



# Perturbance and Animation

## The Removed in Psychoanalysis

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### Abstract

This essay interrogates the Freudian conception of the *Unheimliche* by reinterpreting it through the dual categories of perturbance and animation. Taking Roger Corman's *X: The Man with the X-Ray Eyes* as a privileged site of analysis, it argues that the film not only stages but radically exposes the very dimension that Freud's text systematically dis-simulates: the nexus between ocularity, animation, and the death drive. Whereas Freud

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The insight that moves this essay is a specific interpretation—which, it will be seen, is both cinematographic and ontological—of the concept of the Freudian *Unheimliche*. The translation of the term, which in English is generally rendered as *uncanny* (see S. Freud, *The 'Uncanny'*, in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud* (24 voll.), Translated from the German under the General Editorship of J. Strachey, The Hogarth Press, London 1953-1974, XVII (1955), *An Infantile Neurosis and Other Works (1917–1919)*, pp. 217-256), has given rise to numerous debates. As far as we are concerned, echoing Musatti's classic Italian rendering (see S. Freud, *Il perturbante*, in *Opere* (12 voll.), Bollati Boringhieri, Torino 1966-1080, IX, 1917-1923, pp. 77-118), which translates as *perturbante*, we also propose in English the solution (in this language, we know, not at all unusual) *perturbing*, which thus applies as *troubling*, *disturbing*. The reason why is quickly stated and will become perspicuous as the reading proceeds: the theoretical object of the present contribution is a state of being of the entity that is called *Perturbance*, something akin to a fundamental perturbation, both transcendently and materially understood. We could therefore define it as the 'animistic perturbation' immanent to all things that are and whose inexplicability originally disquiets the *Dasein*, arousing its 'desire for psychoanalysis'. Since, therefore, Perturbance is the dimension of oscillation of the Perturbing, in order to maintain a fruitful (and for us essential) resonance between the two terms, the use of *uncanny* would have been entirely misplaced.

For other reasons, however, of an exquisite conceptual nature, it has been decided to render the German *Verdrängung* not with the accredited *repression*, but with *removal*, decidedly more akin, moreover, to the Italian and French solutions: *rimozione* and *refoulement*. *Verdrängt* is in fact not something repressed, that is, simply obstructed in its expression because it has encountered a hostile force that coercively stifles its prerogatives by inhibiting them. Otherwise, *verdrängt* is something that, pulled out from the plane where it could and would have manifested itself, is transferred to another dimension, inaccessible to self-aware consciousness but only because it is situated in the depths of the unconscious. *Verdrängung* is thus the process not by which something is repressed, but through which a psychic content is removed to be transferred elsewhere.

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Final caveat: The translations from Freud that appear in the text are taken from the aforementioned Standard Edition edited by James Strachey with some minor lexical revisions by me due to the need to conform the text to the development and theoretical choices of my argument. Under all circumstances, reference was always made to the original German text before making any changes.

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sublimates the perturbing into the castration complex, Corman dramatizes its irreducible link with blinding, thereby rendering visible the removed of psychoanalysis. The essay proposes “Perturbance” as the ontological oscillation immanent to beings, the universal radiation that makes them appear mysteriously alive. From this perspective, psychoanalysis is constituted precisely by its removal of perturbance, whereas cinema, by externalizing psychic nexuses in representation, fulfills the repressed possibility of psychoanalysis without removal. Through a dialogue between Freud, Hoffmann’s *Sandman*, the Oedipal paradigm, and Corman’s visionary film, the study delineates a psychophysical ontology in which animation is no longer confined to the living subject but revealed as the fundamental energetic quality of all that is.

**Keywords** Perturbance · Animation · Psychoanalysis · Ocularity · Uncanny · Death drive · Removal · Cinema · Representation · Animism

*to e.g.*

*who relentlessly persists in watching*

I would challenge anyone watching Roger Corman’s—‘The King of Cult,’ as he was hyperbolically nicknamed—*X: The Man with the X-Ray Eyes*, not to be at least perplexed at the fact that the protagonist, Ray Milland in Dr. James Xavier’s lab coat, shows no concern in administering to his own eyes the chemical compound that indefinitely increases the penetrating power of his gaze. It is surprising, that is, the very real risk of damaging or losing his eyesight does not entail any wavering that hinders him in his willingness to pursue his research at any cost. As if the protection of his eyesight were not a priority at all. Even when, by repeating the taking of the drops, the doctor experiences the gradual deterioration of his ordinary visual abilities, he nonetheless shows no signs of hesitation and continues dramatically with the experiment until the final ecstatic blinding.

This first finding already leads us to the heart of the matter, for it decisively overturns the main assumption of Freud’s essay on *The Perturbing*, built on the correspondence between the terror of “damaging or losing one’s eyes” and the so-called ‘castration anxiety.’

We know from psycho-analytic experience, however, that the fear of damaging or losing one’s eyes is a terrible one in children. Many adults retain their apprehensiveness in this respect, and no physical injury is so much dreaded by them as an injury to the eye. We are accustomed to say, too, that we will treasure a thing as the apple of our eye. A study of dreams, phantasies and myths has taught us that anxiety about one’s eyes, the fear of going blind, is often enough a substitute for the dread of being castrated (Freud 1955, 231).

This set of considerations should prompt us to note that the Perturbing, as circumscribed by Freud, has an analytic functioning exactly opposite to the mysterious *Blendungskomplex*, the ‘blinding complex’ that, in Corman’s film, drives Dr. Xavier’s actions. If it is the fear of “losing one’s eyes” that connotes the Perturbing, *the Man with the X-Ray Eyes*, on the other hand, seems to be moved precisely by an uncontainable desire to lose them, so much so that

it could be said that his *Blendungskomplex* reveals a deeper *Blendungstrieb*: in him the death drive exists essentially in the form of the ‘desire for blinding’.

We believe, however, that such an approach still floats on the surface. On the one hand, even on first consideration, anyone who sees the film clearly perceives that in what the doctor gradually learns to glimpse beneath the surface of things, ‘something’ is revealed that is maximally disturbing. If at first he merely penetrates beyond the epidermis of bodies, being able to glimpse the physiology of the patients’ internal organs, as he intensifies his scope, the new sight with which he is endowed gives him access to further frequencies, where, instead of distinguishable entities, what are revealed are the perturbations of a universal psychedelic layer in which the pure interiority of matter, its immanent ‘plane of oscillation’, pulsates. Well, precisely as a vision of the psychedelic *perturbation* immanent to matter, such a vision beyond the spectrum of the visible is in every way *perturbing*.

To claim that Corman’s film has nothing to do with the *Unheimliche*, therefore, does not really seem plausible.

The path that is here intended to be attempted is in fact quite different and involves first of all turning against the Freudian Perturbing its own analytical method. Beginning by saying that the text of the essay has an altogether non-linear course, that instead of offering a specifically articulated and gradually gained theory until defining a principle, it proceeds by piling up linguistic analyses, interpretations of literary figures, references to personal experiences and descriptions of clinical cases, without ever, somehow, arriving at the ‘bottom line.’ What the Perturbing really is, is only said in a couple of passages (moreover redundant with each other), but without ever striving to conceptually outline a real diriment theoretical paradigm.

Far from being a limitation, this lack of poignancy and cogency is a symptom of what the text, while claiming to want to define the Perturbing, is in truth doing, namely dissimulating its own relation to the Perturbing. The Perturbing is the *materia prima* of psychoanalysis, and for this very reason it must take the form of an elaborate red herring, a programmatic dissimulation of its own relation to the Perturbing.

The thesis may appear rash and in need of analytical support, which, however, is not difficult to deploy, starting with the following finding: as is well known, Freud’s essay takes its starting point, in dealing with the relationship between fear of blinding and castration anxiety, from a retelling of E.T.A. Hoffmann’s famous short story, *Der Sandmann*, where literary form is given to the noir-fabled theme of the Sandman, a sinister creature who would intervene in the favor of darkness to gouge out the eyes of children who refuse to fall asleep, then feeding them to his malignant offspring of ravenous birds.

The events of the tale, full of twists and turns, including the series of fatal ‘reincarnations’ of the Sandman in the lawyer Coppelius and his narrative lieu-tenant, the Piedmontese optician Coppola, include numerous alchemical references and, most importantly, but we shall return to this later, the evocation of the automaton as a non-living bearer of κίνησις τοῦ βίου, where it is precisely the effect of simulation that reproduces, on another wavelength than the blinding/castration pair, the frequency of the Perturbing. Yet on this second *facies* of the concept Freud seems to ‘rush off’ rather quickly, basically limiting himself to recalling Ernst Jentsch’s theses. Net of all these interpretive rivulets, the core of his interpretation remains the same: “Moreover, I would not recommend any opponent of the psycho-analytic view—Freud (1955, 231) warns—to select this particular story of the Sandman with which to support his argument that anxiety about the eyes has nothing to do with the castration

complex,” thus reiterating *ex negativo* his own thesis that, in fact, the details of the tale become immediately significant “[...] as soon as we replace the Sandman by the dreaded father at whose hands castration is expected” (Freud 1955, 232).

Now, it is, in my opinion, decisive for an adequate understanding of the *enjeu* of the Freudian essay, to observe that, having exhausted the reference to Hoffmann, throughout the continuation the theme of the eye is set aside and the relation of the Perturbing to blinding is no longer mentioned. It is in fact literally *removed*. The entire essay can thus be read as the progressive narrative removal of the relationship between the Perturbing and blinding, a relationship that is initially announced, only to be more discreetly overlooked later (but doesn’t the same thing happen with the half-truths that are told to more effectively cover up lies?).

For this reading not to be branded as tendentious, it lacks, however, beyond the indication about the thematic shift imposed by Freud, a limpid enunciation of: (1) Why the Perturbing is linked to the necessity of blinding, and (2) What is perturbing about what, by gradually determining the blinding of his ordinary visual faculties, Milland/Xavier’s enhanced eye is able to discern. It is believed that in *X: The Man with the X-Ray Eyes* is contained an answer to both these questions and that for this reason Corman’s film can be considered as one of the most significant—perhaps even the most powerful—operations to bring to the surface and expose fully in image *the removed of psychoanalysis*.

Like *Das Unheimliche*, the film in question also takes as its analytical focus the relationship between the Perturbing and blinding, only, unlike the Freudian essay, the film does not sublimate it into the castration complex. Instead of deflecting the gaze, in fact, it deepens it in the most radical way, that is, by taking the relationship with the Perturbing to its most extreme consequences. It will be seen: it is precisely this epistemic gesture of intensification that allows the film work to succeed where the psychoanalytic text fails. *X: The Man with the X-Ray Eyes* is the coherent and relentless continuation of what constitutes the premise of the essay on the *Unheimliche*: where the Freudian ‘unfolding’ is the progressive masking of that premise, the film is instead its accomplished implementation. That is, it exhibits what the essay sets up the cover for.

Corman’s film—which, let us remember, is American, so for teleohistorical reasons lives within a literalness, even iconographic, that does not foresee of unconscious residue—subverts the Freudian attempt to conceal the Perturbing by speaking of it in a dissimulating manner. Corman takes as his own cinematic material the Perturbing dissimulated by Freud. That is, he deals with exactly that Perturbing that Freud’s essay does not deal with, or, if you will, reveals its implicit, that which the dissimulating form of the essay is engaged in removing. *The Man with the X-Ray Eyes* is thus the most accomplished and rigorous display of that Perturbing of which the Freudian essay constitutes the removal. Please note that such a statement in no way implies that Freud, in his essay on the Perturbing, does not thematize the Perturbing. The words and arguments he uses do not speak, except in hints, of the Perturbing, which, however, constitutes the structure and movement of the text. It is the text itself, that is, and not what it says, that reveals the relationship to the Perturbing. The entire essay is constructed as a mechanism of dissimulation aimed at concealing its true relationship to the Perturbing. Perhaps, indeed, this is precisely why it proved so powerful as to trigger one of the most conspicuous *Wirkungsgeschichte* that psychoanalytic discourse has been able to provoke. The essay has induced an enormous series of discourses precisely because of what it does not say, that is, the relation between psyche and Perturbing, and because, by making

this relation be without saying it, it arouses in others the desire to bring it to language. The *Wirkungsgeschichte* of the discourse on the Perturbing is due to the fact that the essay on the Perturbing reveals the relation between psyche and Perturbing by removing the Perturbing from discourse, thus taking on—no longer simply enunciating—the form of the Perturbing.

The genetic element of psychoanalysis is the existence of the Perturbing, but one could also say: the Perturbing is the *ratio essendi* of psychoanalysis, while its removal is the *ratio cognoscendi* of its content, i.e.: we come into contact with the content of psychoanalysis starting from (and by virtue of) what it removes. Psychoanalysis, in fact, can only exist as the discourse that is generated from the removal of the Perturbing, doing nothing more in its long and articulate enunciation than perimetering the place of that absence, that is, dis-simulating in the form of substitutive discourse the true nature of its own relation to the Perturbing.

An attempt will therefore be made, with explicit reference to *The Man with the X-Ray Eyes*, to give reasons for the considerations introduced.

Dr. Xavier's blinding occurs, it has been said, gradually. Initially, his power makes it possible for him to glimpse organic life internal to the physiology of bodies. Attracting attention must be the fact that he, apart from some minimal evidence (e.g., with some overlapping sheets, where he shows that he can 'read through'), does not seem the least bit interested in inanimate objects. To explain this attitude one could simply note that, as a physician, he aspires to want to develop a method of treatment and, since most diseases concern the internal systems, the enhancement of diagnostic skills involves practicing on bodies and not on objects. However, this explanation seems wholly unsatisfactory.

The gaze penetrates bodies because in them is contained the mystery of the living. Organic matter is activated by a surplus that inert matter does not have. To immerse the sight in the flesh implies wanting to grasp what nourishes the becoming of life. Now, if we limit ourselves to a scientific consideration, this is easily understood: life is an organic phenomenon and the intellect intends to grasp its chemical and physical functioning. Nevertheless, vital is also the psychic flow, the mental existence of the living being that has a body. That is, the vital does not coincide with the organic. The vital is both the body and that which reveals to the outside world the fact that it is a mysteriously activated body, as if its consistency were transfigured by a mesmerizing surplus, the one that, as it were, flashes in the eyes of those who look at us. When we encounter them we immediately become aware of the life pulsing in their bearer. The eyes have a peculiar gleam that has no equivalent in any other bodily surface. Moreover, they are the only thing that, as the form through which vision passes, cannot, by seeing, be seen (whereas for the face, as Ernst Mach pointed out, this is only partially true, since it is possible to make out both the tip of the nose and a portion of the eye socket; observation to which we should add that the face feels *itself*: by prosopoeption anyone senses, for example, whether she is smiling or otherwise how she is deforming his face, whereas the eye—not the eyelid—defines for itself an asensory physiological space: our only portion of the external surface that is not 'feelable' unless we exert pressure on it). Perhaps it is precisely this being removed from direct vision, which even through them alone is realized, that makes the eyes so visible when perceived indirectly. The eyes catch the eye. And this is so true that, even at a great distance, all it takes is a fleeting eye contact to have no doubt whether the other we are looking at is in turn looking at us.

Dr. Xavier, it was said, uses the eye to probe the mystery of the living. But since, we now know, the sign of the living is expressed by ocularity, it follows that—with a circularity that

will prove decisive for us, because it resolves in purely optical terms the basic psychoanalytic relation between ‘subject’ and ‘object’—he uses the eye to investigate something that it is first and foremost the eye to express. For the flashing of the eyes is evidence of Animation. A topic, this, that in the essay on *The Perturbing* is punctually dealt with when, again resorting to Hoffmann, the figure of the automaton is evoked. It, in fact, as a nonliving object that simulates life, produces in those who come into contact with it a particular form of disconcertment, generated, as Freud (1955, 226) indicates by referring again to Jentsch, by the “‘doubts whether an apparently animate being is really alive; or conversely, whether a lifeless object might not be in fact animate.’” While this explanation seems crystal clear, it is not at all so. For why should the suspicion that life is simulated be experienced with disconcertment? What is so disturbing about the fact that something that appears to be alive is actually not? The question arises again today with the utmost urgency in the face of the futuristic achievements of robotics associated with Artificial Intelligence—and perhaps it is no accident that from Rotwang’s Golem in *Metropolis* to the droids of *Star Wars*, from the helmet slit of Robocop to the ring light face of Atlas, the Boston Dynamics robot, what is always missing is the gleam of a pupil. We then return to the question: why should the sight of a ‘machine’ so similar in quality of actions and reactions to the psychophysical behavior of humans cause disquiet?

The answer given by Jentsch, which also, by his own assertion, convinces Freud only in part, is summarized by the psychoanalyst as follows: the sense of perturbation generated by automata derives from the fact that they “[...] awaken in the spectator the impression of automatic, mechanical processes at work behind the habitual image of animation” (Freud 1955, 232). Put in these terms, it would thus be what we might call *replacement anxiety*: the human being sees in the animate machine the risk that he might be replaced, that is, generalizing, he fears his own annihilation. Replacement anxiety would thus be a variant of the fear of death. And the fact that such replacement takes place through a simulation, thus a deception, adds something essential relatively to the psychoanalytic meaning of lying. For it objectifies the possibility of a life to act independently of the life of the one being deceived, but in doing so it is as if it ousts the latter from life itself, saying: mind you, life as such can exist and proceed independently of yours. Lying, that is, disconnects the life of the lied from the life, which stands as a higher-order cognitive power, of the liar. In this sense, the lie also arouses in those who undergo it and learn of it a sense of annihilation that has the character of mortification, thus the symbolic reality of death.

Although the series of these inferences has its plausibility, they are not entirely convincing, especially in light of the relationship that, in *The Perturbing*, is drawn between automatic simulation and ocular anatomy. The interpretation of the automaton implies ocular reference, so much so that to exemplify this Freud—again via Hoffmann—recalls the situation in which Nathaniel, the wretched student protagonist of *The Sandman*, falls in love with Olimpia, in truth an automaton whose inanimate character he will only realize later. All the analytical connections through which the scenic-narrative development is constructed are optical. Nathaniel falls in love with Olimpia by spying on her from afar with a spyglass. Then, however, the dramatic unveiling is described as follows:

But Olimpia is an automaton whose clock-work has been made by Spalanzani, and whose eyes have been put in by Coppola, the Sandman. The student surprises the two Masters quarrelling over their handiwork. The optician carries off the wooden eyeless doll; and the mechanician, Spalanzani, picks up Olimpia’s bleeding eyes from the

ground and throws them at Nathaniel's breast, saying that Coppola had stolen them from the student (Freud 1955, 229).

Olimpia's inertia is marked by the absence of her eyes. It is the absence of the vitality of the gaze that decrees her inanity. And the gaze with which she had been artificially endowed had literally been taken from Nathaniel as a child by the Coppola-Coppelius Sandman: traumatic *Urszene* from which originates the fatal chain of ocular *auferts* that determine the narrative performance of the Perturbing.

The passage is particularly indicative. The disquiet generated by the automaton is not associated with any anxiety of substitution, while instead the link between the Perturbing and ocularity as a primary symptom of being-alive is reaffirmed. What is uncanny about the inanimate automaton is its lack of gaze. Accordingly, perturbing would be the absence of life decreed by the absence of eyes? Only superficially, that is, for psychoanalysis as a discursive sublimation of its own deep motive.

The eye, it has been said, is the detector of Animation, the physiological surplus of psychically active subjects. Its absence, it is true, makes real the annihilating action of death: the eyeless subject is an inanimate *Dasein*, where, as in the empty orbits of a skull, its ultimate 'triumph' becomes visible. Well, this is all reliable, yes, but only for the immediacy that conceives as true—and thus transmutes into meaning—the content of its own sensitive finding. As if to say that, of this analysis, the 'reverse' is missing, that is, the unconscious truth—inextricably conjoined and discursively mediated—of its removed. The discourse on the Perturbing—and the same would apply to the Oedipal model, of whose mythologem that it is blatantly a re-proposition with variants—is not only about what blinding annihilates, but what it enables one to see. Thus, in the automaton's ocular inertia, made even more manifest when its eyes are gouged out, what stands out is not only (immediately) the absence of life, but (mediately) how much life is by opposition present in the animate subjects around it. In other words, *the anocular fixity of the automaton highlights and imposes on attention the animate character of the living*. The absence of the eyes makes their presence all the more remarkable, that is, it imposes as maximally compelling the ocular fact of Animation. It is the deprivation of the eyes that highlights by contrast, thus in the most glaring way, the Animation pulsing in the living eye.

Now, it is precisely this animated pulsation, revealed by the eye, that identifies the 'object' of the Perturbing: that which first and foremost causes it and with which it is structurally related. With another cinematic 'excursion', one could also say that the darting brightness of the eye is the place of the *Shining*, that which is both maximally alive and maximally uncanny, viz.: the Animation itself, that which decrees the psycho-somatic activation of living subjects (and it is perhaps in this regard that one could establish a comparison with the Sophoclean-Heideggerian *Unheimliche*, which has to do with the encircling prevalence of Being in opposition to the as-such of life, thought of, in its techno-poietic foundation, from what it can as a creative and destructive power; nothing to do, therefore, with a simple phenomenon of 'psychic' disquiet).

Given these premises, it is finally possible to approach *The Man with the X-Ray Eyes*, recognizing in it the place where the perturbing character of the relationship between ocularity and Animation is played out in the most articulate and essential way. What in the psychoanalytic context is only announced, and thus still acts in a partial and indirect way, is conducted by the film to its most extreme consequences. Let us try, with some patience, to understand why.

## 1 Perturbance

Key question to begin to catch a glimpse of what will blind the doctor is: but what is it, really, that he can see beneath the refractory peel of appearances?

In the film, the object of vision undergoes a gradual deepening, coinciding with its progressive electromagnetic deconstruction. As if the power of Xavier's eyes resulted not in greater but in less focus, corresponding, however, to a coming closer to the wave-like 'nature' of things.

At the beginning, after an initial accentuation of visual capacities measured, as noted above, on rather ordinary layers of reality, the scene in which at a party the doctor realizes that, while dancing, the bodies of the other guests are shown around him 'as nature made them', is undoubtedly relevant. The 'naked twist' is indicative of the fact that the first threshold penetrated by Milland's Hypervision concerns the overcoming of one of the most important codes imposed by the process of civilization: clothing as a means of deferring the sexual drive, magnetized by the naked body.



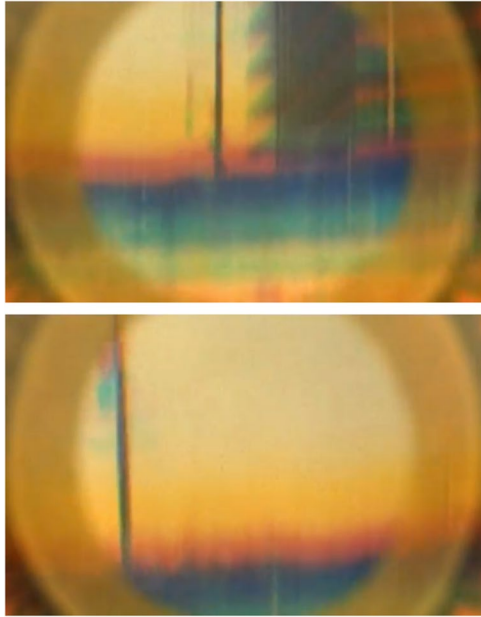
Increased visual abilities are thus connected to a more direct relationship with the corporeal truth of the drive, demonstrating that the whole process is associated with the penetration of a psychoanalytically connoted perceptual horizon that is deeper than what, on the surface, shows only the shielding aspect set up for civilian use by the Reality Principle. Hypervision thus unmask the sexual scene that is constantly played out under the costumes of the social scene. (In which it is also correct to include the widespread sexual stimulus that activates on the public's side the consumption of the *society of the spectacle*, so much so that the film was advertised with a series of billboards where, slyly disregarding the dramatic implication, winking half-naked bodies were put on display, trusting that the alleged scopophilia of the protagonist could direct a few more voyeurs to the box office.)

But this is only a first step, because the bodily form of the drive is still far from offering an ultimate glimpse into the transmental physics of the subcutaneous that psychoanalysis legitimizes and, in some ways, even presupposes.

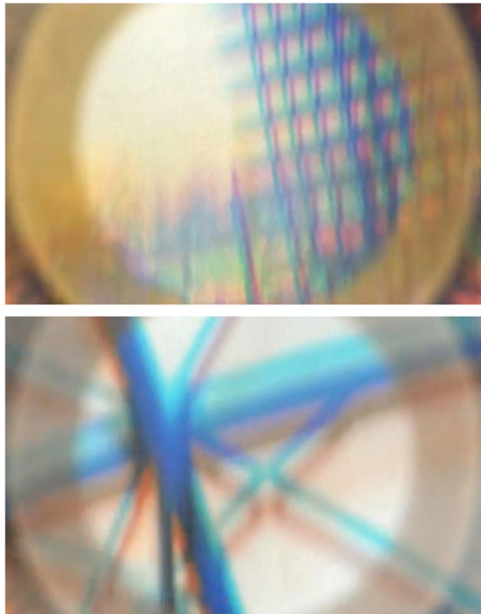
Decisive in progressing in this direction is the episode in which colleague and friend Diane Fairfax, while accompanying Xavier in the car, who, with repeated administrations, has already incredibly enhanced his visual faculties, asks him in dismay: "What do you see?"



Whereupon, as images of hallucinatory, tidal but geometric vagueness alternate with those of the two actors in dialogue, he, following, out the window, the unfolding of the world in infrared, replies (note the appearance of the obscuring lenses that obliterate the eyes: what Xavier sees is already abolition of sight in the ordinary sense, as if the eye must eclipse itself to let further vision be): "This city, as if it were unborn, rising into the sky with fingers of metal, limbs without flesh, girders without stone, signs hanging without support, wires dipping and swaying without poles, a city unborn, flesh dissolved in an acid of light, a city of the dead."



These are expressions of dramatic visionarity that, coupled with the images, outline an impressive psychedelic ontology (formally drawing inspiration from the luminous alchemy of the avant-garde, Moholy-Nagy's *Lichtspiele*—and thus the *Licht-Raum-Modulator* effects—but even earlier the Rayonism of Larionov and Gončarova, dynamized with some Hitchcockian hypnotism: *Vertigo*, whose coils return in *X*'s trailer for *Second Sight*, is from '58).



From embodied forms (the anatomy of internal organs) and carnal forms (the exaggerated dance of naked bodies) we have moved to “limbs without flesh.” Which, like “girders without stone, signs hanging without support, wires dipping and swaying without poles,” strictly allude to a desubstantialized world, a kind of ontology without *ὑποκείμενον* which, therefore, deprived of the material continuity of the substratum, consists of the mere oscillation of the signs that construct, in an electromagnetic space, the essential structure of things (why, disregarding a little too much literalness, not to interpret as real signs—and not mere ‘traffic signals’—the mentioned “signs hanging without support”?). In this very high-frequency world where each entity coincides with its own wave nature, ‘things’ are radiations and their relations interference phenomena.

The hallucinatory description from Xavier has as its context an “unborn” city. The vision is both auroral and apocalyptic: a “city of the dead” that is also, however, “flesh dissolved in an acid of light.” What does this mean, beyond the obvious lysergic reference? Let us try to delve a little deeper. The expression establishes a link between death and revelation: both in the ancestral womb of images (to which “unborn” refers) and in the fulfillment of death (the participle “dead” is symptomatic), the phenomenal world shows itself in transfigured form. Such vision, we understand from the doctor’s words, is an experience *sub specie veritatis* of what instead, *sub specie oculi* (meaning the eye of the ordinary visual apparatus), appears as a world of determinate bodily substances. The following principle follows, which, in form of a theory, underlies the whole film: *The ocular fulfillment of the death drive enables the transfiguration of the experience of the world into a vision of truth.* It is the transfiguration of the ordinary real operated by the death drive (as Rankinianly uterine, “unborn,” as Lacanianly eschatotheric, “dead”) that makes Hypervision *sub specie veritatis* possible.

So let us return to the question, also based on the recalled frames: what, exactly, is the content of Hypervision?

It is time to flip the cards. *Immanent to phenomena and their fundamental oscillatory character, thus a universal attribute that determines their ontological frequency by describing their psycho-ondulatory nature, is their constitutive Perturbance. In the subcutaneous reality of things, Dr. Xavier, just as and because he loses his surface vision, discerns Perturbance, that is, the perturbing character of their psychophysical oscillation in the transversal space of intramundane experience.*

That this vision can be connoted as *unheimlich* is evident from several respects. First, as has been shown, it is vision that involves a hyperactivation of the death drive. Xavier’s Hypervision is produced by blinding, that is, by the annihilation of the most fundamental of his organic capacities: sight. And this is only on a subjective basis, because, on an objective basis, it is equally true that the undulatory content of Hypervision presupposes a further phenomenological annihilation—namely, that the world as it presents itself to ordinary perception undoes its apparent substantiality to reveal its profound oscillatory nature. Death drive is thus also the transfiguring action that derealizes the immediate structure of phenomena to release their immanent frequency.

It is thus understood that the Perturbance Vision (psychoanalytic form of the ‘essence vision’) cannot but be disconcerting, that is, in all respects *unheimlich*. In addition to being physically perturbing—Perturbance is in fact a background ontological radiation—it is also semantically so, because its revelation presupposes as a triggering condition the destructive action—subjectively blinding and objectively dissolving—of the death drive.

Having said that, it is perhaps time to venture a philosophical interpretation of Perturbance that, net of the analysis of the essay and the film, explains in more general terms why the content of Hypervision is ultimately perturbing. Let us try to reflect on it.

On closer inspection, the radiation immanent to things reveals a very simple fact, namely, that entities are an energetic phenomenon. From the physical point of view, this adds little to an awareness already achieved by Aristotle (the ἐνέργεια is essentially this) and substantiated by the well-known acquisitions of twentieth-century science on the equivalence of mass and energy. We here, however, are practicing on a completely different field, that of the living, which includes reference to the particular ‘mode’ of ἐνέργεια identified by the psychic movement—and (pre)sentiment—of thoughts. Dr. Xavier, in fact, probes with his extraordinary faculties the subcutaneous reality of the psychically animated living. Exactly that with respect to which the automaton’s mechanics fails, for its κίνησις is not as such ἐνέργεια, since, with respect to it, that is, to the living movement of the animate being in the flesh, it still lacks something, but what?

The idea that is intended to be proposed is that the energetic quality of the living, what we have previously called *Animation*, exists and is active on the ground of Perturbance as an oscillatory phenomenon that stirs internally the nature of things. To see Perturbance would then mean nothing more than *to penetrate with the gaze the secret of Animation*. And why should this turn out to be dramatically perturbing? Because—and we thus come to a final clarification of the removed content of the Freudian essay—on closer inspection, that is, in a primary and essential way, to be perturbing, for the psyche, it is the most visible and widespread but not therefore the most comprehensible thing, namely, the fact that around the subject there are things that appear mysteriously *alive*. Psychoanalysis, at bottom, is first and foremost this: trying to provide a reason for the fact that there are things that are incomprehensibly alive; more: psychoanalysis is the discourse that develops from the evidence, in itself mysterious and inexplicable, of Animation.

In its naive and immediate form, the Perturbance nexus concerns the primary relationship that is established between ocularity and Animation. Psychoanalysis recognizes the importance of this nexus, succeeds in naming it but its power is such and so threatening that it must be removed (so much so that instead of investigating further, psychoanalysis sublimates it in the discourse on castration anxiety). Whereas, instead, nothing needs to be removed and one should, on the contrary, investigate in the most radical way the connection between ocularity and Animation from which the whole range of possible psychic behavior derives. Exactly what the film *The Man with the X-Ray Eyes* does, investigating this nexus to the most extreme depths, that is, to the point of grasping that Perturbance originally coincides with the fundamental ontological radiation that describes the wave nature of things.

In *The Man with X-Ray Eyes* the Perturbing is associated with a physical phenomenon: the radiation inside bodies, what we call: the Perturbance. Broadly speaking, a mode of operation of all great science fiction is distinguishable here, that of associating a metaphysical instance with an Ultraobject. Science fiction works all the more and all the better when it succeeds in proposing and making visible the philosophical reification of a metaphysical instance: it happens with the Black Monolith of *2001: A Space Odyssey*, which identifies the identity of technology, metaphysics and nihilism; with the ocean of *Solaris* that gives form to the transcendental unity of matter and thought (according to which thought is a universal attribute of substance); with the Force as the ‘principle’ that, in *Star Wars*, makes the Great Unification Theory concrete.

By kindred epistemic procedure, in *X: The Man with the X-Ray Eyes* it is revealed that what on the surface appears as Animation is deep down a universal Perturbance that characterizes all of reality as a whole. This is a doubly disconcerting discovery. First, because, as mentioned above, it involves the integral assumption of the action of the death drive (as subjective blinding and objective dissolution of the nexuses stabilized by the ordinary Principle of Reality), but even more tragically—and this is really decisive—because the Perturbance Vision reveals that the secret of Animation does not concern, at bottom, only the living, but *all* modes of reality, that is, universally, all that is. Perturbance shows that the inner life does not concern only subjects but all things. Every entity has its own immanent psychophysical (or rather: hypopsychic) ‘nature’ that is determined on the transversal Oscillation Plane determined by the wave-like behavior of Perturbance. And is it not perhaps for this reason that it had to be removed from psychoanalytic discourse (in this respect still anthropological and, let us allow ourselves for once to say it, ‘bourgeois’)? Because it says the unspeakable, what least of all the psyche is willing to accept—namely, that *from a fundamental, literally psycho-physical point of view, there is no difference between living and non-living.*

In its profound form, the one probed by Dr. Xavier’s Hypervision, Perturbance would force psychoanalysis to admit that what on the surface justifies it, the nexus between ocularity and Animation as its *ratio essendi*, coincides in truth with the necessity of its overcoming, because at bottom this nexus, as Perturbance, is what affirms that there is no distinction between living and non-living, thus there is no privileged form of Animation, i.e., that is only and merely psychic. The background radiation that animates things is psychic insofar as it is physical. Perturbance would imply, if taken to its fullest extent, the transformation of psychoanalysis into a psychophysics of the depth.

## 2 Cinema and Animation

It is perhaps worth, by way of an interlude, to return to the question of cinema. Why is it that cinema manages to show something that psychoanalysis removes and, in general, what does this entail as to the ‘nature’ of cinema as such and its, so to speak, metaphysical possibilities?

Psychoanalysis exists as an epistemic reaction to the fact that ocularity attests to Animation but this, in all its evidence, remains inexplicable—hence its deeply perturbing character.

Psychoanalysis’ condition of existence is the nexus between ocularity and Animation and its nature as a ‘double bind’ because it concerns subjects both subjectively and objectively: the subject ocularily defines its own relation to the world, thus it is in itself animated as a seeing person and, in parallel, ocularily perceives the Animation of other subjects, which appear for themselves animated only within the ocular relation between seeing subject and animated (s)object.

Not enough attention has been paid to the psychic implications, necessarily immense, especially when considered from the point of view of homination as a whole, that is, from the earliest times, of a striking fact and yet too obvious as not to arouse due attention: of the living we always have only an outward perception, concerning the appearance and movement of life, that is, its effect and not its source. Many things follow from this, first of all the fact that the world is perceived in terms of representation. We see life from the outside but not by what or how its dynamics are produced. That is, we have contact only with a

representation; for if the nexus between subject and thing is ocular, the known counterpart of this nexus will also exist in an optical form, that is, as a representation (a nexus, this between epistemology and optics, which not coincidentally runs through the whole Cartesian ‘system’).

In metaphysical terms, the consequences of this instance are impressive, for it is thus implied that the nexuses of reality exist for the subject only as immaterial, precisely represented, nexuses. The limitations—and the essentially nihilistic character—of this substitution—of the nexuses of reality for representations—which undoubtedly constitutes the center of modern metaphysics, have been repeatedly pointed out. The so-called ‘overturning of Platonism,’ from this perspective, is but an attempt to reverse the nihilistic abstraction—negation of the entity—implied in the representational relation of substitution. But the same issue could also be looked at from a completely different angle. The fact that the relation to the world is ocular also means that, *precisely insofar as they are representations, for the subject all nexuses of reality are psychic nexuses*. A finding, this one, harbinger of decisive implications. For on the plane of effects it explains how the same individuals can simultaneously use an airplane that scrupulously follows the Galilean principle of relativity (which is nothing more than a physical-mathematical representation of a nexus of reality) and place absolute confidence in the equations that govern its functioning, being, however, equally convinced that they are part of an elected people or feeling victimized by society because they refuse to recognize their right to happiness guaranteed by the use of the pronoun in ‘ze,’ or, again, believing that Ukraine can win the war with Russia on the ground, a circumstance whose degree of plausibility is roughly the same as the possibility of curing Parkinson’s disease with homeopathy. Supposedly objective laws and seemingly absurd beliefs share the same plane of existence precisely because the form in which, for the subject, reality nexuses are constituted is essentially psychic. Instead of chasing the chimera of demystifying *fake news*, and the use of common sense as the objective form of judgment, politics should assume as its own territory the contestation over the truth not of the state of affairs, but of the psychic states induced by the states of affairs. As long as this is not understood, we will always have some scandalized well-wisher convinced that he can defeat the populist on duty by adducing evidence upon evidence about his double-dealing or disconnection to the “real situation” (which one, by the way? ). Whereas one has to take extremely seriously the fact that the modern West, being an episteme of representation, coincides with the transformation of politics into psychology, not, however, in the terms of the so-called ‘psychology of the masses,’ which remains a prisoner of a critical sociology of behavior, but as metaphysical psychology, that is, theory of political forms as psychic nexuses, of which the device of political representation (*Repräsentanz* as delegation) is also an eminent example, as a mediated derivative—by extension—of the operator-concept called ‘representation’ (*Vorstellung*).

Psychoanalysis, then, is the discourse in which the subjective, thus representational, counterpart of the ocularity of perceived reality nexuses is constituted. However, this does not mean either that the real is only psychic or that the subject experiences the world only as representation. Indeed, *Dasein* is incessantly tested by a contradiction (another level of action of the Perturbing): that between the reduction of the world to psychic fact and the resistance of the world as, simply, *matter*. (In some, ways, but it is not possible to dwell on this now, it is the contradiction between the world as form—that is, assumed as an immate-

rial nexus—and the world as matter, form being by essence conceptual (idealized by the relation εἶδος-νοῦς) and matter by essence a sensible a priori (χώρα)).

Now, this contradiction implies a backlash with respect to the perception of the world as a network of psychic nexuses translated into representations. Indeed, a priori materiality determines, for the assumption of the world as psychic fact, a resistant residue that can never be fully assimilated. The *pars materialis* of the world, i.e., its irreducible sensible consistency, cannot be fully absorbed by representation—and it is easy to understand how, for a subject who claims the world as psychic, to come up against a fundamental impossibility of this kind, that is, the impossibility of completely transforming the world into representation, determines as its effect neurosis (a psychic *modus* to which, *entre autres*, the vast majority of the individual political attitudes of so-called ‘woke ideology’ can be reduced, being an identitarian exasperation of the individual device of representation; another summonable example, in this regard, would be the futuristic neurosis of technoesthetics whose delirious discourse derives, in reaction, from the impossibility of digitally converting all reality into the system of representations also known as: Internet; a form of raving akin to that of the ascetic who has gone mad because, although she has scrupulously educated his σῶμα, she has nevertheless never directly experienced God).

Instead, it is cinema that succeeds completely in this operation—hence the liberating significance of its performance: the exact opposite of neurosis. *Cinema is psychoanalysis realized*: exhibition in seen form of the fact that all relations between things and between events are psychic in nature, that is, essentially, representations in action. It is a dimension of integral representation that admits of no residue because it produces on screen a coherent world that resolves in representation the entire horizon of experience of those who, ocularly, relate to it.

Perhaps the most extraordinary rendering of this highlighting is the one-way mirror—identical to the one, used in interrogations for incognito recognition, reflecting on one side while retaining the transparency of glass on the other—through which the ‘driven’ conversation between Harry Dean Stanton and Nastassja Kinski takes place in *Paris, Texas*. The scopophilic symmetry of the *privé* of a classic red-light club is broken down into two asymmetrical visual segments: no longer correspondence and reciprocity in the biunivocal seeing/being seen dyad, but: Travis seeing his ex-partner while she cannot see him. Result: the protagonist enjoys pure representation—which, not coincidentally, since he can hear through a receiver her words, is jointly image and language, in full modern episteme, then, where the representational relations are perfectly superimposed on those of predication: *Les Mots et les Choses* coincide.

The world, for the film’s protagonist, is integrally converted into representation, into a *Vorstellung* completely emancipated from its σῶμα (since it does not transcend the device that operates one-way representation) and precisely therefore integrally cinematographic. Travis can see Jane as one looks at a character on a movie screen: without having to worry about whether that character is in turn looking back at us. Whereas in the ordinary world, as Lacan has repeatedly pointed out, the subject sees herself being seen, in cinema she sees herself *without* being seen. However, not because it stands before a mirror, where she would still be seen by herself, but because she is placed before an integral representation that no longer has, as a residue, the subjective presence of the observer in the observation. Indeed, it can be said that, from this point of view, in cinematographic observation the observer is present only objectively: not as subject but as (s)objectivity, because, precisely, what she

sees on the screen is the taking shape, through others, of her (s)objectivity. Consistently, the unidirectional mirror in *Paris, Texas*, being, on the protagonist's side, a transparent mirror, abolishes the 'mirror stage,' thus the idea that consciousness is formed by reflection (and it should be noted that the one-way mirror acquires its peculiar property through the adhesive affixing, to a glass, of a thin, non-concealing metal cling film; it is, in a way, a mirror on celluloid: transformation of the mirror into the imaginal layer of cinema).

We could then say that the absolute power of the film, perhaps Wenders' masterpiece, derives precisely from the fact that it is built around the infraction of the 'mirror stage,' thus fully subverting the modern paradigm of self-consciousness. Through the non-reflecting mirror, Travis observes his own psychic life objectively for the first time, so much so that this vision finally enables him to make a decision, the one he had procrastinated to the point of insanity (wandering and muteness), about the entirety of his existence. But, precisely, in order to make such a decision he must first of all be able to see his own psyche objectively. Which has nothing to do with the modern misunderstanding of self-awareness, comprehending the latter as a reflexive phenomenon—knowledge acquired by the subject through a reflection that returns to the subject (*Nachdenken*). To acquire true self-knowledge is to see oneself impersonally on (not trivially from) the outside, projected radically outward, infringing the mirror of reflection to objectify oneself implacably beyond it, to the point of recognizing oneself—thus not simply recognizing the self—in that extreme exteriority.

From this point of view, the decisive *Anerkennung*, absolutely unreflective, is accomplished in Wenders' film in the culminating scene—and *ἄπαξ εἰδωλον* of the work—when, on the antireflection of the glass that had hitherto prevented Jane from seeing Travis, their faces for a few moments coincide. Hence the negative of an ordinary mirror reflection appears, for the looming tragic *πρόσωπον* includes Jane in Travis, thus the emergence of the other as an internal disfiguration of the conscious Self. "Car Je est un autre," the objective psychology of Travis's life is not his reflected self-consciousness, but Jane, Jane herself as an external, living representation of the content of his psyche.



Like Travis through the surface of the one-way mirror, in the cinematographic representation we see our subjectivity projected outwardly, that is, we observe the whole content of our psyche—its life, its movement—freed from the particular of its individual somatic 'residence'. We see therefore the representation finally emancipated from the individualism of the subject and thus liberated as purely psychic subjectivity, integral psychic flow: cinematographic psychoanalysis of the impersonal unconscious that constitutes us, live externalized.

Where in fact psychoanalysis is a system of representations of the subject, cinema is a system of objectified representations, projected onto external support. Perhaps, indeed, it is precisely this tension toward objectivity that allows cinema to integrally transform the world into representation.

The psychological assumption of the world classically coincides with its introjection: the subject's representations are inevitably internal. That is, they are representations of the world that by their very structure are removed from the world, as if the *ego cogito*, in order to place them in image, 'sucks' them out of things. Conversely, the externality of cinema takes the representation to extremes in an objective sense, as if by furthering the externality of the object to the utmost, all that remains in the end is its representation. Not introjection, then, but externalization to the nth degree.

Applying this paradigm to the link between ocularity and Animation, it follows that its absorption as a psychoanalytic nexus coincides necessarily with a movement of removal. Introjection, by bringing the nexus inward to make it psychic, removes it from the given phenomena. This is why the Perturbing, as the psychic nexus between ocularity and Animation, is not treated but removed by psychoanalysis: because in order to dispose of this nexus psychically, psychoanalysis must draw it inward. That is, it can no longer visualize it materially, which cinematographic externalization does.

Now, since the fundamental dimension of psychoanalysis is the nexus between ocularity and Animation, which coincides with the Perturbing, we can infer from this that while psychoanalysis, in order to relate to the Perturbing, is forced to remove it, thus to place it in a nonexistent unconscious interiority, cinema, which realizes the unspeakable desire of psychoanalysis, that is, what it has never been able to allow itself, makes visible, in a form that is not removed, that is, all exterior and not at all interior, the Perturbing as the true content of psychoanalysis, through which it is shown that all things are for themselves animate. Cinema does not relate to the mystery of Animation by transforming it into the internal representation of a psychic nexus; on the contrary, it exhibits Animation as the fundamental character of the being. *Cinema is the representation of all things as objectively animated*. Cinema is essentially Animation, or, if you will, the secular fulfillment of what in the mythical antecedent of 'civilization' has been called *animism*—and it is no accident that a direct reference to animism appears in the Freudian essay as a mythical counterpoint to the automaton problem. After all, the discourse on animism (everything is animate) is the exact dialectical opposite of that on automaton (the machinic is the inanimate).

In *The Perturbing* Freud (1955, 241), referring in a footnote to a specific passage in *Totem and Taboo*, writes: "We appear to attribute a 'perturbing' quality to impressions that seek to confirm the omnipotence of thoughts and the animistic mode of thinking in general, after we have reached a stage at which, in our judgement, we have abandoned such beliefs." This is a revealing passage because, once again, a decisive instance is brought to light—but not deepened—in the Freudian writing.

Significant is the fact that the Perturbing is associated with animism, disappointing the proposed solution, unless by "omnipotence of thought" is meant that which is attributable to psychoanalysis itself. "Omnipotence of thought" is in fact the psychoanalytic reaction to the mystery, inexplicable, of Animation, precisely that which perturbs *Dasein*. The fundamental state of disquiet that is called the Perturbing derives originally from the acknowledgment of Animation. Psychoanalysis, persuaded that it can define a scientifically coherent method for 'making sense' of that Unexplainable, hypothesizes (and hypostatizes, in the form of

clarified ψυχή) on the plane of thought an interpretive omnipotence that coincides with its discourse. The limitation of such a discourse is that it devalues Animation as animism, laying the groundwork for a logical overcoming, in the psychoanalytic episteme, of what is discredited by it as mythical unconsciousness: archaic beliefs. Whereas instead, those ‘beliefs’ register, in the sapiential framework of myth, something objectively evident: the datum of Animation, with which, moreover, they show that they can interact in a rather flexible and productive way, at once consistent with the phenomenon and akin to its ‘substance.’ The shamanic relation is in fact essentially a way of activating in the subject a form of psychophysical animation that places him or her in effective resonance—thus on the same hylopsychic horizon—with what happens in the external cosmos, for psychoanalysis a mere exteriority of a projection, while instead that projection is already genetically itself in the sphere of an exteriority: what, after all, is more exterior to us than our psyche, which, moreover, is what we know least of all? “Psyche ist ausgedehnt, weiß nichts davon,” Freud himself had to belatedly admit.

So the psychoanalytic λόγος claims, failing, to relate to the animate cosmos by denying that it is animate and reducing what in it is and shows itself to a projection of ‘mind’. But the reduction of the plane of Animation to a logical plane only decrees the abolition of any possible experience of the animate cosmos, which instead continues to exist, universal and encircling, so much so that it perturbs the modern subject, and all the more dramatically so since, unlike the archaic *Dasein*, the former has deactivated any possibility of relation to Animation other than its nihilistic discursive sublimation, thus, in fact, its removal. Psychoanalysis, which exists by virtue of (and from) Animation, builds its discourse, thus itself, on the logical removal of Animation that also made it possible. Only cinema, operating in the diametrically opposite direction, radicalizes and fulfills the assumptions of psychoanalysis, posing itself and existing as an exhibition of Animation as such, thus as psychoanalysis without removal, psychoanalysis realized on the basis of the principle: *everything is animated*.

All this closely affects the discourse on animism and, in many ways, reverses the Freudian approach to the problem, with implications that are essential for us as far as the question of the Perturbing is concerned. In what way it is quickly said. When, drawing his conclusions about animism, the psychoanalyst grafts the topic into that of the *Unheimliche*, he argues thus:

[...] the animistic beliefs of civilized people are in a state of having been (to a greater or lesser extent) *overcome*. Our conclusion could then be stated thus: the experience of Perturbing occurs either when infantile complexes which have been *removed* are once more revived by some impression, or when primitive beliefs which have been *overcome* seem once more to be confirmed (Freud 1955, 249).

The point is eloquent: since the process of civilization has factually surpassed the animistic stage, its reappearance, for example in the apparent animating of a supposedly dead or inert object or body, imposes itself as perturbing. Perturbing would thus be the resurfacing, in experienced form, of a reactivated removed, Freud writes, “by some impression, or when primitive beliefs which have been *overcome* seem once more to be confirmed.” The way he expresses himself is anything but neutral—hence the use, in the original, of terms such as “Eindruck” and “scheinen”—because it presupposes that the subject perceives as real

something that, although it seems so, is not objectively so. The supposed animism, culturally infantile, that is, primitive, of things that are not really animate, arouses in the subject the perturbation of the *Unheimliche*. It is well seen that in so doing Freud on the one hand assumes that civilization has really come out of the horizon of myth (neglecting its pervasiveness in every sphere of the *vie moderne*), on the other hand he devalues the power of the Perturbing, reducing it to a mere derivative effect of an appearance, that is, a non-being even of the second degree. Needless to say, this approach meets with all our speculative suspicion, aimed conversely at attributing to the Perturbance of the Perturbing the character of a fundamental state of being. Why in fact not to conceive of the paradoxical alternative according to which animism—what we call here: Animation—is the fundamental state of ‘things’ when perceived from the metaphysical *ενέργεια* that animates their becoming, and that therefore perturbing is not the primitive psychic reflex of an insufficiently ‘evolved’ subject, but the normal condition of *Dasein* in front of the universal animated state of the beings with which it relates?

Freud, developing an originally Schellingian insight and leveraging the presence of something intimately familiar, evidenced by the *heim-* theme, in the *Unheimliche*, writes:

[...] this Perturbing is in reality nothing new or alien, but something which is familiar and old-established in the psychic life and which has become alienated from it only through the process of removal. This reference to the factor of removal enables us, furthermore, to understand Schelling’s definition of the Perturbing as something which ought to have remained hidden but has come to light (Freud 1955, 241).

But is it really necessary to attribute to the Perturbing a condition of latency from which it would be a matter of re-animating it, bringing back to the surface something that had been removed? This presupposes that there can be psychic dimension in discontinuity with the Perturbing, whereas the relationship with the Perturbing is the actual situation in which the psyche constitutes its own analytic moment: that is, the presence of the Perturbing is the continuous correlate of psycho-analysis. And this is because the Perturbing is not the resurfacing of something, but the psychic being (i.e., perceived through the universal attribute of the psyche) of appearance as appearance (i.e., as the material act of appearing as such). In short, one could say that the Perturbing is to psychoanalysis what the *θαύμα* is to philosophy.

On the basis of this perspective, it is therefore possible to completely overturn the Freudian discourse, identifying in the ‘civilized’ removal of animism immanent to the plane of reality an abolishing (i.e., essentially nihilistic) drive proper to the modern subject, which reduces its confrontation with the world to the sclerotized relationship between a supposedly scientific *cogito* and, all around, the whole of *res extensae* present-at-hand.

From this point of view, psychoanalysis is on the one hand ambiguous, because it still needs, in order to justify its own discourse, to admit the Perturbing, and on the other hand ‘negationist,’ because in order to think of its own episteme—and its own inherence in modernity—as ‘civilized,’ it must deny the reality of its own *prima materia*, reducing the Perturbing, when viewed from the perspective of animism, to the ‘spin-off’ of a *μη ὄν*. An approach, this, integrally subverted by cinema, which instead of denying animism displays it, that is, literally giving rise to Animation and thus exhibiting in all its seductive power the reality of the Perturbing.

Thus, cinema brings to the surface not the childish suggestion, but *the truth* of primordial animism that the process of civilization has removed. Hence, too, perhaps, the incredible ability it has to attract our attention, to polarize the gaze. And—far from secondary—the fact that cinema is *in no way* spectacle. The latter, in fact, as Debord perfectly understood, “est le mouvement autonome du non-vivant” (I.2), while cinema is as such Animation and its movement the exact opposite of an “inversion concrète de la vie” (I.2), since it is, in the cinematic becoming, Animation that expresses as such, in the form of pure representation, that is, as integrally psychicized matter, the ἐνέργεια of the vital, the Perturbance that feeds it. “Autonomous movement of the non-living” can be said, if anything, to be that of the automaton—into which, moreover, the ‘showman’ is easily converted—certainly not the (mimetic) psychology of the actor, an expression which, however, does not refer to the ‘inner motions’ of her acting self, but to the fact that her shape, represented on screen, embodies and exhibits psychic contents with the kinematics of her own gestures.

Since for cinema psyche is the transformation of every possible *realium*—entity happening relation—into an animated representation. Everything that is cinematically becomes a ‘represented,’ that is, a psychic state endowed with an image. Whereas in the ordinary world of perception this step is abstract and necessarily incomplete—we perceive as representations (images) things that are not just representations—in cinema it becomes paradoxically real, because we perceive zero-thickness cinemes, i.e., purely sign-like entities that are actually just representations.

Perhaps one begins to see cinema only when developing a vision that definitively out-classes and annihilates the ordinary one, *truly* surpassing the entity in the representation—and not, therefore, continuing to drag it into and with it, as the empirical residue of every cognitive theory incapable of getting rid of its own miserable ‘will to know.’ To see cinema one must initiate herself into a vision that, in representations, knows how to see not an imitation of the real but its incessant derealization, for it is only with and from it that the world is generated as concrete content, thus as psychic (objective) experience in a sense that is not merely psychological (subjective-individual). Cinema, therefore, also envisions the Oedipal act of blinding: extinguishing the optical insistence on the neutralizing regime of appearances in order to gain a further view of the real: the cinematographic psychedelia of Being.

The cinematographic psyche, that is, the moving image of the fact that there is a perceivable incorporeal form of the relation between all things that are, is the extended place that contains the exteriority of each thing to each other, the emission of the cosmos into animate sign. Psyche-delia, ‘psyche manifesting,’ is thus a name for the cinematographic fact that on such a place—nothing but the screen—all things participate in the universal movement of Animation.

Whereas, moreover, for psychoanalysis, reality nexuses are psychic in a subjective sense, that is, representations of the ‘mind,’ for cinema they are objective representations endowed with material movement. Cinema thus appears as the real ontology of that to which psychoanalysis is the inner projection. Where psychoanalysis projects inwardly, cinema externalizes, imagines—that is, places in image—materially the external. Cinema, contrary to popular belief, is thus the reverse of a projection. Is it then the *reverse of psychoanalysis* as the removal of its removed? If so, the screen on which cinema passes could be described as the strip, external, of the same Möbius tape within which psychoanalytic discourse takes place. We know, however, that the topology of the tape does not involve an inside and an outside.... Does it mean then that, ultimately, cinema and psychoanalysis, epistemic

operations that are moreover almost coeval, share a same flowing dimension? Perhaps this is precisely why our civilization is defined by not being able to take our eyes off what is happening on the screen. Screenness—first cinematographic and then telematic—is what grants a continuous contemplation of the real dynamic of the soul: psychoanalytic reality of desire in action.

### 3 Apotheosis and Blinding

One cannot fail, for an exhaustive consideration of Corman's film, to deal with the strictly Oedipal ending, in which we witness the ultimate blinding of Dr. Xavier. Thus is realized, as the outcome of the *Blendungskomplex* evoked in the opening, the coincidence of blinding and death drive, where the former is the final outcome of the latter. But that is not all, for, as in the quintessential psychoanalytic tragedy, the accomplishment of blinding has the significance of cognitive completion. Through the blinding, the doctor finally sees and knows. But what, exactly, does he see and know?



In the tense closing scenes Milland, now hunted down by his chasers (recall that he was involved in an unpremeditated murder), makes a frantic attempt to escape, but his condition—he is in a patent state of confusion, obliterated by the terminal stage of the blinding Hypervision that afflicts him—portends he will not get far. After, tie loosened, he tumbled badly off an edge, he continues to stumble over his steps. We follow him in wide shot, seeking shelter between two rows of cars as the helicopter looms low overhead chasing him. The landscape is an exemplary combination of peri-Hollywoodian geography and dystopia: San Fernando Valley (?) but already foreshadowing *Zabriskie Point's* flight in (only allegorical) direction of Big Sur, location of the later *The Trip* (1967), in which Roger Corman will further expand the psychedelic warnings of *X: The Man with the X-Ray Eyes*. One wanders desperately, through mental quicksands, waiting for them to swallow, until—a millenarianist twist and yet so consistent with the *discontents* of American civilization—the doctor finds himself under a tent hosting one of those evangelical sideshows to which a varied iconography has made us accustomed: religion as a sectarian form of showbiz.



The staggering entrance is worthy of a drunkard in a saloon. The preacher, didactically crazed as the character predicts, incites the *ecclesia* of proselytes against the sulfurous seductions of sin. Scientology western format, but with soteriological reminiscences from The (hooked) Family. Tanatopolitics, circus and desert. The doctor comes to the altar, *toller Mensch* visionary and damned, and, instead of bowing his head, to the possessed Savonarola, who asks him with haughtiness “Are you a sinner? Do you wish to be saved?”, he replies with prophetic blasphemy:

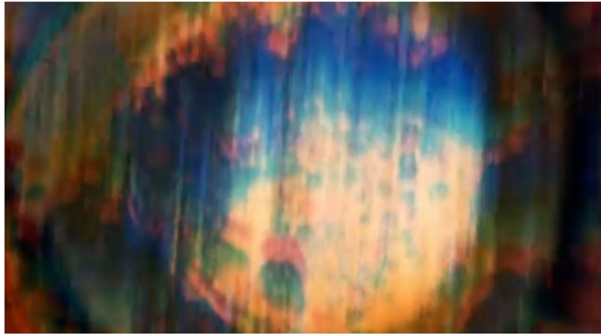


Saved? No. I’ve come to tell you what I see! There are great darkneses, farther than time itself. And beyond the darkness a light that glows, and changes. And in the center of the universe, the Eye that sees us all....

The doctor’s eye has gone fatally black. Hardly in the history of cinema, except perhaps with some alien’s teardrop-shaped photoreceptors, it has come to be expressed more powerfully the ocular nihilism whereby, to be annihilated, is the first characteristic of the living, the gleaming of the pupil. Xavier’s eye continues to shimmer, but his is an integrally darkened *shining*, foreboding doom. To speak, somehow, is a living dead who, from the netherworld into which his tremendous ‘*optique au noir*’ has plunged him, reveals the afterlife to the still terrestrials. And what form does this absolute Ulteriority take that nevertheless seems to speak the truth about all that is, destiny and invisible source of all visible things?

We will begin by saying that the doctor, tragically blinded, now sees the Origin of Perturbance, that is, from what the universal radiation that animates things comes. If the ordinary eye—the ocular relation between subject and world means psychoanalytically this—sees

Animation but cannot comprehend it, and this very thing engenders in the Being disquiet, the blinded eye, thus the dialectical opposite of the ordinary one, sees the opposite of the inexplicability of Animation, that is, finally, what animates it. And what animates Animation? To our knowledge: Perturbance, what in the doctor's anti-sermon is called "beyond the darkness a light that glows, and changes." "Beyond the darkness" produced by the blinding, that is, beyond the annihilation of ordinary sight, there becomes visible that which is revealed to the Hypervision of those who have matured a metaphysical view of the Ulterior, thus "a light that glows, and changes," precisely the appearance of Perturbance as the photoelectric effect of a very high-frequency radioactive ontology. But Perturbance, from what does Perturbance itself derive? The psychedelic cataract that still stands between the words of the prophecy and its content openly declares that, even with respect to Perturbance, there is a Beyond.



Well, what does grant the Perturbance after a photoelectric waterfall washes away its dazzling iridescence?

The eye reappears. Not the one, however, of abolished sight, but the cosmically primeval one "that sees us all." Which eye is it? Beyond the Perturbance, in which the eye dies, a Hypereye of a higher order is revealed. The fact that it looks without being visible indicates that from the Hypereye originally emanates all vision. It is the very foundation of visibility, the optical unity that all visible things, precisely because they are visible, presuppose. Perturbance itself, in order to be noematically grasped (what has been called the Perturbance Vision), presupposes visibility as a condition of its own manifestation. From this point of view, the doctor's anti-sermon has an explicitly Platonic tone, that is, it recalls that absolute monism of visibility which, in the *Republic*, culminate in the Supreme Good as the ontological luminosity essential for a view of ideas to be given. Ideas are ideas, that is, 'visible essences,' only in visibility, which, therefore, must be originally guaranteed by that-from-which it itself comes. The model, in apocalyptic-dramatic version, is analogous, but Platonic verticism in the film's finale is associated with the psychoanalytic Great Other. Let us see how, simplifying the steps to a minimum.

In Lacanian context, the subject does not possess language but is its bearer (a discourse, moreover, which, if taken literally, would imply the coincidence of poetry, philosophy and prophecy). *Dasein* is crossed by language and this, in crossing it, deposits something of its 'flow rate' in words. Reversing the perspective, one could also say that the passage of language triggers in the *Dasein* the resonance of words. What is decisive in this relationship is the fact that there is a dynamic co-partnership between language and subject—that

a perpetually active tension exists between the linguistic dimension and the subjective word. Now, the Great Other is the universal (analytic) moment of this tension, in the same way that, on another ‘scale,’ sex is the universal (driving) moment of the relation between life and gender. The Great Other keeps language in tension, i.e., active, in the subject and between subjects, but without ever exhausting in any of these relations its own preliminary and actual surplus.

To apply this to *The Man with the X-Ray Eyes* is to rethink the Lacanian model from an optical perspective. Just as the Great Other is the relational tension between language and speaker/s, the Hypereye as the foundation and origin of visibility is the necessary and ever-present optical unity that makes possible, for the seer and the Seeing (Voyance), the relations of representation. The Great Other is the optical unity of representations. But since, as we have seen, representations are the analytic form of psychic relations—and of the world as a system of psychic relations—the Hypereye as the Great Other “that sees us all” is nothing but the originary optical unity that presides over the psychoanalytic relations of which ‘the world as representation’ is composed. The Hypereye as the Great Other is the originary optical unity of psychoanalytic representations. *The Hypereye is the supreme psycho(p)tic(al) unity of all representations.*

The psycho(p)tic(al) character of such a drive is posited by the film’s ending in two ways: on the one hand because it implies annihilation—of sight but, blatantly, also of the life of the protagonist, who, in a hypothetical sequel, could at best wander like a bum, re-adapting for the suburbs of LA the events of Oedipus at Colonus—; on the other because it coincides—and here the psychotic explicitness—with the megalomaniacal delirium of a ‘soul’ that has gone so far as to believe it can grasp God with its eyes. To recognize that, at the bottom of the I-see, there is always and only a He (It) sees, is this not indeed the supreme terror? And does not a contact with this evidence ultimately lead to ‘losing one’s mind’?

Blinding and divine *μᾶνία*, then, because the coming definitively short of physiological sight coincides, for Milland/Xavier, with contact with the Hypereye of the Great Other. Blinding finally grants Apotheosis: *unio mystica* with God—thus, in truth, God himself—as the crowning achievement of the death drive. And it could not be otherwise, if the affirmation of God’s existence is as such, for the human being, the supreme nihilistic act, implicit posing of herself as nothing. A spiral of thoughts that it may be prudent to abandon....

While instead it is worth focusing on the Infigurability of the Hypereye. He sees, *It* sees, it was said. Thus conceived, the supreme optical unity has formally the same character as that which Kant, in a famous passage, evokes with the following speculative *climax*: “Durch dieses Ich, oder Er, oder Es (das Ding), welches denkt, wird nun nichts weiter, als ein transzendentes Subjekt der Gedanken vorgestellt=X [...]”—“By means of this I, or he, or it (the thing) that thinks, nothing else is represented but a transcendental subject of thoughts=X [...]” (*KrV*, A 346/B 404). Readjusting to our subject, we might dare:

Through this Hypereye, or the Great Other, or It (the Thing) that sees, nothing but a transcendental principle of seeing=X is posited.

We insist on this passage because—certainly forcing it, but it is a risk that seems necessary to take—we would like to match the ‘X’ it names with the one in the film’s original title: *X*:

*The Man with the X-Ray Eyes*. Truly, indeed, the explication was added at the promotional stage, the actual title initially being just *X*. Director and production were thus undoubtedly alluding to X-ray technology, but there is nothing to prevent us from speculating that unintentionally, or rather: unconsciously, the title was a ‘noumenal’ reference to the originary optical unit letting be and ensuring the visibility of the visible.

And yet, for all the things said, X is also the deep unknown variable that points to the Animation nexus among all representations: the fact that all are animate and precisely for this reason psychically characterized. The world of animate entities is the optical content of the psyche, but Animation itself, as the dynamic unity of all that is animate, thus as the principle of the optical panpsychism of all things that are, cannot itself be a representation. Nor, likewise, since it makes all things visible, can the supreme principle be seen. Rather than being seen, in fact, It sees: it is the Hypereye “that sees us all” and which, by seeing, releases Animation as the universal attribute of Perturbance in which, for the psyche, are all things that are. But then the Hypereye as X, as the principle of Animation *qua* psychic nexus between all representations, names at bottom nothing less than the psychoanalytic Thing, its οὐσία without antecedence, its οὐσία without substratum, which instead of sustaining emits the background radiation of animated Perturbance. X, therefore, is the psychoanalytic Thing as that which emits the animate perturbation of psychic representations of which the kinematics of the moving world is made.

But the kinematics of the world in motion is a Cineoptics. So the Hypereye=X is a Cine-Eye—of which the *Κινογλαζ* remains the embryonic intuition, but which is intended to be reversed here, because Vertov’s Cine-Eye is still a lens looking at the world, while the Cine-Eye as Hypereye is the from-where of the animated *εὐέργεια* of representations flowing for the psyche. Since if the world seen as a system of animated representations is the direct content of the psyche, coinciding with what the subject constantly witnesses, then cinema cannot in any way be reduced to what is seen, to the ‘filmed’. Cinema is instead the continuous emanation of this seeing, the Thing from which it ceaselessly gushes forth and to which, in the form of an unknown variable, the X that marks the ‘real’ title of the film alludes. X is the originary emitter of all the signs that will become material representations of the psyche, that is, intramundane signs in motion. X is the source of optical relations, the infigurable Hypereye “that sees us all.” *X is the unknown name of the psychoanalytic Thing which, in the regressive Apotheosis that blinds every gaze and obscures every image, coincides with the cinematographic Thing*. That which emits cinema as the ceaseless production of the psychic coincidence of the real and the imaginary.

The eschatological move, corresponding to the doctor’s final annihilation, is introduced by a fulminating Gospel quote. To Xavier’s sacrilegious vision, which scandalously claims to grasp and say the Nothingness in and of God, the preacher responds with an irrefutable exorcism: “You see sin and the devil, but the Lord has told what to do about it. Said Matthew in Chapter Five, ‘If thine eye offends thee, pluck it out!’”. Bystanders obsessively repeat the curse, urging to torment, until an exhausted Milland, lost in the darkness of deepest space, sticks his fingers in his eye sockets.



The last frame, freeze image with which the film closes, sees Dr. Xavier, his eye sockets empty, injected with blood, definitively annihilated, a demon trans(dis)figured by pain on whose face even our gaze is finally called upon to quiet down, to no longer want to see beyond.

Transfiguration, annihilation and apotheosis coincide as in martyrdom: ecstasy of images and of cruelty. Having reached the foreshadow of God, the *'optique au noir'* practiced by the doctor also finally suppresses itself and its author. Who has 'ingodded' itself in the supreme Eye by abolishing its own. But this 'ingodding' (from the Dantean "indiarsi") into the Hypereye is the Apotheosis: touching with the dying life, with the fulfilled death drive, brought to the extreme, the deepest and most essential knowledge. Perhaps we too should

learn to follow the doctor. Like inside a black hole that nevertheless also contains all possible light, beyond the event horizon, we are blind in God's orbit.

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**Competing Interests** The authors declare no competing interests.

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