# “ABSENCE” AS DESIRE AND “PRESENCE” AS FORECLOSURE: A PSYCHOANALYTIC EXPLORATION OF CLINICAL PHENOMENA, CONTEMPORARY CULTURE, AND SCIENCE FICTION FILMS

by

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Abstract

# "ABSENCE" AS DESIRE AND "PRESENCE" AS FORECLOSURE: A PSYCHOANALYTIC EXPLORATION OF CLINICAL PHENOMENA, CONTEMPORARY CULTURE, AND SCIENCE FICTION FILMS

by

Banu Kevser Seckin

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This dissertation argues that one can witness a trend, both in clinical work and in contemporary culture, which can be characterized as an intolerance of *absence* and an insistence on *presence*. The term absence is used to refer to a mental state that is difficult to bear in and of itself, for it implies a real or an imagined lack, loss; an imperfection. One can transform absence into a creative space out of which new meanings and links emerge, or one can deny experiences of absence to ensure its immediate concrete replacement, thus can constantly restore presence. In psychoanalytic theory, the former is seen as an act of meaning making, symbolization, and the latter as the destruction of meaning, an instance of de-symbolization. Through a review of classical and contemporary psychoanalytic theorizing on symbolization, it is first argued that tolerance for experiences of absence is critical for the creation of a symbolizing mind. Then, it is demonstrated how de-symbolization is not only a clinical phenomenon, but a current thread running through the clinical, social, and cultural realms. It is then pointed out how

temporal, spatial, and phenomenological experiences of absence are shrinking in the contemporary Western world, which is captured by the characteristics of Postmodernism. The interaction between this ethos and psyche is commented on in an attempt to state the confluence of the primeval unconscious wishes and the demands of current way of life. The vortex of this interaction, recent dramatic changes in technology, especially in terms of how they affect the human body and subjectivity is underlined. Through the discussion of three science fiction films, Blade Runner, Total Recall, and The Matrix, it is posited that characteristics of Postmodernism and the cultural trend of doing away with experiences of absence persist in these fantasized futures as well. Finally, the implications for psychoanalytic theory and practice are discussed.

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*This is why I have tried to think of God in terms of desire, a desire that can not be fulfilled or satisfied…In this sense, our desire for God is without end or term: it is interminable and infinite because God reveals himself as absence rather than presence.*

Levinas, *Ethics and Infinity*

*Nostalgia carries the desire, less for an unchanging eternity than for always fresh beginnings.*

Pontalis, *Windows*

*Ah, the knowledge of impermanence,*
*that haunts our days*
*is their very fragrance*

Rilke, *Sonnets to Orpheus, XXVII*

## *On ABSENCE and PRESENCE*

This dissertation argues that one can witness a trend, both in clinical work and in contemporary culture, which can be characterized as an intolerance of *absence* and an insistence on *presence.* A psychoanalytic exploration of this issue is found worthwhile with the hope that this conceptualization of *absence* and *presence* will constitute a beginning discussion around forming a new psychological language that will shed some light on this intriguing interaction between what is within and what is beyond the consulting room.

The term *absence* is used to refer to a mental state that is difficult to bear in and of itself, for it implies a real or an imagined lack, loss; an imperfection. It is an impingement on, or a disruption of one's narcissistic equilibrium -that sense of well being, whatever it might be, for a given person.

We all, including our patients, want to do away with the painful, anxiety provoking experience of absence all the time. However, there are different ways to survive it. One would be to transform absence into a creative, life-bearing potential space out of which new meanings and links emerge in time. Acknowledgment of one's desire for what is missing enables this transformation. Alternatively one can deny experiences of absence, or ensure its immediate concrete replacement, thus can constantly restore presence. In this case acknowledgment of desire for what is missing is intolerable. In the framework of psychoanalytic theory, the former is seen as an act of meaning making, symbolization, and the latter as the destruction of meaning, a foreclosure, an instance of de-symbolization.

The first argument of this dissertation is a clinical one. In Part I, entitled Within the Consulting Room, using the ideas of several psychoanalytic thinkers and relevant case material, it will be argued that instances of de-symbolization become the dominant mental mode in some of our patients who can't tolerate experiences of absence.

We are living in times of *presence*. The technological advances of our time, especially in the area of internet communication, enable us to be anywhere, any time, as anyone, and with anybody. This virtual world transcends the constraints of the

material world, doing away with a number of instances of absence we might have experienced otherwise. The medical advances, especially in the area of genetics and biotechnology, promise further doing away with any lack, loss, or imperfection. Today's Zeitgeist of Postmodernism itself opts for a perpetual presence, obviating experiences of absence, through pressing for immediacy, co-existence, multiplicity, blurring now-then, here-there, surface-depth, object-subject, and fantasy-reality distinctions.

As an offshoot from these observations, in looking at a snippet of our popular culture, science-fiction films depicting tomorrow's worlds, one witnesses that experiences of absence are done away with in these "imagined" futures as well. Hence, in Part II, entitled Beyond the Consulting Room, it will be discussed that expelling experiences of absence is a recurrent theme both in our contemporary culture, and in our "projected"/"imagined" cultures of the future as depicted in science-fiction films.

The second argument of the dissertation is about the interaction of ethos and psyche. It will be demonstrated from the material discussed in Part I that tolerance of experiences of absence is an important contributor of a symbolizing mind. In Part II it will be pointed out that there is a trend both in contemporary culture and the fantasized future cultures of science fiction towards doing away with experiences of absence. In this light how psyche and culture mutually influence and shape one another will be discussed. One can then hypothesize that this cultural mode of functioning may gradually be refracted in private psyches in time also towards a

declining value and utility of symbolizing in the psychoanalytic sense, which is synonymous with looking in and self-reflection. This conjecture will be taken up in Part III, through a discussion of the important implications of such a shift for the fate of psychoanalysis and psychoanalytic psychotherapy.

# *PART I*

# *WITHIN THE CONSULTING ROOM*

## *The Man Who Does Not Want to Know too Much*

In recent years “difficult” patients who psychoanalytic clinicians encounter in their work have become a topic of growing theoretical and clinical interest. Numerous perplexing instances often seem to form the ground out of which various therapeutic difficulties such as impasses, enactments, drop outs, and even premature terminations spring. These moments are described in the literature in terms of a patient’s pervasive mental rigidity, concrete thinking, affective turbulence, somatic complaints, and use of defense mechanisms centering around splitting. Such patients, for whom these issues are dominant, display being bound to external reality to such an extent that the links between external reality and the internal, psychic reality seem to be severed.

Despite these patients’ often above average intellectual functioning coupled with strong verbal competence, the therapist’s efforts to draw attention to or comment on the abolished links usually turn out to be futile, leaving her/him with feelings of confusion, frustration, and incompetence. In her panel report on psychic reality Denzler (1996) mentions how Grossman (1996) describes this clinical phenomena as a “perverse attitude to reality”, where these patients avoid testing the reality of their

perceptions. According to him, these patients possess a reality sense, but refuse to use it. Denzler adds that analysts like Mc Dougall and Amati-Mehler (1996) conceptualize this refusal to know as motivated by the severe anxiety the painful reality induces, and they view it as an attempt at self-healing. For instance Ellman (1998) in his discussion of enactments gives the following example. "A patient, whose father abandoned her and her mother when she was four and a half, had to leave the session early to avoid my ending the session, which for her had traumatic implications. It took her several years to understand the meaning of this action."

Fonagy, Moran, Edgcumbe, Kennedy, and Target (1991) discuss this phenomenon in terms of "inhibition" of mental processes, where a whole class of mental representations appears to be absent from a patient's mental functioning. These mental processes often remain "inhibited/unutilized" throughout childhood, and its implications can first be encountered powerfully in adult clinical work. Fonagy et al. conceptualize this inhibition as an attempt of the individual to protect his/her mental functioning from very painful and conflicted mental representations. In other words, these patients try to prevent the mental devastation of unmanageable feelings by disengaging or inhibiting some of their mental processes, which generate such conflicts and affects.

Steiner (1993), from a Kleinian perspective, talks about patients who, "habitually, excessively, and indiscriminately" turn to "psychic retreats", states of mind in which the patient is stuck, cut off, and out of reach. He observes that these patients also display a failure to relinquish omnipotent control of their objects. Steiner

thinks a psychic retreat is a defensive organization to avoid intolerable anxiety. According to him these patients are not interested in understanding, and prefer to hold contradictory versions of reality to evade experiences of loss. Steiner says only mourning and acknowledgment of loss can reverse the intense projective identification these patients are engaged in, which denies the differentiation of self and the object.

Bach (2002) talks about patients who complain they have difficulties with thinking, emotions, and bodily functioning such as obsessive thoughts, constant confusion, mood irregularities, irregular breathing etc. Bach describes such a patient of his as follows. "…Bob once casually mentioned that as an adolescent whenever he borrowed the family car his father insisted that he never move the seat adjustment. Since the father at that time was a good head taller than Bob, Bob learned to drive while barely able to see over the hood of the car and he continued to drive like that for many years. …In fact it was not until Bob was in analysis and his wife remarked on his peculiar way of driving that this became conscious…Bob's position of being scrunched down in his driver's seat was also a model for how he was scrunched down both in his emotional life and in his thinking" (Bach, 2002, p.391-392 ) Bach gives couple of more examples. "... a patient who even as a young child was accustomed to waking, dressing, and feeding herself and then trying to awaken her drunken mother before going to school. It came as a great surprise for her to learn, many years later, that other children didn't have to shake their mothers awake, but were instead awakened and cared for by their mothers. Similarly, another patient, when asked how

he got to sleep as a child insisted that it was just like everyone else. Whenever he happened to feel tired, he went up to his room, turned on the TV, and watched till he fell asleep. When he awoke in the morning, the TV would still be blaring. He was quite surprised to learn that most small children of his background were put to bed by their parents at a regular time, often with a book or a song." (Bach, 2002, p.402) Bach sees in these adult cases children who couldn't make sense of their parents' mental functioning. They in a way "learned" from early on that any questioning of the parents' attitudes is forbidden, and hence "accepted" a prohibition on thinking about thinking.

Several metaphors have been used in the history of our field to describe patients and their unique struggles, such as the *guilty man* for neurotics and *tragic man* for character disorders (Kohut, 1977). These days we talk about the "difficult" patient as described above. However, there seems to be a need for a new characterization for these patients, which captures what makes them "difficult". These patients, who do not want to know too much, are struggling with a particular aspect of mental functioning, the kind of knowing that psychoanalysts call symbolization.

***The Nature of Psychic Reality***

Symbolization is a mental activity that facilitates a particular type of knowing. It refers to the mind's capacities to link, to reflect, and make meaning towards the

mentalization of lived experience. Symbolization enables access to the inner world, to the world of psychic reality. Psychic reality is a representation of our experience in ordinary/material reality. It is closely linked to the concept of symbolization in the sense that representation means letting go, momentarily, the thing of which it is a representation of.

Psychoanalysis is a discipline that studies psychic reality and its relation to material reality. According to Etchegoyen (1996) when Freud wrote in his September 21 letter (1897) that "there are no indications of reality in the unconscious, so that one can not distinguish between truth and fiction that is cathected with affect" (Etchegoyen, 1996, p.1) this idea paved the way to the concept of psychic reality and was followed by the theory of infantile sexuality, and together with the notions of unconscious, repetition, and transference constituted the foundations of psychoanalysis. Etchegoyen first quotes Bernstein's 1995 definition of psychic reality as "a set of experiences, emotions, and unconscious representations, personified as objects, which the ego feels to be internal and real" (Etchegoyen, 1996, p.2) and then gives his own succinct definition that "psychic reality is the theory the patient has about himself and others" (Etchegoyen, 1996, p.9)

This is indeed how we understand the psychic reality of a patient's communication, where we put aside the ordinary reality of its surface meaning. Parsons (1996) gives the following example. "A patient once told me that she would wake in the night and tell her father that she was afraid of burglars, or of dying, or of nuclear war. His angry reassurances would make her more agitated, not less"

(Parsons, 1996, p. 97) Parsons explains this mismatch by the father's failing to meet her on the level, not of ordinary, but of psychic reality, where her fears have substance. He adds that psychoanalysts negate an ordinary way of thinking, and psychic reality is the level at which the work is done. Thereby, psychoanalytic efforts don't dwell on whether burglars exist, or if nuclear war is an imminent danger or not, but on what these terrors or fears mean for the person. In this sense, psychic reality is defined by the *absence* of external reality, letting go of the tenacious hold on the literal or the thing in itself, which opens up the possibility to explore psychic reality.

***The Role of Experience of Absence in Symbolization, or in the Access to Psychic Reality***

Symbolization is about developing a creative relationship with the world. A symbol refers to the original object, however, its symbolic function depends on its being detached from it. For a child, a teddy bear is and is not the mother at the same time. Winnicott (1971) talked about this in terms of the "transitional object", the "first possession" of the child, which is neither internal nor external, and requires an acceptance of the paradoxical coexistence of both similarity and difference. Tustin (1984) says "autistic objects" need to be differentiated from "transitional objects". She claims "autistic objects" arise from self-induced bodily sensations (hard faeces, hard snot, insides of the cheek), or from equating the body with a hard object (a small car held tightly in the palm of the hand inseparable from the body). They are auto-

sensuous, allow only for “me centered” manipulations, always available, and function to avoid experiences of asymmetry, contraries, differences, lack of fit, and loss of control over the object.

Fonagy and Target (1996) claim that a young child initially uses two forms of psychic reality; “psychic equivalence”, where ideas are direct replicas of reality, and believed to be always true, with no distinction between internal and external, and the “pretend mode”, facilitated by play, where ideas come to represent reality. This dual mode later integrates into a singular “reflective, mentalising” mode, where the child understands that people have different feelings and thoughts about the same external reality. They see ideas as ideas, not as facts, and can play with different points of view. Fonagy and Target state that this integration happens as a result of the child’s mental states being thought about by the parent in a reality oriented perspective. Hence, the parent serves as a scaffolding to enhance this mental development by being a step ahead of the child’s experience of his/her mind. Auerbach and Blatt (2002) state that the empirical infant research of people like Stern (1985), Gergely and Watson (1996) suggest that sharing of affective states in the process of psychological differentiation between the parent and the infant is effective insofar the parent’s responses are contingent on the infant’s affective displays, but are not exact replicas of them. They claim that the dialectic central to psychological development is the oscillation between “gratifying involvements” and “experiences of incompatibility.” It seems that the psychological attainment of having a separate mind of one’s own, thus tolerating the *absence* of sameness between minds, places limits

on the illusions of omnipotence and fusion, which in return enables transitional fantasy.

A symbol is at first one with the object, but symbolization is really about being able to point to the object and move away from it as it exists in ordinary reality. Without this movement, there is no symbolization. The *absence* created by this movement motivates one's desire for the restitution of what is missing -whether it is an aspect of self, an object, or an experience-, which then results in a revival of what is missing through symbolization. What makes symbolization possible is first the ability to mentally move away from the original experience and/or object in external reality, and then to be able to establish a link with a new experience and/or an object to re-present the former. For example, there is first the tolerance for the *absence* of the mother, and then a creative linking of the mother with the teddy bear for it to re-present the mother.

However, what is described is just the initial step. In symbolization proper, this effort is not just a "symbolism" -just coming up with the teddy bear. It entails further elaboration and reflection on the absent. It is the ability to "use" the teddy bear to represent the mother in the Winnicottian sense. It is to be able display the affective component of this representation, to both cuddle and punch, as opposed to the teddy bear being just a toy. Usually the "difficult" patient falls short of symbolization proper as such, and is stuck with symbolisms. An example of this would be a patient who describes her mother as a wounded lion, but is unable to talk about why she uses this metaphor and what is its emotional significance for her.

Rene Magritte, a Belgian surrealist painter, often questions the validity and superiority of representational seeing in his paintings. His works emphasize equivalence in the visualization of thoughts, which speak to how these patients mostly engage with the world. Magritte's 1964 drawing, *Evening Falls*, is a literal depiction of a sunset. As the evening falls, it crashes and shatters a window and the fragments of the landscape re-appear on the broken bits of glass unchanged. Please see Appendix. This painting captures these patients' strong sense of the literal, often veiled by surface use of metaphors. This mental mode of psychic equivalence harbors strong raw negative affect and its associated thoughts that are potentially self-shattering, yet safely sealed in the concreteness of thinking.

Wrye (1993) talks about patients who suffer from "disturbances in spatial experiencing." She says these patients experience space " as inhospitable and dangerous, feel alienated, disconnected, and distrustful. For them, the notion of potential space as an inviting playground in the presence of the other is utterly incomprehensible. Often, they attempt to fill physical and temporal space with activity and part objects to stave off the terrible void; however, whatever they use to compulsively fill space has a dead quality" (Wrye, 1993, p. 105-106) She adds that as linking is a threatening mental activity for these patients, symbols and metaphors are not used towards abstraction, hence the patients' experience remains concrete. Wrye says these patients fight understanding symbolic meanings of their acts and concretely attack the therapeutic frame like missing sessions and refusing to pay.

She sees the major challenge in the work is to be able to transform the experience of the “hollow”, or absence if you will, from “deadspace” to “playspace”.

It can be argued that to be able to create symbolization proper of one’s experiences, one needs to be able to move away, to disengage from holding on to external reality in a concrete manner. In other words, being able to tolerate experiences of absence really involves tolerating negative affects and being able to acknowledge one’s desire for what is missing. This acknowledgment gives one the mental space to revive what is missing in a manner open to elaboration and further meaning making. It is thus this creation of a tolerable experience of absence that fosters imagination and symbolization.

In the next section first classical and then contemporary psychoanalytic views on the process of symbolization and what accounts for its failure for these “difficult” patients will be reviewed. The specific emphasis throughout this review will be to try to demonstrate how, despite the differences in their terminology, all theorists in their own ways draw attention to the importance of tolerating experiences of absence for the development of symbolization proper. Relevant case material will be included to illustrate the theoretical points.

## *Classical Psychoanalytic Views on Symbolization*

### *Freud:*

In his monumental work, "Interpretation of Dreams" (1900), where Freud outlines his model of the mind and mental functioning, he argues that the infant's first psychic activity is wish fulfillment. He says that the infant hallucinates and produces a "perceptual identity", which is a repetition of the perception that was linked with the satisfaction of the need. However, Freud continues to say that hallucination does not bring complete satisfaction, thus the infant turns towards the external world. At this moment he starts thinking in addition to wishing. Freud will continue to see the wish as the prime mover, not just in the formation of dreams, symptoms, and defenses, which are mostly emphasized in the literature, but also in the formation of thoughts. What is a wish? A wish -whether conscious or unconscious- emerges within absence. After all, if it was there, there would be no wishing.

Wishes make one invest, or cathect to use the Freudian terminology, for their realization. In his paper, "The Unconscious" (1915), Freud says that the system Ucs contains the thing-cathexes of the objects, and the system Pcs originates in a hyper-cathexis of this concrete idea by linking it up with the words that correspond to it. It is this hyper-cathexes, Freud says that brings about a higher organization in the mind and makes it possible for the secondary process to succeed and dominate the primary process.

For Freud the distinction between thing and word presentation was important. It demonstrated the (topographical) transformation of mental representations that are exclusively perceptual, sensational, and motoric (system Ucs) into mental representations that are conceptual (system Pcs-Cs). This is the Freudian description of moving away from being experience bound towards what that experience stands for.

It is interesting to note that Freud arrived at this distinction while discussing symptom formation in schizophrenics (concrete patient par excellence) versus neurotics. He gives the example of Tausk's schizophrenic patient who took hours to dress. The patient was obsessed with pulling his socks properly because he was worried about drawing apart the knitted stitches i.e. creating holes. Freud also gave an example of one of his patients obsessed with squeezing blackheads on his face and then reproaching himself for ruining his face, leaving cavities. Freud's interpretation as to what made these patients so anxious in both cases centered around the threat of castration (holes/cavities). For our purposes, it is important to pay attention to what Freud says for how these patients think. He says "a hole is a hole" is literally true for them whether it is squeezing out of a blackhead or an ejaculation from the penis. Later in Neurosis and Psychosis (1924) Freud would conceptualize psychosis as a disturbance in the relation between the ego and its environment, where the distinction between the inner and outer world is abolished and the inner reality takes over the outer reality.

Imposing such an identity between actions (e.g. squeezing=ejaculation) or between the psychic and external reality not only disregards their difference, but also abolishes absence. The schizophrenic patients see what they want to see, not what is really there or not there. After all Freud said (1924) a delusion is "…like a patch on the spot where originally there was a *rent* (italics mine) in the relation between ego and outer world" (Freud, 1924, p.187). This can help us to think about a psychotic patient's delusions and hallucinations in a different way.

Freud's initial clinical work with hysteric patients led him to state that neurosis has a symbolic structure; that is symptoms are symbolic manifestations of underlying unconscious conflicts. According to Freud there are powerful instinctual impulses that the ego defends itself against by a mechanism that consigns such impulses to the unconscious. This mechanism of defense has been termed as repression, and Freud in his paper "Repression" in 1915 explained it to be that the essence of repression is based on turning something away, and keeping it at a distance from the conscious. In 1924 in "Neurosis and Psychosis" Freud said, the impulses struggle against this fate and force a compromise on the ego by creating substitute gratifications in the form of symptoms. Thereby repression has become the central concept in his theorizing as dreams, fantasies, and symptoms came to represent repressed instinctual wishes. As a result of this thinking, neurosis was conceptualized as the product of repression that has miscarried.

However, within the last fifteen years of his life, Freud's writings suggest that he started to rethink the centrality of repression. This expansion in his thinking came

about through his growing interest in the fate of the ego in the process of defense in different psychopathologies, extending from neurosis to sexual perversions, fetishism in particular, and to psychosis. Most importantly, Freud noticed the ubiquity of loss of external reality in each disorder, albeit in different degrees, to deal with the painful aspects of reality.

In “The Loss of Reality in Neurosis and Psychosis” (1924) Freud compares how reality gets lost in neurosis and psychosis. He says in neurosis the ego, in the service of reality, represses the instinctual impulse. However, he adds that neurosis emerges as an outcome of a failed repression. On the other hand, psychosis, he says, tears the ego from reality, but in a “lordly manner”, by creating a new reality, furnished by hallucinations and delusions, which is not open to objections like the that has been forsaken. Hence, he concludes that in neurosis there is not a wholesale denial of reality. Neurosis just tries to ignore aspects of reality, whereas psychosis denies it in totality. Thus, Freud comes to see loss of reality and substitution of either neurotic or psychotic symptoms for the lost reality ubiquitous in both disorders. He then asks a question in “Neurosis and Psychosis” (1924), which is what is that mechanism analogous to repression by which the ego severs itself from the outer world. He answers this question in the same paper by saying that the ego avoids a rupture by deforming itself by effecting a cleavage or division of itself. Freud later names this division disavowal, a consequence of the splitting of the ego.

In his paper “Fetishism” (1927) Freud expresses his ideas further. In this paper he talks about men whose object choice is dominated by a fetish. He sees the

fetish as a substitute for the boy's belief in the mother's penis that he does not want to give up in the context of castration anxiety. Freud here makes the distinction that repression is directed against internal instinctual demands, whereas disavowal defends against external reality. Through his ideas about the defense mechanism involved in fetishism, Freud asserts the split in the ego. This splitting acknowledges and rejects reality at the same time to avoid the affective impact of a highly anxiety provoking registered reality. It can be seen as a perverse compromise, where negative hallucination (not seeing the painful aspect of reality, for example in fetishism she still has the penis) makes possible wish fulfillment (therefore there is no castration). It is an elimination of the difference between perception and memory to suspend reality testing, where the wish and defense work in collaboration. From his ingenious mention of the fig leaf on a statue, pointing to disavowal on a cultural scale, to his mention of the pervert who enjoys cutting off female hair, and to the Chinese custom of mutilating and revering feet, Freud in this paper also underlines the affective component of this defense that affection and hostility run parallel in disavowal in unequal amounts in different cases.

What is most remarkable in this paper is that Freud, setting fetishism aside for a moment, mentions his analysis of two young men, one whose father died when he was two years old, and the other when he was ten. He says both "had failed to take cognizance of the death of his beloved father, had scotomized it, and yet neither of them developed a psychosis." (Freud, 1927, p. 155-156) He adds, "it was only one current in their mental life that had not recognized their father's death; there was

another current that took full account of the fact" (Freud, 1927, p.156) Freud here points out that the wish and the reality exist side by side in these cases, whereas in psychosis the reality would have been absent. Also, in "Splitting of the Ego in the Process of Defense" (1938), Freud says that the function of the ego is open to disturbances. Thus, through the presentation of these two cases, Freud brings forth the larger question of the alteration of the ego. Hence, he makes it possible to entertain the idea that disavowal as a defense mechanism may be present in disorders that can't be classified as neurosis, sexual perversion, or psychosis.

At this time Freud seems to conceptualize the struggle with experiences of absence that is maintained through the employment of the defense of disavowal as ubiquitous in all disorders. He underlines varying severity of disavowal across a spectrum of disorders.

Finally, we will focus on another theme that is frequent in Freud's writings. Loss in the Freudian sense refers to a fundamental experience of lack, which starts out as a developmental inevitability, that the breast will be lost, and then becomes a ubiquitous experience in life. Once again Freud alluded to the importance of loss in the formation of thinking in several of his papers including 1916 paper "On Transience", in "Mourning and Melancholia" (1917), and in "Inhibitions, Symptoms, and Anxiety" (1926).

In "Inhibitions, Symptoms, and Anxiety" (1926) Freud underlines loss as a central developmental theme. He describes a succession of anxiety situations to be survived ranging from loss of the womb at birth, to loss of the object, loss of the love

of the object, and finally the loss of love of the superego, coupled with experiences of losing the breast, the feces, and the penis. Years earlier, Freud marked the importance of surviving and being able to mourn experiences of absence.

In his 1916 paper Freud said, " ...The poet admired the beauty of the scene around us but felt no joy in it. He was disturbed by the thought that all this beauty was fated to extinction, that it would vanish when winter came, like all human beauty and all the beauty and splendor that men have created or may create. All that he would otherwise have loved and admired seemed to him to be shorn of its worth by the *transience which was its doom* (italics mine) ...led me to infer that some powerful emotional factor was at work which was disturbing their judgment …What spoilt their enjoyment of beauty must have been a revolt in their minds against mourning ...and since the mind instinctively recoils from anything that is painful, they felt their *enjoyment* (italics mine) of beauty interfered with by thoughts of its transience." (Freud, 1916, p.303-304)

A year later in "Mourning and Melancholia" (1917) Freud talked about this revolt against mourning in detail. He termed it as melancholia, a pathological form of mourning. He said that in mourning the world becomes poor and empty, but in melancholia it is the ego itself. For him melancholia entails both the loss of the object and the loss of the ego. The self-reproaches of the melancholic are really the reproaches against a loved object, which has been shifted away from it onto the patient's ego. In mourning there is a withdrawal of the libido from the lost object and displacement of it on to a new one in time, but in melancholia, Freud says, there

is an identification of the ego with the abandoned object, where the shadow of the object falls on the ego. Freud sees the predominance of narcissistic object choice in the melancholic, where the loss might be real or imagined, and is unconscious since frequently the patient knows whom he has lost, but not what he has lost. Melancholia depicts the intolerance of absence and its psychological implications.

In all of these papers Freud talks eloquently about the importance of tolerable experiences of absence in creating the wish and fostering thinking, the ubiquitous tendency to deny pain that absence entails, and the impact of severe disavowal, both in cognitive and affective terms, which can be seen as mental repercussions of not being able to tolerate experiences of absence.

***Klein:***

In her theorizing about how the mind works, Melanie Klein talks about how actual experiences from the external world are continuously altered by one's own phantasies and impulses, thus the inner reality never ceases to test the outer reality. Klein was interested in the "epistemophilic instinct" and the way children's anxieties interfered with this intrinsic curiosity to know. In her 1930 paper on symbol formation and in her 1946 paper on projective identification she claims that these anxieties are basically caused by phantasies of exploring the insides of the mother's body and destroying its contents. According to Klein, interest in the original object, the mother's body, is repressed in time, and is then displaced onto the objects in the

external world constituting the grounds of symbolization. If anxieties about the mother's body are too acute because of the intensity of the phantasied attacks due to either child's excess aggression or the mother's inability to receive such projections, no displacement takes place and symbol formation comes to a standstill.

In her papers "A Contribution to the Psychogenesis of Manic-Depressive States" (1935) and "Mourning and its Relation to Manic-Depressive States" (1940) Klein outlines her view of this process in more detail. According to her, the infant is object related from birth, and under the sway of the destructive or death instinct fueling fears of annihilation and persecution, the infant starts to split his internal and external experiences. In this earliest phase of development mechanisms of introjection, projection, and identification predominate.

Klein names this phase the "paranoid-schizoid position" where primitive anxieties, mobilized by the destructive sources from within and frustrations from without, are projected into the object, which becomes the prototype of the bad object. Similarly, the life instinct also is projected to create the prototype of the good object. These two relationships are kept as separate split object experiences, together with their complimentary split self experiences, as excessively good and bad. Part objects as such oscillate between idealization and persecution. This splitting gives rise to projective identification, where the confusion between self and object, what is internal and external, create a parallel confusion in thinking between the symbol and the thing symbolized, resulting in concreteness. Klein says the "depressive position", a developmental advance, occurs in time where these split experiences are integrated

into whole self and object experiences. This mental move enables experiences of ambivalence, development of concern, and reparative capacities.

Hence, in the Kleinian framework, under the aegis of primitive anxiety of early destructive impulses, external and internal, loved and hated, real and imaginary are split at first, and each step towards their unification leads to a renewed splitting until adaptation to the external world increases, where love and trust in the internalized and the real objects are well established. In “Envy and Gratitude” (1957) Klein underlines that deprivation from the external world intensifies greed, envy, and persecutory anxiety, whereas one’s own and other’s goodness, brought about by the internal and the external experiences of the good breast, help to withstand these destructive impulses as temporary experiences. In sum, Klein conceptualizes the infantile depressive position as similar to normal mourning, where the inner world is being built up as the child’s confidence in his own and others goodness gets strengthened. The result, in the light of a better awareness of one’s destructive tendencies, is an increased fear of loss and guilt, which paves the way toward experiences of gratitude, responsibility, and reparation leading to further ego integration.

Kristeva (2001) describes Klein’s theory of symbolization as a developmental continuum from “equation” to “significance”, where primary symbolism of the drives contemporaneous with the beginning of life precede the emergence of the signifier/signified and verbalization linked to an enhanced sense of reality that structures the matrix of thought. She sees this as a journey from identity to similarity,

equations to symbols, and from anxious fantasy to thought. According to her Klein's rendition of thinking allows psychic interiority to take shape. At first, she says, it is "a depth that is at first grieving, then relieving and joyful" (Kristeva, 2001, p.246) Kristeva concludes it is the sublimation of cavity, where with the help of a bond of love "replaces matricide and takes on the aura of thought" (Kristeva, 2001, p.247)

In the Kleinian understanding, which brings object relations to the forefront in addition to the drives, tolerating the absence of the original object, the mother, is underscored in the development of thinking. Moreover, thought arises and evolves from the work of mourning characteristic of the depressive position, where the absence of a verisimilitude between the internal and the external is accepted and worked through.

***Segal:***

Hanna Segal, in her 1957 paper on "Notes on Symbol Formation", furthers Klein's work on symbolization. She states that symbolization is an ego activity designed to deal with the anxieties stirred in the relationship of the self to the object. She adds that disturbances in differentiation between the self and the object lead to disturbances in differentiation between the symbol and the symbolized.

Segal distinguishes between symbolization in the "paranoid-schizoid" position, which she calls "symbolic equation", and symbol formation in the "depressive" position, which she calls "symbol proper". In the paranoid- schizoid

position the object is possessed if it is felt as good, or totally annihilated if it is felt as bad. Symbolization in this position produces symbolic equations, where the symbol is confused with the object to the point of being the object. Her examples include a psychotic man who could not play the violin in public because for him it meant masturbating in public, a writer who got frequently inhibited in writing when she started to experience words as broken-up bits of things, and a borderline patient who often could not read because she thought words were jumping out of the page and actually biting her eyes. In these examples self is confused with the object. The mental distance, enabling the "as if" position in symbolization, is missing. Segal also talks about children stuck with symbolic equations who can't use toys. She gives examples like a little girl whose play with pebbles was restricted to sucking, spitting, or using them as weapons, and Klein's (1930) well known case Dick, a boy, who was primarily interested in door handles. Segal says concrete symbolisms as such prevail when projective identification is in ascendance. In this case boundaries between the self and the object, internal and external are lost fueled by the intolerance of separation and loss. Segal claims that imagination necessitates abandonment of omnipotence and facing the depressive position.

According to Segal in the depressive position the object is saved from aggression and possessiveness, and symbols created in this mental mode is geared toward re-capturing the object. Segal describes the depressive position as an unconscious memory of a harmonious internal world and experience of its destruction, which gives the impulse to recover and recreate this lost world. Here the

capacity to experience loss and the wish to re-create the object enables symbolization, where new objects come to represent the old ones. Here Segal says the aim is not to deny loss, but to overcome it.

In her book “Dreams, Phantasy, and Art” (1991), Segal says mental life is “crucially affected by one’s capacity to recognize and tolerate the discrepancy between his omnipotent phantasy and expectation, and the reality that he encounters” (Segal, 1991, p.27) She adds that this process is influenced both by the capacity of the infant to tolerate this discrepancy, and the nature of the external experience being tolerable enough. Segal agrees with Freud that thought is a trial action brought forth by the gap between desire and satisfaction. Hence, she concludes “a symbol is like a precipitate of the mourning for the object” (Segal, 1991, p.40) It is important to note that Segal locates “symbol proper” in the depressive position underscoring the vital role of tolerance of absence in this process.

***Bion:***

Another theorist influenced by the Kleinian tradition is Bion. In his 1962 paper entitled “A Theory of Thinking” Bion says that pre-conceptions, like the idea of a breast, are matched with a realization, that is the actual breast, giving rise to a conception, which is a form of thought. If a pre-conception encounters a negative realization, a frustration, that is no breast available for satisfaction, what happens next depends on the child’s capacity to withstand frustration. If the child’s capacity for

enduring frustration is good, the no-breast experience will be transformed into a thought, which helps to endure the frustration, and makes it possible for the child to use this absence, the no-breast experience, for thinking.

Bion describes how this process develops through his concept of "containment". In 1962 he talks about the mother's capacity for "reverie." This is a state where the mother's mind is available, receptive, and engaged in the process of making sense of the world for the infant through making links. He mentions the importance of this maternal capacity for the mother to be able to serve as a "container" to transform the intolerable feelings of the child into a tolerable form that the child can re-introject. For Bion this is the "alpha function" of the mother metabolizing the raw elements of experience for the child. The child introjects this function in time to be able to tolerate frustration, or absence if you will, and facilitate thinking. If this process goes wrong, either because of the mother's incapacity for reverie, or the infant's excessive envy of the mother being able to do what he can't do, then an internal object that will not accept projections results.

According to Bion, the capacity to tolerate absence evolves into an ability to imagine that the bad feeling of being frustrated is occurring because there is a good object which is absent, but which may return. However, if the capacity for frustration is low due to constitutional and/or environmental reasons, the no-breast experience does not develop into good breast is absent, but it remains as bad breast is omnipresent. The absence of the breast is then felt to be a bad object, which must be gotten rid of by evacuation. Here absence is equated with the bad breast and

produces an intolerable affect. Evacuating absence, this essential experience necessary for symbolization, may constitute a Bionian explanation of one of the ways this process fails.

Bion, in his 1957 paper "Differentiation of the Psychotic from the Non-psychotic Personalities", also talks about pathological splitting and projective–identification as other means to a de-symbolizing state of mind. He says in this case destructive attacks on verbal thought results. Splitting process takes over the thought process. Links between objects are attacked until two objects can't be brought together in a way which leaves each object with its intrinsic qualities intact. Their conjunction to produce a new mental object is not allowed. The formation of symbols, which depends on "the ability to bring together two objects so that their resemblance is made manifest, yet their difference left unimpaired," (Bion, 1957, p. 67) becomes very difficult. Bion in his paper "Attacks on Linking" (1959) states that these attacks also produce a disorder of the impulse to be curious on which all learning depends. He adds that emotions are hated as well, both because they are too powerful to contain, but more importantly for their function in linking that gives reality to objects. Hence, the surviving links in thinking turn out to be "perverse, cruel, and sterile" (Bion, 1959, p. 100)

In sum, in his theory Bion underlines the importance of maternal functions, which enable the child to be able to both withstand experiences of absence, and transform these experiences through thinking.

***Winnicott:***

Continuing the discussion on maternal functions that facilitate the capacity to tolerate absence one must also mention Winnicott. In his paper, "Primitive Emotional Development" (1945), Winnicott describes a primitive state that is normal in infancy. He is concerned about aspects of maternal care the infant needs during this state in the first year of life prior to relating to people. The mother for him is the one who gathers "the bits together" as the infant is kept warm, handled, bathed, rocked, and named. This is almost the precondition as to how the instinctual experiences are able to gather the personality from within. He says, "again it is instinctual experience and the repeated quiet experiences of body-care that gradually build up what may be called satisfactory personalization" (Winnicott, 1945, p.151) As Winnicott profoundly states "only on a basis of monotony can a mother profitably add richness" (Winnicott, 1945, p.153)

In his paper, "Primary Maternal Preoccupation" (1956), Winnicott further describes the qualities of this maternal care. The "good-enough environment" in early mother-infant relationship is made possible by the identification of the mother with the infant and his dependence on her. This is a special state the mother moves into towards the end of her pregnancy. It is a heightened sensitivity that lasts for a few weeks from which the mother recovers spontaneously. Here Winnicott reiterates that the infant has a constitution, innate developmental tendencies, and instincts with

changing zone-dominance in line with Freud. However, he adds that before the establishment of instinct patterns sufficient going on being undisturbed by impingements that good-enough maternal adaptation provides is necessary for unfolding of first body and then ego needs. On this road to ego maturity instinctual experiences strengthen the ego, on the other hand in cases of ego immaturity instinctual experiences disrupt the ego. Here maternal failures are understood to weaken existence at best, threaten it with annihilation at worst, having a different quality than the frustrating mother of later stages.

Winnicott also talked about how the devoted mother moves the infant from narcissism to relationships and from fantasy to reality. In his paper, "The Use of An Object and Relating Through Identifications" (1969), Winnicott describes the mother as enabling, first, relating then using objects, hence moving the infant from narcissism to relationships. The infant is ruthless with the mother and she tolerates it. The object of primitive love suffers by being loved. Winnicott says such capacity to use objects mark a change towards the reality principle, which accepts the object's independence beyond one's omnipotent projections. The infant destroys the object (mother) and the object (mother) survives it "proving" its autonomy and own life. Winnicott eloquently puts it as the paradox of becoming destroyed because the object is real, and becoming real in destruction. His understanding of destructiveness is not reactive to encounters with reality, thereby it is not limited to destruction as a negative affect. Destruction is what creates externality, places the object outside the self, and creates object constancy. It has a positive value in that the shared reality is

created and love of a real object emerges. It is similar to what Freud said in 1915 that the object is discovered in hatred.

According to Winnicott, the contact with external reality happens when the infant hallucinates and the world presents, creating a moment of illusion. For this illusion to be produced the mother has to bring the world to the baby in an understandable form, in a limited way, and suitable to the infant's needs. Mother and infant live an experience together, which the infant can take as either his hallucination or a thing belonging to external reality. The overlap between the infant's capacity to create and an external reality that corresponds to it allow the illusion that what the infant creates really exists.

In his 1971 work "Playing and Reality", Winnicott talks about cases of frequent unresponsiveness and/or out of synch presence of the mother, where the mother becomes a thing to look at, but definitely not look into. Winnicott says that the child must see in the mother's gaze first himself. If, too precociously, it is the face of the mother that is perceived, then the child can't form the "subjective object". This leads to a premature loss of being illusioned. As a result, the child prematurely gets involved with the object as "objectively perceived". The child then either organizes a withdrawal, which we see in psychosis, or he refuses to look except to perceive, which we see in concrete patients, as a way of defending himself.

In his 1951 paper, "Transitional Objects and Transitional Phenomena", Winnicott describes the first "not-me" possession a teddy bear, a blanket, or a soft or a hard toy. This not-me object is weaved into a personal pattern within the first year

of life. It survives instinctual loving and hating, has vitality and reality of its own, it must never change, and the child assumes full rights over it. The transitional object as such stands for the breast moving the child from magical omnipotent control to control by manipulation. It eventually loses meaning, gets diffused and spread out over the cultural field of play, creativity, and religion. Winnicott says the internal object is alive, real, good-enough depending on the existence, aliveness, and behavior of the external object. The failure of the latter leads to deadness with a persecutory quality. If the inadequacy of the external object persists, the internal object fails to have meaning, and thus the transitional object becomes meaningless, too.

As Winnicott says, the transitional object must be more than a comforter, it must be a soother. It must become more important than the mother and an inseparable part of the child. This is made possible by how the good-enough mother interacts with the child. She makes active adaptations that gradually lessen in line with the child's growing abilities to withstand her inevitable failures and tolerate frustrations. In the Winnicottian framework, this is how the mother creates and fosters tolerance for absence.

Winnicott says in fantasy things work by magic; there are no brakes on fantasy. Fantasy in this sense, in Freudian terms, is a part of internal reality related to experiences of pleasure and pain that the individual creates to deal with external reality's frustrations. Winnicott also talks about a possible pathology of fantasy; fantasying which results from an inability to withstand inner reality displayed as an attempt at omnipotent control of it. Psychopathology of transitional space, exhibiting

this inability, may lead to fetishism, lying, stealing, addictions, loss of the capacity to play, to imagine, and be creative. The person becomes literal, concrete, and bound to what is objectively perceived. We may view these as different forms of de-symbolization.

Denial of separation, which according to Winnicott is at the core of this difficulty, is then expressed concretely by holding on to a shoe, a lie, a stolen blouse, or a drug that leads to the demise of symbolization and thinking. He says that withstanding absence, or to use his phrase, “disillusionment”, is crucial to later be able to create a transitional space and an object to transform that experience of absence. It is most important for Winnicott to sustain a third area, an absence out of which symbolization emerges. As Andre Green (1991) brilliantly sums up Winnicott in a single sentence in his paper “On Thirdness”, “firstness is being, secondness relating, and thirdness thinking ” (Green, 1991, p.63)

***Contemporary Psychoanalytic Views on Symbolization***

***Green:***

In both of his papers, "The Intuition of the Negative in Playing and Reality" (1997) and "The Primordial Mind and the Work of the Negative" (1998) Andre Green talks about how he approaches the topic of symbolization around his concept of the "work of the negative". Always emphasizing his Freudian origins, in his first paper Green demonstrates his allegiance also to Winnicott, and in the second one to Bion.

Green says "the negative" is the basis of all psychic activity. Here he goes back to Freud to remind us that the lack of the object, combined with the pressure of the drives, activates the mind and gives birth to hallucinatory wish fulfillment –the most elementary form of psychic activity. He further draws a literary analogy referring to Keats' phrase of "negative capability" to talk about a capacity to stay with the negative instead of rushing to mental or physical action (e.g. evacuation or somatization), where symbolic function is arrested.

Referring to a Bionian notion, the distinction of "No-thing vs Nothing", Green says that the former creates mental holes and forecloses thinking. He names this phenomena of psychic holes the "failure of the negative", which is destructive. Here the lack does not constitute a structuring effect on thinking, but on the contrary hampers the development of it. The reason for this failure, according to Green, is because of undue anxiety or frustration that the lack can't be faced and given up. He

says that absence is an intermediate position between presence and loss. In the constructive "work of the negative", absence does not mean a void. It is for Green a potential presence which generates a movement between negating and affirming, separation and connection. A downfall of this process is where "the negative" itself becomes the reality. No-thing or the hole becomes the object where the person, Green says, goes into "mimicry" for reparation. In mimicry the aim is to possess the object by becoming not like it, but being it.

In his 2005 paper "Play and Reflection in Donald Winnicott's Writings" Green illustrates such mimicry as follows. He first states that loss and substitution always go together. Then, he talks about a child patient of Winnicott (1971), a seven-year-old boy who was preoccupied with a piece of string, and nobody dared to call his toys, "toys". Green quotes Winnicott, "….everything I did was translated by him into something associated with string" (Green, 2005, p.17) Winnicott conceptualized this case as a severe fear of separation, where the string is used as a denial of separation rather than a communication. Winnicott noted that the string became "a thing in itself" for this child. Green says this boy exemplifies a predominance of loss with no possibility of substituting for reality. Thus, he says "playing is very restricted, and its creative power is limited to producing *icons* (italics mine) of separations" (Green, 2005, p.17)

According to Green in such instances when the "work of the negative" is hampered, it no longer becomes an indicator of the idea of the latent, but becomes equated with void, emptiness, futility, meaninglessness, and blankness. This also

disables the creation of new objects, the "objectalising function" as Green calls it. He says for a painter his painting is more than the naked body of a woman, or for a stamp collector the activity means much more than the stamps themselves. In cases where the objectalising function is replaced by the "disobjectalising function", the object loses specific individuality and uniqueness. It could be any object or no object at all. Here Green makes the analogy to fetishism. For a raincoat fetishist, he is not bothered about who wears the raincoat, because he is only interested in the raincoat itself. The "work of the negative" comes to a halt here. This is destructive in that it also leads to the decathexes of the objects.

The failure in the "work of the negative", Green says, is the result of the "dead mother complex." In his 1983 paper "The Dead Mother", he comes close to Bion and Winnicott's emphasis on maternal functions. "Dead mother" for Green is a mother who remains alive, but who is psychically dead in the eyes of the child in her care. It is an imago in the child's mind following a maternal depression. This state of the mother results in the transformation of a living object, a source of vitality for the child, into a distant, inanimate figure, who affects the fate of the child's investments in terms of his narcissistic and object libidinal future.

It is possible to construe Green's concepts and contributions having the notion of tolerance of absence in mind. He argues that there is a structuring impact of "the negative" (or absence) on the psyche, where it does not constitute a hole or a void. Hence, "the negative" can turn into a potential presence, generating the possibility for symbolization. On the other hand, where "the negative" itself becomes a pervasive

reality, one wants to do away with it using the mechanisms underlying de-symbolization.

***Freedman:***

Norbert Freedman, a contemporary Freudian analyst, stays close to the clinical data to give his account on symbolization, its failure, and the underlying mechanisms. He starts out with a distinction. Freedman (1998) says there are patients who are "segmental de-symbolizers", where the failure of symbolization occurs around certain themes and affects, and "pervasive de-symbolizers", whose experiences are permeated by the failure of this process. Freedman and Lavender (2002) claim that there are patients, especially pervasive de-symbolizers, who are high functioning, and on the surface, have a rich inner life. Yet, they display a core of frozenness not to be penetrated, and a thinking system immune to interpretation. For these patients de-symbolization is the dominant mental mode.

Freedman claims that in instances of de-symbolization one sees mere "symbolism". This is a state of not being able to further elaborate what the symbol really stands for, or what the accompanying affective quality is. Freedman names this phenomena "fact perception" consisting of "frozen constellations". He says that this is a condensed structure pregnant with meaning to the therapist, but not accessible to the patient. There is something dead, unsymbolized, where emotional experience can not be named. This, he says, is displayed in a variety of ways. Sometimes it is

the endless reports of daily events presented as “petrified facts”, and sometimes it is not listening to the analyst, not hearing the interpretations, trivializing the analyst’s existence, all of which, being governed by almost a wish not to know too much.

Freedman and Lavender (2002) talk about various mechanisms of de-symbolization.

*Psychic equivalence:* This is the phenomenon of concrete thinking, mental rigidity, and propensity for externalization. Here the person relies on cues of immediacy and proximity, where one and only one meaning is possible. There is no “as if “ attitude, no multiple meanings, and no opportunity for self-reflection. The person clings to certainty, is committed to externalization, and regards nothing as a possibility, but an unwavering fact.

*Evacuation of Psychic Tension States:* Based on Bion’s notion of evacuation, in this mechanism of de-symbolization one sees the immediate transition of psychic tensions into action (motoric acts) or into the body (somatization). Tensions are unthought. They remain as unrepresented thoughts. There is almost a commitment that all meaning and significance must be barred, hence symbolization is foreclosed.

*Disavowal:* This form of de-symbolization involves the extirpation of a specific intolerable thought, in other words, disowning it. It is an active destruction. There is the registration of a psychic event and then its repudiation. Statements as to “I never had such a thought”, “It’s nothing at all”, “This has nothing to do with it” all point to disavowal.

Freedman (1998) underlines the importance of mental space, that aspect of thinking that makes an "as-if" mode possible. He believes one needs this space for elaboration, linking, and affective processing. It is possible to see this space as a topographical allusion to absence. Here one does not need to fill it up with what is immediately available (psychic equivalence) or get rid of experiencing it (evacuation and disavowal).

***Bass:***

Another contemporary Freudian analyst, Alan Bass, in his 1997 paper "The Problem of Concreteness", and his book entitled "Difference and Disavowal" (2000), talks about his theoretical formulations on symbolization around the issue of concrete thinking. He says, "…I am not using it to refer to the psychotic concretization of the abstract. Rather, I am referring to a dilemma that arises in a large group of apparently analyzable, non-psychotic patients. Such patients present derivatives of fantasy material, often in an apparent drive-defense configuration, but can not make use of interpretations" (Bass, 1997, p. 642). Bass adds that these patients take something coming from the inside and treat it as an indisputable perception of something that comes from the outside.

Bass states that to interpret is to suggest one thing may mean another. He thinks that these patients reject interpretations by using a defense against such a

differentiation for the purposes of affect regulation within a narcissistic organization. He gives a meticulous description of this process as follows.

According to Bass, these patients resist knowledge about any disagreement with their long held thoughts, feelings, fantasies, and beliefs to ward off anxiety and pain. In those instances they demonstrate a conflation of fantasy and reality, where they impose their own wishes on external reality. The defense of disavowal, which enables them to both register and at the same time actively destroy the dissonant increased tension coming from the external world, makes this wish fulfillment possible in "waking life". Referring back to early Freudian writings, the Project (1895) and the Dream Book (1900), Bass draws attention to temporal immediacy and perceptual identity in wish fulfillment, which is a substitution of a visualization of a scene of relief. For him, this is a regression from the tension raising secondary process of thinking to a primary process of wish fulfillment. Here positive hallucination imposes the wish by the help of negative hallucination that erases both the raised tension, and the distinction between perception and memory. Thereby, the unconsciously registered differentiation is repudiated. In the end, reality gets lost to the defense of disavowal.

When Bass says that there is always the reassurance that nothing is lost, one might think that he sees this reassurance as the motivation for these patients behind their concrete thinking. Focusing on this aspect of Bass's theory, where he describes these patients as seeking almost a verisimilitude between their inner world and external reality, it is possible to think about their psychic struggle through the concept

of intolerance of absence. Within a narcissistic organization absence as such is experienced as a mental blow that must be disavowed.

***Phillips and Lear:***

Andre Green says (1998), “thinking is a digestion of the mind” (p.652) At the end of this review of the contemporary literature on symbolization, we will now turn to two analysts, who in their unique ways, talk about the coexistence of life and death, integration and disintegration, and how certain kinds of death and disintegration create an experience of absence that is mutative.

Phillips in his book, “Darwin’s Worms” (2000), draws our attention to an interesting similarity he establishes between Darwin’s fascination with earthworms and Freud’s dislike of biographers. He claims that in Darwin’s thinking about nature and Freud’s on human nature, they both view life as war. It is a war of natural selection and adaptation for Darwin, and a war between life and death instincts for Freud. Phillips thinks both viewed anguish and suffering as an integral part of life, fueled by survival for Darwin and desire for Freud. Phillips claims that not only life and death stories coexist in both Darwin and Freud, but that death stories illuminate the life stories, where the inevitable and necessary suffering makes more life possible.

According to Phillips, Darwin did not see the earthworms as death bearing, corrupt, and lowly, but on the contrary as maintaining the earth, sustaining fertility through an unseen, hidden process of digestion that cultivates vegetable mold. It is a

digestion to restore. For Freud lives were to be known and understood rather than endlessly re-described, which Phillips asserts to be the reason for Freud's resentment of biographers. He says Freud believed in the elusive, therefore he viewed the coherent story of biography that accounts for a life as denying the essential unformulatable logic of life.

Phillips goes back to Freud's concept of the death instinct, which Freud claimed to "work silently" alongside Eros. Thanatos reveals itself in hiding, in repetitions, in the wish not to know. Eros binds, propels us forward, whereas Thanatos unbinds, and promotes inactivity. People are truly satisfied only when the wish for satisfaction, or desires, disappear. Death in an interesting way is the ultimate object of desire, as Freud put it, all life aims at death, which finally releases us from all desire. Eros disturbs, yet it is possible to respond to its perturbations without giving in to Thanatos, and create more life. Phillips reminds us how Freud observed his grandson deal with the absence of his mother in the famous cotton reel game of "fort-da" that he describes in "Beyond the Pleasure Principle" (1920). He underlines how Freud notices the child's inventiveness in turning the mother's absence into a pleasurable game, and says in that instance an improvisation emerged out of deprivation.

For Phillips loss is a permanent presence in life that one bears through normal mourning, in which case we choose more life to more death. He contends that from fossils of Darwin to half remembered dreams of Freud both theorists see loss not only

as conserving life, but enriching it as well. For Phillips both Darwin and Freud are encouraging people to excel in learning "the art of transience."

Lear in his book, "Happiness, Death, and the Remainder of Life" (2001), brings together Aristotle and Freud in search of what constitutes happiness. For our purposes, we will only discuss Lear's thinking on the Freudian side of this matter. Lear says that the life that we live is a life with desires. The experience of desire is the experience of a certain kind of lack out of which desire is born. Similar to Freud, he asserts a "truly" happy life is one that is beyond desire. Yet, the inevitable pressures of being alive also open the door to fantasy, which we use to account for this continuous experience of discontent, which for Lear, is life itself.

Lear claims that Freud has seen something profound about the workings of the human mind. Going back to "Beyond the Pleasure Principle" (1920), where Freud is trying to understand the repetition in war neurosis, Lear says that what Freud actually discovered is the failure of defense -the veteran who can not dream, but is repetitively brought back to the scene of atrocity in his nightmares. Lear thinks mind always tries to lend meaning to a meaningless disruption –an external trauma or an internal self-disruption. When this effort aborts, mind starts to traumatize itself. He says in this case such "stillborn attempts" to heal can't be transformed into "Darwinian adaptive mutations", where one tries out new combinations.

However, Lear does not see these aborted attempts as only motivated by or a manifestation of the Death Instinct. He sees the activity of self-disruption as an inherent quality of life and mind. Refraining from ascribing morality to terms as

good or evil, he claims it is what the mind does with the disruption that is crucial. Like Phillips, Lear also goes back to Freud's description of the fort-da game. He says it's the outcome of the game, not the game itself, which shows us a conversion. What would otherwise be a nameless trauma is converted into an experience of loss. Here the child is not stuck repeating "o-o-o-o-", thus never getting to "da". Lear says life can never be lived without remainder. He understands the mind as a homeostatic system that deals with the remainder through imaginative activities it creates.

Lear concludes that humans are constitutionally unable to keep things fixed, and forever immune to disruption. Referring to the Freudian understanding of trauma through the concepts like the stimulus barrier and the protective shield (1920), he says when change is externally or internally "too much", there is an "excess" that breaks through. However, this can be turn out to be either an occasion for creativity or destruction. Whether it is a small break, "petits morts", or a nameless breach, according to Lear, will be determined and gain its meaning from how and which particular fabric of meaning it rips.

Both Phillips and Lear eloquently address the importance of being able to bear experiences of absence for the creation of a binding, life-bearing mind. To survive "transience artfully" using Philips' term, or the "petits morts", as Lear puts it, is very difficult for some, who experiences these breaks almost always as a nameless breach.

***On Absence or "Small Death":***

Salomon Resnik, in his book "Mental Space" (1995), talks about "small death". He claims that every separation between ideas is akin to an experience of mourning. Hence, language, either as thought or a spoken discourse, is a set of acts of weaning. He says that a pause, "a small death", with its solitude and separation, enables the individual to reflect on his mental itinerary. In Resnik's understanding absence liberates mental space to come into being. However, he adds that it is not easy to accept mental space for it calls for memory, desire, and knowledge, which can give rise to intense feelings. In defense one may either turn space into a vacuum, or fill it with thin air.

Similarly, Rob Weatherill in his book "The Sovereignty of Death" (1998), says biology, desire, and creativity are all linked to an experience of death. He reminds the Freudian notion of the Oedipus complex, how the young child tragically encounters the separate and exclusive relation of his parents, and is forced to experience death in the sense of being cut-off and small. However, only then he enters the realm of desire, forsaking his sense of omnipotence, which saves him from lack of desire, or an asexual perpetuation of sameness.

Resnik says we live in a culture that fosters running away from our inner world, our unconscious, and from a space for thinking. He adds that in the throes of our "phobia of existence" we keep ourselves busy, and full of nothing to say.

Weatherill concurs that as real life gets harder, images of perfection proliferates. Hence, we witness the precariousness of human subjectivity that revolts against small death, or absence, oblivious to how regeneration and transformation are smothered within the experiences of no scarcity, boundlessness, and excess. This takes us beyond the consulting room.

# *PART II*

# *BEYOND THE CONSULTING ROOM*

## *Introduction*

In their consulting rooms psychoanalytic clinicians aim to nurture a symbolizing mind in their patients by encouraging self-reflection. As discussed earlier, with some patients this becomes an especially difficult endeavor. However, one must also note that just as a symbolizing mind needs particular conditions to flourish, the process of symbolization can be a viable activity if sustained by an environment that is able to provide these conditions, and find it of some value.

In contemporary Western society, maximizing immediate gratification, being perceptually bound to the surface, and doing away with any perceived or possible imperfection, lack, and loss are pointed out to be the prevalent tendencies. These features parallel the presentation of patients having significant difficulties with symbolization proper. As we work with our "difficult" patients struggling for sustaining a symbolizing mind, what is beyond the consulting room seems to compound that struggle. The phenomenological, temporal, and spatial experiences of absence are shrinking in our culture as the distinction between the manifest and the latent is getting lost, and immediacy is being substituted for delay, and surface for depth. Hence, intolerance for experiences of absence seems to be a significant cultural phenomenon as much as a clinical one.

Scholars have singled out these very strands as important characteristics of the current era of Postmodernism. Even though there is still not a consensual definition of what Postmodernism is, one can say that it is a movement of ideas and trends since the late 20th century. Postmodernism came to be an all-inclusive term for various aspects of cultural, social, intellectual life that both extends and challenges the fundamental assumptions of Enlightenment Modernity such as universality, rationality, objectivity, and progress. De-differentiation, an erosion of distinctions, between now-then, here-there, object-subject, and fantasy-reality also characterize the Postmodern era.

One of the best known, and probably the most discussed, facet of Postmodern thinking is the "end" of universal truths and grand explanatory narratives of Enlightenment Modernity (Lyotard, 1984). The "end of the world" as an objective reality and "end of man" as an integrated subjectivity, coupled with profound changes in the definitions of time and space, are among the other "ends" that hit our intellectual shores with a tidal wave impact on our conceptualizations of reality and subjectivity. In addition, as we move into the twenty first century, we encounter a radically new social realm shaped by the advances in communication technologies (internet, multimedia, virtual communities) and biotechnology (artificial intelligence, robotics, genetic engineering). This contemporary fin-de-siecle, named the era of "invisible technology", is described as a "digital techno-cultural info-sphere" (Sey, 1999).

Thinking about Postmodernism, which captures these contemporary cultural trends, helps us to illuminate the realm of the social forces and makes it possible to explore its intriguing relationship to individual psychological dynamics. In this effort we will first look at different approaches to the phenomenon of Postmodernism ranging from philosophical to psychoanalytic ones. We will then comment on the nature of the interaction between this ethos and psyche. Finally, we will review a group of cultural criticisms and sample some pieces of news with a special emphasis on our relationship to the recent dramatic changes in technology.

In the second section of Beyond the Consulting Room, as an offshoot from these observations on contemporary culture, we will look at a snippet of our popular culture. This will lead to our discussion of tomorrow's world, a fantasized/projected future, as depicted in science-fiction films.

# *I-The Postmodern World*

## *Postmodernism- a historical evolution*

Marxist cultural critics, such as Benjamin and Jameson, conceptualize this new epoch as a historical evolution of Modernity, which emphasizes the changes in how we see, think, and produce in relationship to significant changes in technology embedded in a new phase of Capitalism.

Although in his 1936 essay, entitled "Art in the Era of Mechanical Reproduction", Walter Benjamin confines his thinking to art, his claims can be applied broadly. He draws our attention to the issue of the eroding distinction between the original and its copy in an increasingly technology governed world. Benjamin says with the plurality of copies, the "aura" of the work of art withers. According to him technical reproduction of art takes away its "aura" – its unique existence and original authenticity. Benjamin defines aura as a unique phenomenon of distance, however close something may be. He gives the following example. "While resting on a summer afternoon, follow with your eyes a branch that casts its shadow over you, there you experience the aura of that branch." (Benjamin, 1936, p.4). He says with the desire of people to bring things closer spatially, they essentially overrule what is unique by accepting its reproduction. Benjamin conceptualizes reproduction as such a revolt against transience.

In the light of the rapid technological progress of his age, Benjamin tries to account for the shift in preference for the copy by also looking at history of seeing. Benjamin says at turning points in history, in accordance with the technological advances, human apparatus of perception has been challenged to modify. He states that the mechanical reproduction of art changes the reaction of the masses towards art. In this context he gives the example of film. However, Benjamin has faith in this mode of mechanical reproduction of images. According to him, the camera opens a different world to the naked eye as it distracts and shocks the viewer in its introduction of unconscious optics that presents an unconsciously penetrated space instead of a consciously received one. Hence, Benjamin is hopeful about the collective energy of the masses, the film audience, to overcome and resist the false consciousness of a film's pure entertainment and enjoyment value.

In his landmark essay, "The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism" Fredrick Jameson (1984) puts forth important arguments regarding the socio-cultural forces involved in bringing forth the era of Postmodernism. Jameson says with the waning of the modern movement, a new society, a postindustrial society has emerged. He sees Postmodernism as the culture, a historical socio-economic reality, of this society. Jameson claims that as machines of reproduction shifted from turbines, pipes, conveyor belts to televisions and computers, the third and the greatest expansion of capitalism took place in the form of the global market, significantly different from its first stage of the national market, and the second stage of imperialism. Conceptualizing Postmodernism as the cultural dominant of this third stage

multinational capitalism, Jameson says this historical change is evidenced by what is called the “Postmodern Sublime”, a seemingly de-centered network of power and control, masking transnational corporate realities. Hence, Jameson construes Postmodernism as the new face of the agent of exploitation, which is global capitalism.

Jameson further outlines the characteristics of this contemporary Postmodern society as marked by a lack of depth where surfaces (image/simulacrum) rule embedded within a weakened sense of historicity (temporal continuity), and eliciting a new emotional tone, that of emotional intensities. Jameson asserts that in the Postmodern sense of space “critical distance” has been abolished and a “video/screen phase” has been introduced with the annihilation of interiority, where images demote reality to a parody. He adds that temporality has also become a “pastiche”, an admixture of past, present, and future. Borrowing Lacan’s concept of schizophrenia in terms of its associative, euphoric qualities, where affects have been replaced by intensities, Jameson argues that such a schizophrenic disjunction has become the current emotional style, disavowing affects of anxiety and alienation. In this “schizophrenic waning of affect”, Jameson claims repression has been replaced by fragmentation.

***Postmodernism- a byproduct of omnipotent media***

Benjamin's essay introduces the intriguing notion of "aura" as a product of distance, and raises the contemporary discussion around reality (original) versus its simulation (copy), and the simulacra (copy) itself taking over, or even, rendering reality (original) obsolete. Jameson, as well, talks about a "screen phase" where surface images dominate.

In this context of the increasing domination of media as an important feature of the Postmodern era, one can mention the work of the French social theorist Baudrillard (1983) in "Simulations." Baudrillard is best known for his analysis of technological communication. He conceptualizes the demise of the symbolic realm in social life dominated by images. Baudrillard follows from the French thinker Debord's 1967 characterization of "Society of Spectacle". In this latter work Debord probes the historical and economic roots of the media stating that social relations among people are mediated by images in the expansion of this mode of industrial production. Baudrillard thinks today we encounter the power of the image, which is opposed to representation as a mediator. He says a simulation is no longer referential. It is a model without an origin or reality. Image in this sense is not a reflection of a basic reality that it either masks or distorts. For him what the image masks now is the lack of a basic reality. It bears no relation to any reality whatever, and it becomes its own simulacrum. In the "precession of simulacra", Baudrillard talks about the slow erosion of difference and referentiality in time. He also thinks

that the contemporary times are ruled by “the Code.” That people are at the center of a “cool universe of digitality” - based on the operation of the code: binary (0/1) and biological (DNA).

Similarly, in “Archaeologies of Vision”, philosopher Gary Shapiro (2003) writes on the subject of how “seeing” has changed in time and why. He believes that in contemporary culture there is “a new economy of the senses in the distribution of thinking and seeing.” (Shapiro, 2003, p.1) Shapiro says that the visual or pictorial turn in culture, the increasing employment of visualization, is based on a technology driven shift towards a mediatized world, the “culture of the screen” -be it cinematic, TV, or computer based. Reminding us of the iconoclastic movements in history, Shapiro mentions the power of the image/icon mostly feared throughout the ages as heretical, inconsistent with genuine piety. However, in the current “society of spectacle”, he says we see its veneration.

Talking about different visual regimes in different eras, Shapiro relies on Foucault’s (1966) analysis in the “Order of Things”. Foucault says that in the Renaissance the ground of knowledge was based on resemblance, of the part to the whole, of man to cosmos. In the Classical Age there was the idea of complete representation. Only after Kant’s Copernican turn unlimited representation was questioned, but the representative power of the image remained. This was until what Shapiro calls the “ascendancy of the simulacrum” in current times. He says in the circulation of simulacra there is no authentic model, which the infinitely many recurrences (simulacra) are copies of. Images multiply and proliferate so as to erase

their source and center. Shapiro claims this leads to “sameness liberated from the as if”, a move from resemblance towards similitude. He indicates that resemblance presupposes a primary reference, whereas similitude is a relation among images without any reference to an external model or a primary instance. Shapiro claims that representation is now reduced to the presentation of the similitude, and its constant circulation. For him it is the sheer image now that reigns, “emptied of meaning and reference, unfolding from itself and folding back upon itself.” (Shapiro, 2003, p.345)

Both Shapiro and Baudrillard draw attention to a change in the practice and value of seeing in current times. According to the authors, people now *look at*, but do not *look into*, simply because there is nothing to see beyond the image. In this new economy of the sense of sight, there seems to be no tolerance for the absence of the image.

An accelerated life brought forth by the domination of media in social life accompanies this emphasis on visualization. Italian philosopher Virilio is known for his writings on media technologies as they develop in relation to speed and power. Virilio (1997) dwells on this quest for immediacy and instantaneity. He thinks this lust for the power of speed “pollutes” the distance between self and others, self and the world of sense experience, where this much interactivity will eventually “wipe out” temporality. Virilio believes technology can’t exist without accidents. His dire vision for today’s world is that of a possibility for such an “accident”. This “accident”, according to Virillo, fueled by the quest for speed, may be an unprecedented temporal break down, where time itself will crash, duration will

freeze, leaving behind only perpetual presence. In his dark humor, Virilio sees today's people as "terminal citizens" always connected to a computer, yet unknowingly approaching the end.

***Postmodernism- an imminent possibility***

Another conceptualization, different in its emphasis from the above approaches to Postmodernism as a historical evolution and a byproduct of the mediatized world, is the view that Postmodernism is a possibility that can happen at any time. In other words, we are not seeing a new phenomenon, but a unique presentation of ubiquitous human yearnings in response to changing social and cultural circumstances. For instance the French philosopher Lyotard (1984) defines Postmodernism not as the end of Modernity, but as a "constant nascent state" that can happen, that can be born at any moment in time.

In this framework one can also mention Heidegger's contributions on human nature and how it relates to changing society and technology. In his collection of essays, "The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays" (1977), the German philosopher makes his famous comment that "the essence of technology is by no means technological" (Heidegger, 1977, p.4). He sees man's relationship to technology as instrumental; a means to an end. Heidegger conceptualizes technology as a human activity geared towards "revealing". According to him, revealing rules technology in "challenging" the energies of Nature to "expedite" it. Expediting is

used by Heidegger in the sense that technology exposes and unlocks, such as in the case of turning a river into a power supplier. Thereby, energy concealed in Nature is unlocked, transformed, stored up, distributed, and switched about anew. Nature thus becomes a “standing reserve” for man.

Heidegger’s explanation as to why man is engaged in this “revealing” and “challenging” is compelling. He claims that man himself is challenged to do this “ordering/enframing.” He himself is “enframed to reveal”. It is his “Destiny”. What Heidegger finds dangerous is not technology, but man not encountering this truth about his essence. He claims when man does not know his essence, “revealing anew” may transform into a delusion, turning man into a Nietzchean superman governed by the will to power. Then, man himself encounters the danger of becoming a standing reserve. Heidegger believes that man’s disposition should not be his blind fate, but knowing his essence will grant him freedom. This insight into the “two foldedness of enframing”, will illuminate him about his ordering, which can take the form of either empowerment or a dire danger.

Continuing the discussion on the different ways human nature may unfold, Nelson (2001), in her book titled “Secret Life of Puppets” presents the idea that wishes for perfection, youth, immortality, that she calls the “transcendental impulse”, have been within us all along. Today we see it in these efforts to create a super-self, yet Nelson says where these wishes are housed has been changing throughout the history of mankind.

She claims that the current efforts for ever perfecting ourselves can be summed up in the term “divinization of the human”, motivated by this transcendental impulse. According to Nelson, first contained in people’s beliefs in the supernatural, spirituality, and religion, and later lost to Enlightenment, rationality, science, and technological progress, these wishes got displaced onto a variety of human simulacra throughout history in man’s efforts to “ensoul the inanimate” - puppets, robots, androids, and now to cyborgs. Nelson says that “the power of these machines dissolves the boundaries of time and space, creates life and new species, duplicates or mutates old species”, and on the whole “violates and transcends the laws of nature.” (Nelson, 2001, p. 250-251) She thinks this process masks our “unconscious belief in the divinity of these machines”, which is derived from our own “wished for divinity on earth.” Almost more human than human, savior or killer machines, become the receptors of people’s projections of idealized and repudiated aspects of themselves.

Similarly, Heise (2004) claims that the biotechnological developments fed life into unconscious creation fantasies revealed time and time again in the history of our cultural imagination ranging from Ovid’s metamorphoses, to the Jewish legend of Golem, to Hoffman’s Sandman, and Shelley’s Frankenstein. Hence, Heise says that the proposed future man, the “cyborg”, melding of person and machine, is not only a product of our evolving science and technology in the Postmodern world, but a socio-cultural construction fueled by unconscious fantasies to create anew by transgressing the set boundaries between human, animal, and machine.

Nelson goes on to say that the “transcendental impulse” also includes the concept of the other world, which she argues that still exists, but is just relocated from below (underground/ underwater) to above (outer space) and into computers (virtual space). The dead of the underworld, she says, are now either aliens, robots, or androids. The journey to these other worlds are today through space travel and surfing the net.

***Postmodernism - the unconscious housed in a new era***

We will now look at a number of psychoanalytically informed assessments of the Postmodern world to further discuss the power of the psyche in shaping the cultural domain. This is evident in the interplay of unconscious wishes and fantasies with conscious social and cultural forces.

Minsky (1998) defines culture as governed by powerful unconscious as well as conscious processes. She adds that one can develop a psychoanalytic insight into the complexities of culture. For Minsky, unconscious processes constitute the key for such an understanding. The unconscious is revealed in people’s wishes, desires, fantasies, which are shaped by different demands of each historical epoch. Similarly, Perez (1999) states that although social changes have been mostly analyzed from the perspectives of sociology and cultural studies, the themes and the function of such changes can be assessed psychoanalytically. To pursue such an exploration is very important in the sense that it allows for an understanding of social change, including

technology, as shaped by powerful unconscious psychological forces as well as socio-cultural.

### *Freudian Views*

Perez (1999), in attempt to understand the current preoccupation with total power, control, and denial of any vulnerability, refers to Freud's theory of the development of libido from autoerotism to object libido. He makes a distinction between "progressive" and "regressive narcissism". Progressive narcissism is manifest in the initial healthy drive to dominate an object/the world through bodily muscular activity for mastery. Perez thinks this investment/cathexis of mastery finds its sublimatory transformation in musculature being "the gem of the machine" in technology. However, in the case of regressive narcissism, Perez sees a "perverse fetishistic narcissism" to possess the fetish object. He claims that in this case the person ends up in the libidinal economy of perverse narcissism, where an omnipotent wish of complete perfection is revealed.

Perez claims that the origin of the technological object is located in this very conflicted nature of the human psyche. When technology becomes the means of such fetishistic regressive narcissism to possess, as Freud (1927) stated in his paper on fetishism, any recognition of lack becomes unbearable and is denied by a concrete replacement. Perez states that this need for unlimited omnipotence in time leads to the formation of "light subjectivities", where technology is used to compensate for

powerful feelings of inferiority, eg. in cyberspace one can be anybody without any vulnerability. Perez names this phenomena the “amputation of Eros”, which gives rise to a “double wreckage of the self” to satisfy omnipotent yearnings.

In her book, “Psychoanalysis and Culture”, Minsky (1998) also uses Freudian theory to make sense of this wish to do away with any limits. Minsky observes this as a current cultural trend, and draws attention to the underlying Oedipal issues. She says that the Father, actual and symbolic, sets limits and defines the social reality that anything and everything is not possible. For Minsky this not only enables a separation from the mother, but a transition from fantasy to reality. It is a move towards an Oedipal, depressive state, which creates a mental space where internal possibilities bloom under external constraints. For Minsky the meaning of the Father goes beyond making the psychical experience of living in a triangle possible. He creates a cultural block to the ubiquitous urges of limitlessness. Minsky agrees with Lasch (1980) and Weatherhill’s (1994) discussions of contemporary Western culture heading towards an “infantile narcissistic quest for immediate satisfaction of desire”. This is a refusal to keep desire in check, where loss is accepted. Without any limits Minsky claims that infantile wishes, those longed for lost aspects of the self such as omnipotence, perfection, control, and immortality run amok. This produces an inflated ego-ideal without the mediation of reality.

Minsky thinks that the current social values, global post-capitalist economy, the Information Age, and advances in technology became the hotbed for breeding unbounded wishes, the outcome of which is the “fragmentation” of culture. She sees

this fragmentation evidenced in the dramatic rise of absent fathers, broken homes, single parent families, in increased violence and destruction, in wild consumerism, and in the aggressive economic growth at the expense of people and the environment.

### *A Lacanian View*

In his book, "The End of Dissatisfaction", McGowan (2004) notes a shift in the "logic of social organization from a society founded on prohibition of enjoyment to one that commands enjoyment." (McGowan, 2004, p.2) He says it is no longer required of people to accept dissatisfaction as the price for existing within a social order. From a Lacanian perspective, McGowan claims that barrier and prohibition actually enable enjoyment. He says enjoyment does not exist prior to its renunciation. Something becomes an object of desire only when it is off limits. In other words for him desire is "sustained dissatisfaction." He gives the example that if there is direct access to the gifts, without the wrapping paper and waiting for the next day, Christmas would be just another day.

McGowan uses Lacan's terminology to address the current state of culture. He reminds us his three Orders: The Symbolic, The Imaginary, and The Real. The Symbolic order constitutes social reality through the Law, simultaneously creating dissatisfaction and desire. In the absence of things, it is in the Imaginary, the domain of images, that one experiences an illusionary transgression. One visualizes (fantasizes) the enjoyment prohibited by the Symbolic, and impossible/or disastrous

to experience in the Real. The Real is where the Symbolic order fails. Rather than fantasizing, if you actually hit your boss, who still has not given you the raise that you think you deserve, then the Symbolic order fails. In this scenario the Symbolic distance between the desire and its realization evaporates.

McGowan thinks when there is no prohibition, but a command to enjoy, then the Symbolic order diminishes. The power of the Imaginary, where there is no limit, no compromise, no agreement heightens. However, in this shift from the primacy of the word to the image, the image still can't escape the lack, its incompleteness in the Imaginary. When you are trapped by the image, there is only a momentary experience of no absence. Imaginary enjoyment is always unfulfilled contrary to the tantalizing command to enjoy because you still can't experience it in the Real. At this point one may think of the internet. Now it is socially permissible and technologically possible that in "reality" shows you can watch other people's bedrooms and bathrooms. The walls (of prohibition) of these rooms have been torn down. Yet no matter how much you watch you can't tear down the screen and touch. McGowan concludes that this is the reason as to why in our society of "commanded enjoyment" there is constant seduction, yet a pervasive experience of dissatisfaction. He is also concerned about the shrinking of the Symbolic order, together with the disappearance of the concepts of depth and beyond.

Perez, Minsky, and McGowan all underline the importance of the experience of absence that bounded omnipotence, prohibition, or the Symbolic order enable.

Constraints make it possible for the individual to experience his desire as contained by mental representations in thoughts.

Finally, in terms of our novel relationship to Postmodern time and space, psychoanalytic formulations around an intensified separation anxiety take center stage. Conner (2004) claims that communication technologies enable a perpetual presence that includes all time, from retrospection to forecast, so that nothing will be absent from this present. Correa De Jesus (1999) also takes up this compression of time and space. He says that the idea of a journey has now become a generalized arrival that everything arrives without having to leave, rendering the Freudian fort-da game obsolete. Brown (1999) adds that we are "comatosed" in front of the screen to ensure that we bring everything closer and at greater speeds to attain the security of constant availability as a means to defeat distance that provokes anxiety.

***On the Interaction between Ethos and Psyche***

The above conceptualizations of Postmodernism as a historical evolution and a byproduct of media domination help us to construe how culture influences our sense of time, space, reality, and psychic representations of the human body and subjectivity. Thinking of Postmodernism in terms of an imminent possibility, and as the unconscious housed in different era, explicates, in return, how human nature, or our unconscious, shapes and invests in particular cultural developments to fulfill our primeval infantile yearnings for unbounded immediate pleasure, total control, and

perfection. Hence, wishes of release from the constraints and pressures of life, and transcending our perceived vulnerabilities seem to be one of the important motivating forces in contemporary cultural developments, which in return intensify these yearnings.

This description of how psyche and culture mutually influence and shape one another must draw our attention back to the nature of the interaction between what is within and what is beyond the consulting room. This is especially relevant when we think of the parallel process mentioned in the introduction of this section. The intolerance for experiences of absence is observed both as a clinical and a cultural phenomenon. We can now understand this parallel as created by the confluence of the primeval unconscious wishes and the demands of the current way of life. The vortex of this intersection happens to be the recent dramatic changes in technology, especially in terms of how they affect human body and subjectivity.

### *Dilution of Experiences of Absence in an Enhanced World*

Heise (2004) states that since the 1970s scientific insights and technological applications have been advanced at a more rapid pace than ever, especially in the areas of computer technology and biotechnology. Computers, once confined to professional use at work place, have expanded to first private use, and then merged with communication technologies to create the new medium of the internet. This virtual space that has been created, Heise claims, became much richer and more

interesting than the real space. Commenting on the developments in biotechnology, Heise mentions that the first test tube babies in 1978 was followed by the genetically engineered crops and foods, the cloning of Dolly the sheep in 1996, and culminated in the mapping of the human genome in the 2000s. Brown (1999) reminds us that Dolly's first fleece has been shorn and knitted into a sweater for a charity auction. He thinks this was an effort to reduce Dolly to common-place to obviate the fact that ideas of lineage and continuity have been transformed into genetic codes and information networks.

Sey (1999) also looks at the proliferation of various forms of information technologies in the last thirty years, most emblematically the home computer. He reminds us of Foucault (1970)'s famous prediction of an era where the figure of man will be washed from the sands of history by the waves of a self regulating techno-culture. Sey finds the origins of our attraction to this post-human culture in our fascination with what a machine has that a man does not. Machines as such are not prone to the "ills of the flesh" such as sickness, fatigue, emotional contingency, and mortality.

Sey dates this fascination with machines to late 19$^{th}$ early 20$^{th}$ century; the time of the industrial machines. The complicated relationship between men and machine has been powerfully captured in movies like Lang's science fiction classic "Metropolis" (1927) and Chaplin's socio-political comedy "Modern Times" (1936). Sey views the impact of technology as the silent naturalization of the machine culture, whereby the human body disappears in technology. Historically he reminds us of the

rise of neurasthenia (fatigue) in the Industrial Era, and claims that this symptom constituted an oppositional subjective response to the technological regime of industrial work. Sey conceptualizes chronic fatigue as a defense emblematic of the psychological subject's resistance to identification with the technological order and the machine. Sey believes a similar somatic resistance exists now. He sees it in the "cultural symptoms" of relentless body modification, experimenting with alternative sexualities, and in all sorts of corporeal art ranging from piercing, tattoos, to cosmetic surgery frenzy to permanent make-up. Sey believes that disturbances of identity stem from a public sphere, which forces an absolute identification with technology to the point of erasing subjective identity.

Murphet (2004) takes up another dimension of this technologically fueled self/body estrangement. She points out the current preoccupation with the mutability of the body. Murphet thinks our mediatized commercial culture was able to ingrain in our minds a visual edge. Hence, the body has become the space available to constant transformation through interventions such as liposuction, nose-jobs, breast implants etc. She says, "the unconscious has been scooped out and plumped on to the visual out of the troubled depths of self-reflection into the sensitive surface of the epidermis" (Murphet, 2004, p.117) She conceptualizes the infamous death of the subject as a spatial affair. She claims that surfaces dominate "peeled free of their cumbersome depths", turning the ideal self into an "airbrushed ideal".

Similarly, Cushman (1990) in his paper on "Empty Self" also talks about the current state of subjectivity. For him an "empty subjectivity" is one without a

historical memory, root, or a community. This emptiness optimizes one's adaptation to frentic consumption rhythms such as high-tech aesthetic surgery, or biotechnology to enhance one's desirability in the market.

Sobchack (2004) also directs our attention to the impact of technological changes on our sense of body, time, and space, which she finds expressed in the "current cultural dictums" for the denial of body as flesh, and for constant stimulation and impatience. Sobchack thinks since mortality gives us gravity, we are fascinated by the gravitational release that the electronic media grants to do away with the flesh. She points out the danger of becoming ghosts in the machine, meaning having a mere electronic existence to "beat the meat", that reminds us our immanence, reality, and physicality. Sobchack, who has a prosthetic leg herself, adds that even prosthetics is perversely fetishized today in the sense that being "unfleshed out" has become the catchword meaning one has nothing to do with defect.

According to Sobchack, technological advances made space global, where physical geography became irrelevant. Images are interweaved in daily life bringing together different worlds to the same space and time, but concealing any trace of origins; much like eating, drinking, buying clothes in New York City without any awareness of where they really come from. Sobchack conceptualizes this new space as swarming with movement, difference, color, and polyphony, which forces the subject to constantly shift focus and rarely to engage in reflection and patience.

The melding of human biology with technology is further taken up in "Enough: Staying Human in an Engineered Age" by McKibben (2003). In his book

McKibben tries to distinguish, by giving ample references, "allowable improvements" using current scientific innovations from what is "enough", and why.

For Mc Kibben when genetic alteration, inserting select genes into an egg, which is then implanted, is aimed at human alteration –for short parents with black hair to have tall and blond children- it is enough. He appreciates genetically altered plants to increase their yield and nutrition value, but for him creating perfect models of ourselves, or redesigning nature to appeal to our taste (a luminous yellow monkey or a falcon/horse), must be questioned. He says in the past parents just picked their children's names, but now from a gene brochure will be able to determine whether they will be a math whiz or have green eyes. McKibben claims that each generation will easily be outmoded by the new generation -much like cars. He is all for somatic gene therapy to prevent cerebral palsy, autism, schizophrenia, Huntington's chorea, but for him gene splicing as such is too much.

Cybernetics and artificial intelligence, the melding of man with machine, is another concern for McKibben. He says people already go through the melding process when they use pacemakers, hearing aids, heart batteries, and any prosthetics. He fears that this can go beyond restoring normal functioning to striving for perfection – a super arm, or a heart that never tires. McKibben also raises questions about nanotechnology. He asks what if the nanorobot escapes, and you can't turn it off. Now nanorobots are being experimented on to use to assemble water from oxygen and hydrogen in the air, especially important for desert areas or areas with serious water shortage. McKibben's fear is what if the water gizmo chokes us all to

death, absorbing too much. Or the single atom layer gizmo, sent into our bodies to repair parts of us, goes out of control.

Cryogenics, being frozen until immortality is figured-out to be restored back to youth and health, is the least worked on area for now. Nevertheless, McKibben claims that it is receiving increasing interest, probably to offset the remaining complication in upgrading ourselves, that of aging and mortality.

At this point the Lacanian philosopher Zizek's ideas must be mentioned. In his article, "Bring me my Philips Mental Jacket" (2003), he talks about this issue of biogenetic intervention, bringing up questions of bioethics as people become "objects of manipulation." Zizek says human nature as a given is no longer true with the increasing access to the human genome. He predicts that soon there will be a blur between what is natural and made, creating a new issue in our subjectivity –that of ownership. He gives the example of voice as a natural talent versus a genetically enhanced voice. He then asks if the second one wins a singing contest, will his success be unearned?

For Zizek a closely related issue is the serious challenge to the autonomy of the symbolic order. His example is "if I am impotent will I try to understand the unresolved blockage in my symbolic universe instead of taking Viagra", and continues "even if my problems then are resolved, how will this solution be subjectivized?" (Zizek, 2003, p.3) Zizek mentions that Philips phone-cum-CD player will soon be in markets. It will be woven into the material of a jacket. Zizek

once again asks about this quasi-organic prosthetic, and how such developments will affect our subjectivity.

As for social concerns Zizek brings up the question of asymmetrical relations between the privileged, who have access to the new genetic procedures, and who do not, possibly starting a new form of class warfare. He also mentions that in May 2002 at NYU a computer chip was planted to a rat's brain to steer him like a remote controlled toy car. The aim of this research is to devise new ways to contact earthquake victims buried under rubble, and attack terrorists without risking human lives. Zizek is concerned about the possibility of opening the gateway to increasing manipulation and control beyond one's will.

***…and Some Pieces of News from the World of Technology***

In an article from the New York Times, June 16, 2003, Amy Harmon reports on the TEDMED (technology and medicine) conference in Philadelphia. In this yearly conference that centers around the cutting edge field of "melding technology and biology", Harmon mentions a number of companies presenting their products. She includes an interesting thought; that as the Silicon Valley tycoons age, with a growing sense of their mortality, projects geared to wed technology and medicine have been flourishing.

CapMed and Cigno Health Care prepared key chains ($35) that store a person's entire health record. These chains can be plugged into the USB port of any computer to display this information. Roche Diagnostics came up with a weight management tool, an armband ($300-400) that has a small computer with a processor and a sensor. A person can enter what is eaten daily and the band displays the amount of earned and burned calories. Vivometrics introduced a shirt that records stress levels. Great Smokies Diagnostic Laboratory encourage people to get genetic testing to learn about their genetic profiles. Genetic testing is a technology derived from the sequencing of the human genome to be able to come up with personalized drug treatments. Dr. Satava from Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency said that they are working on cyborg moths and robot surgeons. He added "we are the first species to control our evolution." According to Harmon's report, all the speakers underlined their efforts towards the development of a "more precise self monitoring".

About a year after this conference, in October 2004, the FDA cleared a Florida company to market implantable chips that would provide easy access to individual medical records. The New York Times article about this news stated that medical uses of the under-the-skin ID chips, such as this VeriChip produced by Applied Digital Solutions, may accelerate the acceptance of their usage as security/access-control devices, and in financial applications enabling linking people's identities to a payment system, which dispenses with credit cards.

In another article from the New York Times Magazine, April 4, 2004, by Robin Marantz Henig, entitled the "Quest to Forget", the focus is on painful memories. This article talks about Roger Pitman, a Harvard psychiatrist, who together with other medical researchers is working on finding a drug to prevent painful memories from taking hold. Working with subjects who have had a recent traumatic experience, Pitman demonstrates the usefulness of propranolol treatment. He says propranolol interferes with stress hormones released soon after trauma, preventing the emotionally charged memories from taking hold. Pitman argues that this is a therapeutic forgetting that eases trauma, and does not erase it. Scientists at the Department of Neuroscience at NYU are also working on memory and "memory reconsolidation" with rats. So far they have been successful in making fear memories they have implanted through conditioning disappear by preventing the synthesis of a particular protein. As a result the fear memory can't be glued.

The Bioethics Council released a skeptical report in 2002 on the benefits of doing away with bitter memories. In their report the Council stressed that distress,

anxiety, sorrow are human fragilities, and it is important to confront such imperfections and limits in people's lives to contemplate felt shame, guilt, remorse, and also by doing so to be able to empathize with others who go through similar life experiences. However, the author of the article strongly disagrees with the Council, and praises the efforts of the researchers. Henig claims that the Council presents an "idealized way to be a human" and "there is nothing ennobling about feeling pain" (Marantz Henig, 2004, p.37)

Wired Nextfest is an annual exposition that brings together innovations from top scientists, researchers, and entrepreneurs welcoming the future. In the 2005 expo in Chicago, GSC offered cloning of pet cats, or as they put it "replication of deceased feline friends". The company's owner, Lou Hawthorne, already has his two cloned cats. GSC expects to clone dogs soon. Institute of Advanced Media Arts and Sciences introduced "Mobile Feelings", which enables you to send tactile messages with "organic" cell phones. Tiny biosensors embedded in the handsets register your pulse and scent, which is then translated into physical sensations for you to send. University of Dublin presented "Urban Chameleon", skirts equipped with microphones and sensors that measure environmental stimuli so that the garment changes pattern and shapes according to temperature, noise, and air pollution levels. Moller International promises that you may never have to wait in traffic again. The "Skycar" allows drivers to lift off vertically from the highway and speed away from fellow commuters at 350 mph. Its first public availability is expected by 2009.

A year later, in 2006 Wired Nextfest in New York, GE displayed “Kitchen of the Future”, which you can call from work and your kitchen will report to you what is stocked, suggest meal options, list the items you need from the grocer, guide through a needed recipe, and finally set the oven to optimal time and temperature. Technology Institute of Tokyo presented its “Virtual Canoe” with its provided scenery for people to paddle and steer at home, but obtain the sensation of digging, pushing, and navigating in water. Actroid Der is Japanese Kokoro’s female android, who acts and speaks in an eerily human manner. She is designed to work as a receptionist, and a nanny to play with kids. University of Tsulkuba’s latest project is fine tuning its “Robotic Hand”, which now can pinch, pick up delicate objects, talk in sign language, write with a pen, and use chopsticks. The “Hug Shirt” by Cutecircuit is a bluetooth equipped shirt coupled with Java enabled cell phones to let long distance lovers virtually embrace. You give your shirt a squeeze, and within seconds your significant other gets a call and a hug from the similar shirt he/she is wearing. Considered a protesthetic revolution Otto Bock’s “Dynamicarm Elbow 12K100”, is an enhanced prosthetic elbow, which has an electric motor so powerful that it can lift up to 13 pounds.

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Regarding the recent developments in biology and technology discussed above one can say that we are on the brink, if not in the midst, of a sea change in our

representations of the human body, subjectivity, and values. It is a vivid display, which has pessimistic implications for the current state, in particular, the fate of experiences of absence. There is a preoccupation with surface, action, immediacy, and perfection. The technological trend seems to reduce self-experience to physiological and behavioral monitoring conducted in an externalized concrete manner with the help of the use of objective tools. Investment in the body is geared towards bodily modification rather than being, feeling, and experiencing. Moreover, experiences that evoke negative affects, such as some kind of loss, lack, imperfection, or any vulnerability are to be done away with before they take hold. It seems like we are getting ever closer to that technologically intensified/enhanced world we well know of from a segment of popular culture, the science-fiction film.

## *II- Tomorrow's World*

"…The fear in science fiction films springs from the future possibility that we may lose contact with our bodies. The dark secret behind human nature used to be the upsurge of the animal. The threat to man, his availability to dehumanization, lay in his own animality. Now the danger is understood as residing in man's ability to be turned into a machine." Susan Sontag

### *Introduction*

The news on recent technological advances and projects leaves one with an uncanny feeling, that of something being both familiar and unfamiliar, in the Freudian sense. We may be unfamiliar with some of these developments, yet many of us may have had the feeling that we have seen this all, and we know it all. And we do, but from a quite different angle.

Throughout reading the above review on contemporary culture and where it is heading to, one can easily associate to many works of science fiction such as Shelley's Frankenstein (1818), Jules Verne's Twenty Thousand Leagues Under the Seas (1870), H.G. Wells' The Time Machine (1895), Huxley's Brave New World (1932), Orwell's 1984 (1949), Asimov's Fantastic Voyage (1966), novels of Philip K. Dick and William Gibson from the 1970s to 1990s, and to films like THX-1138 (1970), Blade Runner (1982), Videodrome (1983), Total Recall (1990), Gattaca

(1997), Truman Show (1998), Matrix (1999), A.I. (2001), Minority Report (2002), and Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind (2004) just to name a few.

This association also takes us from works of science fiction in literature to science fiction films. Gunning (2006) says that the twentieth century inheritor of the task of telling stories is the cinema. He describes cinema as the medium in which words and pictures intertwine producing stories that are visualized and move through time. He adds that the cinema doesn't just carry stories inertly, but gives them a twist unique to the nature of filming itself. Gunning argues that the environment of projection, the darkness of the theater, is erotic. The film is composed of shadows, where human touch is impossible. However, Gunning adds that as much as the film is the site of fantasy and fulfillment, the presence on the screen is a product of technology. The process of film construction, he says, is a montage of pieces that reveals an embedded destruction as wholeness of the image only exists in the viewer's imagination. Metz (1982) states that the power of the cinema as a medium lies in its unique blend of a sense of presence with absence. He says " it drums up all perception, but to switch it immediately over into its own absence." (Metz, 1982, p.18) Gunning agrees that the ontology of the cinematic image holds the paradox of "promising fulfillment only by withdrawing" as the "screen and sheltering darkness that render it visible provide a powerful staging of the obscure image of desire" (Gunning, 2006, p.266) Hence, as a medium of desire and fantasy brought about in the construction and destruction of images in the dialectic of presence and absence, our association to films is a well-suited one for the purposes of this study.

The film genre of science fiction herald tomorrow's world in a curious way. Works of imagination as such are compelling and they grab us. They tell us something we intuit, but don't yet know, and encourage us to make more of what we already do know. In this regard, a sub-genre of science fiction, "postfuturism" (Sobschack, 1999), is especially interesting. These films particularly center around imagination and fantasies of what living in the future will look like. They also display a tomorrow extrapolated from current technological advances, sociopolitical, and economical trends. In short, using the advances in technology as a backdrop, they portray the possible changes in experience such as sense of space, time, reality, mental representations, and subjectivity.

Artifacts of popular culture, such as film, have a wide public appeal, and it is important to note that these works both have a significant impact on how people think and live, and at the same time express their current preoccupations. Hence, it is worthwhile to take a look at some of the main examples of this sub-genre of science-fiction for both their psychological and cultural implications. This will enable us to have an understanding as to what tomorrow's world may hold at the imaginative and creative interface of unconscious fantasies and current trends and possibilities. Our method in this effort will be applied psychoanalysis, and we will take a look at three films considered to be important representatives of this genre: Blade Runner (1982), Total Recall (1990), and the Matrix I (1999). The fate of experiences of absence in these fantasized futures will also be discussed.

This psychoanalytically informed exploration will constitute a complementary effort to enrich the clinical and cultural reviews presented before from the direction of popular culture that both views do not encompass. Since in the Postmodern world the conceptual barriers between high and low culture have been broken down, and aesthetic and intellectual potential of works of popular culture have been highlighted, the study of popular culture as an expression of the Postmodern world also establishes a continuity within our inquiry into contemporary culture. In this light, we will first comment on the link between the Postmodern era and the genre of science fiction, and then dwell on how this genre is conceptualized in different ways.

***Postmodernism's Science Fiction***

Csicsery-Ronay (1991) states that our current era has been linked to science fiction to the extent that science fiction is even declared the eminent genre of the Postmodern era. He further claims that science fiction in its allegoric nature has become "the dream book" of our age. Csicsery-Ronay states that science fiction primarily deals with the transformations that science, technology, and the new economy of information have brought to life in the post-industrial West. As people and the world are turning into a "technological project", he claims science fiction's powerful metaphors and icons, eg. cyberspace, cyborg, furnish us with unique ways to make sense of our complex orientation to this new world. Csicsery-Ronay thinks science fiction calls for an "awareness" about our world that stimulates reflection.

In the same spirit McHale (1987) says, “science fiction is to postmodernism what detective fiction was to modernism: it is the ontological genre par excellance” (McHale, 1987, p.16). He claims that science fiction examines the world of being in the Postmodern era in terms of its de-centered subject in endless bodily forms living in altenative/parallel worlds. According to McHale, science fiction discusses the “ontological concerns” of our era in an open and visible way. For Bukatman (1993) science fiction narrates the new subject of “terminal identity”. He says that every new technology brings a crisis in culture. He then points out that science fiction has helped us during this journey from the Machine, Nuclear, and to Space Ages in exposing our hopes and fears, especially through its special effects that visualize these abstract concerns. According to Bukatman, science fiction is now doing it for the new Information Age in how it depicts this Postmodern era, governed by media as its new reality, in terms of its image addiction, electronic space, and penetrating technology.

Finally, Sobchack (1999) underlines that science fiction has been a genre mostly neglected as “low art”, and has not usually been treated with respect by scholars. However, she claims this seems to be changing. One can say that science fiction today, being at the crossroads of culture critique and prized product of popular culture, enjoys a wide-ranging scholarly attention, and has been acknowledged in the last few years not only for its aesthetic and technical appeal, but also for its ideological sophistication.

***A Fantasized Future***

Among the many definitions of this genre a compelling one is given by Hodgens (1959): “science fiction involves extrapolated or fictitious science, or fictitious use of scientific possibilities, or it may be simply fiction that takes place in the future introducing some radical assumptions about the present or the past.” Hodgens claims that although science fiction is about the future, it is a fictitious construction based on the past and the present. Byers (1990) agrees with Hodgens, and adds that although science fiction films are about the future, they are really debates about present day society as they both reflect and critique social order.

Hence, science fiction, based on science and its applications, creates a dramatic narrative style through its characters, things, places, and events to indirectly express and reach an abstract conclusion. Such abstraction is attained, with the aid of lighting, distorting lenses, unique camera angles, dialogue, sound effects, and music, through the features of the film’s visual surface, its special effects, the visual tension between the alien and the familiar -a small town police station becoming a breeding ground for aliens, or the introduction of a mutant human- and the transformation and alienation of time and space, like Los Angeles in 2025.

Frederick Jameson (1984) states that aesthetic styles herald the historical emergence of novel forms of cultural understanding often representing a culture’s “political unconscious”. He claims that everything is historical, social, and in the last analysis, political. Cultural productions like science fiction films reveal such an

interdepence of aesthetics, technology, culture, economy, and politics. Kuhn (1990) also mentions that science fiction film is culturally instrumental in the sense that it is a reflection of social trends and attitudes of its time. Hence, science fiction films mirror historical preoccupations of their era. She views these films as sociological evidence revealing the "collective psyche" of an era. Kuhn says these films enact current ideologies, which can't be read directly off the film's surface content. According to her, how society represents itself is hidden in the interaction of film's images, events, and dialogues. Science fiction films for Kuhn are a network of intertexts of cultural meanings and social discourses.

For instance Sobschack (1999) says that in 1950's American science fiction films space travel and extra-terrestial visitors took center stage in a time of incipient multinational capitalism, atomic and hydrogen bombs, electronics of color TV where the promise of novelty, shiny technology, and cosmic expansion were dominant themes. In 1970 and 1980's science fiction domestic concerns such as overpopulation, food shortage, pollution, and ecology became the focus under increasing commodification and pluralism. She adds that after 1980s science fiction films were mostly concerned with the electronic space of video games and computers, the digital representation of bodies, and the technologized human represented by the icon of the cyborg. Sobchack argues that science fiction films are informed by and constitute such "socially symbolic narratives" and map future trends in that the films' focus and projections about the future change in line with the socio-cultural sphere in which they are produced.

Finally, one can say that of all film genres science fiction has been also the one most concerned with mapping and visually presenting cultural transformations informed and/or constituted by the developing technologies. Ryan & Douglas (1990) point out that an in-depth reading of science films present technology, not in an opposition to nature or as inherently evil, but as subject to changes in meaning according to context and use.

***The 'Weaver's Masterpiece'***

In his 1930 address, delivered by his daughter, in the Goethe House at Frankfurt for being awarded the Goethe Prize, Freud says "Psychoanalysis can supply some information which can't be arrived at by other means, and can thus demonstrate new connecting threads in the 'weaver's masterpiece' spread between the instinctual endowments, the experiences, and the works of an artist." (Freud, 1930, p.472). In this spirit of psychoanalytic exploration one may also view science fiction films as repositories of unconscious meanings and processes.

Likierman (1989) states that whether one views art in the Freudian sense as a sublimation or in the Kleinian as a depressive integration and repair, aesthetic/creative capacity exists from the beginning of life, and is inextricably linked to human sensory/perceptual experiences. Likierman claims that these experiences provide the mind with the "raw material" of shapes and forms that interact with life

events. The experiencing self impregnates this data with personal meaning forming a complex fantasy life with symbols.

In his paper “Creative Writers and Daydreaming” Freud (1908) reminds us that the relation of fantasy to time is very important. He says that past, present, and future are “strung together as it were, on the thread of the wish that runs through them.” (Freud, 1908, p.135). Wishes, for Freud, use an opportunity in the present to construct, on the pattern of the past, a picture of the future. Trosman (1990) adds that universal fantasies constructed as such are “common, emotionally laden, and basically wishful”. According to him, they also include “endopsychic perceptions of the state of psyche” such as order, structure, incoherence, fragmentation, regression, merger, and differentiation.

Freud in the same 1908 paper also says that the artist in the formal/aesthetic presentation of his fantasies offers us a “fore-pleasure”, which makes possible “the release of greater pleasure arising from deeper psychical sources” (Freud, 1908, p. 141). In this light Trosman claims that the universal appeal of a work of art is based on its being a derivative and transformation of unconscious fantasies as such. He concludes that the integration of unconscious fantasy into an artistic structure creates an “alternate version of reality.”

***On Method: Applied Psychoanalysis***

Applied psychoanalysis is a method used to reach a psychoanalytic understanding of cultural products, or these alternate versions of reality as such. This analysis enables us to come up with psychoanalytic insights stemming from works of literature, film, art, architecture, and all other kinds of cultural artifacts. Applied psychoanalysis reveals the wishes, fantasies, conflicts, defensive maneuvers, self and other representations prevalent in "culture's psyche" at that point in history. In such an exploration, works of art not only reveal unconscious dynamics that fuel the cultural forces, but also depict the cultural anxieties in the light of these changes.

Kaplan (1986) mentions that it is interesting to think about how much Freud's own contemplations of art and culture influenced him in his clinical and theoretical directions. He says that Freud "took the momentous step of relating and finding in his self-analysis to two dramas of Sophocles and Shakespeare, he brought psychoanalysis into a relationship with culture that remains a principal concern in the development of psychoanalytic thought and a gift to culture as well." (Kaplan, 1986, p.291). Kaplan further views this dialectic between mind and culture as "mind in culture" being a vicissitude of object relations, and in return "culture in mind" as manifesting the process of internalization. However, Kaplan also cautions us to have a modest approach in applying psychoanalysis to works of art to make sure that art

ultimately retains its own authority, autonomy, and never exhausts its unique scope and power under psychoanalytic scrutiny.

Films, cultural products as such, are not only the storehouses of images from particular eras, but also provide the medium onto which prevalent fantasies and conflicts of the contemporary culture are projected. Thus, psychoanalytic film criticism tries to unearth and make meaning of such fantasies and conflicts embedded in films. Baudry (1984) states that a thematic analysis of films helps us identify traces and derivatives of such mental contents including unfulfilled universal wishes, which Baudry believes are the motive forces of fantasy to comprehend a frustrating reality. For him, films have a resonance with the unconscious in terms of how unconscious conflicts are represented in the films imagery, thematic patterns, metaphors, and their transformation.

In our effort towards a comprehensive understanding of our films, a combination of three methods suggested by Gabbard (2001) will be used. In this framework, films will be used to demonstrate some psychoanalytic constructs (e.g. wishes, fantasies, defenses), as expressions of a cultural developmental state or a crisis (e.g. preoedipal anxieties), and as articulations of the cultural mythology of an era as to how subjectivity and otherness are experienced. In addition, expressions of sense of time and space, together with the portrayal of emotions and the human body, will be noted (Sobschack, 1999). We will particularly discuss how certain wishes and defenses color developmental issues and crisis giving rise to conceptions of affect, body, sense of self and other as they relate to symbolization and concreteness. In this

way the fate of experiences of absence, crucial in the formation of symbolization, will be taken up.

Finally, we should note that as these visually and thematically powerful films evoke many interesting points to pursue, we will confine our exploration to the concerns of this study.

***BLADE RUNNER*[1]*- man has made his match***

"The Leningrad psychiatrists, Bryant broke in brusquely, think that a small class of human beings could not pass the Voigt-Kampff scale. If you assessed them in line with police work you'd assess them as humanoid robots. You'd be wrong, but by then they'd be dead." (Philip K. Dick, *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep,* 1968)

It is 2019 in Los Angeles. Tyrell Corporation advanced robot evolution to a being virtually identical to humans. Replicants, as they are called, are superior to humans in strength and agility and equal in intelligence. They are used off-world as slave labor and declared illegal on earth. A special police squad, blade runners, is ordered to kill trespassing replicants. It is called retirement. A test, Voigt-Kampf, is used to tell humans and replicants apart. Replicants fail this test because they can't process and produce empathic/emotional responses.

Deckard is ordered to identify and terminate four "skin jobs" as such led by replicant leader Roy. He is shadowed by Graf, another police officer, who likes to make origamis symbolic of Deckard's state of mind, like chicken for his fears. Deckard is puzzled as to why these replicants came to earth, and want to break into Tyrell Corporation. During his hunt, Deckard not only discovers that these replicants have a life span of four years, but some, like Rachel whom he meets at Tyrell Corp. and falls in love with, are programmed, or "covered", not to know that they are

[1] Blade Runner is based on Philip K. Dick's 1968 book "Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep". The movie was directed by Ridley Scott and released in 1982.

replicants. Replicants want to reach Dr. Tyrell, their maker, to give them more life. Roy manages to access Dr. Tyrell. During this encounter, in his rageful disillusionment in him, Roy kills Tyrell. In his next violent encounter, this time with Deckard, instead of killing him, Roy makes Deckard a witness of his own death as his life span of four years comes to an end. Finally, when Deckard is about to run away with Rachel to save her, he finds an origami of a unicorn left at his door. The unicorn is a recurrent theme in Deckard's "private" daydreams, so it leaves him with the ultimate question of the film as to who is a replicant and who is not.

Blade Runner opens with a "vision of urban post-industrial decay" (Byers, 1990). The high tech of burning refineries, neon lights, high rises, and flying police cars stand next to waste, piles of garbage, poverty, and destitute crowds that swarm the dimly lit streets under a corrosive rain. Bruno (1990) states that the city visually represents Jameson's (1984) conceptualizations. The city is a "spatial pastiche" existing in a "weakened historicity" under the power and control of a "transnational entity." Under the hegemony of Tyrell Corporation, the city's hybrid architecture of high rises that look like Egyptian pyramids, but with Greek columns, houses multinational immigrant crowds. The Asians, punks, Middle Easterners, Hare-Krishnas, and people with 40-50's hairstyles and attire speak a hybrid of a number of languages in this Babel of flying cars and retro Cadillacs. Hence, the city is a condensed space saturated from above with flying advertisements of "Enjoy!" it is

Coca Cola, and pill popping Geishas, and from below with bazaars, crowds, garbage, and traffic. Temporally it is a simultaneous past, present, and future with diminished distance and distinctions.

The centerpiece of this spatial/temporal constellation is the replicants. Perfect "skin jobs" as such, replicants are incarnations of the disdain for the frailties of the human flesh culminating in the fascination with enhancement. The more machine like it is, the more one can transcend the organic human body. The unconscious fantasy at the root of this endeavor is to create a perfect other as an idealized representation of the self, which is simultaneously used to get rid of painful affect states such as vulnerability, loss, and longing. Rank (1971) states that the creation of such a double is a defense against narcissistic vulnerabilities, especially that of imperfection, aging, and death. 25-year-old J. F. Sebestian, genetic designer of the replicants, suffer from a genetic disease, which is described in the film as "accelerated decrepitude". His wrinkled face and slow unsteady gait personify this terror of decline, but at the same time reveals its defensive compromise in that Sebastian lives in his managerie of perfect proxies- his self made "friends", life-size dolls and mechanical toys, that are ageless and know no suffering.

Telotte (1990) conceptualizes doubling as an abdication from all desire and life when one replicates the self at the cost of the self. Kohut (1972) alerts us that the fusion with absolute perfection, the grandiose ego-ideal, is always temporary because it is inherently unstable. First it marks the obliteration of the self that is swallowed in this fusion, and secondly it forces a confrontation with the real self's feebleness upon

separation. In this sense, replicants as perfect doubles, are only a source of exuberance for humans for a brief period of time, and soon turn out to generate fear and paranoia, together with contempt for their artificiality. Thus we see the preoccupation with distinctions, and the intense anxiety and paranoid fear around what is real and what is artificial. That is why Voigt-Kampff test becomes the fundamental litmus test to distinguish humans from replicants. Moreover, to undo some of this threat of dazzling perfection, we see artificial animals with built in disease circuits, and replicants with a termination date, a four-year life span, as a "fail-safe" mechanism.

The Voigt-Kampft test calls for empathic/emotional responses and a capacity to engage with hypothetical, as-if, questions, which replicants can't do. As capacity for emotional processing becomes the quintessential distinct human quality, throughout the film it is really the replicants who display a range of affect from rage to despair and to tears as opposed to cold, unmoved, apathic humans. This reversal and the waning of affect in humans is pointed out in the epigraph of this section, and also in a couple of questions Rachel asks Deckard in the film whether he ever retired a human by mistake, and whether he has ever took the Voigt-Kampff test himself.

It takes twenty to thirty test questions to detect a replicant, however, Rachel an experiment in advancement, requires over a hundred. Contrary to the others, Rachel does not know she is a replicant. She has a "cover", a cushion for her emotions, to control her better as Dr. Tyrell says. She has been given a past. Her implanted memory is "validated" by photographs of a past that show fake memories

of childhood. As Deckard confronts her, Rachel shows him her photograph on the lap of her mother sitting on the steps of their porch. She is devastated when she realizes all her past is fake. The same quandary hits Deckard as Graf leaves an origami unicorn at his door, a symbol of Deckard's "private" daydreams. Past memories, implanted and sustained by fake photos, are no Proustian madeleines that ignite remembering and reflection, but only create confusion, rage, and despair.

Replicants in fact get killed in their search for such history and answers. They almost have the life span of the Oedipal child. Roy, in fact, commits the Oedipal crime in his rageful disappointment in his idealized maker/father Dr. Tyrell. Roy says to him "I want more life fucker! (easily can be heard as father). However, Dr. Tyrell caught up in Roy's, his narcissistic creation's perfection, replies " light that burns so bright, burns half as long, and you have been so very bright Roy". He is deaf to Roy's, the Oedipal child's rage for what he is missing, and at the same time to his plea for more life, experience, separation, and growth. For replicants, it is also a motherless history as the most precious photo in the film is the one with the mother, not having had one engenders narcissistic injury and rage. Pris, one of the replicants, calls herself an "orphan", and Leon, another, kills when asked about his mother.

Blade Runner is an ode to a crisis in being and knowing. There are repeated allusions in the film to the eye/I and the activity of seeing/being. There is the seeing eye with no guarantee of reality in this world of replicants, synthetic animals, memory implants, and fake photos. This gives rise in return to the omnipotent eye that stems from this trauma of vision and is moved by pre-oedipal narcissistic

paranoid anxieties. The omnipotent eye is preoccupied with definitions, boundaries, and demarcations in the form of surveillance, control, and tests. Finally, there is still a glimpse of the curious and the searching eye/I for knowledge and answers in a time where questions are forbidden.

In this story of the eye/I, Blade Runner highlights the implications of the diminishing distinction of real and manufactured, fear of vulnerability and death, together with loss of affect, history, and agency, which are prominent Postmodern themes. The *absence* of a life and a mental space to negotiate authenticity of existing and knowing oneself is central to Blade Runner's humans/replicants painful struggle. It is the struggle of the eye/I as the knower.

***TOTAL RECALL[2]- memory of a life time***

MCCLANE

"What is it that is exactly the same about every vacation you have taken? You. You are the same. No matter where you go, there you are. Always the same old you. Let me suggest that you take a vacation from yourself. I know it sounds wild, but it is the latest thing in travel. We call it an "Ego Trip". (Ronald Shusett & Dan O'Bannon, *Total Recall Final Script*, 1989)

It is 2084, a time that interplanetery travel is possible, and Earth has colonized other planets including Mars. Mars is a mining colony covered by a dome of artificially created oxygen. Its air supply is regulated by the Agency on Earth in lieu of the productivity of the mines. There is much unrest on Mars due to an intensifying rebel movement against the Agency. Quaid, a construction worker on Earth, is haunted by recurrent nightmares about Mars. He is especially puzzled by the brunette he keeps seeing himself with despite being happily married to Lori, his wife of eight years. Quaid is intrigued by the Red Planet and wants to go to Mars.

Rekall Inc., a memory implant company, sells vacation memories. Quaid buys a two-week package to Mars, and can't resist the alternate identity option and ends up choosing secret agent for his trip. Something goes wrong during his implant procedure. After that Quaid finds himself a target of his work colleague, strangers, and even his wife, who are all after him to kill him. Quaid finds out that his true

[2] Total Recall is based on Philip K. Dick's 1966 book "We Can Remember It For You Wholesale". The movie was directed by Paul Verhoeven and released in 1990.

identity has been wiped out, and his Quaid self is an implant. He is in reality a secret agent, Hauser, working for the Agency, ordered to cease the rebel movement on Mars. However, on his mission Hauser realized that he was on the wrong side all along, and fell in love with Melinda of the rebel group. Hauser now wants Quaid to continue helping rebels. Quaid goes to Mars, but he and Melinda get caught, and the rebel leader Kuato gets murdered. Quaid then discovers that Hauser fooled him about switching sides, and used him, the Quaid identity, to infiltrate the movement. The head of the Agency, Cohaggen, wants Quaid to go back to his real Hauser self, and even promises to wipe out Melinda's identity and implant a new one to make her Hauser's girl friend. Quaid fights back, escapes, and frees Mars by activating the generator that creates air, which Cohaggen was keeping a secret to sustain his ultimate control on the planet. Quaid then kills Cohaggen, and finds himself embracing Melinda, just like in his nightmares, but this time it is a dreamy reality.

Total Recall opens with Quaid's waking up in terror from his nightmare. Lori cajoles him into lovemaking, and says "now I am going to show you something to dream about." Then we see the couple in their living room with a wall-size TV screen. Quaid is watching the news about Mars rebel movement with attention. Lori interrupts by saying "no wonder you have nightmares with all this watching of the news". She switches off the TV screen and turns on even a bigger screen that displays a virgin forest. Total Recall presents a world where an immediate switch to an

experience of pleasure do not leave any room for pangs of reflection, such as Lori's push of a button that turns opaque walls into transparent windows in the morning.

As Quaid leaves home for work, he walks us through this anonymous city on Earth. The city is a crowded transportation hub, where robot taxi drivers in old-fashioned cabbie uniforms take you around, and space travel has become commonplace. A hologram tennis instructor trains you in the comfort of your living room, and implanted vacation memories make actual travel obsolete. So despite all this accelerated movement in time, movement is also diminished in that time is frozen in the instantaneous meeting of all needs. The city, to use Sobschack's (1999) term, is a "deflated space", flat and two-dimensional, cramped with screens for all kinds of purposes ranging from TV screens to video-phones. People walk behind X-ray security panels toward "secure zones". Subways have multiple screens for advertisements, such as the one for Rekall Inc., that catches Quaid's attention.

A man is lying on a bed. The bedroom is under a glass dome at the bottom of the ocean. Outside, colorful fish swim around. The narrator says "Do you dream of a vacation at the bottom of the ocean..." The man now appears in a poor apartment, alone, surrounded by a pile of bills. Narrator continues "...but you can't float the bill?" A woman skis to a stop next to a flock of penguins. The narrator says, "Would you like to ski Antarctica..." The same woman, now in an office, is surrounded by demanding employees. Narrator continues, "...but you're snowed under with work?" Finally, a man in a space suit climbs up a mountain. The narrator says, "Have you always wanted to climb the mountains of Mars..." The man is an old man trying to creep up a staircase. The narrator says "...but now you're over the hill? Then come to Rekall, Inc. for the memory of a life time..." (Ronald Shusett & Dan O'Bannon, *Total Recall Final Script*, 1989)

Rekall sells memory implants of vacations that are “cheaper, safer, better than the real one”. The salesman at Rekall tells Quaid that he will get “first class memories”, guaranteed money back if his brain can distinguish between the two, and all “without the hassles of lost luggage, lousy weather, and crooked taxi drivers”. As the salesman says, everything at Rekall is perfect. The only trace of affect remaining in these implanted memories is that of a blissful perfection brought about by total control of the environment devoid of any unsettling feelings such as desire and frustration.

Rekall packages also include an “ego trip” option, which is traveling with an alternate identity. Hence, in Total Recall, the human body is depicted just as a vehicle, a vessel that carries different identities. Memories are wiped out and new ones are implanted. Landsberg (1995) coins the term “prosthetic memory” for this idea of memory implants that rupture memory from lived experience. Quaid is an implanted identity in Hauser’s body. He is startled when he sees his own face on a monitor, it is Hauser who says to him, “you are not you, you are me”. Seeing one’s double is an experience of the uncanny. One of the ways Freud (1919) conceptualizes the uncanny is that of a repressed self which has remained hidden coming to light. Freud says “animism, magic, and sorcery, the omnipotence of thoughts, man’s attitude to death, involuntary repetition and castration complex comprise practically all the factors which turn something frightening into something uncanny” (Freud 1919, p. 365). It is this resurfacing of the infantile surmounted modes of thinking and repressed desires emerging in real life that makes the experience of the double

uncanny. Meeting with one's double is powerful in so far as such an encounter exists. In a world where bodies are vessels for implanted identities, if you have no record of your old self, amnesia swallows the possibility of the experience of uncanny.

Even though Quaid meets his double, he deals with its affective impact through disavowal. Quaid chooses to stay with his implanted identity rather than going back to his villain self, Hauser. His good heroic self saves Mars and gets Melinda. He defines who he is only with his present actions. Quaid's creation of his subjectivity is not one of change in time through reflection and moral questioning, but a push of a button, a pragmatic one. Moreover, Quaid never fears surfacing of Hauser like traits in himself, nor does he display any remorse and responsibility as to who he has been in the past. His is not a metamorphosis, but a touch of magic wand. It is a wholesale disavowal of the split off bad Hauser self, knowing it and not knowing at the same time.

In "A Note Upon the Mystic Writing Pad" (1925), Freud uses the trope of the palimpsest, that 'mystic writing pad' provides not only a receptive surface that can be used over and over again, like a slate, but also leaves permanent traces of what has been written are legible under suitable lights. Why does Quaid have nightmares about Mars, dreams of Melinda, is compelled to visit Mars, chooses secret agent option, knows how to fight and shoot, and has this deep feeling that he says to Lori " I feel I was meant for something more than this, I want to do something with my life" if he has no traces of Hauser in his mind? Despite the overt emphasis of the film on the possibility of constant self-creation, there are clues as such that implies that

memory is a palimpsest beyond its surface. At the end of the Rekall TV advertisement Dr. Edgemar opens his cupped hands and butterflies flutter out. However, despite this imagery, the film bypasses the three stages in a butterfly's life from pupa to caterpillar to butterfly, but is primarily concerned with an accelerated instantaneous change from one to another.

At the closing scene of Total Recall Quaid asks Melinda "what if this is all a dream?" We do not know whether Quaid has been dreaming all along, or if he is still strapped to the implant chair at Rekall and this is his secret agent vacation package, or it is the reality. Total Recall points out a blurring distinction other than the one Blade Runner took up, which was between the real and the manufactured. This one is about the eroding boundary between dreams, fantasies, and reality. Also, in Blade Runner humans implanted memories in replicants, but here humans implant memories in other humans. Implanted memories as such have the potential to provide pleasurable experiences, but also can be means of control and surveillance, which we see in the purpose of the creation of the Quaid identity. Quaid's removing the bug embedded in his skull is a microcosm of surveillance that we see broadly as a paranoid preoccupation with control in the strict delineation of "secure" and "non-secure zones" of the city. Once again, as in Blade Runner, in the world of blurring distinctions between the real and man made paranoid fears surface.

Although Quaid answers the psychic mutant who asks him "do you want to know your future" as "what about the past", Total Recall is about amnesia about history. The crisis of the "I as the knower" in Blade Runner is foreclosed. Total

Recall is a world of immediate gratification. Memory has become a mere surface like a screen. The protean self is devoid of a past and affective texture, other than intensities like Quaid's heroic feats, and his narcissistic love for Melinda as a match to his female fantasy of an "athletic brunette who is both sleazy and demure". Total Recall is a story of wishful self- remake, that is not a becoming, but being it, where experiences of *absence* are disavowed.

***THE MATRIX[3] -welcome to the desert of the real***

MORPHEUS

"You take the blue pill and the story ends. You wake in your bed and you believe whatever you want to believe. You take the red pill and you stay in Wonderland and I show you how deep the rabbit hole goes." (Larry and Andy Wachowski, *The Matrix Final Script*, 1998)

Thomas Anderson, a computer programmer for a software company, leads a secret life as a hacker by the alias of Neo. A cryptic message on his computer screen leads him to meet Morpheus, who is aware of the question on Neo's mind: "What is the Matrix?" Morpheus explains to Neo that the Matrix is a world pulled over his eyes to blind him from the truth. Neo chooses to see the truth. Morpheus' crew then "unplug" Neo from the Matrix, and bring him to their ship, the world of the Real. Morpheus further explains to Neo that humanity has been fighing a war against AI. The machines enslaved the human race, and have been using them as their source for energy, growing people in fields of pods, like the one from which Neo was unplugged. Morpheus' crew, a small group of "unplugged" humans, is the resistance against the machines. Morpheus says to Neo that he believes he is "the One", a man prophesied by the Oracle to end the war and bring freedom to the human race.

Although Neo doubts that he is the One, he joins the resistance. He learns the

[3] The Matrix is inspired by William Gibson's 1984 book "Neuromancer". The movie was directed by Larry and Andy Wachowski and released in 1999.

necessary skills to survive in the Matrix as training programs are uploaded to his mind. Morpheus warns Neo of the Agents, sentient programs that eliminate any threats within the Matrix. Humans can't fight the Agents. However, Morpheus is unaware of an equal danger on his ship, Cypher, who strikes a deal with the Agents that he will arrange for Morpheus to be caught in exchange for his being reinserted into the Matrix. Thus, Morpheus gets captured. Neo belives he can rescue Morpheus. In this process, he becomes more confident within the Matrix, performing Agent like feats such as dodging bullets. He rescues Morpheus, and even fights and beats Agent Smith. However, before he can leave the Matrix, Neo gets shot by Smith. He collapses to the floor in the Matrix. Trinity, on the ship, whispers to Neo that she loves him, and kisses him. Neo's heart begins to beat again, and within the Matrix he stands up. The Agents shoot at him, but he raises his palm and stops their bullets in mid-air. Neo looks around himself, and sees the Matrix for what it is, lines of streaming green codes. He becomes "the One". A short epilogue shows Neo back in the Matrix, making a phone call promising that he will help his fellow humans to free their minds. He hangs up the phone, looks up to the sky, and flies above the city.

We meet Neo in his studio overgrown with technology. He is sleeping in front of his computer screen until he hears the sound of the cursor. "Wake up, Neo. The Matrix has you. Follow the white rabbit." What's the Matrix? This has been the splinter in Neo's mind for some time. It is ironical that, like in Poe's story of "The

Purloined Letter" (1845), Neo has his answer in front of his eyes, but can't see. He has Baudrillard's book "Simulations", however, he hollowed the book out to use it to hide his illegal computer disks. In this book, Baudrillard (1983) describes the successive phases of the image, the last phase being the image as bearing no relation to any reality, and turning into its own simulacrum.

As in Alice in Wonderland a white rabbit starts of Neo's adventure down the rabbit hole. In the film the white rabbit appears as a tattoo on one of Neo's customer's arm. Neo leaves his apartment to follow this clue. It is important to note that Neo can only start his exploration as he "unplugs", sever his cord attached to the maternal screen, enabling him to displace his interest and curiosity to the external world (Klein, 1946). In other words Neo's quest begins when he is able to go beyond his "terminal identity" (Virilio, 1997). What follows this mental readiness and initial action to separate, "practicing" in Mahlerian terms (1975), is the "unplugging" of Neo by Morpheus'crew, who physically dislodge him from the Matrix, and bring him to the ship.

At the ship, Neo sees on the big screen the green glitter of flowing columns of numbers. The Matrix is an information grid. It is a neural interactive simulation of incredible power and subtlety of the real world as it once existed. The world is now an appearance, a bunch of computer codes. It is 1997 in the Matrix, but in the real world it is close to 2197. Past, present, and future are in a confusing mix. Morpheus says " I can't say for certain what year it is because we honestly don't know." Neo is traumatized when Morpheus shows him the real world. The real world is in ruins. It is

a huge black scorched wasteland. Like in Borges' story, the Matrix is like the life spent on the map, a one to one perfect match to the underlying territory, which masks the desert of the real. The Matrix is a depiction of the world as an appearance, "a cool universe of digitality" based on the operation of the Code, 0/1 and DNA. (Baudrillard, 1983). For the "plugged" people the Matrix is the real world. Seeing is believing.

"Plugged" humans think they exist in a real world where they are free and exercise their free will. However, it is only their "residual image" that exists in the Matrix, a projection of their "digital self." Their true bodily existence is in the Power Plant, an immense field of pods. Naked human bodies float in their individual pods attached to cables, and each has a neck-bolt behind their shaved heads. Humans are grown by the machines as their energy source. The human body has become a "coppertop battery". This is a portrayal of the corporal body, house of drives and affect, as passive, violated, and objectivized. Humans as grown, and not born, are half machine, and half human. Neo, Morpheus, and his crew all have neck-bolts and they are computer uploadable. Their bodies are mobile codes that get in and out of the Matrix flowing through phone lines. The human flesh is surmounted and augmented. The human body has become the "standing reserve" (Heidegger, 1977).

In the progression from humans using and programming replicants in Blade Runner, to humans using and programming the minds of other humans in Total Recall, here we arrive at the machines using and programming the humans. Thinking of conceptualizations such as humans wished for divinity on earth fueled by the transcendental impulse (Nelson, 2001) and unconscious fantasies to create anew by

transgressing the set boundaries between human and machine (Heise, 2004), one can say that the savior ones, like Quaid in Total Recall, become the receptor of idealized projections, and the killer ones, like the replicants in Blade Runner and machines/Agents in the Matrix, become repudiated projections. Overall, these creations generate unconscious guilt that ensue from a sense of Oedipal transgression.

The humans who are "unplugged" from the Matrix know the real world has fallen into decay. Hence, reality is bleak. Out of the Matrix, like on the ship, everything is gray and worn out. It is cold, damp, with the same gooey food for all meals. The crew has shaved heads, ragged clothes, and neck-bolts. Between the world of the ship and the Matrix, the film holds the tension between pains of knowing and the lure of believing. The world of the Matrix is captivating. For Cypher, the Matrix is the steak, money, and the fame. In an upscale restaurant where he meets Agent Smith, eating his gorgeous looking steak, Cypher says, "I know that this steak doesn't exist. I know that when I put it in my mouth, the Matrix is telling my brain that it is juicy and delicious. After nine years, do you know what I've realized? Ignorance is bliss. I don't want to remember nothing. Nothing! You understand? And I want to be rich. Someone important. Like an actor." Cypher is the man who does not want to know too much. He wants to move beyond the experiences of absence knowing generates. He represents the desire to remain in ignorance, preferring "the negative" as his reality. Green (1998) says in such instances the negative no longer becomes an indicator of the idea of the latent, but equated with foreclosure of reflection and thinking.

For the other “unplugged” crew members, who refuse the appeal of ignorance, the Matrix is a world to fight with. In their dangerous fantastical quest, they play according to its rules to win. The crew looks very attractive and powerful in the Matrix with their black leather and latex clothes, boots, and sunglasses. Their movements are unnaturally smooth, graceful, and super fast in their leaping kicks, and dodging bullets. They can load themselves with clothing, hairstyles, combat training, jump programs, pilot programs, and weapons. They try to keep on an even keel with the Agents.

Agents govern the world of the Matrix. In the Matrix we see them in their dark suits wearing sunglasses. They are wired with an earphone in one ear, and a cord coiling back into their shirt collar. They are sentient programs, gatekeepers of the Matrix. Since they can move in and out of any software, they are everyone and no one. Hence, any one who is not unplugged can potentially be an Agent. When Morpheus is captured Agent Smith tells him that the first Matrix was designed to be a perfect human world, where none suffered, and everyone was happy. It turned out to be a disaster because the human mind did not accept the program. Agent Smith differentiates himself from the “human species” and human way of life, which he calls a “zoo”, in two important ways. One is that the humans define their reality through suffering and misery, and secondly they are a piece of flesh that feels. The latter is portrayed in his disgust at the sight and smell of sweating Morpheus under his interrogation. As machines, an evolution from humans Agent Smith claims, they know no sweat, no fear or anxiety, and have no problems with total control and

perfection.

Matrix is a film of visual delight despite its grim premise around where the wish for no sweat and suffering may take humanity. This is especially so in terms of its special effects with leaping kicks, dodging of bullets, jumps that defy gravity, and movements that can freeze or accelerate out of real time. Clover (2004) says Matrix is "a digital entertainment about being digital." (Clover, 2004, p.19). The dissonance of its content with its visuals epitomized in the choice of the red pill or the blue pill, Matrix powerfully depicts the temptation for and the dangers of an oblivious mind that psychoanalytic concepts of defense and insight capture.

Many critics find the film's end disappointing in the sense that the film does not live up to its promise. In the final scene we see Neo, the One, in the Matrix wearing a long leather black cape, who then flies faster than a speeding bullet over the city. Various interpretations of Neo becoming the One range from unexplained facile transcendence to Neo as the Christ the savior, as the Buddhist monk, Neo as a machine much like an Agent, or Neo as a comic book superhero. However, it is possible to see, from a psychoanalytic perspective, that Neo becomes the One through a transformation, unlike how Hauser instantaneously turns into good heroic Quaid in Total Recall.

How does Neo rise above and beyond the Matrix? Motivated by his curiosity and his wish to know, symbolized in the swallowing of the red pill, Neo chooses to "unplug" himself first from his home and work computer, then from his pod in the Power Plant. Then, Neo learns to function in both worlds, that of the Real and the

Matrix, sustaining Winnicott's (1971) paradox of not being one or the other. During his visit to the Oracle, Neo sees children levitating wooden alphabet blocks, and bending spoons. A child tells him that there is no spoon, and it is not the spoon that bends, it is only yourself.

What Neo learns from children, masters of play, is crucial: the capacity to engage with the as-if. These children grasped what the Matrix is, much like Alice who says to the Queen, "who cares for you, you are nothing but a pack of cards" right before she wakes up in her sister's lap. At the end of the film Neo can stop bullets in the Matrix, which is exactly the point that all he sees in the Matrix is the green of the racing numbers. Neo becomes the One when he can see the Matrix for what it is, just a code. He can subvert the simulation's laws of physics, in a way the Agents can't, because of the unique human capacity to be able to "look awry" (Zizek, 1991), which enables him to discern features that escape a straight forward look. The crisis of the eye/I taken up in Blade Runner is not foreclosed in this movie as it was in Total Recall. Here, a solution is offered in terms of how rewarding the struggle to sustain the curious/searching eye is because it eventually leads to the capacity for a skewed look that brings a mental liberation. In his ability to tolerate experiences of absence in the real, and in the Matrix in terms of letting go of the images, Neo becomes the hero of the Symbolic.

* * *

Blade Runner, Total Recall, and the Matrix portray the same issues of the Postmodern era discussed in the criticisms of contemporary culture such as blurring distinctions between now-then, here-there, surface-depth, real-artificial, fantasy-fact, together with waning of affect and estrangement from the body as flesh and blood. This marks the relevance of these issues from the direction of popular culture beyond academic circles. These films hold up a mirror to the spectator to spur reflection on these issues, and also portray possible solutions. Blade Runner powerfully puts forth the crisis of being and knowing, and in return Total Recall presents the tendency towards disavowal, whereas the Matrix opts for risk taking against the wish to remain in oblivion.

The films depict the mind's ubiquitous tendency to oscillate, under the aegis of unconscious wishes and anxieties/fears, when confronted with questions of existence between knowing and not wanting to know, desire and foreclosure, and absence and presence. These Postmodern days constitute a strong pull for the latter. We know that particular historical eras can hold the mind hostage in one position for some time significantly slowing down the vital to and fro swing between reflection and refuge. So for times such as these, we may then ask why do we need psychoanalytic thinking and practice?

# PART III

## *WITHIN AND BEYOND THE CONSULTING ROOM:*

## *MAKING ABSENCE MATTER*

"For questioning is the piety of thought"

Heidegger, *The Question Concerning Technology*

"Indeed, I should not be surprised to hear that psychoanalysis, which is concerned with laying bare these hidden forces, has itself become uncanny to many people for that very reason"

Freud, *The Uncanny*

***Where does Tyrell's Owl take us?***

In Blade Runner the owl is the animal totem of Tyrell Corporation. It is an artificial owl with one blind eye, much different than Minerva's owl. Hegel (1967) refers to Minerva's owl in his famous statement that it spreads its wings when it is dusk. Owl, the bird of Goddess of Wisdom, is the harbinger of knowledge, which takes flight in times of darkness. However, the owl is also a bird associated with evil, death, and destruction. Tyrell's artificial owl, not only marks the extinction of the owl of wisdom, but also the owl of death. Its blind eye is not prophetic, but depicts a stillborn vision. Tyrell's owl is an uncanny frozen constellation, a symbolism.

Freud says " …an uncanny effect is often and easily produced when the distinction between imagination and reality is effaced, as when something that we have hitherto regarded as imaginary appears before us in reality, or when a symbol takes over the full functions of the thing it symbolizes" (Freud, 1925, p. 367). How do we move from a symbolism to symbolization proper? In symbolism there is only the identity of the symbol. Symbolization proper entails ambivalence. The symbol embodies the absence of which it is representing, as well as being a substitution for it. Thus, symbolization proper has absence written all over it. Absence constitutes that cleavage between what is desired yet missing, freeing up psychic representation.

Where does Tyrell's owl take us? We are back to the beginning in full circle. We started off with a discussion of "difficult" patients of our times, whose primary struggle is with de-symbolization, which has become their dominant mental mode. Through a review of classical and contemporary psychoanalytic theorizing on symbolization, I argued that tolerance for experiences of absence is critical for the creation of a binding, life bearing, and a symbolizing mind. Then, I tried to demonstrate how de-symbolization is not only a clinical phenomenon. It is a thread running through the clinical, social, and cultural realms. In the discussion of contemporary Western culture, I pointed out how temporal, spatial, and phenomenological experiences of absence are shrinking, which are captured by the characteristics of the spirit of this era, Postmodernism. I then commented on the interaction between this ethos and psyche in an attempt to create a dialogue between

what is within and beyond the consulting room. I stated the confluence of the primeval unconscious wishes and the demands of current way of life. I underlined the vortex of this interaction as the recent dramatic changes in technology, especially in terms of how they affect the human body and subjectivity. From this technologically intensified and enhanced world, I associated to a segment of popular culture, the science fiction film. Through the discussion of three films, Blade Runner, Total Recall, and The Matrix, I posited that characteristics of Postmodernism and the cultural trend of doing away with experiences of absence persist in these fantasized futures as well.

Society, culture, and psyche coexist, interact, and shape one another. This journey from the consulting room to its beyond was an effort to integrate these three spheres of existence and experience often treated disparately. It was also an attempt to show how psychoanalytic discourse interacts with other discourses in unique, interesting, and provocative ways, and can enrich our understanding beyond its usual confinement to the clinical realm.

When we acknowledge these dramatic changes in subjectivity and society, which also color our projected fantasies of the future, we must also discuss its profound implications for the current state and fate of psychoanalytic thinking and practice. Given that doing away with experiences of absence constitute the kernel of these changes, this discussion is crucial for psychoanalysis, which is founded on bringing forth mutative experiences of absence towards the creation of a symbolizing mind.

***Scanty Subject of Times of Plenty***

What is at the foreground of today's clinical scene is medication, self-help books, diets, exercise programs, alternative therapies, and a valorization of advances in psychopharmacology, neuropsychiatry, neurobiology, and thought and behavior modification strongly supported by insurance companies interested in short-term, symptom focused, and evidence based treatments. One is reminded of a scene from an old yet eerily current science fiction film, George Lucas' THX – 1138 (1970), where medicine cabinets ask people "what's wrong" to dispense the necessary pills, and failure to take your medication is a crime. A recent advertisement for Rozerem, a widely used sleeping pill, goes "your dreams miss you, take Rozerem", which speaks to a mind that can no longer produce its own dreams.

Lear (1999) in his book "Open Minded" reformulates Oedipus' story in a radical way. He says Oedipus' story goes beyond killing the father and marrying the mother. Oedipus' mistake, Lear says, was his literal take of the Delphic Oracle, which led him to flee the people whom he thought to be his parents. During this escape, Oedipus first kills his father, and then marries his mother. Lear says Oedipus' tragedy is brought on by his "knowingness", his treatment of meaning as transparent with a disregard for the fact that meaning remains opaque to human reason, and unconscious meaning is ubiquitous.

In a chapter of this book entitled "Knowingness and Abandonment -an Oedipus for Our Time", Lear states that psychoanalytic thinking and practice is under vehement attacks in this "Age of Knowingness". He says that the " Age of

Knowingness" is a product of trauma, much like the story of Oedipus. It is the trauma of abandonment and loss. Lear reminds us that Oedipus was abandoned at the mountains similar to the contemporary subject robbed of its traditional, religious, or transcendental values and ideals as anchors. Lear claims that the anxiety ensued by this abandonment leads to absolutist attitudes such as conservatives, fundamentalists, relativists, cynics, and believers of material wealth, social success, and private pleasures. Lear contends that in contemporary culture everyone already knows everything, yet it is a mere "knowingness" to evade intense anxiety. He points out that as "knowingness" ascends, there is an increasing loss of a Socratic open mindedness, which can tolerate the experience of absence that questioning entails.

Strenger (2005) in his book "The Designed Self" discusses how immense cultural and technological changes since the mid 90's have shaped human experience and subjectivity. His work with a cohort of young adults who inhabit this fast changing world led him to further explore this contemporary identity, that of "Generation X". For Generation X the world is a dizzying array of possible self, sexual, occupational, and financial experiences unconstrained by familial, cultural, and religious traditions. Their maturational path is charted less by conflicts with authority, or choice and responsibility inherent in agency, but an imperative to "design thyself", Strenger's pun on Socrates' "know thyself". For this protean self, authenticity is supplanted by the need to experiment endlessly with the self, which is reinforced by the media, ranging from career choice, hair color, to gender identity. Thus, shaping the self takes precedence over expression of individuality. Strenger's

clinical work with this group center around their issues of self esteem fueled by lack of a sense of continuity, fatherlessness, and anxiety about absence of perfection manifest in the terror of aging, and falling short of publicized social and financial success stories. Under the pressure to lead spectacular lives in a time where every question and concern is quickly trivialized, these patients Strenger says suffer from confusion, disorientation, and depression. Strenger underlines that these are not "difficult", but "different" patients, and emphasizes the importance of psychoanalysis coming to terms with this new subjectivity of our time.

Kristeva (1995) poses the question does the psyche still exists these days? She defines psychoanalysis as the exploration of the psychic life of speaking beings. She says that since the subject as a speaking entity has been pushed aside, so is psychoanalysis. Kristeva says that the representation of experience, whether it is exhilarating, distressing, unbearable, or deadly, enable access to one's body and other people. According to her today's "amputated subjectivity" suffers from a psychological poverty. She says that the pleasure of immediate gratification, devoid of a sustained sense of fulfillment and satisfaction, takes the center stage to overcome the anxiety meaning engenders.

Kristeva states that today's patients "often resemble "traditional" analysands, but maladies of the soul soon break through their hysterical and obsessional allure, maladies of the soul that are not necessarily psychoses, but that evoke the psychotic patient's inability to symbolize his unbearable traumas." (Kristeva, 1995, p.9) She says that there are new "maladies of the soul" in this era that are voiced as sexual and

relationship difficulties, somatic symptoms, a difficulty in expressing oneself, and a general sense of malaise conveyed through a language that is artificial, empty, and mechanical. She states that psychoanalytic clinicians try to capture the difficulties of these patients through widening their diagnostic classifications to narcissism, false self, borderlines states, and psychosomatic conditions. However, she emphasizes that the crucial common denominator, which is the inability to represent, is often overlooked. Kristeva says that these current renditions of ubiquitous struggles go beyond and overhaul traditional classification systems, and they primarily embody difficulties or obstacles in psychic representation.

She gives a case example. Didier[4] is a young amateur painter whose relationship problems brought him to treatment. "A reader of psychoanalytic and literary texts, and a well-informed art lover", Didier at the beginning excited Kristeva for the rich clinical work to come. However, to her surprise, in the treatment Didier used "learned and guarded" words in a monotone laconic speech, where his stories were told in a "technical fashion" to be quickly disposed of as "lifeless objects", or "sterilized waste products". Lonely, unable to love, detached from colleagues and wife, and even indifferent to his mother's death, only masturbation and painting sustained Didier's interest. Kristeva says Didier spoke "for the purpose of ignoring me, wearing an invisible walkman, in a state of "mental and libidinal automatism", "a robot with no soul who occasionally got sick" like his suffering from dermatitis.

[4] Didier's case is extensively discussed by Kristeva in *New Maladies of the Soul* (1995) p.10-26.

She experienced Didier as an “enclosed independent self-sufficient totality that lacked nothing and needed nobody.”

Kristeva argues that the primary struggle of the contemporary subject, like Didier, is with “psychic mutism”, which is manifested in an empty artificial discourse. According to her this deficiency of psychic representation hinders sensory, sexual, and intellectual life, and also strikes a blow to biological functioning.

Similary, Roudinesco (2001) states that we now encounter different patients of a different society than the one psychoanalysis has been familiar with up until the 1990s. She says that the society now insists on reducing thought to a neuron, and equating desire with chemical secretion. Roudinesco claims that the contemporary subject, a cult of oneself, now suffers from empty desire and apathy affecting the body and soul. She underlines that today’s patients primarily suffer from narcissistic and depressive disturbances. They are nihilistic and battle with annihilation of thought. She adds that these patients are attached to various networks without affirming their difference, and complain from contemporary hysterical symptoms of an undefined fatigue, deficit, and a sense of weakening. There is a flight from the unconscious, and a wish to rub any conflicts out of oneself through devotion to health, perfect body, an ideal of an impossible happiness, and an addictive dependence on the world of food, sex, and exercise. Silence is preferred to language, which has become a source of distress and shame. Speaking of private suffering, even the idea of articulating and confronting one’s experience, became intolerable.

Roudinesco adds that there is no interest in finding out the origins of this suffering because of a widespread emphasis on external causality such as genes, hormones, and culture. She claims that there is now a simplistic universal sameness discourse of organicity, and an irreconcilable difference discourse of culturalism in terms of identity and ethnicity. She says that reference to internal psychic causality has become lost. Roudinesco finds it ironical that today's people have no time for anything, like long-term treatment, even though they have a longer life span, and time for leisure and boredom are extended. She states that people suffer from freedoms obtained that they no longer know how to use, and wish for more freedom without constraints towards an independence without history and desire.

***Can Psychoanalysis Stop the Bullets from Within and Without in Mid-Air ?***

Psychoanalytic clinicians should acknowledge the above discussed clinical challenge that they are encountering different patients today struggling with new incarnations of the familiar "maladies of the soul" (Kristeva, 1995) powerfully shaped by the spirit of the current times. What can one say about some of the other challenges to psychoanalysis beyond the clinical realm, from within and without, and most importantly of their nature?

Finlay de Monchy (1989) states that the current Postmodern era poses a significant challenge to psychotherapeutic discourse, especially to psychoanalysis and psychoanalytically oriented therapy, which work with subjectivity through

interpretation of representations. She says that the contemporary subject lost its continuity and embodiment in space and time, and exists only as a discourse in Postmodernism without an ontological status. Since the subject is no longer the source of its discourse as well, she says we encounter the death of the centered embodied subject. Consequently, Finlay de Monchy says, discourses of knowledge and disciplines that study the subject, like psychoanalysis, also are in the process of becoming superfluous. Additionally, she mentions the crisis of representation, where this epoch pushes for the sign's independence from its referent, and strips off its power to signify meaning. Finlay de Monchy emphasizes the dominant culture's tendency to eliminate the linkages of things, words, and meanings, together with the centrality of the human subject of interiority as the source and object of discourses of knowledge such as psychoanalysis.

Roudinesco (2001) states that passions, unconscious, sexuality, death, madness, and relationships form the mold of subjectivity, which no endeavor can exhaust, and since psychoanalysis works in the heart of these matters it can never be exhausted as well. However, she admits that in the eyes of the public, psychoanalysis has grown old, unattractive, ineffective, and out of fashion. She mentions the bitter comment of Pontalis in 1998 that there will only be other psychoanalysts left on the analyst's couch. (Roudinesco, 2001, p.16)

Although Roudinesco engages in a similar description of the spirit of the current social realm with that of Finlay de Monchy, she also admits that psychoanalysis increasingly isolated and withdrew itself from the social realm, and in

its confinement to the clinical, lost both its synchrony and the power to engage with the culture at large. Here Roudinesco directs our attention as to how psychoanalysis increasingly moved away from the social and cultural discourses, perhaps overly confident and satisfied with its existence in the clinical realm, which brings another dimension to Finlay de Monchy's analysis of how today's world of Postmodernism is pushing psychoanalysis to the sidelines, in that this seems to be a process of mutual repulsion.

Roudinesco further states another challenge to psychoanalysis: its ability to withstand the current trend to put deficits into numbers, measure the handicap, and quantify the degree of trauma without asking any questions about the origins. Roudinesco narrates that an American psychologist once suggested to Freud that he should measure libido and give his name to the unit of measurement. Freud replied " I do not understand enough of physics to express a reliable judgment in the matter. But if I am permitted to ask a favor do not call your unit by my name" and added that he hoped to die someday with an unmeasured libido. (Roudinesco, 2001, p.22)

Phillips displays an effort to confront this challenge in a recent article in the New York Times (February 26, 2006), "A Mind is a Terrible Thing to Measure", where he claims that the scientific method alone can never encompass the primary issues in treatment around who one is and how one should live. He says that love, sexuality, mourning, amusement, and inspiration are neither measurable nor predictable. Phillips says that therapy should "resist the allure of fashionable certainties" and must offer something beyond the dominant cultural trends.

As for challenges to psychoanalysis from within, Kristeva (1995), in addition to working with new maladies of the soul in treatment, mentions another important one that confronts psychoanalysis, which has to do with the nature and organization of the psyche. In psychoanalysis' competition with the neurosciences that push for the pill, Kristeva underlines the primeval unconscious human desire to remain in ignorance, a desire she finds in perfect harmony with the enthusiastic reception of the pill, and with the spirit of the current times. She warns about the "negative narcissism" (Green, 2001) of man, which manifests itself as a blank mourning, and an investment withdrawal from the libidinal that aspires to psychic death to evade the anxiety of knowing.

Schimek (2002) brings up another internal issue, which is that of the different schools of psychoanalysis working towards making some of its vital concepts obsolete. He talks about how relational schools of psychoanalysis define transference as a shared co-construction to use and foster, rather than analyze and interpret, within a merged inter-subjective matrix. He says that the distinctions between transference, countertransference, and the real relationship, transference itself as a unique mixture of fantasy and reality, the entire transitional reality of the analytic situation, the analytic effort to make links between the unconscious and the explicit towards its integration are all being rejected to be replaced by nonverbal affective communication towards an implicit relational knowing. Schimek is concerned that the main function of psychoanalysis, to enable and strengthen symbolization, is being minimized. He concludes that cycles of symbolizing and desymbolizing can be found

not only within the therapeutic process, but also in the history of analytic theories and techniques. (Schimek, 2002 , p. 260)

***Psychoanalysis as the guardian of absence and provider of the psychic shield***

Psychoanalysis can't turn a blind eye to these challenges from within and without. It must acknowledge and assimilate them towards a critical self-reflection that will enable a refreshing growth to enhance its potency as a theory and clinical practice. Psychoanalysis has always been about the exploration of the human condition holding at its core the wonder about its seeming unintelligibility. Psychoanalysis primarily involved itself with meaning making and interpretation of the depth and complexity of human life and its restless mind, thus providing a psychic shield from defeating internal and external realities. Psychoanalysis is a quest for the patient's internal world that is in inevitable conflict with the external world, while at the same time striving to interact with it. It serves as a mediator, a metaphorical bridge, between different aspects of a patient's reality. The question then becomes can psychoanalysis engage in a similar quest for itself, and its own engagement with the world as it now represents both within and beyond the consulting room what is at odds with the current times namely self exploration, reflection, and the ubiquity of pain and loss.

In the clinic psychoanalysis has long demonstrated its ability to modify and expand its reach to a widening scope of patients from working with children to severe mental illness, and to psychotic conditions. For today's patients psychoanalysis can also engage in a similar effort to highlight its theoretical and technical tools that guard the temporal, spatial, and subjective experiences of absence, which enable symbolization. Psychoanalysis can help recuperate the crisis of the contemporary subject and psychic representation, and more importantly address the kernel of de-symbolization, that is to abolish experiences of absence, within the consulting room. This effort, not only can initiate fruitful theoretical and technical discussions around further awareness, understanding, and treatment of these new maladies of the soul, but also can bring about further theoretical contemplations about the nature of the human mind. It may also engender a helpful dialogue among different schools of psychoanalysis in the delineation of certain core concepts and techniques that are essential, perhaps more useful than others, to address these issues.

Below are some examples as to how psychoanalysis utilizes its theoretical and technical tools to bring forth mutative experiences of absence.

Winnicott (1965) noted the environmental conditions necessary for the emergence of the being of a person in history, not geared toward self-reflection at first, but restoring a sense of self. Resnik (1995) takes up such conditions in terms of the temporal and spatial dimensions of psychoanalytic thinking and practice. He says that the analytic work is not only a space for reflection but also refraction, a window for looking into the internal cosmos. He says in symbolic disorders there is no time,

no transitional space, and the incessant flow of images and information make it impossible to think and symbolize meaning leading to indifference, or an affectless ideational overflow. The analyst is the keeper of time and space resisting its foreclosure. If the analyst is too visible, too transparent, too present the temporal and spatial aspects of absence get saturated or deadened with sameness. Chasseguet-Smirgel (1992) similarly views the analytic frame as a temporally and spatially defined enclave, a defined absence with maternal and paternal functions. This enclave receives psychic productions, intimacy, fusion, and regression of the primary maternal relationship, and its paternal aspects highlight limits, separation, reality to offset fears of ego dissolution and loss of reality.

Phillips (1989) talks about the spontaneous gestures in analytic engagement that reveal a sense of aliveness and reality. He says that the analyst in his/her enigmatic opacity and deviation from surface and appearance allows for silences that move meaning without breaking the charm and subtlety of the otherness of the patient. Sobschack (2004) names this phenomena "interobjectivity". For her interobjectivity entails seeing the self both as an object and a subjective being, and apprehending the other as an object for the self and a subject for itself, but most importantly as an object for itself. This "for itselfness" is the object's opacity in its difference. Applied to the analytic situation, interobjectivity is experienced in the coexistence of a sense of self under the gaze of the other, an intimate meeting, and the simultaneous resistance to one another in the asymmetry of need, desire, and

communication, which depicts the experience of absence in psychoanalytic relatedness.

Lear (2004) emphasizes the unique linguistic features of psychoanalysis in his concept of irony, and how this exposes instances of absence and utilizes it towards insight. Lear argues that a deeper understanding of irony and its possibilities is central to the therapeutic action of psychoanalysis. He reverts to an older, and what Lear takes to be a richer, conception of irony. Thus understood, irony is not, saying the opposite of what is meant. Lear returns to the writings of Kierkegaard, and finds that what constitutes irony in Kierkegaard's work is not simply saying the opposite of what he means, but arises from saying exactly what one means and saying it in a manner, which exposes a *gap* between pretense and aspiration on the one hand, and reality on the other. Lear writes, "irony becomes possible precisely because the speaker insists on holding onto what the words really do mean" (Lear, 2004, p.68). Lear argues that this process is one of developing in the patient a capacity for irony, the ability to see in himself the *gap* between pretense and reality, and to see that the patient himself is largely responsible for creating this *gap*. The patient then is able to engage in self-reflective activities that allow him to discover the irony of his own thoughts and behaviors. Lear says the patient begins treatment with little understanding of the *gap* between his aspirations and pretense. Even less does he understand how this gap is structuring his life. Inspired by Loewald, Lear says through “lovingly ironic interpretations”, the analyst helps the patient to bring this *gap* to light (Lear, 2004, p.177). This is a loving activity on the part of the analyst for

Lear because ironic interpretation, once the patient is ready for it, offers the patient the reins of self-discovery by allowing him to discover for himself under the caring gaze of the analyst.

Finally, Kristeva (1995) draws our attention as to how the work of analysis resists de-symbolization, and doing away with the phenomenological experience of absence. She says, for instance, that the essential psychoanalytic intervention for the "new maladies of the soul" is to restore psychic life, psychic aliveness, and re-enable the speaking subject through working on a new psychic apparatus in treatment to establish the psychic significance of meaning. Kristeva believes that psychoanalysis, both as a discourse of knowledge and a discourse of desire, is most suited to the task of engaging in the transformational cycle of psychic death and resurrection. She says "analysts do not shy away from being both the dead fathers of knowledge, and the subjects of affect, desire, and jouissance." (Kristeva, 1995, p. 35)

She claims that as an important social commentary psychoanalysis must also discuss the current state of language or the speaking subject around issues of "lifeless speech", "devalorization of language," an evolving "fetishistic and exhibitionistic discourse", which is all knowing and has no desire to learn, and the increasing split of affect from discourse towards a narcissistic withdrawal and decline of desire. She emphasizes that psychoanalysis must withstand the end of the possibility to tell a story. Kristeva believes that psychoanalysis must incite change because if it fails to do this, she can't see what else will inspire such a change. She claims psychoanalytic thinking is one of the very few endeavors that allows for change and surprise. It

allows life in its belief in the resiliency of psychic discourse. Thus, for Kristeva psychoanalysis can reach out to the boundary that offers it the most resistance, and have much more to offer “than just a refuge for society of spectacle and consumption” (Kristeva, 1995, p. 44)

On that note one can say that historically Freudian psychoanalysis, both at its inception and during its course, has functioned as a theory of mind that illuminated and challenged the very world it belonged to. Psychoanalysis can regain its revolutionary spirit, and still claim cultural relevance to reach a wider audience. Most importantly, psychoanalysis can communicate its unique understanding of what it means to be an individual in this era with reference to the interaction of the current demands of the social and cultural order with unconscious wishes, anxieties, and fears and the concomitant de-symbolizing defenses motivated by doing away with experiences absence. Thus, psychoanalysis can also help to recuperate the subject beyond the consulting room as well.

# *EPILOGUE*

*Why is my verse so barren of new pride,*
*So far from variation or quick change?*
*Why with the time do I not glance aside*
*To new-found methods, and to compounds strange?*
*Why write I still all one, ever the same,*
*And keep invention in a noted weed,*
*That every word doth almost tell my name,*
*Showing their birth, and where they did proceed?*
*O! know sweet love I always write of you,*
*And you and love are still my argument;*
*So all my best is dressing old words new,*
*Spending again what is already spent:*
*For as the sun is daily new and old,*
*So is my love still telling what is told.*

*Shakespeare, Sonnet LXXVI*

Von Unwerth (2005) in his book "Freud's Requiem" mentions Freud's 1897 letter to Fliess stating that the goal of his travels is "to drink a punch made from Lethe." (Von Unwerth, 2005, p. 54) Lethe is the mythic river of oblivion from which the souls of the deceased drink to forget the memories of their lives, which torment their ghostly existence. Freud was no stranger to the allure of oblivion. In the "The Interpretation of Dreams" (1900) Freud wrote about dreams and the unconscious. He said that the ghosts of the underworld awake to new life with the taste of blood, a revival through new life experiences. Freud intuited that remembering is a bloody affair. As Von Unwerth mentions Freud understood the dilemma of Ulysses torn

between Calypso's island of eternal paradise and sailing the treacherous waters to go back home to Ithaca, that of comforting fantasy and tribulations of reality.

Myths and Gods were not only on Freud's mind, but surrounded his desk and his consulting room. Burke (2006) in her book " The Sphinx on the Table" talks about Freud as a passionate collector of Roman, Greek, and Egyptian antiquities starting when he turned forty, the year his father died. Burke says Freud formed his private museum with more than two thousand statues, vases, papyrus fragments, precious stones, and rings. Burke argues that Freud's collection was beyond decorative. It was an integral part of his work as his objects were his "divine counselors, providing inspiration, cultural tradition, historical context, and aesthetic stimuli for Freud's investigations." (Burke, 2006, p.4)

In one of their meetings Freud said to Marie Bonaparte that everything perishes and his thought will only survive twenty thirty years, but it will eventually die as well. Anxious Marie Bonaparte reminded him that Homer is still read, but Freud was unmoved, and said it's the eternal flow that renders life beautiful. (Von Unwerth, 2005, p.177)

Freud in his theorizing and outlook on life truly appreciated how the clinical, social, and the cultural are interwoven. His edifice includes brilliant pieces on many subjects traversing these realms. In his work Freud captured life's transformational, regenerative spirit in *absence* as the keeper of desire and the eternal flow, always to be challenged by a foreclosing *presence* that revolts against this flux.

This work is a tribute to his inspiration.

# Appendix

Rene Magritte, *Evening Falls*, 1964.

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