Cinema and (un)reality

Clearly influenced by the current visual technological development and simultaneously able to express the contemporary situation with regards to our social understanding of it in a most accessible and palatable way, cinema, a (sometimes distorted) reflection of the ideology, collective imagination, knowledge and vision of our potential future, provides a most unique point of reference with respect to the confusion between reality and unreality. It is an art form that also has the ability to produce adhesion and cohesion between the realistic and mythical contents, and, for Gerard Imbert, this can be explained by the special characteristics of cinema: it has the potential of transforming the abstract configurations and signs into easily identified and communicated elements; to condense symbols, concentrating abstract and undefined aspects and shape them into stories (Imbert, 2002: 92). It is through the natural selection of the eye in the perception of reality, and the artificial discrimination of the camera, that reality is filtered, created and transformed in cinema to produce cinematic (un)reality.

Cinema is an art of our time but simultaneously it has inherited important cultural baggage since its invention. Unlike the other arts, cinema does not have a past of centuries to be used as a reference. Yet, this is by no means a negative characteristic as it has facilitated the medium in absorbing technological development without prejudices. It is impossible to find an art that has had, in its first century of life, such a rich and dizzying evolution as cinema. The 'culmination of two centuries of industrial modernism and technological sophistication in visual representation' (Darley, 2000: 38), cinema had its genesis in the fusion of the machine with culture, producing a massive cultural diffusion and thus breaking with the principle of art being destined only for the benefit of a privileged minority.

André Bazin (1967: 21) explains how the genesis of cinema began with photography, and he distinguishes a chain of progressive steps towards attaining the ideal of faithful reproduction of reality through visual

technological media. For him, the technological development in visual arts has historically demonstrated the intention of:

> A recreation of the world in its own image, an image unburdened by the freedom of interpretation of the artist or the irreversibility of time (Bazin, 1967: 21).

Indeed, the advent of photography caused a revolution in our system of representation of reality and provoked a dilemma in fine arts as its aesthetic monopoly of the image was questioned. It is through the use of technology that photography became paradoxically more pure and more artificial than its precedent arts and transformed the relationship of the object with its representation; more pure as it captured and reproduced the object with (theoretical) fidelity and objectivity, and more artificial as it introduces between the object and the artist the filter of the technological equipment. In this sense, Hugo Münsterberg understands that, in photography, and this was inherited by cinema, the mind develops memory and imaginative ideas that give sense to the image. Therefore, the image is absolutely dependent on two factors: the perception of the eye and the mind of the spectator (Münsterberg, 2004: 58).

The primary difference between the transcendental moment of photography and the existential moment of cinema is that photography can only be *contemplated* while cinema can be *lived.* Cinema spectators can be absorbed by a film and 'transported' via the combination of the narration of the story and their personal experience, whilst photography requires a 'mystic experience' in which the observation needs to find the right memories and experiences to be personalized. In this respect, Baudrillard (2004: 193-202) observes the higher illusionism of photography over the cinematographic image. Indeed, the illusion of cinema itself gradually disappeared with the introduction of sound, colour, special effects and all the developments that have arisen during the last century and that have brought the medium closer to the reproduction of (un)reality. The illusion of cinema nowadays is fundamentally based on the fascination of the spectators about the (un)realities that it is able to create, the spectacular (un)realities and simulations, and not so much on the solution of an enigma in which the

spectator has to locate the image in his reality using his own imagination. In this way, cinema today moves further from photography and closer to spectacle. Of course, with cinema the illusionary component is always necessarily present as audience and spectacle do not share the same space and time. Everything, from actors to settings and the dialogue heard are absent in the moment in which we watch a film: it is the 'semi-real presence of the unreal itself' (King, 2005: 61). In this context in which reality and unreality are ambiguously represented to the audience in the present/non-present, cinema reproduces life, with all the conscious and unconscious components, and reciprocally life reproduces cinema.

Today technological development makes it not only possible to create the illusion of reality but also, thanks to digitalization, as discussed in the previous chapter, technology facilitates the recreation of unrealities. Bazin points out that art can only exist when the illusion of reality produces the dilemma of simultaneously finding the image unacceptable and pleasurable. Today, with the introduction of the digital image in cinema, this statement has absolute validity. Thus, Bazin observes that cinema invents or narrates 'dreams' that are technologically reproduced with the highest accuracy and fidelity accessible (cited in Wollen, 1972: 131-132). Nowadays, visual technological developments have transformed the spectator's gaze, our perception of films. In this sense, the incipient introduction of interactivity in films is a useful example of the technological evolution of the reproduction of reality. Virtual Reality offers the possibility to change the way in which we watch films. No longer just a fragmentary part of reality that we have to 'sew' to give it sense, using our nervous system to cover the gaps in our perception, the possibilities of interactive cinema and Virtual Reality transforms the viewing process and consequently simplifies the perception of the footage: our efforts to interpret the image decreases and we do not need to process as much the information we are receiving. Think less and perceive more, this seems to be the aim of Virtual Reality and the cinema of the future.

The simulation of reality that we find in Virtual Reality, cinema and videogames generates the multiplication of referents, as indicated by

Baudrillard and mentioned earlier in this research, and this has the potential to produce confusion. The confusion implied in the reproduction of reality raises an important question: why do human beings have the need to reproduce reality? We can find a possible (dual) answer in the risk of being confused, together with the satisfaction of seeing the world mirrored; in expressing and identifying our problems, fears and hopes through its reproduction. In this sense, technological reproductions of reality through Virtual Reality, cinema and videogames are successfully accepted by society as a means of creating faithful, immersive and interactive (un)reality; as a means of becoming the 'perfect reproduction'. Nowadays, these technological developments pose new questions that supplement the traditional inquiries. Thus technological reinvention of the real in the application of virtuality and simulation brings up the question of whether we need a reality anymore when a multiplicity of realities are being created artificially. It is fitting that we find a dual answer in *The Matrix*: on the one hand the natural human search for truth represented in Neo seems to demonstrate that simulation will never be enough in comparison with reality. However, the hedonism of Cypher, who prefers satisfaction over truth, raises new sub-questions to the original dilemma which can only be answered with each individual human condition.

3.1. Ideology, (Collective) Imagination and Utopias

For Lacan, the social experience through the use of languages irrevocably alienates us from our real beings; thus language is a deceit or a trap regarding reality. Our configuration of reality is critically determined by our social relationships and how we observe the world through the perception of other beings (Branston, 2000: 140). In this sense, cinema plays a very important role in the creation and manipulation of our vision of the world, in other words, in our ideology. Every single film has an influence on how someone perceives the self and the world around, and, for writers like Louis Althusser, this is what creates ideology: 'Ideology is a representation of the imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence'

(Althusser, 1977: 152). It reflects the way in which individuals interpret and answer to the social ambit, contributing to the organization of our experience. Today, according to postmodern authors such as Žižek, the function of ideology is not only to offer an escape from our reality, but also to provide an evasion of our current traumas (Žižek, 1989: 45).

Cinema clearly also works in this way: it transmits habits, norms of conduct, mentalities, ways of life, myths and therefore images that constitute ideology itself. At the same time, cinema collects the wishes, eagerness and imaginaries of the people from the point of view of the director, someone not isolated in society and who gives a personal vision of what he or she sees (Camarero 2002: 18). For this reason, the relationship between emissary and receptor, filmmaker and spectator, is doubled and constitutes a feedback process. Consequently, cinema is a perfect tool for analyzing the hidden, invisible and unconfessed parts of our societies. Indeed, throughout their careers, key filmmakers such as Godard, Woody Allen, David Lynch and Cronenberg have consciously exercised the possibilities of 'cinematographic (un)reality', exploring the power of the gaze, the sensitivity of the camera, as an effective instrument for transmitting information. Assuming that nowadays knowledge and information are the main sources of power, precisely such control of the image, its symbolical 'property' and intention, what is shown and what is suppressed, becomes an important element in the configuration of today's society at large.

Cinema may be the perfect testimony of current ideology, not only informing the historical moment but also spreading and socializing these ideas to the population whilst offering a (necessarily selective) world onto which we can project our desires and where our deficiencies are compensated. Therefore, films such as *The Matrix*, *eXistenZ* and *Total Recall*, in which we find the fear of being confused and/or controlled by the fast technological development that fascinates western societies, also entail a consumerist or capitalist ideological message that is not necessarily opposed to the intention of the film. Indeed, these films suggest how the impact of technology in society drastically influences the relationship of ideology and individuals; its relevance has tinged both elements, creating a technological ideology in a

technological population – or vice versa. In general, of course, we assume that the anxieties and fantasies of each spectator are different, although in specific times there exists a common concern, a shared fear that affects large social groups or even society as a whole. According to Žižek, the fictional films of today are the best means we have of looking at the world in which we live: looking at it directly, in a 'real' way would be inconceivable for us (Žižek, 1989: 45). Thus, the visual technological developments that we are experiencing today through films with their unique ability for fascination and spectacle may be the perfect way to transmit ideas.

David Hume explains that when people see a certain part of the reality/world in the same way, the *picture* gets sharper. This is the place where stories arise and simultaneously explains why people are filling this area, on the edge of reality, with myths or fictions (Hume, 1978: 8-90). Nowadays, films are situated firmly in this region and, together with videogames and other technological visual media, are absorbing, reflecting and sharing the collective imagination of western societies. The collective imagination is an essential dimension in every culture; it contains the roots and imperatives of any civilization. We can find in the collective imagination the anthropological background, desires and adversities of society. It can be understood as a social adaptation to the environment, a necessity to subsist and develop culturally. In films such as *The Matrix* and *eXistenZ* the collective imagination is identified in the social fear of the future of society in times in which technology escapes our control and society is paradoxically controlled by technology. Collective imagination is the consequence of the projection of illusion but, once it is consolidated, it manifests new ways of reinterpreting reality.

The collective imagination implies an alternative to the multiple dualities compounded by the rational and irrational, logical and illogical, between reality and dreams. Its restriction in a binary dimension is paradoxically broken with its fusion. Imagination is the key element that links both worlds: the dreaming and the real one. It allows us, collectively, to go beyond the boundaries of established reality, have wider limits and consequently unlock the coercion that reality imposes on humanity. In this

respect, Roger Bastide suggests that the *bewitchment* of reality through the imaginary is only possible in cultures, like western cultures, that have previously fragmented the natural osmosis that exists between reality and dreams, exiling the dreams to the territory of the imagination (Bastide, 1972: 32-65). This is the confrontation of reality and unreality that this thesis proposes to join with the concept of (un)reality. In this way, *The Matrix* and *eXistenZ* suggest an implicit convergence of reality and technologically created unrealities and are useful visual examples in our understanding of the potential conception of (un)reality.

Collective imaginations have as much relevance today as they ever had in the history of humanity. Films such as *The Matrix* contribute to create a deposit of legends, myths and characters that play a fundamental part in molding, understanding and questioning the significance of reality and unreality in our culture. However, authors like Ledrut (cited in Carretero Pasín 2005: 41) believe that in a society of consumerism as in today's western world, the imaginary carries the risk of being 'ideologically distorted': the preconceived styles of life that emanate from media are taken as imaginary, and, through the desire to achieve these lifestyles, are transmitting a consumerist message. The majority of the illusions, the imaginary realms and utopias of today are being produced by institutions and economic agents with an economic, ideological and/or political interest in maintaining the status quo and preserving the same society that they are pretending to alter. In this way, the irony is that we are at risk of playing a 'preconfigured game' in which, by thinking that we can change the rules, we are indeed respecting the instructions of the game. This 'falsified rebellion' is the key to keeping our conscience satisfied and simultaneously not transforming the system. The fear of being simple actors following a script when we think we are 'improvizing' is reflected in films such as *The Game* (Fincher, 1997), *The Matrix* and *eXistenZ*, films in which the loss of control and dominion over our acts and decisions creates an anxiety in the characters that is mirrored in the spectators who have an unconscious concern about suffering the same phenomenon.

The potential capacity of imagination to fragment the established reality and consequently to show possible realities or probabilities inside the real, is the point where we can find a close link with the notion of utopia. Utopias are 'incomplete' cultural expressions; they are possibilities of reality that amplify the potential social existence. For Karl Mannheim (1936: 169), utopias are searching to find a shelter in places and moments where there is a need to imagine something that does not (or we do not want to) exist in reality. Utopias have, in this sense, some analogies with the mirror,[23] dreams and the SF genre: they are unreal, with an origin and connection with reality, and thus 'represent the reduction of the original abyss between ideas and reality' (Ricoeur, 1997: 295).

One of the characteristics of utopias is that they show disagreements with society through the exposition of alternatives and the reactivation of unrealities. Utopia implies the idea of a journey to a (non-) place that is completely different; most of the time this is a journey with a return ticket to the origin: 'utopias have become a place without a place, a moment out of time, the truth of the fiction' (Marin, 1993: 8). In such a (non-) place the conflicts of reality have the potential to be faced, analyzed, understood and overcome. Today, the creation of utopias/dystopias in which the loss of control over technology and the creation of alternative/virtual worlds are constantly being reflected, are a clear sign that we are aware of the problems that our society (potentially) has. Utopia has become an effective social tool that penetrates inside reality and transforms it, renews it,

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[23] Indeed, Michael Foucault sees in the mirror a perfect analogy of utopias:

> The mirror is, after all, a utopia, since it is a placeless place. In the mirror, I see myself there where I am not, in an unreal, virtual space that opens up behind the surface; I am over there, there where I am not, a sort of shadow that gives my own visibility to myself, that enables me to see myself there where I am absent: such is the utopia of the mirror. But it is also a heterotopia in so far as the mirror does exist in reality, where it exerts a sort of counteraction on the position that I occupy. From the standpoint of the mirror I discover my absence from the place where I am since I see myself over there. Starting from this gaze that is, as it were, directed toward me, from the ground of this virtual space that is on the other side of the glass, I come back toward myself; I begin again to direct my eyes toward myself and to reconstitute myself there where I am. The mirror functions as a heterotopia in this respect: it makes this place that I occupy at the moment when I look at myself in the glass at once absolutely real, connected with all the space that surrounds it, and absolutely unreal, since in order to be perceived it has to pass through this virtual point which is over there (Foucault, 1998: 2).

provoking instability in the established social system. In this sense, the creation of alternative realities is questioned in a series of dystopian films like *The Matrix*, *Dark City* and *Total Recall* that make patent our intention to avoid a future in which we are unable to distinguish if our life is real and we are being dominated. These dystopian SF films demonstrate that the 'bright, clears prospects of science and technology have turned into a grim nightmare. Dystopias are, after all, failed utopias, a demonstration of the dangers of attempting to engineer any kind of perfect world' (King, 2000: 15).

Cinema seems, therefore, a perfect medium to represent ideology, collective imaginations and utopias/dystopias; the existence of all these elements is not exclusive as they can coexist and converge in the same film without necessarily being in contradiction with one another. In this sense, *The Matrix* and *eXistenZ* are pertinent examples of films in which the ideology, collective imagination and the dystopia narrated relate to various aspects of the understanding of (un)reality but the different perspectives cohabit harmoniously. Films are responsible for the representation of real spaces, where we could have physically been, and simultaneously cinema expresses credible fictions which nobody can ever inhabit. Therefore it fulfils the ritual function of enunciation in images, the knowledge of our time, the ideas, fears and hopes that refer to the large collective myths or the small mythologies of everyday life. Cinema is achieving this in the most spectacular way: giving the maximum (in)visibility to the ideology, utopias and collective unconsciousness of our society.

3.2. Semiology and Knowledge of (un)reality

As the real world becomes more fantastic, so the fantastic world becomes more real (King, L: 2002: 137).

The unreal may arise spontaneously in dreams and seems to fool us while we are dreaming. The unreal may also result from sensory or cognitive error, again spontaneously, and such as to lead to deception. In either case, the world co-exists with something else thanks to the powers and frailties of the mind. There is another way in which the real world

comes to co-exist with something else. Human beings can represent the world in signs, language and images. Consequently, we live in a world of things and of representations of things (Irwin, 2002: 229).

Visual media, and specifically cinema, are fundamental representations of (un)reality and also of its signs. With the visual technological development experienced in recent years, representations have achieved a reproduction of the image that breaks the traditional relationships between the sign and the referent. Therefore, the (un)reality that we perceive in films has developed to a point where we need to understand the relationships of our world with the image if we do not want to be confused with/in the reproductions. In short, semiology in cinema, the study of the filmic signs we create to represent (un)reality, is fundamental to comprehend the world in which we live today.

Baudrillard (1993: 50-57) describes the evolution of western culture regarding the relationship of reality and its representations, their signs and images as occurring in three well differentiated stages. He denotes the first stage the *counterfeit*, a period that extends from the Renaissance to the Industrial Revolution and whose chief characteristic is that signs reflect a basic reality; the intention of art was to imitate life. The second stage, which he calls *production*, lasted throughout the Industrial Revolution and refers to mechanical reproduction. The third stage, the *simulation*, introduced previously in this thesis, occurs in the moment in which we live today, and is based on information, cybernetics and hyperreal. In this period the definition of the real becomes 'not only what can be reproduced, but which is always already reproduced, the hyperreal' (Baudrillard, 1983, 146).

Semiology of cinema in Roland Barthes' (1972: 5) terms reaches the point where it can be seen as a semioclastia: the deconstruction of the system of signs that surround us and the attribution of the latent cultural messages that they invoke. Cinema is therefore composed of cultural signs which are semiologically more complex than the word in its relation to the referent. The cinematic image is constituted by a 'galaxy' of signifiers not based in a fixed structure but in networks and therefore with infinite interpretations (Barthes, 1981: 108). This ensures that each film is different

for each spectator: a film constitutes a spectator's 'version' of the director's film; in it the semantic and social values held by the spectator are combined with the (un)reality and diegetic world of the film.

As outlined previously, one of the ways to understand the qualities of the image nowadays is to observe the image, not as simple imitation of reality, but as a creation of reality. According to Barthes (1964: 1-11), the image is basically a reconstruction and it does not intend to achieve the representation of reality; it is not a reproduction, it is a simulacrum. In this sense, Barthes questions visual representations, examining the possibilities of the *copy* to produce true systems of signs and not merely the aggregation of symbols. Barthes is interested in analyzing how cinema operates as a language, and, to this end, differentiates three levels of the message, all of which are present in the image:

1. *The linguistic*: articulated in denotation and connotation
2. *The iconic*: constituted by a series of discontinuous signs
3. *Symbolic*: the correspondence of signified and signifier which produces meaning and is strongly codified. This is the place where we can find the ideological sense of the message.

In short, Linguistic, Iconic and Symbolic elements of cinema create the (un)reality of films. The specific nature of each one, and the interaction of all of them together, will create a more or less (un)real representation of reality, a representation that is simultaneously communicable. Christian Metz (1982) believes that cinema is indeed a language. It is a language because it has a text and a meaningful discourse; but it is language without a code, with the ability of communicating (un)reality without the constraints of typographic media. Metz reduces the importance of iconography in cinema to a marginal level, focusing on simple evidence such as 'good cowboys wear white shirts and bad cowboys wear black shirts'. Metz follows the same line as Saussure, who perceives in the signs an arbitrary condition that makes them fundamental in communicating cinematic (un)reality. In fact, in the symbol there is always a code: it is not absolutely open and the relationship

between signified and signifier is unequivocal, and it is complicated to replace the association (Wollen, 1972: 78-81).

Godard is one of the directors who most emphatically investigates the possibilities of the image and cinema as a medium of communication. Godard makes the most of a medium that is semiologically complex. He achieves a satisfactory mixture of the Linguistic, Iconic and Symbolic levels of cinema in his continuous research into the nature of the perception of the (un)reality of cinema. His films are the result of a style of filmmaking in which the conceptual meaning of the film coexists with the visual beauty of the image and the documentary 'truth' (Baecker, 1996: 567 and Wollen, 1972). Godard's films can be defined as 'metacinematic'. This is to say, he makes cinema speak about cinema, 'manipulating' cinematic language to undress and reveal his ideas about it. He frequently questions the very reality of cinema, as we can see in films such as *À bout de Soufflé* (1960), *Le Petit soldat* (1963) and *Le Mépris* (1963). In these films, Godard conceives a cinema where the only reality that it is possible to stage is a reality that is paradoxically immersed in fiction. In films such as *Une femme est une femme* (1961) Godard suggests that the consequence of breaking the traditional fictional artifices that configure the (un)reality of cinema is that the distance between the characters and the audience is reduced, initiating a dual phenomenon of proximity between the director/medium/content/material and the audience. When the characters evade the cinematic conventions, the audience feels disturbed, as the expectations about the narrative are anomalous. In fact, in films such as *À bout de soufflé* and *Le Petit soldat* we are encouraged to consider the act of having characters occasionally talking to the camera/audience, breaking the traditional laws of cinema.[24] Reflecting the (un)reality of films in this manner, Godard emphasizes cinema's conventions and, as a result, the distance between reality and fiction, the (in)visible filter that separates them, is now evident and therefore it is possible to ignore it.

Following, then, the cineliteracy of directors of the *nouvelle vague*, a post-classical American director like David Lynch in films such as *Blue Velvet*

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[24] We find a similar, highly self-reflexive technique in films such as *Play it Again, Sam* (Ross, 1972) and *The Purple Rose of Cairo* (Allen, 1985).

(1986), *Lost Highway* (1997) and *Mulholland Drive* (2001) has similarly confronted the question of how we read a film and how it is related to reality. So, just as Godard uses his films to question and revise the old forms and conventions of cinema, so, too, does Lynch, arguably updating Godard's exposé of cinematic reality to revel in a truly postmodern reliance on pluralities and multiple meanings. Thus, Lynch introduces the spectator to these films with a shocking immediacy, and then the reality, the place where the spectator was before, is revealed as an artifice, thereby suggesting the unconscious and unstable characteristics of reality (Lash, 1990: 192). In *Mulholland Drive* we observe the story of an aspiring actress who meets an amnesiac woman who has suffered an accident. The film then adopts a surrealistic/oneiric narration that makes sense only if we interpret the images as part of a dream. The reinterpretation of the laws of cinema and the confusion of the spectator's perception of the film is the ultimate aim of Lynch. As an investigative artist, Lynch, like Godard, is interested in the thin line that separates reality and unreality, film and audience, and his mode of research is the creation of his own films. In short, in films such as *Lost Highway* and *Mulholland Drive*, Lynch confuses the spectators to demonstrate the manipulability of the (un)reality of cinema.

The image has a quite unique ability to communicate, then, with its semiological complexity, the representation of (un)reality. The (un)reality of the image is explained by its inevitable comparison with reality, in other words, the distance and relationship between the sign and the referent. In this sense, fiction breaks with the conventions of language and modifies the relationship of the sign and signifier. The creation of fictions in films is the perfect example of the relationship between reality and unreality: fictions are unreal in their composition but they have the ability to look real in our perception. Thus, developments in visual technologies enable the image to be both: a perfect reproduction of reality and/or a complete invention, an image with no referent in reality. In this sense, the events that followed the devastation which occurred on the 11th September 2001 in New York affected the way in which we perceive films, transforming our symbolic and epistemological system. This episode was beyond our imagination, beyond our

words and, in Lacanian terms, we can say that it was necessary to reconcile the real and the symbolic to understand its consequences (King, 2005: 18). The (un)reality of films was superseded by reality on 9/11 and therefore cinema required a different kind of perception to offer to the spectators as the boundaries of imagination became altered. Baudrillard anticipated this situation a few years before saying that: 'There is an escalation of the true, of the lived experience. And there is a panic-stricken production of the real and the referential' (1994a: 12-13). Indeed, Baudrillard (1987a: 104) points out that our society only knows itself and the world around through the reflections that come from the camera's eye. Thus, this is an unreflexive-Americanized knowledge: as the production credits of many of the texts discussed in this thesis attests, because a vast amount of films, television productions and videogames are generated in America, it follows that what we perceive is a somewhat (unavoidably) 'American reality'. Moreover, this America of today is a place where things only need to 'appear' credible in order to 'be' credible; it is the 'desert of the real' of today and an ongoing example of the emptiness of representations (Baudrillard, 1988a).

   We are witnesses to the rise of a new regime of signification that reconfigures the culture from its foundations. In this sense, Martin Barbero (2002: 81) affirms that what the technological revolution introduced into our society is not only a considerable number of new machines, but, more importantly, a new way of relating to the symbolic process. In other words, the most relevant consequences of technology are not the apparatus, the new devices, but the new modes of use of language and perception. The real impact of new technological inventions is produced in intangible elements: in(side) our selves, in the way that we interact with our environment, with (un)reality. This is the consequence of the dominion of the audiovisual experience over typography and the belief in the image as a legitimate way of transmitting knowledge. As Peter Greenaway points out 'we have achieved the end of the supremacy of the text and we are entering now in the time of the image' (Constenla, 2008). Therefore, we need to learn how to perceive and understand the image and its (un)reality.

For Lacan (1980: 80, 292) the 'thing' itself is the glance, not the object that is perceived. In this sense, images that distort our perception of reality are 'real' in themselves; they cannot be taken marginally. Reality in Lacan's work (1980: 56-77) will not be the referent that should be discovered and domesticated using the filter of fantasy, because reality is also the filter itself. In this respect, Gilles Deleuze believes that when things are replaced by their image, the image becomes automatically self-sufficient, self-referential and independent of the subject, in other words: an absolute. In the image, the truth and the imaginary are, in some sense, indistinguishable (Trifonova, 2004: 145). We need to 'reconstruct' our perception to manage our understanding of the new technological image which has no trace in reality. Indeed, our perception will need to get closer to 'the artificial' because this will be the perfect way to perceive (un)reality. In other words, this is the replacement of the 'original purity' of perception with the artificial/technological understanding of it.

Deleuze (2005: 163) designates the cinema of the last few decades a cinema in which the image by itself produces fascination as 'pure expression', a cinema of real falsification. His conception of cinema is similar to the idea of knowledge in Plato: the world is a film that was there before the perception of the human eye captured the images in celluloid, creating a 'camera consciousness'. Indeed, it is interesting to use the allegory of Plato's cave to illustrate the knowledge of reality in cinema spectators when they give 'reality to a world without substance' (Konigsberg, 1996: 1), and, being immobile and passive in the dark, accept copies or simulacra for the original objects. Plato (1992: 514-517) illustrates the human situation with respect to knowledge of reality and what informs this by evoking the image of a cavern. Within the deepest part of the cavern he depicts prisoners who have been chained up since their childhood, and are able only to watch what is presented before their eyes: a wall onto which the shadows of various objects placed behind them, and therefore that they cannot see, are being projected. In a situation like this, when a prisoner is released they perceive the first shadows as more real than the direct objects they encounter. Only once the initial pain is transformed into a clear vision would they begin to

perceive the true things; and thus it is in this 'outside luminous' that the real knowledge of these things occurs. The prisoners would learn not to be deceived by appearances that, inside the cavern, they had taken as a true and unique reality. We can find a strong parallelism here with *The Matrix* trilogy in which the humans connected to The Matrix undergo the same phenomenon: their vision of the world is far from reality and clearly distorted. Just as in dreams, they live in an unreal world, but they ignore the fact that this is their condition.

Indeed, cinema is, in a sense, comparable to the act of dreaming. Cinema and dreams are usually seen as diametrically opposed to reality when they should be observed as dialectically linked. Cinema shares some of the functions traditionally fulfilled exclusively by dreams as it helps our brain to improve its operation, identifying our worries, fears and hopes. For authors such as Jean-Louis Baudry the analogy between cinema and dreams is based in a 'form of lost satisfaction' (1986: 307); indeed in cinema we find something that 'belongs to the sphere of the double, the phantasm, the mirror or the dream' (Baudrillard, 1987b: 25). Thus, apart from the obvious physical affinity between both experiences (the darkness, the passivity, the images), the most relevant similarity lies in what cinema gives to us: a primary and unconscious identification with what we are seeing/dreaming. Baudry describes it as being:

> A relative narcissism, and even more to a mode of relating to
> reality which could be defined as enveloping and in which
> the separation between one's own body and the exterior
> world is not well defined (Baudry, 1986: 312).

In this process of watching a film, the cinematographic image suffers a double and paradoxical effect: it becomes more real than the simple succession of images and it also becomes more 'ours'. Cinema contains its own reality but this reality is appropriated by the spectator who, with his memories, experiences and personality, 'reconstructs' and gives a personal sense to the (un)reality of the film. The spectator, during a specific lapse in time, introduces the imaginary of the film into his life and the film becomes

like that of a 'lent dream'. Such interwoven processes of absorption generate a (partial) disconnection from the reality of the individual.

A common response to the power of a film's images comes from their peculiar characteristics, where the large scale and highly detailed images engage the audience in an activity of intense but simultaneously relaxing sustained attention. In cinema, the spectator's actions are normally reduced to merely watching and listening to the film. Under these conditions, the normal 'judging' function of the ego is suspended, to some degree, and our ability to be receptive to ideas, to the (un)reality of the film, increases in comparison to our everyday life. This can be interestingly compared to the activity of watching a film at home where, in spite of the development in technological audiovisual devices, the capacity of concentration decreases in inverse proportion to the increase of distractions. In this context, the (un)reality of the film encounters more barriers in linking with our imagination, permeating our psyche and being appropriated by the spectator. The lights, noises, interruptions and other interferences make the spectators less vulnerable to the film when watching in a domestic environment.

Metz observes that one of the most remarkable qualities of cinema is that it effaces the absence of the real with a simulated or constructed reality, and, as a result, it fills the spectator's lack, restoring him to an imaginary wholeness:

> The unique position of the cinema lies in this dual character of its signifier: unaccustomed perceptual wealth, but at the same time stamped with unreality to an unusual degree. It drums up all perception, but to switch it immediately over into its own absence, which is nonetheless the only signifier present (Metz, 1982: 45).

In this sense, Lacan, who locates himself at the point of confluence between unconscious reality and conscious reality, refers to this phenomenon when reality and unreality comprise one entity using the term 'suture'. Lacan (1979: 118) explains the identification of the audience with the film, relying on this 'conjunction of the imaginary and the symbolic' within the cinematic

discourse itself. In Lacan's terms, cinema sutures the reality and the imaginary, and produces (un)conscious satisfaction in the audiences.

The continuous play of contemporary cinema with presence and absence, with reality and unreality, produces a new harmonic co-existence within the 'cinematic dream'. The perceptual equality of the image, as real and unreal objects have the same status on the screen, means that, in filmic terms, the imaginary can be just as credible as the real. Therefore the consequence is a disconcerted consciousness where the imaginary seems perceptual and the perceptual seems imaginary. In Sartre's terms we can deduce that there is a displacement of the real by the unreal and it is this which produces pleasure in the audience (Orr, 1993: 85-90).

To achieve this connection of the (un)reality of the film with the spectator, cinema has created a series of shared conventions, a kind of accepted (un)reality, to watch films in a certain way. The assumption is that the initial reality is being substituted for an illusion of reality, and consequently, it has become an established complex set of abstractions mixed up with elements of 'authentic' reality. A perfect illustration of the 'real' status achieved by (un)real conventions of cinema is sound and colour. We certainly perceive the world with colour and sound and therefore an accurate representation of it should have these characteristics. But in spite of this, when it became technically feasible, colour and sound in audiovisual media did not faithfully reflect the reality perceived when we are not in front of the screen. The social habits, the education of perception, play a fundamental role in the acceptance of cinematic (un)real conventions and therefore are adapted according to the circumstances and technology available at the time. In this sense, one of the most relevant conventions we can find is the use of the black and white image. It seems to be completely artificial, but nevertheless human perception has managed to give it cinematic (un)reality. Language and certain sounds are other conventions that have 'gained reality' through the historical cinematic education; the language in a film may not necessarily correspond with the time and location

represented[25] and we accept that some sounds are different to the ones we hear in real life. In particular spot effects demonstrate how cinematic conventions can become real for audiences. A useful example is the sound of gun fire: onscreen, gun fire has to whistle to seem real, a noise that does not correspond with the real sound of a bullet.

Paradoxically, the violation of such conventions concerning the (un)reality of the film creates fascination and satisfaction in the audience. *Á Bout de soufflé*, *Le Petit soldat*, *Le Mépris*, *Lost Highway* and *Mulholland Drive* are all illustrative of the violation of classic cinematic conventions in order to investigate the (un)reality of cinema. Today what we find in films such as *The Matrix, eXistenZ, Memento, Waking Life* and *Run Lola Run* is the 'technological' twisting, the transformation and innovation of such conventions to research the technology and the (un)reality in which we live. These films break with the conventions of cinema using 'artificial' zooms, movements and camera positions, slow motion, colours, sounds and narration of the plots, which leave the spectator in a position of uncertainty. Therefore, we should say that cinema is not real *per se*, but we 'make it real' in an (un)conscious social and audiovisual process that today reflects the transformation in the perception and understanding of (un)reality.

The new cinematic conventions that films are creating through technology, among which the 'bullet time' is the most representative, demonstrates that the social and technological time in which we live is generating a new glance at the world; one in which reality and unreality is digitally (con)fused. Therefore, the introduction of new technologies implies that cinema is not simply a 'realist mirror'. The new technologies applied to cinema favour the creation of new styles and simultaneously the complexities, fears and hopes of contemporary life provides new thematics for these films. Fused together, both elements generate the appearance of a new image as well as a new way of seeing cinema.

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[25] In this respect Zack Snyder, the director of *300* (2007), justifies the abundant presence of British actors in the film, claiming that 'it was a convention of those type of movies that people from the ancient world speak with an English accent. I know it is completely ridiculous, but I thought audiences would accept it' (Millar, 2007: 25) .

3.3. Postmodernity

> One could isolate two impulses in tension at the turn of the century -the impulse to rectify the discontinuity of modernity, its traumatic disruption, through the provision of an illusion of continuity (to resist modernity), and the impulse to embody discontinuity as a fundamental human condition (to embrace modernity). The cinema, in effect, does both (Doane, 1993: 13-14).

Postmodernity is explained by the disruption of the modern illusion in constant progress. Today we find that progress in cultural, social, political and economic areas is not as advanced as we might wish; yet technology hides this frustration with the ability to create unrealities never thought able to be produced before. George Balandier indicates that today we are living in a hyperrationalized and aseptic culture that is sentenced to segregation: on one side exists a collective imagination that reflects the socially frustrated dreams, and on the other side a 'technoimaginarium', where the power of the image and the magic of the complex machines that we have developed cover up the dissatisfaction hidden behind the brightness of the lights (Balandier, 1988: 242). The reproductions that we have created conceal our incapacity to build a world in which *égalité, fraternité* and *liberté*, the dream of the Enlightenment and the fundamentals of modernity, become true, not only in virtual, hyperreal, cyber-realities of 0s and 1s, but in the real *world of atoms*. Thus, the so-called culminating point of our society is revealed in films such as *The Matrix*, *Blade Runner* and *Terminator*, SF dystopias with a pessimistic image of the future: a loss in faith related to our progress in terms of science and rationality. The assumption of this social and cultural failure of modernity is metaphorically represented in *The Matrix* when Neo, after choosing the red pill and consequently choosing to know the truth, opens his eyes and is guided by Morpheus in a demonstration of the real status of the world: a destroyed society in a deserted environment.

In economic and political terms, we can define our era as that of a multinational capitalism, a system that is highly dependent upon rapid technological advancements for its continuous expansion. As described

previously, today the key 'global resource' is information itself rather than oil, farm goods or other resources usually associated with capitalist market systems. Information today represents power and determines the population's actions; consequently dominion over the world of bits is translated into control in the world of flesh. *Blade Runner* is perhaps the film that in the clearest way shows the dramatic view of a postmodern society (Lyon, 1994: 1-6). *Blade Runner* takes place in Los Angeles, a modern and multicultural city nowadays, but which in 2019 presents an aspect of absolute urban decadence. The sunny California that we know has obviously suffered a nuclear or chemical disaster. The city becomes an impersonal place without distinctive characteristics, where different styles and cultures are mixed up under the neon lights of commercial advertisements. It is in this context that the modern industrial organization shows new principles that are not based in capital or work as the main resource of power. Instead, they have been substituted for information, knowledge and communication. Therefore, we cannot see any political or social influence in the execution of power. Economy manipulates society and both are directly dependent on the technological and information industry. *Blade Runner* portrays a consumerist society in which everything is a show and the most important thing is appearance. *Blade Runner* depicts a situation in which all boundaries have imploded within cultures, biology, technology and between reality and unreality. Consequently, this is a world in which simulations have displaced reality (Kellner, 1995: 305).

At the point of confluence of reality and (un)reality, of machine and human, we find Cyberpunk. Cyberpunk is defined as a postmodernist tendency and 'the cultural expression of late capitalism' (Jameson, 1996: 9). It is a vision of the future under the prism of a pessimistic imposition of technology and its consequences: its impact on the conduct of the people and the living space which turns from an empirical reality to a virtual one, the Cyberspace, the 'no-space' (Jameson, 1991: 38 and 321). Cyberpunk should be understood as a kind of socio-economic theory that embraces technology and offers up an alternative to the bright, utopian dream of modernity: a dystopian future. Cyberpunk is reflected in the increasing number of dark

premonitions about the fast technological changes that not only affect society, but also the human body. *The Matrix*, *Videodrome*, *eXistenZ*, *Strange Days* (Bigelow, 1995) and *The Terminator* are perfect examples of both: a pessimistic vision of the future and the increasing link of technology with the human body, the end of the duality of flesh and machine. In this respect, we find the work of Donna Haraway as an alternative to the pessimistic conditions described by Cyberpunk. For Haraway the cyborg is a 'hybrid of machine and organism, a creature of social reality as well as a creature of fiction' that designates forced adaptations of life to global capitalism and produces future hybrid solutions to technological societies (Haraway, 1991: 199).

Indeed, (con)fusion and contradiction are probably the best way to define the nature of the postmodern cinema wherein there is a constant blurring of boundaries; where reality and unreality share the same representations; and where technology and human, cultures, temporal periods, spaces and languages are (con)fused. In other words, postmodern cinema symbolically (re)constructs and (re)presents reality in ways that 'simultaneously and contradictorily abolish and establish the real and its representations' (Jameson, 1991: IX-XIII). Postmodern cinema should be understood as the 'historical' and social result of the confusion between reality and unreality, a cultural intention to join the technological development with our old social and philosophical knowledge that has not been significantly transformed since the Enlightenment. Postmodern cinema reflects the times in which we are living, times of digitalization in which copy and modification acquire new magnitudes and consequently affect the relationship of signifier and referent. Postmodern cinema is, in this sense, the 'crisis caused by modernism and modern culture confronting the failure of its own strategy of visualizing' (Mirzoeff, 1998: 4). Lash (1990: 11-12) indicates that the basic difference that we can find between modernism and postmodernism in cinema is that whilst modernism is interested in the problematic character of representation, postmodernism makes reality problematic and consequently referents and signifiers assume a new and different relationship:

> Modernism had clearly differentiated and autonomized the
> roles of signifier, signified, and referent. Post-modernization
> on the contrary problematizes these distinctions, and
> especially the status and relationship of signifier and
> referent, or put another way, representation and reality
> (Lash, 1990: 12).

According to postmodernism, behind surface and simulation there is nothing; there is emptiness in the representation. Postmodern cinema is based around simulation, (un)reality, substitutes and virtuality. This is a paradigm that contrasts it with modernity and its obsessive search to discover hidden referents under (un)reality. Indeed, in postmodernity the images and signs, the representation of the objects have achieved a similar standard to the referents, the objects that contribute to the configuration of our lives (Baudrillard, 1974: 32-33). In Jameson's words:

> If there is any realism left there it is a 'realism' which is
> meant to derive from the shock of slowly becoming aware of
> a new and original situation in which we are condemned to
> seek History by way of our Pop images and simulacra of that
> history, which itself remains forever out or reach (Jameson,
> 1991: 71).

The image that we can see in Jameson's vision of postmodernism is similar to Lacan's endless chain of signifiers, which culminates with no reference in the world of experience and produces emptiness, despite the fulfillment of images. The conclusion is that technology has, in our current time, an effectiveness never experienced before to (re)create (un)reality from representations. In this sense, films like *The Matrix* trilogy, *Dark City*, *Total Recall* and *eXistenZ* appeal to the perfect simulation of reality; the ultimate virtual technology that provokes inestimable consequences in our lives when we do not know if we are living in the representations. Apart from a common concern across their plots, some of these films coincide in having an astonishing level of performance in which the visual spectacle works together with the story, mutually reinforcing each other in their coexistence and generating a cinema with a figural connotation. In these films the

spectacle is (un)reality, its potential transformation and our fears related to this phenomenon.

The continuous play with the (un)reality of the images and the consequent belief/disbelief in the spectator denotes a cinema in which 'being tricked' is its final aim. Signification does not run very deep and 'being fooled is enormous fun, and although we are not sure precisely how it was done, we are amazed at the cleverness of it all' (Darley, 2000: 55). As discussed in the previous chapter, today the irony of the computer generated image and visual-technological special effects is that even being conscious that we are being deceived we can still submit to the illusory effect generated by them. New technologies will provide us with the tools necessary, not only to reproduce the reality that we know but to communicate new forms of reality or new realities. In this sense, special effects are a way to 'represent a mode of visual display that privileges aesthetic novelty over realism' (Pierson, 2002: 156).

We are thus living in a society where our perceptions are divided and confused between reality and the representations of reality. The latter gradually constitute a larger proportion of our perceptions and consequently the vision that we have configured of the world is closer to the simulacrum than to what it actually represents. In particular, SF films such as *The Matrix*, *eXistenZ* and *Total Recall* are very useful cultural tools to analyze the creation of alternative/simulacral (un)realities, their cultural and social significance, and how individuals react to such technological confusion.

3.4. Science Fiction

Because real life, true life, will never be enough to overwhelm human desires. And because without the vital dissatisfaction that the lies of fiction appease, we would never have real progress. The fantasy we have is a demonic gift. It continuously opens an abyss between what we are and what we want to be, between what we have and what we wish. But imagination has conceived an astute and subtle palliative for that inevitable divorce between our reality and our excessive appetite: the fiction. Thanks to it we are more and we are others being the same persons. (Vargas Llosa 1990: 19).

> We engage ourselves in the fictional space the film creates for us. The more we 'lose ourselves' in the fiction, the further we choose to enter this altered reality in a way psychologically similar to the way Neo entered his new reality, Douglas Hall and Jane Fuller enter simulated worlds in *The Thirteenth Floor*, or the way Allegra Geller and Ted Pikul enter the simulated game world of *eXistenZ* (Irwin, 2002: 179).

In creative terms, fiction is defined in opposition to reality, designating all those productions with a content that does not directly correspond to the empirical reality of the world. SF is a composed and opposed concept, because science refers to the set of knowledge subject to experimentation, arrangement and verification but fiction, on the other hand, evokes invention, the 'no-existence state'. SF, from this point of view, constitutes a step forward in the idea of transgressing reality, transforming it into something credible. And to make this possible the unconditional and (un)conscious collaboration of the spectator is essential.

SF has used its diversity and flexibility to absorb ideas from other domains and genres to keep the genre alive for more than a century (King, 2000: 3). Films like *The Matrix* are SF productions that contain elements of other genres such as the martial arts film, the western and the thriller. SF cinema manages to amalgamate the subjective point of view of the artist who creates the story with the objectivity of science and, as a result, it creates a scientific perception of the future observed from the subjective position of the director. SF shows, in this way, the possible changes that will occur in a hypothetical future from a credible point of view, telling us (sometimes pessimistically) how things will be if we follow a certain direction and thereby highlighting our present fears and anxieties. However, SF cinema does not only display the contradictions of the system; it also makes clear that the world in which we live is not the only possible one, but simply a set of social and human relationships that is one amongst many possibilities.

Like myths, the main tool used by SF to reflect the problems of our society is to project them into a different world or a distant future where we can see, reflected with more objectivity, these problems of our society far from the location and time where we live. Today these problems are mainly

related to the fears of losing control over our life provoked by the development of technology, and this often leads to the creation of virtual worlds in which the perception of reality and unreality is confused. SF films such as *Total Recall*, *eXistenZ*, *The Lawnmower Man*, *The Matrix*, *Abre los Ojos*, *Dark City* and *The Thirteenth Floor* are perfect illustrations of these fears and the pessimistic predictions of our society.

Science has always endeavoured, with theories and with the use of technology, to explain and question the nature of reality and the way we perceive it. Scientists such as Hugh Everett III discovered in 1956 that reality may not be the product of universal laws of perception as we can only experience 'one world' consciously, and so named his theory the 'Many Worlds Theory'.[26] The Many Worlds Theory is useful to apply to the experience of SF protagonists such as Neo, César, Quaid and Allegra Geller, and simultaneously the experience of the spectators of these films. According to this theory, there is a coexistence of different worlds, different realities. Technological virtual worlds are only an alternative and, concurrently, visual technologies in cinema, the diegetic worlds that we perceive on the screen, are just a different level of (un)reality. Both of them cannot be defined as opposed to reality but at a step removed from the natural world.

With their arguments and questions, films of the SF genre denote the social and ideological changes in the concept of reality and, in this sense, we can observe a problematization of reality, the coincidence of various levels of reality in some of the SF films released in the last two decades. In this way, in *The Matrix* we see a computer generated life, the battery life of the pods and the life in the 'desert of the real'. *Total Recall* juxtaposes the ideal reproduction of the character's life with the reality of his existence, and this is interwoven in a way that the fact of who he is is completely indiscernible for him. And in *eXistenZ* we can perceive diverse and simultaneous virtual levels (when the protagonists play virtual games inside games) together with the reality of the computer users. In *eXistenZ*, the perception of the boundaries between virtuality and reality shift and alter in such a way that

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[26] See Giobran (1999).

the distinction between the game and the diegetic world(s) of the film becomes blurred. All these SF films demonstrate that western society is aware of the reproduction/creation of technological (un)realities and the dangers that they imply. The only possible way to avoid the fear and feel confident about our creations is to understand their potential, the dangers of our technology and how to deal with the virtual worlds that we are producing.

SF is historically and intrinsically linked to technology, and, in this respect, we can trace two fundamental stages in the relationship between SF and technology, periods in which the technology used in the films also reflects the historical social moment and the transformation of the genre from low budget films to the spectacular budgets of today. So, we find a period in the 1950s when technology was acquiring a new role: the Cold War and the fear of the outsider inspired many films in which Earth or our society is attacked by societies/aliens with more advanced technology. Indeed, films such as *It Came from Outer Space* (Arnold, 1953), *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* (Siegel, 1956), *Forbidden Planet* (Wilcox, 1956) and *It, The Terror From Beyond Space* (Cahn, 1958) illustrate this fear of the unknown in western societies. Today, with a consumer electronic/virtual/digital society, and where technology has achieved a different stage and become part of our life and simultaneously an unknown, the social fear is different; the threat is not outside but it is 'in' us, in our society. This is a fear based on losing control over our technological creations, of being dominated by the technology we have produced and not being able to understand the virtual environments that we have produced. Films such as *The Matrix*, *eXistenZ*, *The Lawnmower Man*, *Total Recall* and *Abre los Ojos* are perfect examples of both the technological fears and the SF of today. In this sense Vivian Sobchack suggests that 'we have lost a concrete perception of reality and those changes in technology have led to the radical alternative of our culture's temporal and spatial consciousness' (Sobchack, 1997: 255). Thus, SF films have the ability to analyze social changes and the way that individuals perceive reality; this makes SF a most crucial tool for analyzing the

technological confusion between reality and unreality that we are experiencing today.

In this sense, and according to Isaac Asimov (1984: 2), the concept of SF emerged and was directly linked to the social change caused by scientific and technological development. The interest of SF would be to criticize, extend, review and revolutionize all the scientific models with a core purpose: to provoke a new vision, a more suitable and appropriate perception of the world. For Asimov, SF uses arguments as a tool to introduce scientific concepts to the receptor, raising new theories and discovering what could happen if they were ever applied in reality. New technologies, specifically visual, digital and virtual technologies, are the innovations that SF of the last decades is projecting in the future. And this has devastating consequences for individuals and the society as we can observe in *The Matrix*, *Total Recall*, *eXistenZ* and *The Lawnmower Man.*

Paradoxically, SF has always used ideas and concepts from science but has also inspired scientists to research and believe in certain possibilities concerning the evolution of technology in a double feedback process. The Internet is a good illustration of a fiction which 'inspired' or preceded a real invention. As mentioned in the previous chapter, some years before the general public had news about the World Wide Web, William Gibson proposed in his novel *Neuromancer* the concept of a network that facilitates connections and communication among humans, what we understand today as the Internet. SF is therefore the result of speculations that have the potential to become real, thanks to the impulse of the imagination. In this sense, the SF films from the end of the 1980s, such as *12 Monkeys*, *Strange Days*, *The Matrix*, *The Lawnmower Man*, *eXistenZ* and *Total Recall*, are based on variations of the technology that we currently have and the fears that they invoke.

SF productions make a double and paradoxical use of technology: they apply to the film the most developed technology to denounce the 'perverted' side and obscure perspective of technology. Bukatman (1999: 265) identifies the 'sublime', the 'dark side' of this technological evolution in SF productions in which there is a connection between the technological spectacle, as in *The*

Matrix and *Total Recall*, and our anxieties about the appearance of new technologies. Bukatman points out that the paradox of:

> the presence of the sublime in the deeply American genre of science fiction implies that our fantasies of superiority emerge from our ambivalence regarding technological power. The might of technology, supposedly our own creation, is mastered through a powerful display that acknowledges anxiety but recontains it within the field of spectatorial power (Bukatman, 1999: 265).

Therefore, the spectacle displayed by SF films hides a terrifying truth under the spectacular surface: the technology that we have created has moved beyond our ability to control and understand it. To denounce this, SF requires the submission of the spectator to its internal logic. The capacity of cinema to immerse ourselves in the film is analyzed by Sarah E. Worth (Worth, 2002: 180-181) who names her theory 'the paradox of fiction', and which can be explained via three central points:

1. We only respond emotively to things that we believe to be real,
2. We do not believe fiction is real, and
3. We respond emotionally to fiction

In spite of the contradiction that it represents, the paradox is possible thanks to both: the ability of SF film narratives to immerse the spectators and the visual credibility of the 'technological tricks' of the films. The consequence is that the spectator is able to believe in the (un)reality of SF. The narrative structure of SF films also helps to produce submission to the film on the part of the spectator. The spectator identifies with the reality that is described in the beginning of the film, but one or more elements will break the normality and confuse it with fiction. In this way, *The Matrix*, *eXistenZ* and *Abre los Ojos* use 'science', technology that is not completely unfamiliar to us, to immerse us in the film, then the 'fiction' arrives once we 'believe' and are completely submerged in the film. In *The Matrix*, the double life of Neo, who is both a computer programmer and hacker, is twisted when he is immersed in a virtual world. And, in *Abre los Ojos*, the dream life of César turns into a

nightmare when he has an accident: his inability to accept his consequently disfigured appearance drives him to commit suicide and, with the help of technology, he leaves his body frozen while his brain is fed with a virtual pre-selected future. These are the facts that will not need a rational explanation, although they are not necessarily illogical. Thus, maintaining a link with an unusual perception of the familiar, SF manages to make credible the incredible, justify what our reason points to as a hypothesis or present a world that only responds to speculation.

In parallel with the narrative structure and tricks of the SF genre, its visual technology, the image, is also perfectly adapted to the believe/doubt structure. On one hand, it reproduces a credible (sometimes future) real life, the 'believing element', and on the other hand it astonishes the spectator with optical tricks and spectacular images, the 'doubt element'. Indeed, in SF it is not possible to speak about content eluding the form and vice versa, because each element contributes to and depends on the other; in fact 'spectacle and speculation sum up the two dimensions of the genre' (King, 2000: 7). SF explores a fundamental objective: to satisfy the spectator about the creation of credible (un)real worlds. The genre is developed between the spheres of the real and the imaginary (Gatto, 2000), and therefore requires a special relationship between both dimensions. Indeed, we are thus reminded, once again, that SF cinema perfectly illustrates the (con)fusion of reality and unreality. Reality is revealed in films such as *The Matrix*, *Total Recall* and *Lawnmower Man* 'through' fiction. SF represents 'the sublime' and the 'suture' of the real and imaginary, and, in the process, provides satisfaction together with the simulation of undesired and probably terrible experiences.

This is actually a recurrent idea in Dick's stories. The ideas of this famous SF writer have been adapted into several films that have been released in the last three decades such as *Blade Runner*, *Total Recall*, *Minority Report* (Spielberg, 2002) and *A Scanner Darkly.* His main ideas can be summarized in the existence of a simulation or perceptual trick, a fictional reality that may be under someone else's control. The idea of false consciousness, an intentional deception, is combined with the belief that to be in control of reality and its representations is the only way to re-conquer

our existence. According to Richard Wright, such films found their inspiration in 'a media critique which sees the new information societies as having created and imposed on their populations a form of organization structured by mediated forms of experience' (Wright, 2000: 1).

SF makes clear the unconscious, hidden and imperceptible elements of our society and also makes credible and acceptable 'the supernatural' and a variety of strange elements, finding its justification in the progress of science. The verisimilitude that arises from the association with the attitudes, methods and terminology of science is one of the aspects that distinguishes SF from fantasy films. In other words, SF implies the transition from magic to science while the magical characteristics of fantasy clash with the scientific approach of SF. According to Robert A. Heinlein, this is precisely the definition of SF:

> realistic speculation of future events, a speculation based on a suitable event of the past or present world and that is constituted through the understanding of the nature or the signified of the scientific method (Heinlein, 1964: 22).

Thus the principal difference of fantasy films and SF films is that fantasy is simply elaborated with elements of reality but has no connection with reality. Fantasy does not intend to project our society into the future with its present problems, but is presented as an escape or an alternative to our current issues. Fantasy cinema is defined by James Donald as:

> Films which show worlds, whether ours or not, that depart from the rules of everyday reality, often using cinema's spectacular capacity for illusion and trickery to conjure up before our eyes weird creatures and strange happenings in impossible narratives (Donald, 1989: 10).

In this way, the huge economic success of fantasy sagas such as *Lord of the Rings* (Jackson, 2001-2003), *Star Wars* (*Star Wars Episode IV: A New Hope* (Lucas, 1977); *Star Wars Episode V: The Empire Strikes Back* (Kershner, 1980); *Star Wars Episode VI: The Return of the Jedi* (Marquand, 1983); *Star Wars Episode I: Phantom Menace* (Lucas, 1999); *Star Wars Episode II: Attack*

of the Clones (Lucas, 2002) and *Star Wars Episode III: Revenge of the Sith* (Lucas, 2005)) and *The Chronicles of Narnia* (Adamson and Apted, 2005-2008) suggests that spectators also find satisfaction in the absence of reality. This is not in contradiction with our fears of technology and the perception of (un)reality but should be understood as an alternative to them. In fact, the disavowal of reality produces in the spectator the avoidance of present threats. In this way, due to its connection with the unconscious, fantasy is especially open to psychoanalytic studies, suggesting a confrontation between the laws of society and the unconscious resistance of the mind.

The extraordinary events that we perceive in fantasy are admitted as genuine in the fiction, although the spectator does not believe in these facts in his real life. The strategy of fantasy is to immerse the spectator in a delimited-unlimited reality-unreality. This is a place we will inhabit for a certain, though usually prolonged,[27] amount of time before coming back to the real world, not believing that the fantasy continues there. In other words, in fantasy, we are always aware of what constitutes the real world, our lives and what does not; reality and unreality are clearly bordered. This is in distinct contrast with SF in which the ideas of the film tend to continue in our minds after we finish watching, simply because it has a stronger link with our reality. This is the 'exit strategy' that for Darren Tofts (2003: 4) frames fantasy in opposition to SF. Ironically it also reflects the experiences of the characters in some SF films of the last decade: Neo in *The Matrix*, Quaid in *Total Recall* and Allegra Geller in *eXistenZ.* These characters try to find an exit and they 'escape' (or believe they do) from virtuality to return to the real world, something that is illustrative of both the escapist idea of SF and of the moment we are living, in which new virtual technologies fascinate us but simultaneously threaten to take us to labyrinthine places from where we cannot return.

SF does not offer audiences an escape, but, like a distorted mirror, many SF productions of the last two decades showcase the problems that

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[27] Indeed, many fantasy films are known for their long run-times. At a run-time of 201 minutes (251 minutes for the special extended edition), a film such as Jackson's *The Lord of The Rings: The Return of The King* (2003), the third in the trilogy, is indicative of the protracted immersion offered up by the fantasy genre.

society faces today as well as those that are waiting to come. It achieves this using the same elements that it is denouncing: confusion and technology. Its analytical and anticipative qualities make SF an essential tool and medium with which to understand the confusion of reality and unreality provoked by technology and that lies at the heart of this thesis.

Chapter IV

Practical Project - *Luna* [28]

    Luna is an independent film that investigates the confusion between reality and unreality. The film works synergistically with the text, creating a body of work that conducts research in the same direction, pursuing the same target but from different perspectives. It was apposite to use images and words, practice and theory, the subjective experience of the diegetic character concerning the confusion of reality and unreality and what is generally held to be the 'objective' concepts of academic formality in a complementary and mutually beneficial endeavour. The theory is thus 'translated' into facts to see if the academic discourses - social, philosophical and cinematographic theories - can be applied to everyday life, or, in other words, to examine if the scholarly vision of our society is accurate, or, if it reflects a non representable dimension of our culture. Central to the film, however, is precisely the confusion of reality and unreality and the use and influence of technology in this confusion, a phenomenon oscillating at the crux of the various discourses presented in the thesis.

    This film is not a SF production; nevertheless the structure of the film maintains some common elements with the SF productions examined in this research including *The Matrix*, *Total Recall* and *eXistenZ*. Thus, Victor's (Vicente Diaz Gandasegui) perfectly normal life is altered by an incident that produces confusion about the (un)reality in which he is living. Victor, like Neo, Quaid and Allegra Geller has to deal with the new circumstances of his life and the confusion of not being able to differentiate between what is real and what is unreal. With each of these characters it is technology that plays a fundamental part in provoking such confusion, being the origin and the medium to be (un)consciously confused. *Luna* is a story that 'belongs' to our society and at the same time shows the inner concerns of our society, specifically our incapacity to deal with the attributes intrinsic to new technology. The experiences narrated in *Luna* are not intended to be applicable to every single individual but to capture a more general social and

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[28] The original script is included in the appendix.

sociological concern in western societies: today technology provides new sources to immerse and confuse reality and unreality through Cyberspace, digital worlds and videogames, and our misunderstanding of it can potentially affect us.

It was intended that an uncomplicated film be made; a film that presented the audience with the (un)reality of daily life. It was the objective that the originality of *Luna* had to reside largely in the narrative decisions and not in the digital manipulation of the image. That said, such audiovisual manipulation is certainly present in *Luna* when the female protagonist, Luna (Małgorzata Wądek), faints in the toilet, and, correspondingly, the alteration of colour and the change of speed illustrate the potential of digital techniques and their capacity to (re)create (un)reality. Offering a subjective viewpoint, these scenes emphasize and transfer the feeling of confusion from the eyes of the character to the audience. Thus, and although budget limitations and equipment availability were factors in not pursuing a special effects heavy SF film, production circumstances have nevertheless inspired the use of creative resources in the expression of the story.

Indeed, a variety of cinematographic techniques are employed to transform the spectator from a voyeur to an active participant; mirroring, in this way, the special effects of big budget productions such as *The Matrix*, *Total Recall*, *Abre los Ojos* and *eXistenZ* that are able to communicate a much more heightened sense of interaction and confusion. The use of the hand-held camera is significant in this process, as are the postproduction effects that replicate the immersion in virtual environments that is experimented by Victor. Here, the camera moves from a bush to the diegetic television screen and then stays immobile, absorbed by the flashing light, brusque movements and captivating sounds of the game. It then moves again to Victor eyes, in which we can see not only his intense immersion in the videogame, but, in a double reflexivity, we observe the camera, being a witness to everything. Therefore, Victor's eye is the point of confluence of three dimensions: the diegetic world of the film, the virtual world of the game and our (un)reality, that is 'denounced' by the camera.

Dialogue is also a key tool in disconcerting and implicating the spectator in the film. Victor speaks to the camera, breaking the fourth wall between him and the spectator, connecting reality and fiction in a pertinent monologue in which he wants to explain his feelings and thoughts about the (un)reality he is living to those who are observing him. His words are the words of a diegetic character to his extra-diegetic audience, assuming therefore the existence of the camera as an observer and recognized filter; in Lacanian terms, identifying the existence of the camera its influence can resultantly be ignored. Indeed, the cinematic reality and the fiction of the film find each other in two images where the camera and the tripod are slightly visible: the reflection on the tap and in Victor's pupils. Nevertheless, and in spite of the importance of the sequence in which Victor speaks directly to the camera, it is feasible that *Luna* also works as a silent film: muting the volume, the film conserves its meaning and the story is not significantly affected. The movements of camera, the corporeal and facial expressions of the characters and the images speak for themselves. In this way the dialogue and soundtrack are simply additions, serving to enrich the meaning of the film.

Symbolism has a remarkable relevance in *Luna*. The mirror as a reflection and reproduction of images is employed to show Victor in two specific moments, before and after the incident that changes his life, displaying two 'different' people. The mirror and constant reflections in different objects, function, in this way, as a simplistic, but nonetheless illustrative and useful metaphor of the reproduction of the image in digital media, the copy or the simulacrum. The mirror is also an important prop and feature of the mise-en-scéne in that it permits visual access to the story and characters in the scene in which Victor speaks from his room to Ania (**Katarzyna Różańska**), who is sitting in a different room. Here the simple positioning of the camera and a mirror allows the spectator to simultaneously perceive both actors and the existing distance between them. And there are other moments of symbolism which evoke the potential unreality of the events: thus, the creak of the door or an alarm clock that advances by three minutes, hints that we can be observers of a dreaming state.

Luna was filmed using three non professional actors and, in this respect, it was necessary that the character of Victor was interpreted by the researcher, me. Like Leonard Shelby (Guy Pearce) in *Memento* and Tyler Durden (Brad Pitt) in *Fight Club* (1999, Fincher), Victor is (un)consciously confused about the reality he is living. Yet, for Victor, it is not his mental health but technology which works to reinforce his desires. And so to be the person who is writing about the confusion and to simultaneously be confused in the diegetic world of the film is a very captivating paradox, and a perfect way to 'close the circle'. *Paradox* and *confusion* thus impregnate both the thesis and the film. *Luna* is a film in which an unreality occurs inside a dream where the protagonist becomes immersed in virtuality. Four different levels or layers of reality – the (un)reality from which the film is filmed, the diegetic world of the film, dreams and the virtual world of the games – all meet in a short portion of time, reflecting in this way the plot of some of the most significant films examined in this research. That said, *Luna* exercises the capacity of cinema for suggestion and the absence of a definitive conclusion that produces a second paradox: the audience can feel confused about a film that is all about confusion, something that we can also observe in films such as *The Matrix*, *eXistenZ*, *Total Recall* and *Abre los Ojos.*

Victor's confusion is provoked by the disruption of his perfectly ordinary and satisfactory life with the introduction of a shock that changes everything. In this case, the incident that affects Luna opens a gap between Victor and his reality. Victor explains in a monologue how he is consciously adopting a position of total denial, submerging himself in a world of illusion where he is happier than facing the 'ignorant bliss' described by Cypher in *The Matrix*. Victor makes use of technology in his aspiration of abandoning reality after Luna's incident: becoming immersed in videogames (instead of actual games, like football), Victor obtains satisfaction, living the experience of being someone else or simply not being himself in this world. In the virtual environment, Victor lives and enjoys life and this is reflected by the vividness in his use of the interface that contrasts with the passivity and boredom of the rest of his life. The reality that he has to walk is a transition, a 'punishment', which he has to travel every day. Technology and the digital

world open a new door for escape to Victor through non-personal communications, e-mails and instant conversations. He confuses reality because, nowadays, when it is often the case that characters on–screen are all we have to meet, communicate, identify and become intimate with, only the faith and confidence in receiving the true 0s and 1s makes possible such relations. Victor (un)consciously avoids questioning the information received from the screen and in consequence he becomes confused; for better or worse trusting in his own hopes and desires, in his own constructed (un)reality.

Luna reveals that if we want to believe, we can believe, and if we prefer to admit an unreality we will find the necessary resources in technology to make (un)real our mental representations. As Sherry Turkle suggests illustratively, if ironically: 'On the Internet nobody knows you are a dog' (1997: 263). The film culminates by raising the question of a dream state, something that is directly linked to the moment in which Victor wakes up and then contemplates his face at the mirror in the bathroom, moments before Luna faints. He looks at himself trying to find out if he is awake, and, trying to certify his feeling, he touches his face and rubs his eyes, but nothing seems to offer definitive proof to differentiate his dreams from reality. The film creates a duality in that moment, urging the audience to question whether the following scenes can be interpreted as reality or part of his dreams.

Luna is a project that translates the abstract notions investigated by this thesis into a practical and familiar context. Placing these concepts within such a framework they arguably become 'alive': they can be interpreted and analyzed in order to question the hypothesis that the confusion of reality and unreality is a phenomenon that has recently acquired new and peculiar characteristics. In this respect, the film responds affirmatively, demonstrating, by way of an 'ordinary' and tangible experience, the causes, morphology and consequences of such confusion.

Conclusions

The history of western thought has always been linked with the confusion between reality and unreality. The nature and morphology of such disorientation is diverse; and a sign of its importance and complexity is that figures as diverse as Plato, Descartes, Hume, Baudrillard, Geoff King, Žižek, Allen, Godard, Cronenberg and Lynch have each dedicated part of, or their entire, production to the contemplation and analysis of this phenomenon. Today, the peculiarity of the confusion between reality and unreality is wholly and inevitably linked with the rapid development of technology. The configuration of our future will depend upon our ability to understand the present and our capacity to react to and defend ourselves from potential threats. If we do not want to make true the worst forecasts about our future, we need to anticipate the consequences, identify and find solutions for them. Our future depends on us, on our decisions, today. The notion of 'potentiality' is indeed recurrent in this research because the technological, social and historical processes that it describes are incomplete and their consequences are certainly predicted but remain uncertain.

In western societies we are currently living in a constantly changing environment in which technology has affected the majority of the contexts of our personal and professional lives. We live in houses surrounded by technological devices; our work is often influenced by technology; we use transport that is managed by technology; and, most crucially for this project, our leisure time is very often employed in finding satisfaction through technology. Therefore, the different levels of ignorance that we manifest about how and why these technologies operate means that, nowadays, we do not know ourselves and, more importantly, we exhibit a tangible paralysis when it comes to actually analyzing, understanding and knowing the future perspectives of our society. Our perception of the world is also being radically transformed. Many of our daily perceptions and communications are compositions of 0s and 1s, hence our interpretation of reality is technologically mediated and altered: we are observers of a world of representations. The reality that we perceive today does not only consist of

atoms, but also of bits, a binary source that facilitates the alteration, combination, elimination and construction of new (un)realities of an abstract nature. To be deceived is not a particularly atypical feeling in western societies: our reality has been extended to the 'unlimited' hyperspace, and although this change implies certain problems and potential dangers we can be positive and not necessarily afraid of the creation of new dimensions.

The appearance of digital imagery (and sound, of course, though this is not a concern of this thesis) has unequivocally affected the medium of cinema, facilitating the manipulation of the image, and even the possibility of creating an image with no source in reality. Today, the simulation of reality in films has acquired new levels of credibility: we have achieved a technological status in which it is possible not only to represent with unparalleled accuracy reality, but also to 'create' it. These days, special effects are chiefly at the service of recreating reality; and these artificial simulacrums of reality produce, simultaneously, a fascination and confusion in spectators. The audience have to decide what they believe and what they do not. The answer to the question 'is that thing I am watching real?' is not only 'on the screens', but also lies within each spectator.

More than ever before, the future evolution of cinema is dependant on the development of technology. New technological and digital imagery is continually being discovered and investigated, and the concept of interactive and personalized films, in which every spectator will have their individual film 'built' as to his requirements, is no longer science fiction. Therefore, if we wish to explore the future of cinema we should look to the videogames industries and the possibility of accessing virtual/alternative worlds where responsibilities are reduced to a minimum, boredom is eliminated and satisfaction maximized. In other words, cinema will provide the highest experience of 'personalized otherness' during a time of leisure which defines our society. Indeed, our entertainment frequently consists of being someone else or being ourselves in different contexts and conditions. This is a clear sign that we are discontented with what we have around us.

In a parallel phenomenon, digital technologies have opened up the co-production of cinema to the audience. The accessibility of the medium,

where the necessary devices are affordable, and production and postproduction processes are accomplishable for a large portion of the population and not just professionals, has the potential to provoke, in the short term, the 'democratization' of cinema. In fact, the quality of the image is not necessarily impoverished by a low budget film, but the technological creation of (un)reality may well be. Thus, although the economic and ideological influence of the film industry is still crucial in our understanding of the world through films, today we are in a position to affirm that cinema is not such a medium of privilege; it is (almost) accessible to anyone who wishes to transmit ideas.

Mass media, like cinema, has been deeply influenced by the development of technology, and, simultaneously, have contributed to the confusion between reality and unreality. The appearance of digital media and new ways of communication such as the Internet has provoked new means of reaching audiences and the possibility of efficiently manipulating the message with 'credibility'. This is metaphorically illustrated in *The Matrix* which achieves, in Morpheus' words, a 'world that is pulled over your eyes to blind you from the truth'. The truth of being, allegorically speaking, a 'slave' in total control is realized. Mass media does not only take advantage of the technological evolution but also of its social repercussions and our 'naïve' understanding of such phenomena. Furthermore, it is essential to preserve a certain grade of diversity of thought. Our society has always evolved thanks to the confrontation of different perspectives, but the recent tendency to 'unify' society through technological media which are able to reach the majority of the population can imply a cultural failure. We should respect and maintain alternative attitudes and behaviours if we want to avoid the possibility of becoming simple cogs in a machine in which our function will be to do and consume what 'we are being told'.

The future of our society depends on how we deal with technological progress and the new forms of (un)reality. If we are able to have control over the evolution and development of technology and have dominion over virtual spaces we will succeed in the most important 'battle'. This is indeed the battle that humanity loses in films such as *The Matrix* and *The Terminator*

and that consequently threatens human existence. We should be prepared to face the moment in which technology will have consciousness and will try to gain independence and subsequently domination. Hence, we must be constantly aware that technology is destined to fulfill our necessities, facilitate our lives and provide satisfaction for humanity. Indeed, we need to remain 'independent' from technology and from those who produce and communicate information, and not be totally influenced by it.

Today, information, access to it and the means to disseminate it, is the key to economic and political power. Mass media does not only transmit information; it produces knowledge and creates habits that are translated into what, how, when, where and why we consume. Individuals in contemporary societies are the last link in the consumerist chain. It is possible to argue that we are not defenseless, that the plurality of information that brought new means of communications provides a freedom of choice that did not exist before. Yet, while retaining a certain degree of truth, this argument also implies the potential danger of being adrift in the 'sea of signs' that is produced, the Hyperreality that Baudrillard speaks of.

Hence, under the double threat of being manipulated and/or lost by the multiplicity of information, we need to use filters, mechanisms in the perception and understanding of the information that facilitates the discrimination of what we believe. In other words, these tools of cognition aim to protect ourselves from being manipulated and confused and the solution is the discrimination of the different layers of (un)reality to ensure we are not totally lost. The constant and Cartesian doubt can be a useful and definitive tool, but the idea of not believing in anything can also produce a schizophrenia which will prevent us from developing our lives. Thus, the path we should follow, if we do not want to be lost within the confusion of reality and unreality, requires a constant and fluid questioning tinged with skepticism in which the examination will not eliminate or block the value and nature of our perceptions. It is important to be conscious of the confusion of reality and unreality and the concepts that are formed and deformed in the process. Nevertheless, understanding the disorientation of reality and unreality does not imply a rejection of everything that is not real. On the

contrary it can be applied to take advantage of the situation and construct a satisfactory environment where we can fulfill our needs, still being aware that we are 'partially residing' in a virtual context. We live in a kind of multiple reality where reality and unreality can potentially coexist and coincide in time and space. The idea of 'this is or this is not real' should be replaced by 'this has a certain grade of reality'. The alternative to this, either the passive acceptance or the complete denial of the information we receive, is equivalent to the formation of a multiplicity of personalities that will depend on the source (and reality) of the information and the resultant confusion.

In this way, the 'prolongation' of reality through virtuality will not necessarily impoverish or remove reality, but can potentially enrich reality. We have to comprehend that reality is constantly changing, and the future conceptions of reality will inevitably be different as they will likely incorporate what we understand today as unreal or virtual dimensions. Indeed, the virtual spaces created by technology ensure that economic, social, ethnic and gender factors do not have the same influence in the interrelations that occur in these territories where equality and freedom of expression acquire new meaning. We simply need to learn how to use the capacities that virtuality offers, and prevent, through knowledge and understanding, the potential dangers that they imply. Once we are aware of what technology 'means' and how it can influence our lives, we will be prepared to discover, inhabit and return from these domains.

We have to adapt our social and cultural knowledge to the evolution of technology if we do not want to be immersed in social and psychological dysfunctions and be ignorant about of our creations. Consequently, we should break the social duality of reality and unreality and reconcile both concepts. The static and rigorous description of these notions does not only imply difficulties but simultaneously suggests a strategic error. Reality and unreality are fluid, changing and dynamic concepts and their status requires a redefinition and the creation of new concepts. In this sense, (un)reality could be a solution to denominate all the ambiguous spaces created between both spheres. (Un)reality means the fusion, and simultaneously the assumption, of

a contradiction; (un)reality is the perfect way to define the creation of spaces, elements and identities that share characteristics of both. Indeed, the use of brackets in this thesis is fundamental to express terms that are synthesized, reconciling the opposition of the previous concepts. Thus, the ambiguity of language is being used to express the openness of the concepts treated in this research. In this sense, mass media, the Internet, virtual games and cinema will not simply be considered as 'not real', but as elements that contain a different grade of (un)reality and that, further, have the capacity to be subsequently segmented within the (un)realities of a particular web site, Virtual Reality environment, videogame or film.

The primary use of cinema in this research is not arbitrary. The role of cinema in this investigation is indeed essential to examine the 'intangible' aspects of the confusion of reality and unreality, everything that the abstract abilities of the image can explain without 'confessing it', such as the hopes and fears held by society. In fact, cinema captures and reproduces our society, culture, ideology, fears and hopes and simultaneously it produces knowledge with the transmission of certain ideas. The relationship between cinema and technology is double and paradoxical: cinema necessarily employs technology and at the same time it denounces, with its plots, our current situation in relation to technology. Thus, the subjectivity of cinema, its active implication in the topic researched here, renders it particularly relevant for the investigation as it offers a diegetic perspective of this problematic. In this way, films such as *The Matrix*, *eXistenZ*, *Total Recall*, *Abre los Ojos*, *The Lawnmower Man* and *Dark City* are most useful examples as they are witnesses, symptoms, causes and consequences of the confusion of reality and unreality produced by technology.

The Matrix, a film whose recurrence throughout this thesis denotes its usefulness in these discussions, is a most pertinent illustration of the human reaction to the simulation of the world, where the reproduction of the world has the potential to be more satisfactory than the real world. The character of Cypher, then, is the best illustration of this. However, what we see in *The Matrix* is that the majority of the characters 'choose to know', following, in this way, the Platonic allegory of the cave that indicates that happiness and

freedom come from the knowledge of reality; in this sense when the characters are able to discern the dimension that they inhabit. Perhaps the duality *blue/red pill*, knowledge of reality or illusion, will not be the election of the future of our society, but conversely something more intermediate and with a temporal effect: the idea of being immersed in virtuality, taking it as real, but knowing that there are 'doors' opened to return to our reality. The fears start when we cannot open these doors, when we lose the determination to decide when to open the doors, or when we are not sure when we have left virtuality.

We have to understand the confusion of reality and unreality in social and psychological terms. This confusion is in our society: it has social repercussions, but it also manifests different intensities for each individual in different contexts and times. The disorientation in our perception of reality varies depending not only on personal, contextual, perceptual, educational and identity factors, but also in respect to how we perceive and understand contact with virtuality. Thus, the range of our communion with virtuality can vary from an occasional visit to the (un)real world to an 'inhabitation' of this space which can affect us to a lesser or greater degree. However, independently of how our relationship with virtuality operates, it is important to be aware of the existence of a virtual dimension and the confusion that it provokes.

In conclusion, the destiny of our society depends upon a (re)definition of reality and unreality, and also upon a social and cultural understanding of the new spaces created by technology and the social consequences that they produce. This research seeks to provide a guide to understand the relation of reality and unreality, the new conceptualization derived from the transformation of this relation and how our perception of the world is being modified at a time when technology is influencing every aspect of western society. Therefore, it is essential to comprehend the effects of technology to be able to understand ourselves, individually and as a society. Hence, using the ability of cinema to examine our society from a subjective and abstract perspective, *Luna* 'generalizes' a particular disorientation of reality and unreality in which technology plays a crucial role. *Luna*, like films such as *The*

Matrix, *Total Recall* and *eXistenZ* help us to be aware of the dangers and potential confusions that can affect our minds. These films will certainly help us to interpret the world and our (un)reality; however, knowing the risks does not make us immune to the threats.

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Appendix

Luna

A screenplay by

Vicente Diaz Gandasegui

February 2007

Opening credits.

SCENE 1. INT. NIGHT. VICTOR´S ROOM.

Victor and Luna lie in bed. Victor is in his thirties and
Luna in her late twenties. We can see them from the foot
of the bed. The room is in half-light. The desk lamp
beside the bed is on and illuminates their faces. They
speak very low, almost whispering.

                    VICTOR:

          Entonces ¿compramos mañana los
          billetes para Barcelona?

                     LUNA:

          Creo que si, podríamos comprarlos.
          Esperar más es tontería, más
          baratos no van a ser en el futuro.

                    VICTOR:

          Cojonudo. Empezaré a descontar los
          días. Mañana avisare a Juanjo ¿Nos
          quedaremos en su casa?

Luna opens her eyes in an expression of surprise and
disagreement.

                     LUNA:

          ¡Estarás de coña! Mi madre me
          mataría si no nos quedamos con
          ellos. Además, a Juanjo le podrás
          ver todos los días.

                    VICTOR:

          Tiene su sentido, pero acojona.

                     LUNA:

          ¿El qué te acojona ahora, mis
          padres?

                    VICTOR:

          No, vivir con ellos.

LUNA:

          No digas tonterías cariño, son
          sólo cuatro días.

                    VICTOR:

          Joder ¿solo cuatro días? Le acabas
          de quitar parte del encanto… ¿nos
          dará tiempo a ir a la playa?

                    LUNA:

          Podrás ir todos los días, si es lo
          que quieres.

                    VICTOR:

          Uhuuuum… ya estoy saboreando la
          jarra de cerveza del chiringuito…

                    LUNA:

          Que tonto eres, aun queda un
          mundo.

                    VICTOR:

          O dos…

                    LUNA:

          Pues venga, tu a tu mundo y yo al
          mío. Apaga la luz y a dormir, que
          aquí algunos tenemos que trabajar
          mañana.

Victor turns to the left and switches off the light. It
is dark now and we can just make out shadows and
contours.

                    VICTOR:

          ¿Luna?

                    LUNA:

          ¿Uhm?

VICTOR:

        Que duermas bien.

                    LUNA:

        Buenas noches cariño

We can hear a good night kiss.

                                        FADE OUT
                                        TO BLACK:

SCENE 2. INT. NIGHT. VICTOR´S ROOM

In the darkness of the room we see the LED red light of
the alarm clock. The time is 5.05. With very dim light we
can just make out the outline of Victor and Luna who are
sleeping. After a couple of seconds Victor sits up and
kisses Luna on her cheek, then he whispers.

                    VICTOR:

        Voy al baño.

                    LUNA:

        Espera, voy contigo.

They both get up from different sides of the bed. Victor
walks first and opens the door. It creaks with a loud
noise.

                    LUNA:

        Esta puerta me va a matar.

They walk down the corridor and both look to the right
hand side where there is a door wide open. The interior is
dark, someone is sleeping inside. When they reach the
bathroom, Victor opens the door and pulls the cord to
switch on the light.

                    LUNA:

        Yo primera.

Luna sits on the toilet with her elbows propped between
her legs, her head holding her hands. Her eyes are wide
shut. Victor is standing, drinking from a glass of water.

Then he straightens up and he looks to the mirror, touching his face with his fingers for a few seconds, as if checking if he is totally awake. When Luna finishes she looks at Victor with scared eyes.

> LUNA:
>
> No me encuentro bien.

She attempts to stand up, but she faints. Victor tries to hold her but she falls to the left side and Victor just manages to put his arms around her before she reaches the floor.

> VICTOR:
>
> Luna ¿Que te pasa?

Luna is on the floor and Victor is kneeling when she starts to have convulsions. She is very pale and she opens her eyes but she is definitely unconscious. Her pupils are very dilated.

> VICTOR:
>
> ¡oye, despierta!
> ¡Luna!
> ¡Luna!
> ¡Luna!
> ¡Abre los ojos!

Victor touches her face, trying to wake her up. After 15 seconds she comes back to consciousness. She looks confused.

> LUNA:
>
> ¿Qué ha pasado?

> VICTOR:
>
> Te has desmayado ¿te encuentras
> bien?

> LUNA:
>
> No demasiado. Me encuentro rara.

VICTOR:

     Luna ¿has tenido alguna vez
     ataques epilépticos?

                    LUNA:

     No digas tonterías cariño, te lo
     habría dicho ¿no crees?

                    VICTOR:

     Si, supongo que si. Pero…

                    LUNA:

     Ya vuelve otra vez…

Luna has another episode of convulsions. She is in the
same position and again her eyes are open and she has very
pale skin.

                    VICTOR:

     ¡Luna!
     ¡Luna!
     ¡Luna!
     Venga, abre los ojos. Vamos
     cariño, que ya ha pasado todo.

A few seconds after Luna's eyes look different. She has
recovered consciousness. She is again looking confused.

                    LUNA:

     No entiendo nada ¿pero que me esta
     pasando?

                    VICTOR:

     No tengo ni idea ¿Qué es lo que
     sientes?

                    LUNA:

     Es como una cosa fria y oscura que
     se acerca hacia mi. La siento
     aproximarse, pero despúes todo se
     queda en blanco.

VICTOR:

          No te preocupes, ya ha pasado
          todo.

                          LUNA:

          Victor, tengo miedo.

                          VICTOR:

          Lo se, yo también.

                          LUNA:

          Ya esta aquí…

For the third time Luna suffers an episode of convulsions,
with exactly the same effect as the last two.

                          VICTOR:

             ¡Luna!
             ¡Luna!
             ¡Luna!

Somebody knocks the door and before Victor can say
anything it is open. Ania is standing there. She is
Polish, around twenty-five years old. She is in her
pyjamas with a shocked expression on her face.

                          ANIA:

          What is going on?

                                          FADE OUT:

SCENE 3. EXT. SUN LIGHT. A BENCH IN THE PARK

Victor is sitting on a bench in Roath Park. He is looking
nowhere. After few seconds he starts to speak to the
camera.

                          VICTOR:

          No es que no pueda creerlo,
          simplemente se trata de que no
          quiero creerlo. Quizá podría hacer

un esfuerzo, pero dudo seriamente
de que merezca la pena

He looks to one side and he thinks for a few seconds.

                    VICTOR:

        Siempre he estado interesado en
        conocer cuales son los beneficios
        de la realidad o los
        inconvenientes que implica la
        ficción, pero nadie ha sabido
        explicármelo de forma convincente.

Victor looks again to one side, contemplating something or
someone that we cannot see.

                    VICTOR:

        Supongo que algún día estaré
        preparado para mirar a la cara a
        la realidad, pero mientras tanto
        me siento más seguro y más cómodo
        en mi mundo. El de la negación
        total, el de la fantasía
        artificial.

Victor looks to the ground. He takes some time before he
continues.

                    VICTOR:

        Nadie ha dicho que esto sea fácil.
        Siempre hay puertas y ventanas,
        finas fronteras que se abren a
        todo aquello que no quiero ver. Sé
        donde esta la realidad, pero ahora
        mismo no estoy interesado en
        visitarla. Solamente tengo que ser
        suficientemente listo para
        declinar esas invitaciones.

Victor smiles sadly and pauses. His eyes look somewhere
else for a few seconds before he returns to the camera. It
is as if someone has asked him a question but we cannot
hear anything.

                    VICTOR:

        ¿Si soy consciente de todo esto?
        He conseguido ser inconsciente de

> mi propia consciencia. Al fin y al
> cabo, no es tan difícil hacer
> oídos sordos a la razón. Cuando mi
> mente aporta alguna argumentación
> que no me interesa yo lo niego o
> simplemente no la escucho. Es un
> proceso complicado y que conlleva
> cierto entrenamiento, pero he
> conseguido convertirme en un gran
> escéptico de mi mismo…

Victor smiles. He laughs at himself and the words he has
just pronounced. The camera moves and we see what Victor
was observing before: a deserted park, where no one is
playing or doing anything of any note.

                                              DISOLVE TO:

SCENE 4. INT. DIM AND ARTIFICAL LIGTH. LIGHT OUTSIDE.
LIVING-ROOM OF THE HOUSE.

Victor is playing *play-station* sitting in the floor of the
living room. He is not far from the television. Victor is
absolutely immersed in the game he is playing. We can see
him moving according to the movements of the game. He is
living the virtual experience and is detached from the
real world. Ania opens the door to his back and walks
around him in the direction of the kitchen. She looks at
him, observing what he is doing.

                          ANIA:

        Hi Victor. What are you playing?

Victor does not seem to realize that Ania is in the same
room. He is absorbed in the game. Ania stands there for a
few seconds waiting for an answer that is never given.
Then she continues on her way to the kitchen and closes
the door, but after a couple of seconds she opens the
door, and sticks her head around it.

                          ANIA:

        Tea or coffee?

Ania waits patiently for a few seconds. She does not
receive any answer. She reflects understanding in her face
and then she closes the door. We just see Victor's face
and hear the sounds of the videogame coming from the TV.

Victor's face demonstrates his distraction in the virtual world of the game.

                                             FADE OUT TO
                                             WHITE:

FADE IN FROM WHITE:

SCENE 5. EXT. DAY. TEWKSBURY STREET.

Soundtrack music is all we hear. There is a view of the street, a long street and in the distance we can see Victor walking slowly. As he approaches the camera we can see that he has been playing football. He is still wearing the football kit, the boots are hanging around his neck and his shin pads are in one of his hands. His legs are covered in mud, as if he has been playing an energetic match. But as he approaches and it become possible to distinguish his face, we see that he looks sad and distracted in his thoughts. He constantly looks to the ground.
                                             CUT TO:

SCENE 6. INT. HALLWAY OF VICTOR´S HOUSE.

From upstairs we can see Victor opening the door and slowly making his way upstairs. He looks tired. He turns left into the bathroom and cleans the mud of his face with both hands. While he is washing, he lifts his head up to look in the mirror. The water is running constantly. He contemplates his reflection in the mirror for a few seconds. It is the same mirror he was examining himself in a few nights before. He smiles very sadly and he turns off the water. He then walks the corridor to his room. Ania's door is open and she is sitting inside, in front of the computer. End of soundtrack with a fade out.

                         VICTOR:

                           Hi

Ania speaks from her room. We cannot see her. We can just see Victor who collapses onto his bed, apparently devoid of any energy.

                          ANIA:

                     How was the match?

Victor throws his boots to the floor with no interest.

                    VICTOR:

        Good.

Victor takes off one of his socks.

                    ANIA:

        Did you win?

                    VICTOR:

        Yeah

Victor takes off the second sock.

                    ANIA:

        Did you score any goals?

                    VICTOR:

        Yes, a lucky one…

Victor smiles. He then stands up and steps towards the
door. He is about to close the door, but as he goes to
shut it he realizes that the door is not making any noise.
He closes and opens the door a couple of times and after a
few seconds he makes a face of surprise and he leaves it
open.

Victor turns and walks across his room in the direction of
his computer which is on the desk, on the other side of
the room. He turns his computer on and he looks out the
window. The moon is there, a pale moon, because the sky is
not completely dark. He notices a picture of Luna that is
in the windowsill. It is a black and white picture and
Victor remains absorbed in the image until his computer
makes a noise indicating that it is ready to be used.

Victor sits in front of the computer and he checks his
mails. His face changes drastically. We can see the screen
that shows a recent mail from Luna. His hand is trembling
but he manages to do a double click. The mail simply says:
'Hello, how are you? I am doing ok, but I miss you a lot.
Kisses, Luna'. We can see his face. Victor is absolutely
amazed. He is frozen, with his right hand on the mouse and

the left one on the desk. His eyes are lost inside the screen and he repeatedly reads the mail.

A beep coming from the computer reactivates him. He then realizes that it is Luna who is speaking to him using *messenger*. She starts an unremarkable conversation: 'How are you?' 'What are you doing?' 'Where have you been?' Victor reads all these questions before he can move his hand to the keyboard and ask her: 'How is that possible?' 'How can you be online?' 'Where are you?' 'Where are you?' 'Where are you?' But she is not responding to any of these questions. Victor waits impatiently for a few seconds but when it is obvious that she is not typing anything else Victor jumps from his chair and makes his way out of the room, starting to speak before he reaches Ania´s room.

                    VICTOR:

          Ania! Ania! You won't believe what
          is happening!

Ania does not reply. But Victor enters her room very excitedly and he continues talking.

                    VICTOR:

          Luna… Luna is there! Well, she is
          not there but she is, was,
          speaking to me in messenger.

Ania looks to Victor with a half smile and a compassionate face, but she does not say a word.

                    VICTOR:

          This time… This time it is true.
          It is not happening in my mind.
          She e-mailed me and she was just
          speaking to me in messenger. I
          told you! I told you! I…

Victor looks to the screen of her computer. We can see it as well.

                    VICTOR:

          …am an idiot.

On the screen we can see a window of *messenger* open and flashing. It is a conversation with Victor. Victor's face looks sad and disappointed.

VICTOR:

          Wh… why? I mean… Why?

                    ANIA:

          I am sorry, Victor. I didn't want to
          disappoint you or play with you. It is
          just…

Ania thinks for a moment.

                    ANIA:

          You were so far from this world that I
          thought I could help you in yours. I
          thought that at least you would be
          happy. Real or not, I had the
          impression that anything will be
          better than the sadness I can see
          everyday. But I was obviously wrong…

                    VICTOR:

          But…

Victor looks as if he is going to complain, but
he stops and moves his head, nodding.

                    VICTOR:

          Just tell me. How did you manage to be
          her?

Ania smiles and then speaks with tenderness.

                    ANIA:

          How can you forget that? You gave me
          Luna's computer a few days ago. So
          when I turned on the computer her mail
          and her profile were there, in front
          of me.

Victor listens to her moving his face.

ANIA:

          When I spoke to you in English I
          thought you were going to realize that
          I was not Luna, but you simply didn't
          want to see it. You didn't question
          anything. You were eager to believe
          and be involved in this fiction.

                              VICTOR.

          I see…

Victor turns and starts to walk.

                              ANIA:

          Victor.

                              VICTOR:

          Yes.

                              ANIA:

          I am sorry.

                              VICTOR:

          No… No… Thanks…

Victor slowly leaves Ania's room and enters his room. He
stops in the middle of the room for a moment, confused,
not knowing what to do. Then he approaches his computer,
sits at the desk, stretches his fingers and starts to
write in the window of Luna's instant conversation. We can
see his face behind the computer. He happily smiles.

                                        FADE OUT:

FADE IN:

SCENE 7. INT. NIGHT. VICTOR´S ROOM.

We see the same alarm clock of the beginning of the film.
The time is 5.09. Very slow fade out, like the eyes of
someone falling sleep.

Credits.

14 de Agosto de 2008.
Cardiff.
Podemos.