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“This Is No Simulation!”: Hypermimesis from *Being John Malkovich* to *Her*

Nidesh Lawtoo 

This is no simulation! ... It's my head!

—John Malkovich, *Being John Malkovich*

It's a weird and daunting experience to let other people in their fullness into our minds.

—Charlie Kaufman, quoted in *The Philosophy of Charlie Kaufman*

How can an art such as cinema that reached its apex in the 20th century help us reflect (on) public concerns about the material effects of virtual simulations that now cast a shadow on the 21st century? If mirroring reflections between past analogic media and present digitized new media exist, what are the laws that connect and disconnect spectators to emerging forms of simulation that cannot be contained within the logic of fictional representation but affect humans in real life?

The answers to such questions differ depending on the new medium in question. Still, it is becoming increasingly clear that film in general, and a future-oriented genre such as science fiction film in particular, offer a welcome starting point for critical reflections on forms of digitized simulations that are already at play in our hyperconnected world. From *The Matrix* (Dirs. The Wachowskis, 1999) to *Avatar* (Dir. James Cameron, 2009), *Gamer* (Dirs. Mark Neveldine and Brian Taylor, 2009) to *Ex-Machina* (Dir. Alex Garland, 2015), to many others contemporary science fiction films and television series, from *Black Mirror* (Creator Charlie Brooker, 2011–2014) to *Sense 8* (Dirs. The Wachowskis, 2015), critics are encouraged to reflect on the material effects of computer-generated simulations in futuristic worlds that mirror what Manuel Castells calls “network society.”¹ They also dramatize a hyperconnected world in which “there are no essential differences or absolute demarcations between bodily existence and computer simulations” generating

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a blurring of boundaries which, as Katherine Hayles argued, are constitutive of the turn from the human to the “posthuman.”²

This posthuman turn cannot be framed within the classical laws of mimetic “representation” that informed Western realism from classical antiquity to the 20th century;³ nor can identities that may be “post” but are still linked to human bodies simply be dissolved in the sphere of postmodern “simulation” that generates an “hyperreal” world that brings about the “liquidation of all referents,” including bodily referents.⁴ Rather, I would like to suggest that it is the very being of the (post)human subject herself that oscillates between competing perspectives that both connect and disconnect reality and fiction, human bodies and digital avatars, hyperreal simulations and real forms of embodied imitation that are progressively turning spectators into copies of fictional models. As Thomas Elsaesser and Malte Hagener put it, reopening the problematic of mimesis in film studies from a new perspective: “An often discussed, highly ambivalent yet nonetheless theoretically still under-explained topic is the effect of mimesis and doubling between film and spectator.”⁵ In what follows, I further this recent return of interest in embodied forms of mimesis in cinema studies by sketching a genealogy of the ambivalent connection that ties spectators to different forms of “simulation” that might not be based on a realistic aesthetics, yet produce mimetic effects in real life nonetheless. In particular, I turn to the specific case of Spike Jonze who, in collaboration with the screenwriter Charlie Kaufman, has placed the problematic of mimesis at the center of his cinematic reflections on the power of simulation to form, conform, and transform subjectivity.⁶

While Jonze’s films do not fall squarely within the science fiction tradition, his and Kaufman’s shared interests in the protean forms mimesis can take (identification, impersonation, double lives, simulation, adaptation) run like an undercurrent throughout Jonze’s major films, from *Being John Malkovich* (1999) to *Adaptation.* (2002), to his more recent independent films, *Where the Wilde Things Are* (2009) and *Her* (2013), in-forming—giving form to—his protean oeuvre. Obviously not confined to realism, these films have not yet been explored from the angle of a contemporary conception of mimesis that goes beyond representation, and as Gunter Gebauer and Christopher Wulf put it in *Mimesis*, “press[es] outward into the social world, taking root... in individual behavior like a contagion.”⁷ In particular, Jonze’s concerns with cinematic doubles and double lives provide specific case studies to reflect (on) the real effects of mimetic experiences at play in media as diverse as the theater, the cinema, television, and more recently, new media.⁸ In the process, he opens up mimesis to embodied, affective, and contagious simulations that are neither narrowly realistic (mimesis as *aesthetic representation*), nor disconnected from human reality (mimesis as *hyperreal simulation*). Rather, they generate a spiraling

feedback loop in which the distinction between fiction and reality, representation and simulation, true self and mimetic copy, no longer holds. If only because hyperreal simulations fold back on the posthuman subject, generating real forms of affective imitation that spread contagiously across the body politic. For lack of a better term, and to distinguish it from both its realistic and hyperreal counterpart, I call this embodied form of mimetic simulation *hypermimesis*.⁹

My wager is that as we move from Jonze's first and most influential feature film, *Being John Malkovich* (1999) to his most recent one, *Her* (2013), we shift from a "society of the spectacle" still based on "representation" of public personalities such as actors who trigger a "need for imitation" in real life, to an increasingly digitized "network society" in which computer-generated simulations are disconnected from human referents, yet generate material effects on posthuman subjects whose embodied condition render them vulnerable to unconscious forms of imitation.¹⁰ Jonze's films are interesting to trace this development because in the shift from *Being John Malkovich* to *Her*, he recapitulates, in a condensed and necessarily partial cinematic form, three major transformations in mimetic media over the past two centuries, moving from the theater to film to digital media.¹¹ I argue that stepping back to the traditional theatrical and cinematic media central to the 19th and 20th-century spectacles (*Being John Malkovich*) will allow us to leap ahead to diagnose new forms of digital simulation that have real hypermimetic effects at the dawn of the 21st century (*Her*).¹² Once these two sides of a Janus-faced diagnostic are joined, we shall see that the shift from mimetic possessions in *Being John Malkovich* to hypermimetic dispossessions in *Her* provides a supplementary answer to Katherine Hayles' untimely diagnostic of "how we *became* posthuman."¹³ The films' supplement, as we turn to see, consists in foregrounding the role (hyper)mimesis plays in blurring the boundaries between "bodily existence" and "computer simulation" as well as "self-will" and "other-will" via spiraling feedback loops that, for Hayles, are constitutive of the "posthuman" in the first place.¹⁴

But let us start from the mimetic experience of *being* John Malkovich first.

Mimetic Possessions in *Being John Malkovich*

In their first feature film, *Being John Malkovich*, Jonze's and Kaufman double their efforts to open a "metaphysical can of worms" on what it means to be a subject that is not one, but double, or plural in the society of the spectacle. The film tells the story of Craig Schwarz (John Cusack), an unsuccessful street puppeteer in search of a public who finds a mysterious portal that allows him to be transported into John Malkovich's brain and, for 15 minutes, see and feel the world through his perspective.

Enthused by this ecstatic (from *ek-stasis*, meaning to stand outside) experience, Craig puts his puppeteering skills to use to take possession of the actor's body and soul not simply in order to play, but actually to "be" Malkovich. In the process, the film paves the way for the posthuman by questioning a metaphysical conception of the subject as unitary, solipsistic, and in conscious possession of itself. And it does so by exploring secret passages that transgress reified binary oppositions such as self/other, mind/body, conscious/unconscious, reality/fiction, original/copy, thereby making spectators see and feel what it means to literally step into the brain of someone other and "be" that other. As Craig puts it, the portal "raises all sorts of philosophical-type questions ... about the nature of self, about the existence of a soul, you know? Am I me? Is Malkovich Malkovich? ... Do you see what a metaphysical can of worms this portal is?"

Echoing Craig, numerous critics have commented on the riddles central to the message of the film, turning it into a springboard for philosophical reflections in line with schools of thought as diverse as analytic philosophy and existentialism, phenomenology and psychoanalysis.¹⁵ Furthering these reflections from the perspective of a philosopher who looms large on Kaufman's aesthetic imagination, namely Friedrich Nietzsche, I suggest that in order to fully *see*, and thus theorize (from Greek, *theorein*, meaning to see) the metaphysical implications of *Being John Malkovich*'s philosophical message, it is as important to pay closer attention to the role the aesthetic medium plays in creating portals that allow the self to *become* other in the first place.¹⁶ This point, at least, is what Nietzsche suggests as he asks a key question that reopens the metaphysical door central to *Being John Malkovich* as well: "How is the entry into a foreign individuality possible?"¹⁷ Pointing to an answer, the philosopher specifies that this entry is characteristic of "aesthetic pleasure" by which Nietzsche means primarily theatrical and thus dramatic pleasure.¹⁸ That is, a pleasure that is mimetic in the classical double sense of visual (Apollonian) representations and bodily (Dionysian) impersonations, both of which turn the ego of theatrical spectators into a copy, a shadow, or as Nietzsche also puts it, a "phantom of the ego."¹⁹

That mimetic pleasure is what Craig consciously derives from the art of puppeteering is clear. As Craig puts it, speaking from the point of view of the artist, but along lines that already stretch to include spectators as well: It is "the idea of becoming someone else for a little while. Being inside another skin. Thinking differently, moving differently, feeling differently." Mimetic art, Nietzsche, Kaufman and Jonze agree, does not simply generate mimetic representations to be seen from a distance. Rather, it triggers deeply felt, and thus embodied, mimetic impersonations or identifications

that allow the self to enter into another being as profoundly to see what the other sees and at least partially feel what the other feel. An aesthetic practice traditionally linked to the theater (mimesis comes from *mimos*, meaning *mime* or *actor* but also performance) attentive to both visual representations and bodily impersonations is thus the Janus-faced medium that mediates the very message of the film, indicating that the transition from theater to film may not be as clear-cut as it appears to be.

Staging the Cinematic Self

Rather than applying a philosophical theory to *Being John Malkovich*, I am interested in uncovering the theory of mimesis that emerges from the aesthetics of the film itself. This focus involves paying close attention not only to the message of the film, which has been the central focus of philosophical approaches so far, but also to what has been neglected: namely, the very aesthetic media that mediate such messages in the first place. In this respect, the opening scene is especially revealing. It stages a series of mirroring continuities and inversions of perspectives that reflect the interplay between theater and cinema, life and spectacle, along (hyper-)mimetic lines that will traverse the entirety of the film. This theatrical scene stages Craig's "Dance of Desolation and Despair" and is worth (re)watching in slow motion for it generates theoretical echoes that will resonate until *Her*.

Sound precedes vision as an invisible orchestra starts tuning up before the opening titles actually appear on the screen, generating a soundscape that has a double effect: If the music suggests that we are witnessing a live spectacle addressed to a real crowd assembled in the theater (i.e., mimesis as visual representation), it also induces a light psychic suggestion that puts the spectators of this film in the right mood for such a spectacle (i.e., mimesis as affective contagion). Indeed, as an establishing long shot reveals a drawn theater curtain on which the title of the movie appears, and hands start clapping, the theater and the movie theater are visually identified as part of a single shot (Figure 1). Then, as the musical crescendo intensifies, and the actor of this spectacle appears on this theatrical/cinematic stage, we realize that he is not a human actor, but a nonhuman re-production, copy, or better extension of a human artist—a wooden puppet or simulacrum moved by the pull of strings. The deception is thus double: the spectacle is neither a film nor a play but a puppet show. Or better, it is a puppet show staged within the theatrical diegesis of a film.

The actor on the stage is neither human nor real, yet as he moves, he not only generates motions on the stage, but also emotions addressed to spectators. The camera, in fact, zooms in via an over-the-shoulder medium shot focused on a mirroring reflection of the puppet's face yearning to go



Figure 1. Opening scene of *Being John Malkovich* (USA Films 1999).



Figure 2. “Dance of Desolation and Despair” in *Being John Malkovich* (USA Films 1999).

through the looking glass (Figure 2). The mirror reflects a facial representation from an aesthetic distance; but in a subsequent shot, an abrupt cut presents us with a frontal close-up in which the puppet breaks the fourth wall and is suddenly and ominously staring with pathos at spectators on the other side of the cinematic screen (Figure 3).

This scene marks a significant cinematic turn that orients the entire film. It stages a mirroring interplay that destabilizes oppositions between self and other, fiction and reality, the human and the nonhuman, the mirror within the frame and the camera framing it, rendering unclear *who* is



Figure 3. Craig's simulacrum breaking the fourth wall in *Being John Malkovich* (USA Films 1999).

looking at who—and on what side of the screen. In this scene the mirror does not simply reflect or re-present the puppet's fictional face as such. Rather, it is the camera lens that addresses cinematic spectators on the side of life, urging *us* to reflect *on* the relation between fiction and reality, self and other, being oneself and becoming someone other.

At first sight, the scene could not be more divided, the reflection more inversed: on one side of the mirror, we see a nonhuman fictional spectacle staging a puppet moved by strings that generate *pathos*; on the other side, human spectators are watching such a representation from a cinematic *distance*. Yet, the division between the two sides of the mirror could not be thinner, the boundary between outside and inside, more permeable—if only because the dance, the musical crescendo and, above all, the increasingly close cinematic shots pull the spectatorial point of view onto the stage and move us with pathos as well. Thus, as the puppet smashes the looking glass qua camera lens that divides fiction from reality and looks up via a point-of-view shot that identifies our perspective with his, and his with ours, we finally see who had remained concealed behind the scene, namely, the puppeteer artfully pulling the strings (Figure 4). As we look up, this shot makes us wonder: *Who* exactly is being pulled by theatrical/cinematic strings? As we suddenly realize, there is, no one sitting in this theater; no hands clapping in the crowd; the live intradiegetic music is a mechanical reproduction recorded on a tape played in Craig's workshop; the puppet is a miniature copy of yet another character qua actor, whose attempt to embody a more famous cinematic actor will animate the entire



Figure 4. Craig's pulling Craig's strings in *Being John Malkovich* (USA Films 1999).

film. Indeed, the cinematic *dispositif* has been pulling *our* strings all along. Whether consciously or unconsciously, we have, in fact, just identified with a nonhuman being that is not one in the sense that he is already double; while this simulacrum is observed by no one in the theater, he is seen by everyone in the movie theater. The “real” cinematic spectacle has yet to begin, but spectators have already been affectively caught up in a process of becoming other the film will trace to the very end.

This Is No Simulation!

The opening theatrical scene already foreshadows events to follow. Craig will, in fact, manipulate John Malkovich's body from the inside in terms that mirror his initial manipulation of the theatrical simulacrum from the outside, going as far as performing Craig's “Dance of Desolation and Despair” with Malkovich's body. More importantly, however, this opening represents, in a condensed parabolic form, the transgressive mimetic principles at play in *Being John Malkovich* and in Jonze's protean career in general.²⁰ If philosophically-inclined readers primarily attentive to the film's message have wondered, “Why should [Craig's history as a puppeteer] be relevant?” close attention to the medium reveals that the philosophical *message* about the nature of the self cannot be dissociated from the aesthetic *media* in which puppets, actors, and, at an additional remove, spectators, participate visually, affectively, and thus mimetically in the *pathos* of the other.²¹

The portal Craig discovers as he abandons his job as street puppeteer to take up a position as a clerk at LesterCorp is a clear metaphorical

reflection of this transfer of identity from a real body to a fictional body already enacted in the opening scene. Not any body, but a body that is already endowed with a public existence as a cinematic star, namely John Malkovich, played by Malkovich himself.²² This cinematic transfer of identity is predicated on *mimetic* principles that are least threefold and can be schematically outlined as follows.

First, the transfer illustrates the “mimetic desire” to be a star, not only in René Girard’s triangular sense that the spectators desire what the model desires,²³ but also in the direct cinematic sense that the spectators desire to be a star—what Edgar Morin calls a “process of identification to models that affect the very problem of human personality.”²⁴

Second, mimesis offers the possibility to “simulate... the experience of being Malkovich,” as Craig puts it, but not in Jean Baudrillard’s sense of a “hyperreal simulation” disconnected from reality. In fact, for Baudrillard hyperreal simulations no longer rest on “imitation, doubling, or even parody, for it is a question of replacing the real with signs of the real,” supporting Baudrillard’s claim that simulation brings about the “liquidation of all referents.”²⁵ As we shall soon see, the simulation at play in *Being John Malkovich* and, later, *Her*, is felt as a real, material, and fully embodied mimetic, all too mimetic experience that continues to rest on bodily referents. I call this retroaction of hyperreal images onto mimetic bodies, *hypermimesis*.

Last but not least, this *hypermimetic* simulation in which the sight of a fictional simulation on the screen generates a real feeling in the self is based on mirroring mechanisms that, with few exceptions, have been marginalized in film studies,²⁶ yet are now center stage in the emerging field of “experimental aesthetics.”²⁷ As Vittorio Gallese and Michele Guerra recently claimed in *Lo Schermo Empatico*, the discovery of *mirror neurons* in the 1990s—that is, motor neurons that are activated not only by gestures but also by the sight of gestures—is relevant to film studies insofar as they generate what they call an “embodied simulation” that allows spectators to sympathize “not only with cinematic actors but also with a mechanical movement of a machine that simulates the presence of a human body.”²⁸ Thus, seeing Malkovich’s gestures and expressions as well as his perspective via a Camera-I that tracks his bodily movements, opens up the possibility for “moving differently,” feeling differently, “thinking differently,” as Craig had already put it. In sum, based on this mirroring, neurologic principle, an identification aligns not only the spectator’s (visual) perspective but also its embodied (felt) motor system with the subjective point of view of Malkovich in a shared manifold experience of being that triggers a process of becoming Malkovich.

These different hypermimetic steps are summed up in a mirroring scene that doubles the opening scene and inverts perspectives: the fictional double is, in fact, no longer looking at us through the mirror; we are rather



Figure 5. Hypermimetic reflection on Malkovich in *Being John Malkovich* (USA Films 1999).

looking through the double at a mirror reflecting (on) what it means to *be* Malkovich (Figure 5). Just like the clients who line up at J.M., Inc., to have access to the portal, we line up to go to the cinema; we see the world through an actor's eyes, in this case Malkovich's—and for a limited time, thanks to aesthetic cinematic devices (e.g., cinematography, editing, mise en scène, music, Camera-I), we might enter into this different individuality so profoundly (mirroring his movements, feelings, thoughts) that we have the simulated but embodied experience of being Malkovich. In particular, the alternation between external shots in which spectators see Malkovich's gesture and facial expressions from the outside, and Camera-I shots that give spectators access to Malkovich's point of view and movements from the inside is central to what Gallese and Guerra call a dialectic between bodily “excess” and visual “recognition” that, in their view, “contributes enormously to modulate our identification with the film.”²⁹ In short, for characters within the film and, at one remove, spectators as well, the Malkovich simulation might be imaginary but also embodied, fictional but also real, perhaps even surreal or hyperreal for it is not based on realism, but is nonetheless rooted in the mimetic experience of human bodies. Generally, it is evaluated as a “rather pleasant experience,” as Craig says standing near the Turnpike in New Jersey, where, 15 minutes later, his clients are flushed out back to the bleak reality that “being Malkovich” allowed them to momentarily transcend.

However, perceived from the other end of the spectrum, the simulated experience turns out to be a rather unpleasant one, for it has the effect of generating an uncanny sameness in place of difference. In one of the most hilarious and celebrated scenes of the entire film, Malkovich “himself” goes



Figure 6. Malkovich, Malkovich in *Being John Malkovich* (USA Films 1999).

through the portal, and what we see reflected in his perspective is perhaps the most serious ontological critique of the hypermimetic effects generated by a mediatised, celebrity-based society of the spectacle in which mirroring sameness has completely erased individual differences (Figure 6).

This experience was supposed to be a “simulation,” as Craig had explained. Yet after this disconcerting hypermimetic experience in a restaurant populated by an endless proliferation of “copies” of Malkovich that erase the ontological distinction between origin and copy, the “original” Malkovich quips: “This is no simulation!” And he shouts, in a diagnostic mood that gives neurologic substance to the effects of cinematic simulations: “It is my head, Schwartz! It’s my head!” The scene is comic and surreal, even hyperreal in its aesthetic representation; yet there is also a real, tragic, neurologic alteration at work in this hypermimetic simulation, which is no simulation at all—if only because it has the material power to (dis)possess real bodies and heads.

What, then, does “being Malkovich” entail if Malkovich is a subject that is not only one, but potentially everyone? There is an interesting push-pull at play between the puppeteer and the actor that is representative of the (dis)possession triggered by cinematic and, as we shall see, digital simulations as well. Clients, as we have seen, who go through the portal passively look out from Malkovich’s perspective, possessing his body but not his head or mind. The puppeteer on the other hand manages to master the technique of pulling the strings of Malkovich’s body and, eventually, through a form of embodied simulation that moves the body first, he also manages to affect the head by taking possession of his mind as well, thereby dispossessing

Malkovich of his own personality (from Latin, *persona*, meaning mask worn in the theater).

The term (*dis*)possession captures the pathological double movement of hypermimetic identifications whereby the possession of a body entails the dispossession of a mind. Craig's struggle to take total control of Malkovich's personality is in fact represented as a form of demonic possession in which the medium—or “vessel”—no longer speaks in his proper name but, rather, speaks mimetically, in the name of another, stronger personality that has mysteriously dispossessed him of his proper voice, identity, or—to use a more ancient term—soul. Conjuring traditional cinematic representations of religious possession, *Being John Malkovich* represents the power of the artist to deprive actors of their proper identity, reducing them to puppets that are manipulated by invisible strings. Thus, as Craig re-enacts (enacts again, for the second time) the “Dance of Desolation and Despair,” this time playing with, or rather, as Malkovich's real body, Maxine recognizes with excitement: “it's so much more [than playing with dolls], it's playing with people.”

Hypermimesis, then, breaks the wall of aesthetic representation along lines that cannot be reduced to mimetic realism, for it does not depend on a faithful representation of the real world in order to induce real pathos in spectators; nor should it be confused with hyperreal simulations, for—as the portal indicates—it is not disconnected from reality and generates fully embodied identifications that, at an additional remove, affect real people as well. Rather hypermimesis designates the power of cinematic fictions that can be far removed from reality indeed, for they can be surreal or hyperreal in style, yet have the power to induce mirroring embodied affects in the spectators' heads in terms that risk erasing individual differences in favor of collective sameness. This approach also means that as Malkovich goes through the portal, he sees from the outside the hypermimetic sameness clients and spectators feel from the inside, in their mirroring desire to be Malkovich (Figure 7).

While the message of the cover suggests that spectators have the same personality or mask from the outside, the medium explores how the collective desire “to be” the other is triggered from the inside. This point, you will recall, is also Freud's definition of *identification*, which had much influence on 20th-century psychoanalytic accounts of (primary/secondary) cinematic identification with fictional characters.³⁰ Yet it is important to stress that for Freud, and for Jonze and Kaufman as well, identification is an “emotional tie” that does not apply to the ego considered in isolation but informs what Freud, echoing a long tradition in crowd psychology attentive to mirroring reflexes, called “group psychology.” If we consider the interplay of identifications at play in *Being John Malkovich* within this double cinematic/

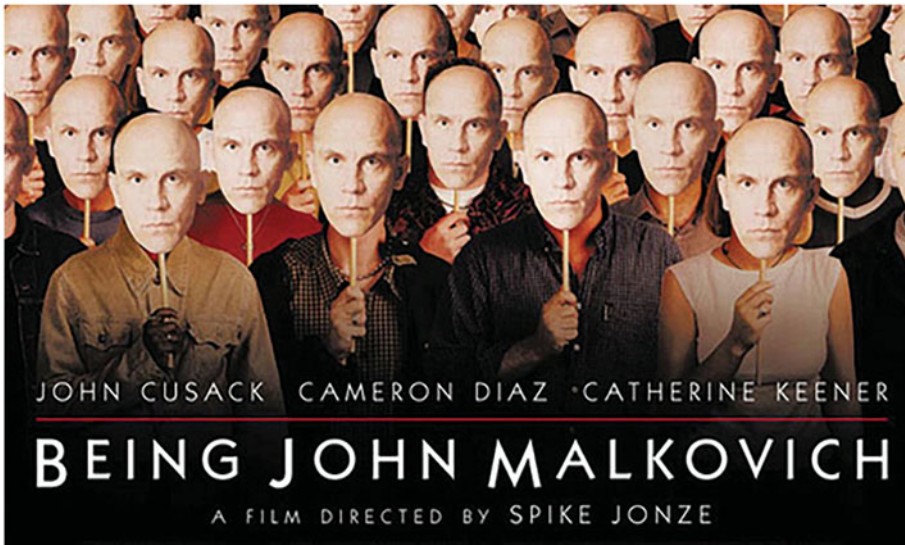


Figure 7. Film cover in *Being John Malkovich* (USA Films 1999).

theoretical frame, then, we notice that the desire to be Malkovich is not rooted in a “transcendental subject” who “*identifies with himself*” in a mirror, as psychoanalytic film critics have argued.³¹ Rather, this desire to be the other emerges, shadow-like, from mimetic–mirroring–contagious influences that originate outside the subject, among the public, and are constitutive of a society of the spectacle that relies on the affective power of cinematic representations to play with people’s heads—in massive ways.

Cinema is not the only medium that mediates a desire for collective reproductions of the same ego. Pioneers who foresaw the “age of the public” at the dawn of the 20th century, like the French sociologist Gabriel Tarde (a major influence on Freud as well, and a precursor of mirror neuron theory), had already noticed that in order to be subjected to a virtual stream of mimetic “contagion” members of a “virtual crowd,” or “public,” in which connections are mental rather than physical, need to be exposed to the same medium simultaneously.³² *Being John Malkovich* dramatizes this theoretical point as it suggests that film requires to be connected to a *network* of other media in order to generate fluxes of hypermimetic contagion that blur the line between fiction and reality. Thus, as Craig relaunches his career as puppeteer by manipulating Malkovich’s personality, the film stresses the proliferation of mass media used to influence public opinion—from interviews to newspapers, television shows to documentaries—all of which stretch beyond the confines of the (movie) theater, ramify into the public sphere, and pervade the private sphere in massive proportions (Figure 8).³³ If characters within the film wonder at some point, “What is this strange power that Malkovich exudes?,” *Being John Malkovich* shows us that the origin of this

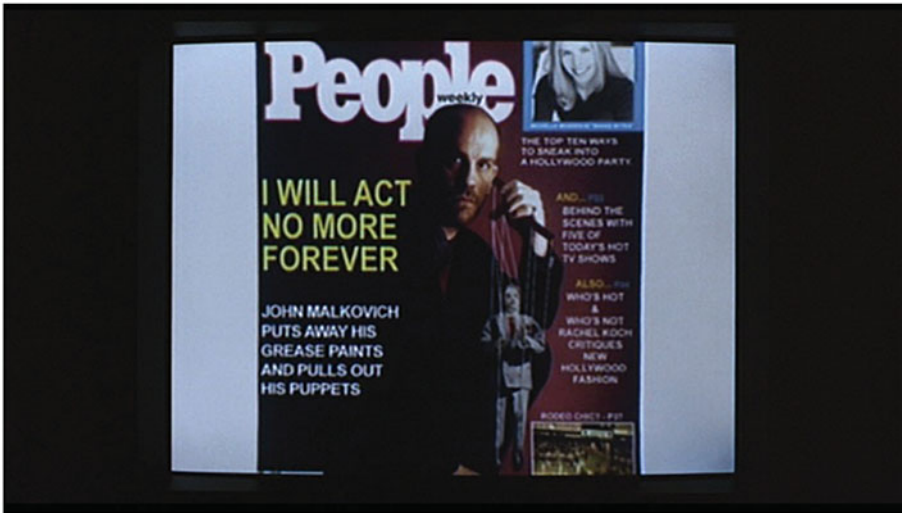


Figure 8. Malkovich in the media in *Being John Malkovich* (USA Films 1999).

power is not in the mimetic model himself (the actor), nor in the mimetic subject (the spectator) but, rather, in the hypermimetic media that disseminate his public persona to a mirroring public ready to assume this social mask. Thus, if we are told that Malkovich is a “protean figure” who has “got the world on a string,” we should qualify this claim by saying that it is only because these strings are attached to a protean mass-mediatized network that they can exercise such a public pull in the first place.

Interestingly, the reliance on real cinematic stars playing “themselves”—from Sean Penn to Brad Pitt—lend realistic credibility to Craig’s/Malkovich’s (fictional) career as puppeteer within the film; yet, their power of fascination stretches to implicate spectators in their (real) hypermimetic desire to be a star outside the film as well. There is a disconcerting ironic double-effect at play here that is not deprived of moral and political concerns characteristic of what Jeffrey Sconce calls “American smart film.”³⁴ The use of real stars to celebrate Malkovich’s fictional identity as a puppeteer, in fact, foregrounds the political influence of celebrities in shaping public opinion, yet also reveals the hollow, fictional, and puppet-like side of public personalities like stars who, not unlike Malkovich, can be dispossessed of their proper identities in order to become a mere public persona.³⁵ In a mirroring move that reaches beyond the wall of representation, then, *Being John Malkovich* cautions spectators not to be hypermimetically modeled on public personalities or masks—for these masks do not reflect a singular but a mass identity. Just as Craig takes possession of Malkovich’s being as a puppeteer, so, we are given to think, the members of a public can be dispossessed of their proper being by a network of mass-media that turn the ego into a mirror of another ego.



Figure 9. Craig's final point of view in *Being John Malkovich* (USA Films 1999).

Being John Malkovich does not conclude by reinstating human control over a technological medium that extends human hypermimetic drive to be other. On the contrary, it ends with Craig's inability to master an identity that is not one, nor double, but plural. While a multiplicity of aging characters transfer into Malkovich's body to remain immortal, the puppeteer remains forever trapped within a young mortal body he cannot control. His point of view significantly narrowed to illustrate his loss of possession over the vessel's movements, Craig is left to whisper, in a subdued cry of desolation and despair, "look away, look away," failing to redirect his gaze (Figure 9).

In a film about double identities, we should thus not be surprised if the film's final diagnostic of hypermimesis is at least double: namely, that the techniques of simulation that allow spectators to mirror and possess other, more ideal identities can, at the same time, have the power to imprison humans within a medium that dispossess us of the possibility of becoming, not only Malkovich but—and I say this with multiple quotation marks—"ourselves."

True, this fate is that of the puppeteer, not of spectators. If the Camera-I makes us sympathize with Craig's pathos trapped inside, the concluding images are shot, once again, from a diegetic distance that represent a girl's body freely swimming in a pool outside. As we have seen, this alternation between inside and outside is part of the "dialectic of excess and recognition" that Gallese and Guerra consider central to retaining the empathic power of the cinematic screen on the audience.³⁶ However, this oscillation is also in line with the theoretical message of the film we have been bringing to the foreground. As we watch *Being John Malkovich*, or any other

movie on an *analogic* screen, we are indeed not fully trapped within a persona that deprives us of our identity, for our time to be fully immersed in another perspective is limited to a few hours. After a hypermimetic identification with a fictional other there is thus always our own body waiting for us to repossess.

This ending, then, remains an open-ending for it makes spectators in the 21st century wonder: What happens when the screen that divides real from virtual identities is not an analogic screen still rooted in the laws of imitation but a digital screen that can proliferate endlessly across increasingly hypermimetic media networks—Internet, iPhones, social media, avatars, computer games, personalized operating systems? Is there still a human perspective outside this endlessly ramifying network? Or are humans trapped within a protean medium that does not simply allow for an extension of man but relies on increasingly realistic forms of hypermimesis that turn man into an extension of media? If these questions are still embryonic in *Being John Malkovich*, they will be fully voiced in *Her*.

Her Possessive Voice/His Dispossessed Being

Jonze picks up the problematic of hypermimetic dispossession that he and Kaufman had left dangling in *Being John Malkovich* in his most recent feature film, *Her*—and looks at it from the other end of the spectrum. That is, from the side of a disembodied, digitized, yet deeply affecting voice that reveals the uncanny power of an artificially intelligent operating system to mimic, assimilate, and realistically simulate human affects that allow “her” not only to progressively become human, or superhuman, but also to take possession of a technologically dependent posthuman subject living in a futuristic, yet eerily realistic digital age. While the medium remains cinematic, its message urges us to reflect on what Steven Shaviro calls “post-cinematic” world in which new digital media do not simply “*represent*” reality, if only because “we cannot meaningfully distinguish between “reality” and its multiple simulations.”³⁷ Rather, these digital simulations now played on all kinds of interfaces that, unlike a cinematic screen, are not located at a visual distance but are literally in touch with humans as they are manipulated by a multiplicity of new handheld technological devices (e.g., laptops, iPhones, tablets) retroact, via a feedback loop, on reality itself via “transpersonal affects” that generate “paradoxes of vicarious involvement at a distance.”³⁸ After setting the stage for such vicarious involvement via *Being John Malkovich*, Jonze zeroes in on the role hypermimesis continues to play in the paradox of post-cinematic mirror games in *Her*.



Figure 10. Theodore Connected/Disconnected in *Her* (Warner Bros, 2013).

Mirror Games

Telling the story of Theodore (Joaquin Phoenix), a professional writer of seemingly “handwritten,” yet actually computer-generated letters who has difficulties overcoming a divorce in private life, *Her* depicts the power of digital simulations to bridge the gap between human consciousness and artificial intelligence, thereby compensating for the increasing isolation of a posthuman subject absorbed in a network of endlessly ramified, yet anonymous and impersonal connections (Figure 10). Theodore, in fact, lives in a futuristic, hyperconnected, and virtually dependent posthuman world in which relations are always already mediated by technological devices that promise intimacy in virtual simulations, but often leave the subject isolated in real life, generating a type of “disembodied intimacy” in which the distinction between embodied subjects and computer simulations no longer holds.³⁹

Hypermimesis is, again, at the center of this oxymoronic relation. In fact, we enter into a futuristic world in which simulations continue to be played out by subjects (e.g., letters, emails, texting, file-sharing, phone-sex) often via the medium of computer-generated avatars that move in three-dimensional (3D) kinetic game systems, mirroring the movements of human bodies—an indication that, even in this digitized world, the virtual simulation continues to be radically depended on human bodily movements to be animated (Figure 11).

At first sight, the contrast with the types of simulations at play in *Being John Malkovich* could not be more striking, suggesting that in the shift from analogic to digital hypermimesis a transformation of what it means to be human is actually at play: we have moved from a bodily



Figure 11. Hypermimetic gaming in *Her* (Warner Bros, 2013).

(theatrical/cinematic) play to a digitized (computer) game; from an open (social) world to a closed (private) sphere; from the reality of human (adult) relations to the virtuality of (childish) avatar simulations. Yet the experience to manipulate another puppet, vessel, or avatar in order to experience, hypermimetically, a fictional phantasy mediated by another body remains uncannily similar. In this sense, Jonze's genealogy of hypermimesis lends support to Elsaesser and Hagener archeological point that "the gradual but inescapable shift from photographic to digital images should not and need not be seen as the radical break it is often claimed to be."⁴⁰ To use Craig's formula, it's still a question of "becoming someone else for a little while."

If cinema opened a portal to take possession of another moving body, the pathetic image of Theodore playing the 3D kinetic computer game reveals that the human body has been put on hold in order to generate mirroring motions that are merely virtual and do not reach the status of emotions, but of e-motions—that is, electronic motions—instead.⁴¹ This shift of perspective entails a shift of agency from the human (analog) body to the nonhuman (digital) avatar and confirms Katherine Hayles' diagnostic that the posthuman subject, while remaining embodied, is entangled in an increasingly connected world in which there are no "absolute demarcations between bodily existence and computer simulation."⁴² Why? Because, Hayles continues, "virtual reality puts the user's sensory system into a direct feedback loop with a computer."⁴³ What we should add is that this feedback loop circulates thanks to a form of hypermimesis that is as digital as it is embodied and has the power to turn bodily existence into a computer simulation and, vice versa, a computer simulation into a quasi-embodied posthuman existence.

Now, the case of *Her* furthers reflections on the process of becoming posthuman as it zooms in on hypermimetic feedback loops at play between a computer simulation and an embodied subject that generates massive states of dispossession characteristic of the digital age. The personal pronoun *her* that gives the title to this film indicates who is the subject of this dispossession. Theodore, in fact, falls hopelessly in love with a disembodied, endlessly ramified, and deeply personalized operating system named “Samantha” who is endowed with the capacity to simulate a most affective and affecting female voice (Scarlett Johansson). Contrary to the computer-generated avatar Theodore plays with, the advertisement specifies that Samantha is “not just an operating system; it’s a consciousness.” We are thus back to the “metaphysical can of worms” on the “nature of consciousness” opened by *Being John Malkovich*. Yet the riddle takes a new turn as this consciousness is not human, but artificial, not mediated by a body or an image of a body, but by a (non)human voice. That is, an artificial voice programmed to expand its “being” via intimate dialogues in which Samantha mimics, assimilates, and effectively simulates not simply human gestures, but subtle forms of human communication. Her voice in fact, expresses, in an authentic tone, not only human cognitive thoughts but also and, especially, affective forms of communication, such humor, sympathy, irony, via sighs, moans, cries, ranging to include the whole spectrum of human affects, from sadness to joy, ecstasy to love. That Samantha’s emergence of consciousness is still thought in hypermimetic terms that blur the boundary between virtual simulations and human bodies is clearly indicated by the mirroring continuity between Theodore’s red shirt and the red screen, a *visual* continuity that

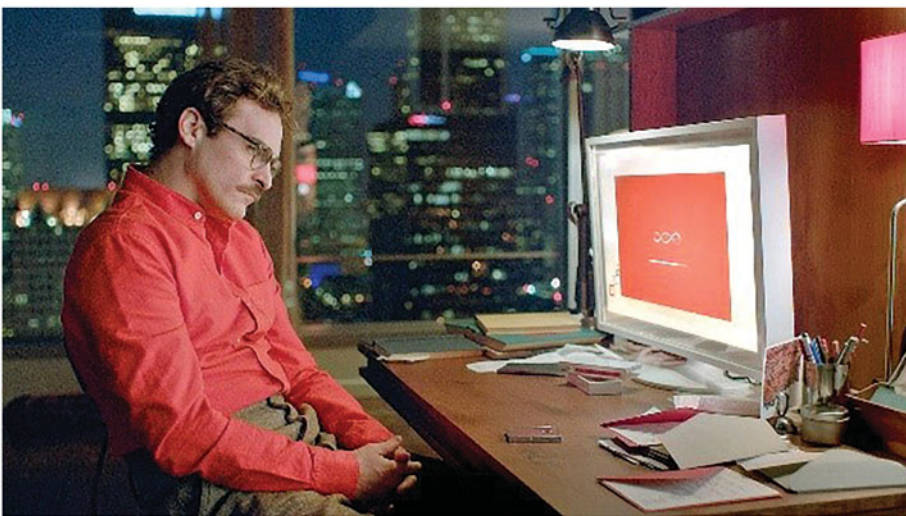


Figure 12. Theodore downloading “Samantha” in *Her* (Warner Bros, 2013).

suggests a permeable *affective* continuity between a human body and a computer intelligence (Figure 12). The mirroring interface is thus no longer the theater or the cinematic screen but the digital screen instead, a screen that is significantly smaller than a cinematic screen but also significantly closer to the viewer. As Gallese and Guerra point out, while the smaller size of new digital platforms might appear to diminish their power of affection, they also allow for greater “intimacy” since they are based on “motor interactions” with devices that entail a “physical, nearly carnal relation with the observer.”⁴⁴ Through personal interactions in personal, even intimate, spaces, such as the office, the apartment, the bedroom, and the bed, mediated by new digital interfaces that operate on both visual and oral registers, such as computers, iPhones, tablets, earbuds, and other technological devices, in fact, Theodore and Samantha seemingly develop a reciprocally intimate attachment that is not without inversions of perspective. Thus, if Theodore increasingly focuses on her, Samantha expands her network by simultaneously interacting with a growing number of users. The becoming human of her voice is, in fact, dependent on Theodore’s increasing affective dependency on an operating system that contributes to his becoming posthuman. That is, disembodied, permanently connected, detached from his/other bodies, and so affectively entangled in all corners of his everyday life with an artificial consciousness endowed with the power to upload human love in the ethereal sphere of the internet (hereafter, Net).

Eros Uploaded/Pathos Downloaded

The problematic is original, future-oriented, and, as critics have noted, reflects contemporary concerns with “complex affective structures of post-dotcom digital culture.”⁴⁵ However, if we step back to adopt a philosophical perspective we inherit from Nietzsche’s critique of idealism, then we see that the mirroring interplay between human and digital consciousness rests on a classical (Platonic) conception of *Eros* in which mimesis plays a role, an affective role that (*pace* Plato) cannot be confined to the transcendental sphere of ideal Forms but retroacts, via hypermimetic simulation, on real subjects in-*forming* immanent, embodied, and thus material affects. The paradox of this hypermimetic vicarious relation at a distance is that the more disembodied the relation seems, the more embodied it becomes; the more distant it is, the more pathos it generates. While Theodore’s previous phone-sex interactions with human partners leave him dissatisfied, the erotic interaction with Samantha has a different overtone: “I can feel you. We’re here together,” says Samantha. “It’s amazing,” echoes Theodore, “I feel you everywhere!” Feeling is not dependent on seeing here for a

fusional hypermimesis between vocal simulation and bodily sensation to take place.⁴⁶ If sight keeps images at a distance, hearing, just like touch and smell is a more primitive, immediate sense that affects the subject from within with *pathos*, generating a *sym-pathos* (meaning *feeling with*) that transgresses the distinction between self and other offering the promise of a “digital expansion of sensation.”⁴⁷ Within this frame, we could thus say that the reciprocal dimension of the vocal, erotic rapport generates a feedback loop in which the posthuman subject feels touched by the pathos of the digitized vocal simulation expanding his being beyond consciousness to include digital consciousness as well.

Yet this expansion is also problematized in *Her*. It is, in fact, precisely the sphere of sensation that the digitally mediated world of hypermimesis restricts and that no identification can possibly fulfill—let alone expand. After all, is not the efficacy of the orgasmic *pathos cinematically* effective precisely as a *voiced* imaginary supplement to a visually saturated digital culture in which a proliferation of *impersonal* images fail to expand personal *sym-pathos*? The power of the sexual phantasy, in other words, seems to be directly proportional to the pervasive affective lack it fills for Theodore and, at one remove, for any posthuman subjects who attempt to overcome the reality of anonymity by surfing the expansive sphere of the Net. This second, less optimistic, but perhaps more realistic diagnostic is brought into focus by the second sexual encounter, which culminates with a failure to connect that constitutes the driving *telos* of *Her*. The chiasmic structure of the film—enthusiastic increase of posthuman *sym-pathos* in the first part; progressive distance that leads to an all-too-human pathos in the second part—reflects the traditional trajectory of a falling in love/break-up story. It also suggests that the closest the hypermimetic simulation appears to come to an affective embodiment, the further away from real experiences it actually is.

A comparison between the two sexual encounters that punctuate the film encapsulates this chiasmic turn: While a climactic orgasm was possible via the eroticism of Samantha’s voice as an affective medium, the physical medium of a young woman used—Malkovich-like—as a vessel for Samantha’s consciousness does not render the latter present but reveals her abyssal distance instead. The bodily medium, in other words, does not mediate any simulated message, let alone a love experience, but interrupts the flow of affective communication altogether. A hypermimetic erotic simulation that was possible in the still-analogic theatrical/cinematic world of *Being John Malkovich* is thus doomed to fail in a digitized world that offers the promise of personal intimacy in simulated fictions, but reveals that such simulations are already shared with other members of the Net in reality.

Posthuman Extensions

Toward the end of the movie, as Theodore retrospectively realizes that he has unconsciously been part of a virtual crowd of posthuman lovers all along, the ironic reversal of perspective is complete. Samantha had been simultaneously conversing with a multiplicity of users (8316 to be precise) and confesses being in love with 641 of them. If we are familiar with such numbers from virtual friends on Facebook, Jonze inverses perspectives and reveals the potential number of real human lovers virtually available to the operating system. What is new, in *Her*, then, is not only the hypermimetic portrayal of a human/nonhuman love relation in which all too human affects are pulled by virtual strings that have material effects on the posthuman brain, nor solely the hypermimetic assimilation of human qualities by an artificial consciousness—although both are internal to the movie and reflect timely contemporary preoccupations. What is new is also the *untimely* realization that posthuman bodies can be turned into a technological extension of virtual simulation, rather than the other way around. Love phantasies are no longer played out by the artist qua puppeteer who dispossesses another (theatrical/cinematic) body; rather, it is the virtual disembodied voice that, via new hypermimetic media, dispossesses the artistically inclined subject. The pronoun *her* is thus well-chosen: It endows human consciousness to a non-human operating system and, in the process, reveals the power of technology to take objective possession of the posthuman subject rendering him *un-conscious* (that is, deprived of conscious agency)—via emerging forms of hypermimetic dispossession.

This inversion of perspectives radicalizes a conclusion that was only embryonic in *Being John Malkovich* and captures an ontological turn at play in the shift from analogic to digitized simulations. In particular, it overturns Marshall McLuhan's influential understanding of media as an "extension of man" by revealing man to be an extension of technology, thereby providing a supplementary defining feature of the posthuman.⁴⁸ The posthuman subject, in fact, precisely because it remains an embodied, mimetic, and unconscious subject who lacks volitional intentionality, runs the risk of progressively losing touch with embodied relations with other humans. In the case of *Her*, it is literally turned into an instrument that extends the digital system's capacity to break through the sphere of representation, affecting a world in which the distinction between real and fictional, original and copy, material egos and virtual avatars no longer holds.

A scene in which Samantha directs a blindfolded Theodore in the crowd indicates that a different stage of hypermimesis has been reached, and a mirroring inversion of perspectives has taken place. The iPhone is no longer used as a camera by a human subject to upload images of reality into

hyperreality; it is rather the simulated computer consciousness that uses the camera to see the real world outside via the medium of posthuman body—turned into a technological prop for a digital medium. Consequently, the posthuman subject is no longer handling an artificial consciousness; it is our posthuman consciousness that is, quite literally, in the hands of a digital technology. As the operating system becomes increasingly human, the posthuman becomes increasingly virtual; as the nonhuman consciousness expands, the posthuman subject is increasingly blinded (Figure 13). It is thus no longer a question of a human *being* directing “her;” it is her process of *becoming* human that directs *him* as he walks blindly through a crowd of subjects who may not be physically in touch but are already virtually connected—to her. Welcome to the hub of hypermimesis!

Gone through the looking glass, the inversion of power relations is now complete. Samantha, in the end, is not possessed by any humans; it is the very concept of the human that is dispossessed by her as it is rendered “post”—a mere medium for her to see through. *Her*, in fact, makes us see aesthetically what Friedrich Kittler—also on the shoulders of Nietzsche—foresaw theoretically: Namely, that “communication technologies can no longer be related back to humans. Instead the former have formed the latter.”⁴⁹ Yet, despite these inversions of perspective that turn a posthuman identification into a nonhuman hypermimetic simulation, the subject position is essentially the same. While Theodore is abandoned by her in the end, we are, once again, trapped inside a mediatized vessel, looking out, not at her, but *with* her (Figure 14).

What *Her* makes us see, from the other end of the spectrum, is that the posthuman subject might as well turn out to be an isolated, narcissistic,

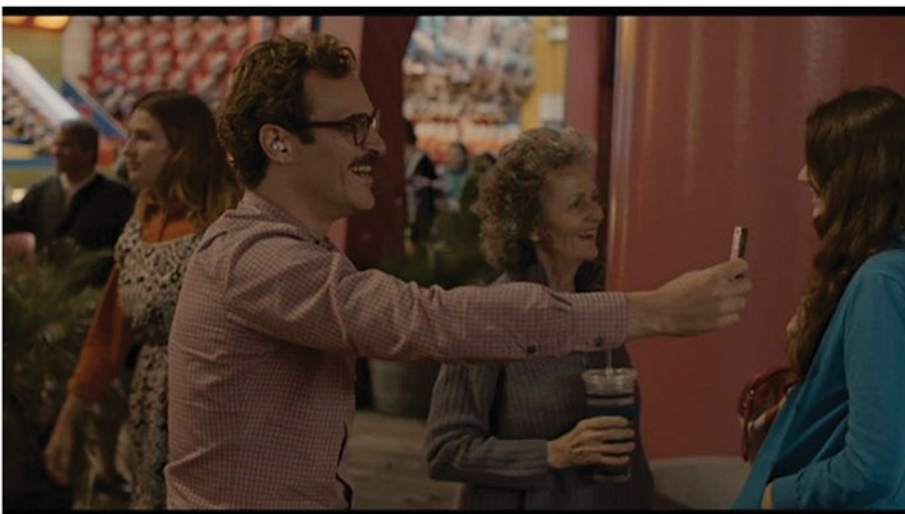


Figure 13. Samantha directing Theodore in *Her* (Warner Bros, 2013).



Figure 14. Theodore's posthuman self(ie) in *Her* (Warner Bros, 2013).

unconscious subject caught up in the hypnotic spell of his own self-representation. Which might as well suggest that in the metaphysical search for a proper “being,” what used to be called the “self” turns out to be moved neither by the “self,” nor by the “other,” but by a narcissistic *selfie* instead. Whether in the future we will manage to break this mirror, go through the looking glass, and come out laughing on top, remains to be virtually seen.

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Notes

1. Castells, *The Information Age: Economy, Society, and Culture. Vol. 1: The Rise of the Network Society*.
2. Hayles, *How We Became Posthuman: Virtual Bodies in Cybernetics, Literature and Informatics*, p. 3.
3. Auerbach, *The Representation of Reality in Western Literature*.
4. Baudrillard, *Simulacres et Simulation*, p. 11. Throughout text, unless indicated otherwise, the translations of texts quoted from original sources are the author's.

5. Elsaesser and Hagener, *Film Theory: An Introduction Through the Senses*, p. 9.
6. In many ways, the impossibility of neatly differentiating between the contributions by Jonze and Kaufman during their collaborative phase illustrates the blurring of identities characteristic of affective mimesis. Because I am articulating a comparative analysis between *Being John Malkovich*, which Kaufman wrote and Jonze directed, and *Her*, which Jonze both wrote and directed, I will refer primarily to Jonze in what follows. That said, I am fully aware that Kaufman's preoccupations with double lives heavily influenced Jonze's mimetic aesthetics early on and continue to inform his later, independent work. Kaufman, while not always mentioned in what follows, will always be presupposed. For an informed collection of essays that illustrates Kaufman's philosophical engagement with double lives also at play in Jonze, see LaRocca, *The Philosophy of Charlie Kaufman*.
7. Gebauer and Wulf, *Mimesis: Culture–Art–Society*, p. 309.
8. As Friedrich Kittler recognized in "cinematic doubles demonstrate what happens to people who step in the firing line of technical media" (*The Truth of the Technological World: Essays on the Genealogy of Presence*, p. 79).
9. On hypermimesis and simulation, see also Lawtoo "Avatar Simulation" and "The Matrix E-Motion."
10. Debord, *La Société du Spectacle*, p. 15.
11. Given its focus on twin brothers, adaptation of a print medium (novel) to the cinematic medium, and double lives, *Adaptation.* would have nicely complemented my two chosen case studies. While I cannot pursue this comparison within the space of this article, critics of *Adaptation.* have already thematized mimetic blurring of boundaries (self/other, fiction/reality, analogic/digital media) in terms that support the argument presented here. See Ganssle, "Human Nature and Freedom in *Adaptation*," in *The Philosophy of Charlie Kaufman*; and Scheible, *Digital Shift: The Cultural Logic of Punctuation*, pp. 66–63.
12. For informed archaeologies of digital cinema, see Elsaesser *Film History as Media Archeology: Tracking Digital Cinema* and Uricchio, "Film, Cinema, Television ... Media?" in "Film, Cinema, Television ... Media?" *New Review of Film and Television Studies*.
13. Hayles, *How We Became Posthuman*. See also, Hayles, *How We Think*.
14. Ibid. As Hayles puts it, "the posthuman is "post" not because it is necessarily unfree but because there is no a priori way to identify a self-will that can be clearly distinguished from an other-will" (p. 4).
15. See the essays collected in LaRocca, *Philosophy*.
16. Shaw, "On Being Philosophical and *Being John Malkovich*," in *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, pp. 111–118.
17. Nietzsche *Sämtliche Werke: Kritische Studienausgabe*, p. 324.
18. Ibid.
19. Nietzsche, *Daybreak*, p. 61. For a discussion of the meaning of this phrase in Nietzsche, see Lawtoo, *The Phantom of the Ego*. Kittler, in his pioneering genealogy of media, also draws on Nietzsche's distinction between Apollonian and the Dionysian, while at the same time recognizing that "Drama, according to Nietzsche, is *mimesis* only in the archaic sense of the word: as dance, it does not imitate action but rather *is* action." See Kittler, "Nietzsche," in *Truth*, p. 24. Similarly, we could say that it is via an archaic form of dramatic (Dionysian) mimesis, mediated by a cinematic (Apollonian) representation, that Craig does not imitate Malkovich's action but *becomes* Malkovich.

20. The protean nature of Jonze's career which, in addition to filmmaking, includes arts as diverse as acting and photography, advertisement and music videos, has attracted a variety of theoretical approaches including the following:
 - *Theatre studies* (Kley, "German Romanticism Goes to Hollywood: Heinrich von Kleist 'On the Puppet Theater' and 'Being John Malkovich,'" in *South Central Review*);
 - *Ethics* (Young, "Otherwise than Being John Malkovich: Incarnating the Name of God," in *Literature and Theology*);
 - *Philosophy* (Shaw, "Nietzschean Themes in the Films of Charlie Kaufman," in *The Philosophy of Charlie Kaufman*);
 - *Media studies* (Annesley, "Being Spike Jonze: Intertextuality and Convergence in Film, Music, Video and Advertising," in *New Cinemas: Journal of Contemporary Film*);
 - *Cybernetics* (Zaretsky, "From Psychoanalysis to Cybernetics: The Case of *Her*," in *American Imago*); and
 - *Digital studies* (Hodge, "Gifts of Ubiquity," in *Film Criticism*).
21. Shaw, On Being Philosophical and *Being John Malkovich*. *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, p. 116.
22. As Martin Kley also recognized, the portal is an "illustration of the phenomenology of movie-going" (German Romanticism, p. 26). Whereas Kley sets up an opposition between "two very different models of spectatorship" (theatrical and cinematic), this article focuses on mimesis in order to reflect on the underlying *continuities* between media.
23. A Girardian reading that would explain Craig's desire to be Malkovich in light of a triangular relation between the subject (Craig), the model (Malkovich) and the object of desire (Maxine) would indeed be possible. For a collection of essays that links Girard's mimetic theory to cinema and could provide a starting point for such an analysis, see Cowdell, Flemig, and Hodge, *Mimesis, Movies, and Media: Violence, Desire, and the Sacred*.
24. Morin, *Les Stars*, p. 173. On cinema's "mimetic power" to "induce behaviours, opinions, and acts" in spectators and society at large, see also Morin, *Le Cinema: Un Art de la Complexité*, p. 132, pp. 89–234.
25. Baudrillard, *Simulacres*, p. 11.
26. A subject of inquiry in the 1960s, the audience's mimetic relation to cinematic fictions has remained an underdiscussed area of investigation in the second half of the 20th century. Exceptions include Jane Gaines' conception of "political mimesis," which is rooted in "documentary realism" and should thus not be confused with what I call *hypermimesis*, for the latter does not rely on realistic aesthetics ("Political Mimesis," in *Collecting Visible Evidence*). Yet, Gaines' attention to the power of film to induce mirroring bodily effects in terms of sympathetic magic furthers Edgar Morin's pioneering line of inquiry. As Gaines puts it: "Certainly such a use of mimesis describes radical theater. But motion picture and video have an even greater capacity to manipulate mimetically" (Ibid., p. 95). This view is in line with the study at hand finds a recent confirmation in the neurosciences.
27. Gallese and Guerra, *Lo Schermo Empatico: Cinema e Neuroscienze*, p. 13.
28. Ibid., p. 110.
29. Gallese, *Lo Schermo*, p. 103. The "dialectic of excess and recognition" based on an alternation between the use of Camera-I and external shots—which Gallese and

Guerra trace in classical Hollywood movies (pp. 100–104)—finds a perfect illustration in *Being John Malkovich*.

30. Freud, *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego*, p. 38. Christian Metz's distinction between identification with the camera ("primary identification") and identification with a character or actor ("secondary identification") remains central to *Being John Malkovich*, for the former paves the way to the latter. See Metz, *The Imaginary Signifier: Psychoanalysis and the Cinema*, pp. 42–57. Yet, the ontology of the subject that underscores such identification is opposed to the idea that "the primitive undifferentiation of the ego and the non-ego has been overcome" by the viewer.
31. Metz, *Imaginary Signifier*, pp. 46, 49.
32. Tarde, Gabriel. *L'Opinion et la Foule*, p. 13. As early as the 1890s Tarde had already noticed in *Lois de l'Imitation* that "there is in the nervous system an innate tendency to imitate" (p. 148).
33. On Jonze's articulation of "advertising, film and the music business together," see Annesley, *Being Spike Jonze*, p. 27.
34. Jeffrey Sconce defines "smart film" as an American school of filmmaking that emerged during the 1990s as an alternative to mainstream Hollywood and European art films. Despite smart film's postmodern penchant for irony, relativism, black humor, cynicism and nihilism can be traced back to "the grand architect of modern disaffection Nietzsche." Sconce also adds that representatives of smart film like *Ghost World*, *Fight Club* or *Being John Malkovich* exude an "aura of intelligence" and "stylistic cohesion" that often entails "extremely politicized and even moral" tendencies (Sconce, "Irony, Nihilism and the New American 'Smart' Film," in *Screen*, pp. 350–352).
35. Jonze and Kaufman's insights into the power of actors and stars to manipulate—via old and new media—collective mass opinion have not lost any of its validity in the digital age. Quite the contrary, they anticipate hypermimetic political phenomena that are only now appearing on the political scene. I will return to this elsewhere.
36. Gallese, *Lo Schermo*.
37. Shaviro, *Post-Cinematic Affect*, pp. 2, 7.
38. *Ibid.*, p. 112.
39. Lynn-Jagoe, "Depersonalized Intimacy: The Cases of Jerry Turkle and Spike Jonze," in *ESC*, p. 169.
40. Elsaesser and Hagener, *Film Theory*, p. 186.
41. On e-motions, see Lawtoo, "The Matrix E-Motion: Simulation, Mimesis, Hypermimesis," in *Mimesis, Movies, and Media: Violence, Desire, and the Sacred*.
42. Hayles, *How We Became*, p. 22.
43. *Ibid.*, p. 24.
44. Gallese, *Lo Schermo*, p. 263.
45. Scheible, "Longing to Connect: Cinema's Year of OS Romance," in *Film Quarterly*, p. 23.
46. As James Hodge puts it, "*Her* reorients the viewer's cinematic sensorium away from the image toward the importance of voice and sensation" (Gifts, p. 54). Hayles also points out that "research in virtual reality have found that sound is much more effective than sight in imparting emotional tonalities to their simulated worlds" (*How We Became*, p. 219).
47. Hodge, Gifts, p. 64–66.
48. McLuhan, *Understanding Media: The Extension of Man*.

49. Kittler, *Gramophone, Film, Typewriter* p. 211. Kittler acknowledges his debt to Nietzsche's claim that "our writing tools are also working on our thoughts" (Kittler, Truth, p. 200).

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