Filozofski vestnik | Volume XXXVII | Number 2 | 2016 | 79–94

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The Spectre In The Screen[1]

Theories of spectatorship and cinema are nothing new. In fact, they abound. On the other hand, theories of spectatorship and animation are still rare. Rarer still are theories that implicate animation and cinema, including in the area of spectatorship.

For us, beyond as well as between theories of cinema spectatorship that attribute a pure passivity to the spectator and those that grant him a pure mastery, and beyond as well as between those that present themselves as purely text based and those that present themselves as purely context based, lies something, something missing from consideration that calls for acknowledgement, something integral to cinema spectatorship as it is to cinema "as such," as it is to film spectatorship and to film "as such" – animation, film and media studies' "blind spot."

In accord with my larger project to bring to the fore the crucial nature of animation for the thinking of not only all forms but all aspects of cinema, of film, of film "as such," this paper seeks to elaborate a theory of spectatorship "proper to" animation, to film "as such" as a form of animation.

Not that I have not broached such a theory already.

This paper is ghosted, like all papers.

Ghosted especially by my "The Crypt, the Haunted House, of Cinema" (Cholodenko, 2004). At its end, I call for the rethinking of *all* aspects of cinema as form of animation as form of the animatic through the spectre, through what I

[1] This paper was presented at the SCREENSCAPES PAST PRESENT FUTURE conference at The University of Sydney, 29 November-1 December, 2007. It was originally published in *Animation Studies*, 3 (2008).

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there elaborate as the Cryptic Complex, composed of *the uncanny, the return of death as spectre, endless mourning and melancholia and cryptic incorporation*. I propose that the elements of the Cryptic Complex offer a way of conceptualizing film rich in implication, including for the thinking of the sense(s) of cinema and for the rethinking of received theories of cinema, including those of ideology, the imaginary, fetishism, narrative, spectatorship, identification, etc. From this point of view, that of the necrospective, that of the vanishing point of view, every film and every analysis is a tale from – and of – the crypt, making it necessary to conceive of cinema, of film, as *spectrography* (the writing of the spectre – ghost writing), as *cryptography* (the writing of the crypt), as *thanatography* (the writing of death). To conceive of spectatorship, as of analysis, as *spectreship*, as haunting and being haunted, as encrypting, as mourning and melancholia in perpetuity, no matter what other affects might be generated to cover them over. From this point of view, there is always a spectre and a speculator in the spectator-analyst, always a corpse and a crypt. In fact, the spectres are always in the plural; and they are never laid to rest, never resolved, never reconciled. So, too, the analysis of the crypt, itself "the crypt of an analysis," as Jacques Derrida declares (Derrida, 1986: p. xxiv).

Ghosted too by my more recent "(The) Death (of) the Animator, or: The Felicity of Felix" (Cholodenko, 2007),[2] a text following on from "The Crypt, the Haunted House, of Cinema." In this text I elaborate that spectre not simply as psyche but as *psuché*. *Psuché* is the Homeric simulacral figure, the spectre, that leaves the body of the dead one to wander as flitting shade in Hades, which is, not insignificantly for us, Maxim Gorky's Kingdom of Shadows, his (for us) Kingdom of Cinema, of Animation. No matter that Plato "turned" *psuché* the spectre into psyche the soul, he for us was never able to master the spectre – who could?! – a failure reanimated in every attempt by all his avatars to be master of the games played by the world and its objects, including master of cinema, of film animation – be it maker, analyst, theorist, spectator.

Plato's reversal and ontologizing of the Homeric *psuché* as soul is inherited in the Latin *anima* (air, breath, soul, spirit, mind) and in the soul of Christianity. And in animation thought as ontological, that is, of the order of presence, es-

[2] Part II of the paper is in *Animation Studies*, 2, 2007, on the Society for Animation Studies website. Part I joined it there in 2009.

sence, the Platonic psyche, the Latin *anima*, the soul of Christianity. Which is to say that *psuché*, for me what Derrida calls the hauntological, spectres psyche, the ontological – pure soul, spirit, mind – as it does all rooted in psyche and the ontological, making them the special case, the reduced, conditional form, of *psuché*, of the hauntological.

Spectring the mind, *psuché* makes of thoughts ghosts.

And I would add: as "in-betweener," to use a term of animation, *psuché in like manner* spectres the body and all associated with it, with materiality.

Lying at the "origin" of both cinema and mind, animation as *psuché* cryptically incorporates cinema in and as mind and mind in and as cinema, as *psuché* (and/as *animus*) likewise lies at the "origin" of both cinema and body, of cinema in and as body and body in and as cinema. And *psuché* as knot, as we see in the hair of Madeleine/Judy and Carlotta Valdez in *Vertigo* – that spiral/twist called a "Psyche Knot" – inextricably knots (such) binary oppositions, creating knotty problems, problems incapable of resolution, definitiveness, finality, even as the always already doubled nature of the spectre makes definition impossible, including of animation "itself."

Animation – as what we call the *animatic* (the very singularity of animation, anterior and superior to animation, the condition of possibility and at the same time impossibility of animation, at once the inanimation in and of animation and animation in and of inanimation, that nonessence at once enabling and disenabling animation as essence, at once the life of death and death of life) – is of the order of the hauntological, of *psuché*, the Homeric *eidolon* – of at once this world and "an inaccessible elsewhere" (Vernant, 1991: p.187).

In "(The) Death (of) the Animator" I declare that cinema as form of animation as form of the animatic calls not simply for a psychoanalysis but a "*psuché*-analysis," an analysis by definition impossible of resolution, for *psuché*, even as it enables such a possibility, at the same time spells its death, as it does that of a science of the psyche, that is, psycho-logy, which would be an impossible science of the double, of spectres, *psuché* turning that "science" into a séance. I would add: even as it makes a science of cinema and of animation impossible. Such a "*psuché*-analysis" encrypts the analyst and spectator within it, at once

turning analyst into spectator and spectator into analyst, making it impossible to say which is which, commingling them inextricably, turning spectator and analyst into what they were never not – speculators, theorists (from the Greek *theoria*, meaning a looking at, contemplation, speculation, from *theoros*, spectator).

Irretrievably speculative, not only ghosted by but ghosting them in turn, this paper draws forth from these texts and their calls, in this case to extend in particular the theory of spectatorship already broached in those texts, considering the spectator and the screen.

In so doing, it is immediately confronted with the question: is my call for a *psuché*-analysis of cinema, of film – of film as a form of animation – one not already responded to to a significant degree in the application to film since the 1990s of Jacques Lacan's psychoanalytics of vision in the work of Joan Copjec, Slavoj Žižek and Todd McGowan – work serving as a corrective to the 1970s French and English Marxist film theorizations that brought Lacan's article "The Mirror Phase as Formative of the Function of the I" to the theorizing of the cinematic apparatus (even while those theorisations at times misunderstood and misrepresented it)? Such theorisations were at best partial applications, ignoring, or in the case of Christian Metz undervaluing, Lacan's complex elaboration of the scopic field in his *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis*, an ignoring that included Lacan's focus there on the term that became increasingly significant for him – the Real.

Here I turn to Holbein's *The Ambassadors*.

Lacan makes it the centrepiece of his model of vision (Lacan, 1979: p. 91 and p. 106), the overlapping triangles diagramming the irreducible split, the antinomy, between the eye and the gaze of the irreconcilably split subject for him – the subject seeing the object as image and the object gazing at the subject as *screen*, turning the subject thereby into the object of the object, into, Lacan says, a "picture," a "*photo-graph*" (Lacan, 1979: p. 106), that is, a drawing/writing with light[3] – what is the determination of the subject in the field of the other

[3] On the relation of drawing and animation, see my "*Who Framed Roger Rabbit,* or the Framing of Animation," "The Illusion of the Beginning: A Theory of Drawing and Animation," "Still Photography?" and "The Animation of Cinema."

Hans Holbein, *The Ambassadors*

by the gaze, which is *objet petit a* (in English little object a, a for *autre*, other) in the scopic field.

For Lacan, the scopic field is one where the subject seeing is always already given-to-be-seen by what is for Lacan privileged – the object – the object *petit a*, object-cause of desire. Its effect is not only to keep desire desire by keeping it unfulfilled, but also to undermine the Imaginary illusion of the mastery of the subject over all he surveys, as well as to introduce constitutive lack into the field of signification known as the Symbolic – *objet petit a* the void, emptiness, abyss, around which the symbolic order is structured (Žižek, 1989: p. 170). Object *petit a* stands in for Lacan for and as the Real, his third term in the trio Imaginary, Symbolic and Real. The Real is what is excluded from reality, including the Imaginary and the Symbolic, for reality to be reality. It is a hole in reality, an ungraspable, undeterminable, non-signifying traumatic kernel of non-sense at the heart of reality, at the heart of the subject, at once their very condition of possibility and impossibility.

Obviously, it cannot be totally excluded from reality, rather it is traced within it, it even erupts within it, even constitutively so, Joan Copjec tells us (Copjec, 2002: p. 184), which makes it for me like Derrida's repressed but irrepressible trace of the radically other operating within, and at once enabling and disenabling, the structure of difference that is the sign. Indeed, Lacan declares that the trace of the Real as stain of the gaze is marked "at every stage of the constitution of the world, in the scopic field" (Lacan 1979, p. 74), as the trace is likewise for Derrida, who, calling the spectre "perhaps the hidden figure of all figures" (Derrida, 1994: p. 120), turns the trace into a form of the spectre.

The Holbein, a *vanitas* painting, a *memento mori* (a reminder of death), exemplifies Lacan's animated, indeed animatic, modeling of vision. He declares:

> ... the secret of this picture is given at the moment when, moving slightly away, little by little, to the left, then turning around, we see what the magical floating object signifies. It reflects our own nothingness, in the figure of the death's head. It is a use, therefore, of the geometral dimension of vision in order to capture the subject, an obvious relation with desire which, nevertheless, remains enigmatic. (Lacan, 1979: p. 92)

Detail of Hans Holbein, *The Ambassadors*

Lacan identifies the anamorphotic skull in the foreground as *la tache*, which means *stain*, *spot* – a stain, spot, that is not only, he states, "the phallic symbol, the anamorphic ghost," of the Symbolic but that which is superior to it, exemplifying the very function of vision as trap for the subject of desire: "the gaze as such, in its pulsatile, dazzling and spread out function" (Lacan, 1979: p. 89). What would be second spectre – Žižek calls it Lacan's "fantasmatic spectre" (Žižek, 2005, 2006: p. 239) of the Real – that of *objet petit a*, the "primordially" lost object, seen only by looking awry, that oblique look marking the thing that forever eludes the grasp of the subject, that look that turns, that is, metamorphoses, anamorphoses – reanimates – the signifier of lack of the Symbolic order into the lack of the signifier of the Real.

So Lacan had found the spectres traced in the Holbein long before I had,[4] the *psuché* and the *psuché* of the *psuché*, the *psuché* "as such." His psychoanalysis is *psuché*-"analysis."

Now, another word Lacan uses for the stain, the spot, is the *screen*, stating: "...if I am anything in the picture, it is always in the form of the screen, which I earlier called the stain, the spot" (Lacan, 1979: p. 97).

So the stain, spot, spectre, is the screen, the screen of the gaze of *objet petit a*. It is the point of vanishing being of the subject. The dead point, the point where the picture "looks back," telling the subject it is always already accounted for, inscribed within, enframed and determined by, it.

The screen is, we would say, the crypt of the subject, the place of cryptic incorporation, where the subject is encrypted as its own impossibility. It is the "place" where the subject is always already turned into a spectre, into spectres.

Indeed, one day, looking awry at the Oxford English Dictionary definition of the word *screen*, I saw these words: "The form has probably been influenced by confusion with screne = SCRINE, chest, coffer."

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4 See "(The) Death (of) the Animator, or: The Felicity of Felix," Part II: "A Difficulty in the Path of Animation Studies," *Animation Studies*, 2 (2007), p. 10, note 3.

A check then disclosed that the words *chest, coffer,* are etymologically and semantically related to the word coffin!

The screen as coffin.

Crucially, Todd McGowan, treating of the Holbein, says, "Even when a manifestation of the gaze does not make death evident directly like this, it nonetheless carries the association insofar as the gaze itself marks the point in the image at which the subject is completely subjected to it" (McGowan, 2007: p. 7), to the gaze.

And the stain, spot, spectre, screen is *scotoma*, another term Lacan uses, which means a dimming of sight accompanied by dizziness, vertigo, and is term for the blind spot in our normal field of vision. For Lacan, the consciousness of the subject is scotoma, a blind spot blind to its lack of mastery, including of the visual field, dependent as that field is on the gaze, itself blind, indeed indifferent to, but nonetheless animating of, the subject, the subject blind to the blind spot "as such" that is the *objet petit a*, blind to "that point of vanishing being" of itself (Lacan, 1979: p. 83), except when that spot is "looked at awry." It is a spot that is at once traumatizing, wounding, pricking and eluding, a *punctum* (*petite tache* for Roland Barthes, as Margaret Iversen tells us[5]) and darkness that can never be brought to the light of understanding, of grasping, and that at once organizes and disorganizes the visual field.

In other words, the *tache* (spot) is blind spot (*tache aveugle*) is screen – at once barrier and passage, at once the barrier of the passage and the passage of the barrier – like Derrida's notion of hymen.[6] It is that entity that is at once unseen,

[5] Not only does Margaret Iversen point out how Roland Barthes' thinking of the punctum takes up Lacan's *tache*, Barthes even using the term *petite tache* to characterise punctum (Iversen, 1994: p. 457), she indicates the relevance to both Lacan's and Barthes' *tache* of Georges Bataille's notion of *la tache aveugle*, the blind spot (Iversen, 1994: p. 463, note 29). See my treatment of Baudrillard's photograph, *Punto Final*, in terms of the punctum in "Still Photography?"

[6] As I treat of it in "*Who Framed Roger Rabbit*,..." Hymen is one of Derrida's many undecidable, deconstructing figures, in this case meaning both virgin and consummated, neither simply virgin nor simply consummated, at the same time (along with such likewise deconstructed oppositions as confusion/distinction, identity/difference, veil/unveiling, inside/outside, etc.) In that essay, I link the figure of the hymen to that of the eye of the spectator,

in fact is never seen "as such," but that allows one to see, is the very condition of possibility of "sight" – the blindness that make sight at once possible and impossible.[7]

The *tache*, stain, spot, blind spot, spectre, scotoma marks the point of the turn, where the *image* turns on itself, uncannily turning into *screen*, turning the subject from illusory mastery to nothingness, an effect of not only metamorphosis but anamorphosis, not only an animation- but an animatic-effect. Ana-, as in anamorphosis, meaning *back, again*, reminds us of the turn, the return, including of death, including of Freud's death drive, for which all uncanny returns are stand-ins, the return of death to the subject and the subject to it, which the subject had never left nor death it. And of the phantasm, the spectre, of immortality beyond the cycle of life and death that the death drive urges upon the subject. It reminds us too of the deformation in every reformation, and vice versa, of the difference in every repetition, and vice versa, and of the destitution in every restitution, and vice versa. Mourning and melancholia are its affects.

So the blind spot of the gaze, equivalent to the blind spot of the mind – the psyche – is for me *psuché – the spectre not only in but as the screen and the screen not only in but as the spectre*, the screen "as such," the spectre "as such." In spectring the subject, the gaze turns the subject into spectre(s).

Copjec writes: the field of vision is "haunted by what remains invisible in it, by the impossible to see" (Copjec, 2002: p. 94). This is the effect on Lacan of the *fantasmatic,* that is, *spectral*, object he calls *objet petit a*, the object-cause of desire, the object that, like that famous floating sardine can, "looks back" at him, an object therefore with *a life of its own*, *lifedeath*, animate(d) and animating, indeed animatic, an object that not merely attracts but *seduces* him, as I discovered when I caught Alan Sheridan badly mistranslating seduces as attracts! (Lacan, 1979: p. 112).

to the self, to the cinema screen and to film "as such," "the hymen of the eye/ 'I'... disseminating the unity of meaning, of presence and self-presence as identity" (p. 233), including the identity of film "as such," not only penetrated but never penetrated at the same time.

7 Parenthetically, Derrida's treatment of the parergon, the tain, the supplement, is relevant to the degree that the screen is and has been regarded as supporting act to the star, the image. The screen as repressed but irrepressible trace of the other would never not be returning to the image as what at once enables and disenables it.

Here Lacan crosses paths with Jean Baudrillard, with whom he has in my articulation already met, without my having the space to divulge it to you, but let us at least note their common assertion of the superior life of the object and its games over the subject and his desires, the quantum object even, "horizon of the subject's disappearance" (Baudrillard, 2000: pp. 76-77), object which seduces the subject, plays with the subject, who for Lacan can return the favor and play with the object as a mask (to its mask, I would add), who for Baudrillard can return the challenge. And they seem to share the simulacrum hiding (the) nothing – the nothing which haunts reality – the question: why is there nothing rather than something?, and the secret.

Here let me simply propose: Lacan's Real is to reality as Baudrillard's Seduction is to his second order of simulacra, that of production and simulation, which order he too calls "reality," making reality the special case, the reduced conditional form, of both Lacan's Real and Baudrillard's Seduction.[8] Which is to say that the *objet petit a* as gaze lures, *seduces*, the subject, leads it astray, annihilates it and the putative mastery that the Imaginary, that production, reproduction and simulation, installed in the psyche.

I call *objet petit a objet petit animatique*, at once animating and deanimating reality and the subject.

I call it *psuché*.

The animating, indeed animatic, spectre of Death the animator, Death which, as formless form, as Lacan's *informe*, gives all form, but is "itself" never given as such, just like Eisenstein's plasmaticness, which for him is essence of animation and for me non-essence of animation as the animatic. Like the Thing in John Carpenter's *The Thing from Another World*, which is for me the very figure of Freud's death drive as "organic elasticity" of protozoa (Freud, 1984: p. 309).

[8] And as Derrida's *différance* is to presence, making presence the special case, the reduced conditional form, of *différance*. I must note here: the thinkers whose work I privilege, Baudrillard, Derrida, Lacan et al., are not only thinkers of animation and the animatic but animatic thinkers of it. Please consult my Introduction to *The Illusion of Life 2: More Essays on Animation* for an elaboration of this point.

Indeed, insofar as Lacan's *tuché, "the encounter with the real"* (Lacan, 1979: p. 53), is for me an *animating* encounter with his amoeba-like, for me plasmatic, lamella (Lacan, 1979: pp. 197-199), it is an encounter with the Thing in the Carpenter film. Žižek in fact links the alien Thing in the Carpenter film to Lacan's lamella, marking its uncanny, morphing, infinitely plastic, simulacral, undead nature, declaring "the alien is libido as pure life, indestructible and immortal" (Žižek, 2006: p. 63), and describing it as standing "for the Real in its most terrifying imaginary dimension, as the primordial abyss that swallows everything, dissolving all identities..." (Žižek, 2006: p. 64). An encounter with Lacan's lamella, with his Thing, is therefore for me an encounter with *psuché, the animatic*.

The Thing's capacity to seduce by simulating, making whatever it simulates enter its realm of metamorphosis, even despite itself, turning it from its destination to its destiny, cannot but recall for me the way in which Baudrillard turns Freud's death drive on Freud, making Freud enter Baudrillard's realm of metamorphosis, turning death into reversion, reversal, the very turn of Seduction, the turn that for Baudrillard *is* Seduction – the reversibility of anything and everything – and into challenge. In such a light, *psuché,* the animatic, is not only fatal to reconciliation "as such," it is never not fatal to itself.

But here we must ask: Is all this not Maxim Gorky's experience of cinema as form of animation as form of the animatic as he relates it in his for me account of the unaccountable, of what will not, can never, compute? And as I treat of it in "The Crypt, the Haunted House, of Cinema" and "(The) Death (of) the Animator..."?

Can we not read Gorky's response through Lacan, through his seductive, animatic model of vision as he exemplifies it with Holbein's *The Ambassadors* and as we have elaborated it? In Lacanian terms, would it not be fair to say that Gorky was traumatized, wounded, by his encounter with the gaze as *objet petit a*? Gorky "saw" the stain, the spot, the scotoma, the blind spot – the screen as apparition, his own apparition as spectre – and the blind spot of the blind spot – death, his own death, his own lifedeath, his condition as "undead," (his)

reality put on the spot by the Real, by *psuché*, the spectre that screens – that is, at once installs, "reveals," conceals (re-veils), and retracts – (the) nothing.[9]

In fact, Gorky's description of his experience of cinema makes of the image as well as what it images spectres, to which he adds more spectres with his famous declaration: "Suddenly a strange flicker passes through the screen and the picture stirs to life," metamorphosing from still photographic image to mobile cinematographic image, passing from virtual animation to actual animation.

He saw the spectre that is this uncannily animating flicker stirring the image and what it images to life, turning still image into mobile image, and turning that mobile image (back) on itself, turning image into screen, at once drawing that "life," or rather lifedeath, forward and withdrawing it, indeed drawing it forward in withdrawing it and withdrawing it in drawing it forward at the same time.

And he adds another spectre yet: the spectator. Cinema spectres the spectator even as the spectator spectres it, each having the other as its spectre, its haunted house, its corpse and its crypt.

And more yet: the maker and the analyst-theorist.

And all are in the plural.

These spectres, screens, haunted houses and crypts not only multiply but concatenate, at once spectring, screening, housing and encrypting and in turn being spectred, screened, housed and encrypted in and by each other.

The Cryptic Complex.

Animation as the animatic turns the spectator into what it always already was, a spectre, a spectre of the other, ghosted by and ghosting it, including ghosted by and ghosting the cinema and the cinematic apparatus, its characters and its author/maker, even as the cinema and its apparatus are ghosted by animation and its apparatus, as all these are ghosted by and ghosting the animatic appa-

9 I would add: Gorky experienced Barthes' punctum, he experienced Bataille's blind spot.

ratus. As well, the animatic (and its apparatus) ghosts all models theorizing the spectator as simply a fully living human being (as form of presence, soul, spirit), including those models figuring that spectator as either merely passive or merely active.

The "life" of cinema, of film, as form of animation is *psuché*, the animatic, life-death, making the subject's sight and the image the special case, the reduced conditional form, of the gaze and the screen, making the subject the special case, the reduced conditional form, of the object, *objet petit a,* making life for me, as Nietzsche put it, the special case of death.

As for the hyperreality, the virtual reality, of today's world, let me repeat this thought of Baudrillard, a thought marking the passage *from* the mirror stage of "reality," where the self was accompanied by a shadow which paradoxically *made* the self a self, a self as constitutively always divided from itself, always spectred by its shadow even as it spectred its shadow, *to* the screen stage of hyperreality, the stage of the clone, the revenge of the mirror people who break the mirror and enter into "reality."

As Baudrillard says, "He who has no shadow is merely the shadow of himself" (Baudrillard, 2004: p. 103).

Or as we would say: "He who has no *psuché* is merely the *psuché* of 'himself'."

The crypt of "him"-"self."

"His" "own" coffin.

"His" "own" Kingdom of Shadows, not the old Hades, the old spectre, of the *Other* but the Hell, the spectre, of the *Same*.

"He" is the man of but screens.

He is only screen.

He is Total Screen.

Denis Nedry of *Jurassic Park*, not only surrounded by but surrounding and indistinguishable from screens.

He is Baudrillard's Telematic Man, his Tele-Computer Man.

And he is Paul Virilio's Man of the Three Bombs (atomic bomb, cyber/information bomb and genetic bomb), after Einstein, and as well figure of Virilio's Total Accident of science (Virilio and Lotringer, 2002: pp. 135-137, 142, 153-155), as testified to by Nedry's computer, with the fascinating images attached to it – a photo of J. Robert Oppenheimer, "father" of the atomic bomb, with two papers stuck on top of it: a drawing with a mushroom-shaped cloud of the atomic bomb imaged within and doubling a thought balloon; and the words "Beginning of Baby Boom" on the paper next to it.[10]

He is Baudrillard's and Virilio's Man the extension, the prosthesis, of his machines, his vision machines, as exemplified by Deckard, with his Voight-Kampff machine, testing Rachael, in *Blade Runner*.

He is Terminal Man, too, exemplified by Miles Dyson of the Cyberdyne Corporation and Major General Robert Brewster, USAF, who arguably *have* put Skynet online...as "them"-"selves." "They" are "it" and "it" is "they."

He that is all these Men is for me avatar of that shadow, that crypt of "him"-"self," that is Dr Strangelove.

He is hyperanimated, hyperanimatic, hyper*lifedeath*: at once a life more death than death, more dead than dead, and a death more life than life, more alive than alive.

He is Baudrillard's ecstatic, Lacan's Real, in their metastatic, viral, fractal, clonal expression: hyper-*psuché*, figured for me most compellingly in the skull of the Terminator.

He is hyperspectre.

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[10] On those attachments to Nedry's computer, see my "The Nutty Universe of Animation, the 'Discipline' of All 'Disciplines', And That's Not All, Folks!."

The Death of Death.

The end... of the end...

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