# Time and Point of View in Contemporary Cinema

by **Temenuga Trifonova**

In *Cinema II* Deleuze situates the beginnings of what he calls the cinema of "the time-image" in post World War II European cinema, specifically in Italian neo-realism. This is a cinema of duration, whether psychological duration (emphasizing the characters' inability to act) or the duration of things (the characters' failure to act allows things and events to express themselves independently of the characters' subjective interpretation of them). Time is either affective (psychological) or existential (it reveals the being of things by drawing attention to their sheer presence). While the cinema of the time-image can be described as a cinema of reflection or ambience, the majority of the films made over the last few decades are no longer preoccupied with portraying the failure of action or of comprehension (a failure Deleuze attributes to the traumatic war experi-ence), nor do they attempt to remain purely denotative (foregrounding the sheer exis-tence of things, their absurdity).

Time in contemporary cinema is not a means to an end but has become the end itself. The new role of the flashback illustrates this trend well. The flashback is most commonly used as a technique for imparting information to the audience about a char-

Run, Lola, Run
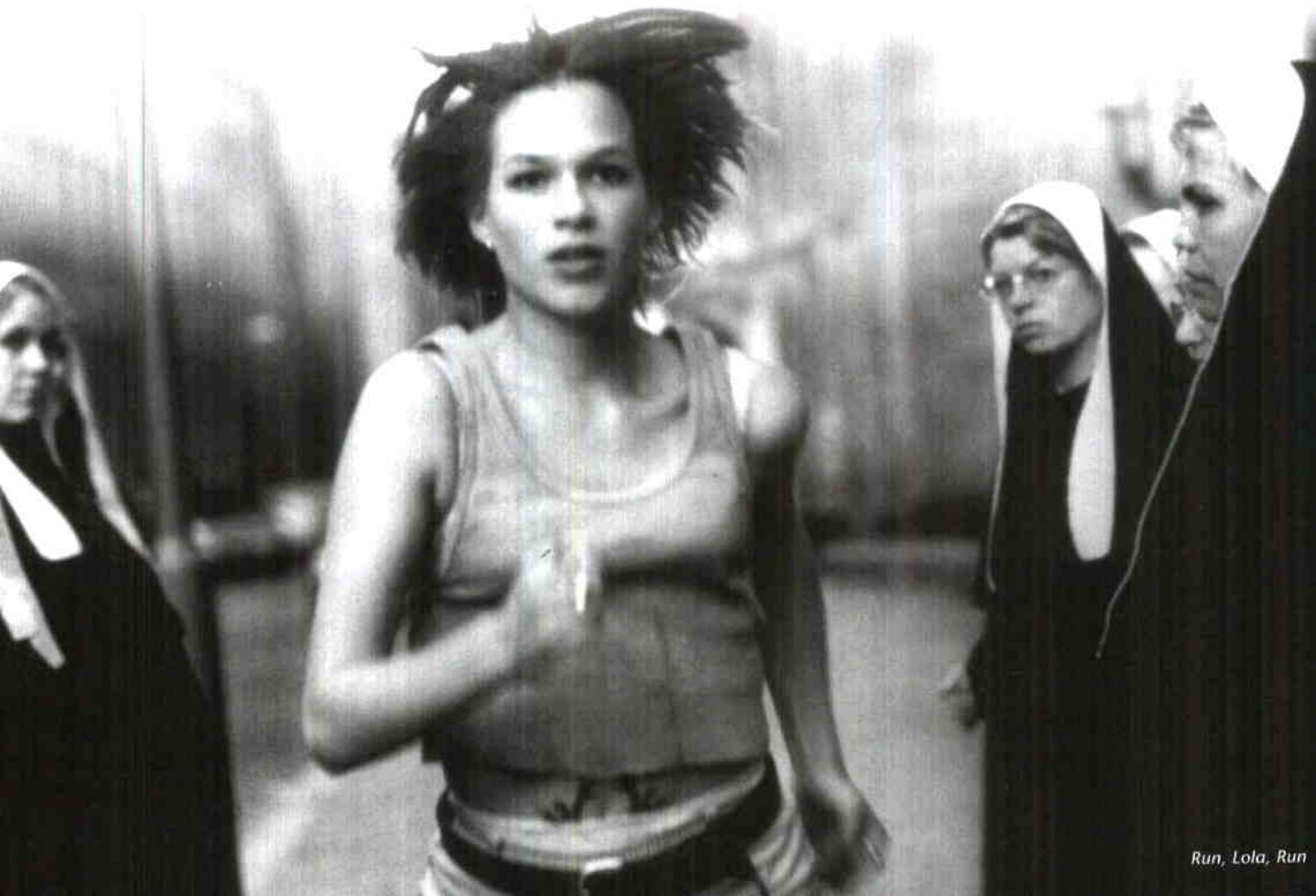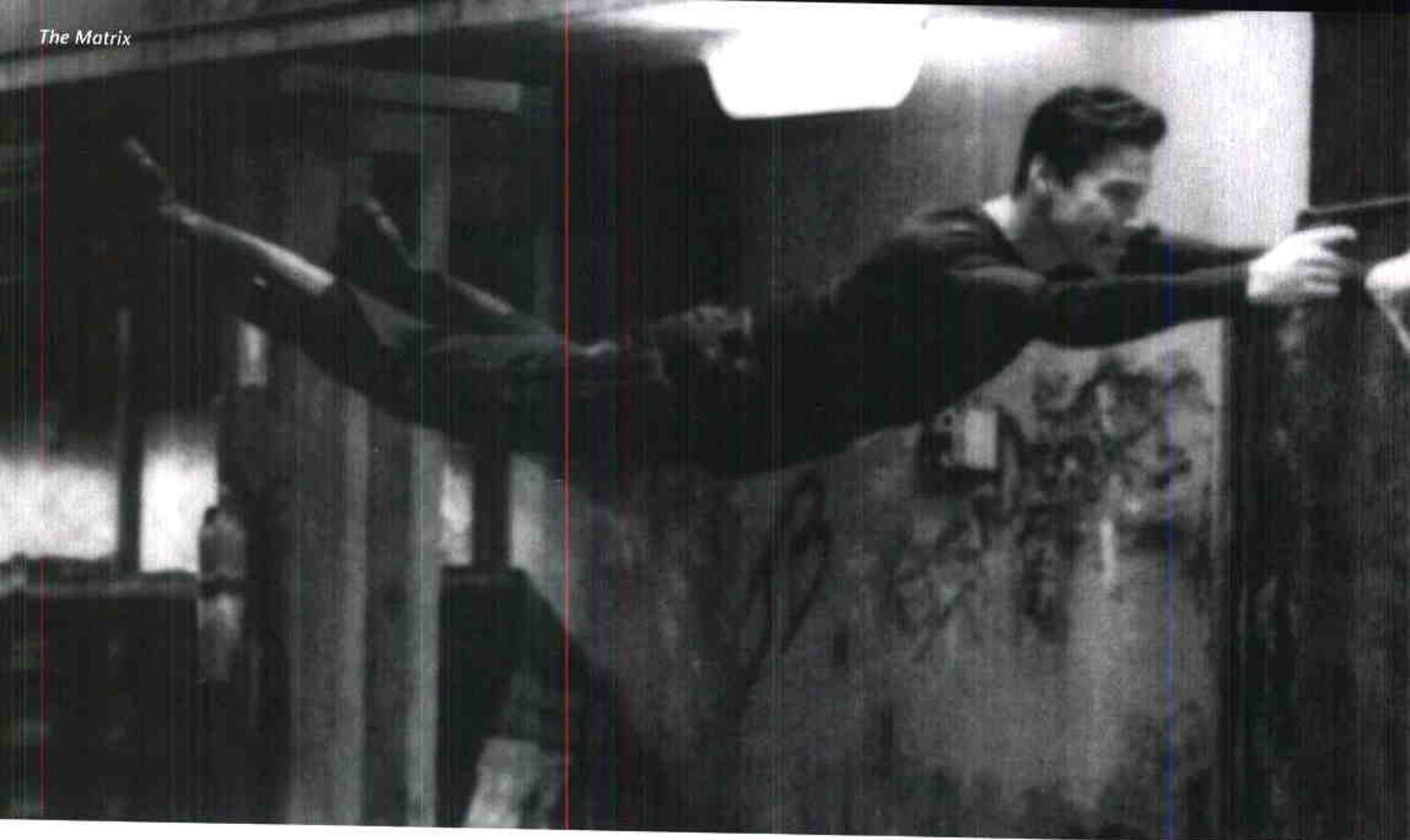
acter's motivation or his/her past; however, in many contemporary films it encompasses the entire film. Its function now is to increase the level of ambiguity in the film, to conflate the present with the past, the real with the unreal. Time is no longer that through which things and people reveal themselves (time as change) but rather the source of a confusion of the real with the imaginary, whether this confusion results from the malfunctioning of memory, or from a discrepancy between the point of view within the story and the point of view from which the story is told, or from an incongruity between different levels of knowledge or self-consciousness within one character or among characters.

Errol Morris' documentary *A Brief History of Time*, based on the book by Stephen Hawking, follows the attempts of Hawking and his colleagues to explain the origin of the universe. Towards the end of the film, the hypothesis is put forward that the universe should not be conceived as originating from a singular point since the laws of physics break down when one tries to explain the universe in terms of singularity. The concept of *imaginary time* is introduced as a means of avoiding the problem of singularity. In this new model, the universe is smooth and self-contained (visually the model of the universe existing in imaginary time is represented by an elliptical form with no edge, no boundary, no beginning). This model excludes any notion of a creation event. Not only is the universe not created by God, but it is equally incorrect to say that it is created from nothing: there is no "nothing" in the midst of which the universe suddenly springs forth. As one of Hawking's colleagues remarks, in this model the use of verb tenses is no longer appropriate. The theory of imaginary time, or of an infinite universe, bears a striking resemblance to Henri Bergson's idea of pure memory developed in *Matter and Memory* (1896). Bergson envisions our mental life, and the universe as

well, as having no beginning and, instead, infinitely stretched out 'towards' or 'into' pure memory.

According to Bergson, déjà vu is a privileged experience insofar as it reveals the true nature of our mental life: its infinity, or, what amounts to the same, the infinity of time. In déjà vu we remember something that we cannot attribute to our own past, but which seems to come from some anonymous, impersonal past. Since we are too busy meeting the demands of the present, we suppress those memories that are not immediately relevant to our present. If it were not for this narrowing down of our mental life, we would be constantly experiencing déjà vu, i.e., reliving an impersonal past. Bergson believes that everything has already happened an infinite number of times and that if we were able to expand our mental life to its true proportions, we would see that time is infinite, that our lives have been repeating themselves infinitely, without beginning or end, and that it is namely because of this infinite repetition that we exist at all. The infinity of time or consciousness is independent of our realization of it: it is not because we experience déjà vu that time is infinite; rather, *we experience déjà vu because time (and consciousness) is infinite*. Time's infinity does not need a material proof such as a particular deja vu experience, but a déjà vu experience always presupposes (and reveals) the infinity of time and consciousness. This is exactly the kind of relationship Sartre posits between pre-reflective and reflective consciousness: the former does not need to be reflected in a higher consciousness, but the latter always presupposes (and reveals) a pre-reflective cogito. In this sense, we can think of reflective consciousness as repetition, which renders manifest the pre-reflective aspect of consciousness that usually remains hidden but which is the condition of possibility of reflective consciousness.

Memory occupies an ambivalent position in this model.[1]

On one hand, memory is the standard on the basis of which the real is distinguished from the unreal. In Christopher Nolan's *Memento* the past ceases to be automatically preserved in the present, as a result of which it becomes more and more difficult to distinguish events that have really happened from those that have not happened: the film makes visible the power of memory to separate *real* from *unreal events*. On the other hand, insofar as pure memory is atemporal, eternal, even that which one fails to remember could have just as well taken place, indeed it *must* have taken place, because in an eternal universe everything has always already happened. In this respect, memory affirms the compossibility of the real and the unreal. Alternatively, films like *The Spanish Prisoner*, *The Princess and the Warrior* and *Run, Lola, Run* emphasize the difficulty in distinguishing events that have been planned or even *destined* from events that are purely *accidental*. The *virtual* is precisely this indistinguishability or compossibility of the real and the unreal, neither of which ever supplants the other.

The virtual in cinema exists on two levels: on the level of cinematography and on the level of point of view. A perfect example of a virtual cinematography is The Wachowski Brothers' *The Matrix* (1999), which employs a technique known as "bullet-time photography." One of the eye-catching scenes has Neo and the agents dodge bullets. To suggest the incredible speed with which the characters are moving, the cinematographer either superimposes several images of the body in different positions or slows down to an incredible degree the body's movements. In both cases, speed is suggested not, as might be expected, by means of increasing the frequency of movements or the abruptness of the change from one position of the body to the next, but just the opposite, by slowing down the movement as much as possible, in fact by presenting the body as almost immobile. To suggest great speed (which is itself imper-

ceptible) it is not necessary to divide the movement into many points: speed is not represented by an increase in the number of points/moments through which the movement passes but rather by a slowing down of the image. In general, the more easily perceptible or the slower the movement, the easier it is to divide it into segments, whereas the faster and the more imperceptible the movement, the better it is represented by intensifying or saturating the image. In this respect, the slowing down of an image to represent speed is analogous to a close-up of a face to suggest strong emotion.

Included in the DVD release of *The Matrix* is a short documentary explaining the idea of bullet time photography, using the dodging bullets scene as an example. Single photographs of the different stages or points in the movement of the body (Neo falling down as he tries to dodge the bullets) are taken and then scanned into a computer. Once provided with this series of stills, the computer generates in-between drawings ('interpollations'), which create the impression of movement from one still to the next. Thus, the exceptionally fast movement we see on the screen is a combination of real frames and computer generated frames. The movement can then be stretched out or compressed, depending on the way in which one alternates real with computer generated frames, making the moments inbetween the captured frames longer or shorter. One of the spe-

1 Given the increasingly important place of memory in contemporary cinema, one wonders what the implications of this trend could be for the old "Montage-or-Bust" controversy (whether montage is essential to cinema or not). Does the interest in the workings of memory demand a revival of montage? For a discussion of montage as a form of simulation versus "naturalism" or representational cinema, see Metz 31-91. Although Metz's position is that cinema "is language, *above and beyond any particular effect of montage*"(47), one needs to examine more carefully the nature of memory: is memory a form of pure expression i.e., is it denotative, or does it rather belong to signification (hence it presupposes and demands montage)? Patrick Fuery, for instance, believes that "[s]igns of time and memory usually have connotative values of reliable or unreliable"(155), as in *Last Year at Marienbad*.

cial effects specialists working on *The Matrix* remarks that thanks to the introduction of computers in cinematography, the camera has been dissociated or liberated from its subject matter. The camera no longer depends on the real movement of bodies in its reproduction of movement. It can now *create* movement and even combine it with real movement. The camera has become *virtual*. Film no longer represents only real movement but the illusion of movement: *virtual movement*.

The Matrix, then, poses a challenge to Christian Metz's argument that movement creates the impression of reality in cinema[2] insofar as "the spectator always sees movement as being present [presence is assumed to be the criterion for establishing the real]"(8). Movement is the paramount guarantee of the sense of reality in cinema because movement is intangible:

> Movement is insubstantial. We see it, but it cannot be touched, which is why it cannot encompass two degrees of phenomenal reality, the 'real' and the copy. ...The strict distinction between object and copy...dissolves on the threshold of motion. Because movement is never material but is always visual, to reproduce its appearance is to duplicate its reality. ...In the cinema the impression of reality is also the reality of the impression, the real presence of motion. (8-9)

The movement represented by bullet time photography is still insubstantial and visual. The question, however, is whether there is a difference between the visual nature of real movement and the visual nature of computer generated movement. Real movement is always perceived as present, but is this also true of movement reconstituted from a series of real and computer simulated frames? From Metz's point of view, it would seem that the more technologically advanced cinema becomes, the more it alienates itself from its own nature and the more closely it begins resembling photography, whose major characteristic is that it presents only the trace of past movements.

The second level on which the virtual functions is a film's point of view. A point of view is virtual if it confuses the real and the unreal. However, it is not that the real is mistaken for the unreal (or the other way around); rather, *the origin of the unreal cannot be situated in real time*. Because of the unreliable, unreal, virtual point of view (whether the unreliability of the point of view is the result of deception or self-deception), the film does not have a clear beginning, although it usually has a clear end (when the deception or self-deception is revealed). Films like *Memento, Following, The Spanish Prisoner, The Sixth Sense, Open Your Eyes* (and its remake *Vanilla Sky*), and *Fight Club* employ a virtual point of view (the point of view belongs to an imaginary character, or to a dead character, or to a character who has been deceived or who has deceived himself), which manifests itself most clearly in an incongruity between the visual and the narrative aspects of these films. Even if the film reveals the source of deception/self-deception, either the distinction between the real and the unreal is preserved on the level of narrative but not on the level of images, or the two are distinguished visually but confused narratively. Some of these films tell a story refracted through a mixture of memory and imagination, while others tell a story whose untruthfulness or

unreality is later exposed. The importance of memory (and, accordingly, of the flashback) cannot be overestimated. This fascination with presenting events as reconstructed or remembered rather than as taking place in the present confirms Metz's belief that memory is the key to understanding the phenomenology of narrative (and of film narrative in particular). Since "an event must in some way have ended before its narration can begin"(Metz 23), every account of events must, by necessity, be already a product of memory: "Reality does not tell stories, but memory, because it is an account, is entirely imaginative"(23). Memory is the condition of possibility for any narrative act, including a film. Films that present events as remembered or reconstructed could be seen as the film equivalent of metafiction or self-referential fiction, since they draw attention to the phenomenology of film narrative as such, to the fact that *memory is the very condition of possibility of any kind of narrative*. Thus, films in which memory plays a significant role—both as a subject matter and as a strategy for telling the story—problematize the possibility of narrative i.e., the relationship between events and the account of events.

Is it really necessary for an event to end before its narration can begin? Could the narration of an event precede the event itself? How does one determine the end of an event, i.e., how does one distinguish the memory of an event (its imaginative reconstruction) from the real event? Could the narration of an event begin before the event has ended, in the middle of it, as it were? The films I am going to discuss here all pose these questions in one form or another. They are particularly appropriate for this discussion since they all deal with the theme of deception or self-deception, demonstrating that the question of the relationship between events and their narration is also the question of the relationship between the real and the unreal. The point of view in these films is virtual insofar as it is either impossible to situate the origin of unreal events on a real timeline (even if such is present in the film) or the representation of events relies on an inverted hierarchy of causes and effects, where effects are represented as preceding rather than following causes. Whatever the particular deception, dream, or unreality these films represent, its eventual revelation on the level of *plot* always fails to distinguish, even retrospectively, between the real and the unreal, which have been conflated *visually*. The knowledge that certain events in the film have been mistakenly assumed real is never sufficient to establish the precise point at which the real was compromised.

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Everything in David Fincher's *Fight Club* (1999) hinges on the question of from whose point of view the story is told. When we watch the film for the first time we assume the story is told from the point of view of Edward Norton's character, even though we never learn his name (we only know some of his made up names—Cornelius, Rupert—under which he attends the meetings of various support groups). At the end of the film, we find out that Tyler Durton—played by Brad Pitt—is, in fact, another side of 'Cornelius', a hallucinatory representation of the kind of man Cornelius wants to be but is afraid to be. Tyler's two lives are never clearly separated—it is because Cornelius' life overlaps with Tyler's, both penetrating each other at certain

points, that Norton's character is eventually able to realize that he is Tyler Durton. Norton's character does not suffer from a split personality disorder (this is not a movie about schizophrenia, pathology); he is simply in "bad faith" (Sartre): he is afraid to admit that he is not only Cornelius the conscientious office worker, Ikea boy, insomniac, but he is also Tyler Durton, a free man.

We expect the story to be told from the point of view of Cornelius, who gradually realizes that he is Tyler: indeed, the film opens with Cornelius, who then meets Tyler (played by a different actor), and it ends with Cornelius realizing he is Tyler. At least this is what we see on the screen. However, the voiceover represents a completely different point of view: the voiceover belongs to Tyler i.e., to Cornelius *after* he has realized that he is Tyler. Thus, the images and the voiceover (the visual and the linguistic or narrative elements of the film) represent two different, and in fact opposed, points of view. The film must find a way to address the paradox that on one hand, Cornelius is always already Tyler (from the moment Tyler appears as a separate character) while, on the other hand, the film wants to trace the history of Cornelius' realization that he is Tyler. The story cannot be told from Cornelius' point of view, because it would not make sense psychologically in retrospect: the unity of the character's consciousness would not have been established if from the very beginning it was split into two separate consciousnesses. The only way the unity of the protagonist's consciousness can be restored is to tell the story from the point of view of Tyler, because Tyler represents the reflective consciousness, the consciousness that 'knows' that it is Cornelius who has suppressed his identity with Tyler. However, visually this would have made no sense: there would be no film if from the very beginning we were shown only one character, if Cornelius' alter-ego were not embodied in a separate character. Thus, the two limitations or conditions the film faces are: how to combine psychological authenticity (unity of consciousness) with the necessity of presenting the history of the character's transformation, or how to represent consciousness in the act of changing (expanding). The only way to do this is, precisely, to split the point of view between the two major elements of the film: the images and the voiceover. The point of view is not split between the two different actors representing the two sides of the protagonist; rather, *it is split only in terms of the structural elements of the film itself: visually the story is told from Cornelius' point of view, whereas the voiceover represents Tyler's point of view.* The images represent pre-reflective consciousness, the voiceover reflective consciousness. Although we assume that the voiceover expresses the thoughts of the character we see on the screen (Norton's character), in reality the voiceover is not contemporaneous with the character, but represents Tyler's *retrospective* point of view. Such a complete separating of voice from image would have been rather jarring—it seems only natural to us that there should be a continuity between the image of a man and his thoughts/words—but we only become aware of it retrospectively. The voiceover determines the kinds of images we are going to see: the images simply illustrate the story told by the voiceover. We don't see any irrelevant images, images that are not within the control of the voiceover. The voiceover is privileged over the visual aspect of the film because the voiceover represents a higher, reflective consciousness, which is now trying to reconstruct the sequence of events which led up to the realization of the identity of Cornelius with Tyler. The subordinate role of the images is such that it does not even matter if the events the voiceover is recounting really happened or not. Whatever the voice says must be demonstrated with images, including events that never actually took place: at one point Cornelius wishes for a plane crash and although the plane does not crash, his wish is dramatized visually.

The splitting of the point of view produces a splitting of film time as well. Time flows in two opposite directions: visually it flows forward (from Cornelius' ignorance of his own identity to Cornelius' realization that he is Tyler), but narratively (on the level of voiceover) time flows backwards (tracing retrospectively Cornelius' process of self-discovery). It is because the voiceover expresses reflective consciousness (time flowing backwards) that long before Tyler appears as a separate character, we have already seen what appear to be subliminal images of him. These flashing images (the first one appears on the screen when Cornelius goes to see a doctor about his insomnia, another one appears after Cornelius meets Marla for the first time) could be just Tyler's jokes (since he is telling the story and since he works as a projectionist, whose hobby is to insert precisely such subliminal pornographic images in family films), or they could function as an odd kind of foreshadowing, marking the point at which Cornelius starts inventing Tyler. They appear and disappear so fast, barely visible, because they represent Cornelius' unconscious. The different exposure of images (in terms of how long they remain on the screen) becomes a way to represent different levels of consciousness: well-exposed images suggest a well-developed consciousness, while the unconscious is expressed through short exposure. The more successful Cornelius is at suppressing his identity with Tyler, the more present Tyler becomes on the screen. On the other hand, as soon as Cornelius begins having doubts about his identity, Tyler becomes cinematographically invisible.

The splitting of the point of view challenges the distinction between real and virtual, a distinction that continues to be questioned on other levels as well, particularly on the level of 'natural' versus 'digital' images. While the opening credits are running, we see a computer-generated image of Cornelius' brain, and then the camera 'emerges' on the exterior surface of his head. The digitization of the internal (the images of the brain) continues on the level of what is, supposedly, the most individual, most personal or secret aspect of a human being: their thoughts. A series of digital, purposefully fragmented and fast, MTV-paced images is flashed on the screen, over which the same voiceover that was just a second ago accompanying the
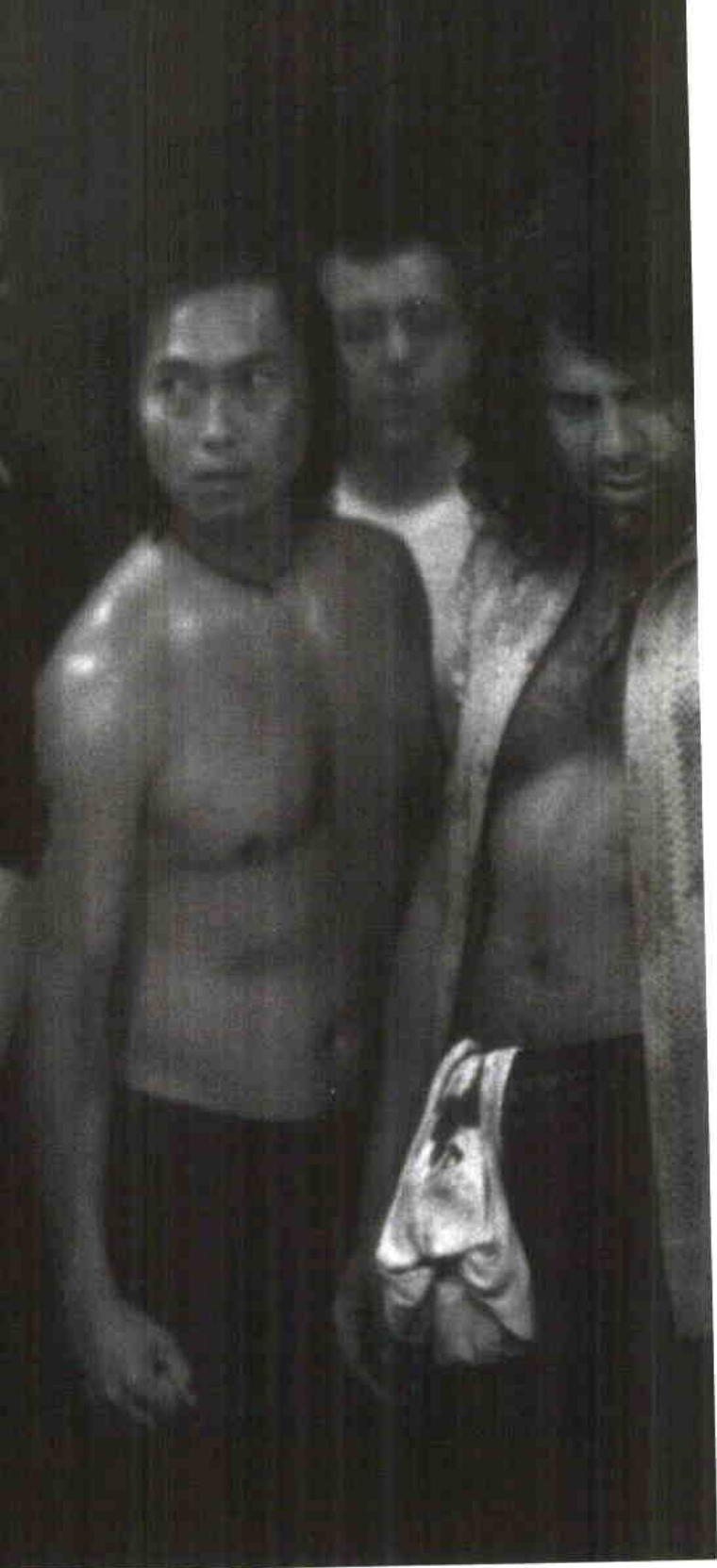
2 In a passage reminiscent of Baudrillard's argument of the nature of the real—the real, Baudrillard believes, takes place only within a certain interval, at a certain speed of light, which makes possible the separation of causes from effects—Metz places film in-between theatre and photography, a sort of "optimal point…on either side of which the impression of reality produced by the fiction tends to decrease"(13). On the reality (not realism) constitutive of cinema, see particularly pp. 3-15 in *Film Language: A Semiotics of the Cinema*. See also Fuery 123-128 on "the reality effect" in cinema. Fuery identifies the sense of reality created in cinema with the hyperreal i.e., with simulation.
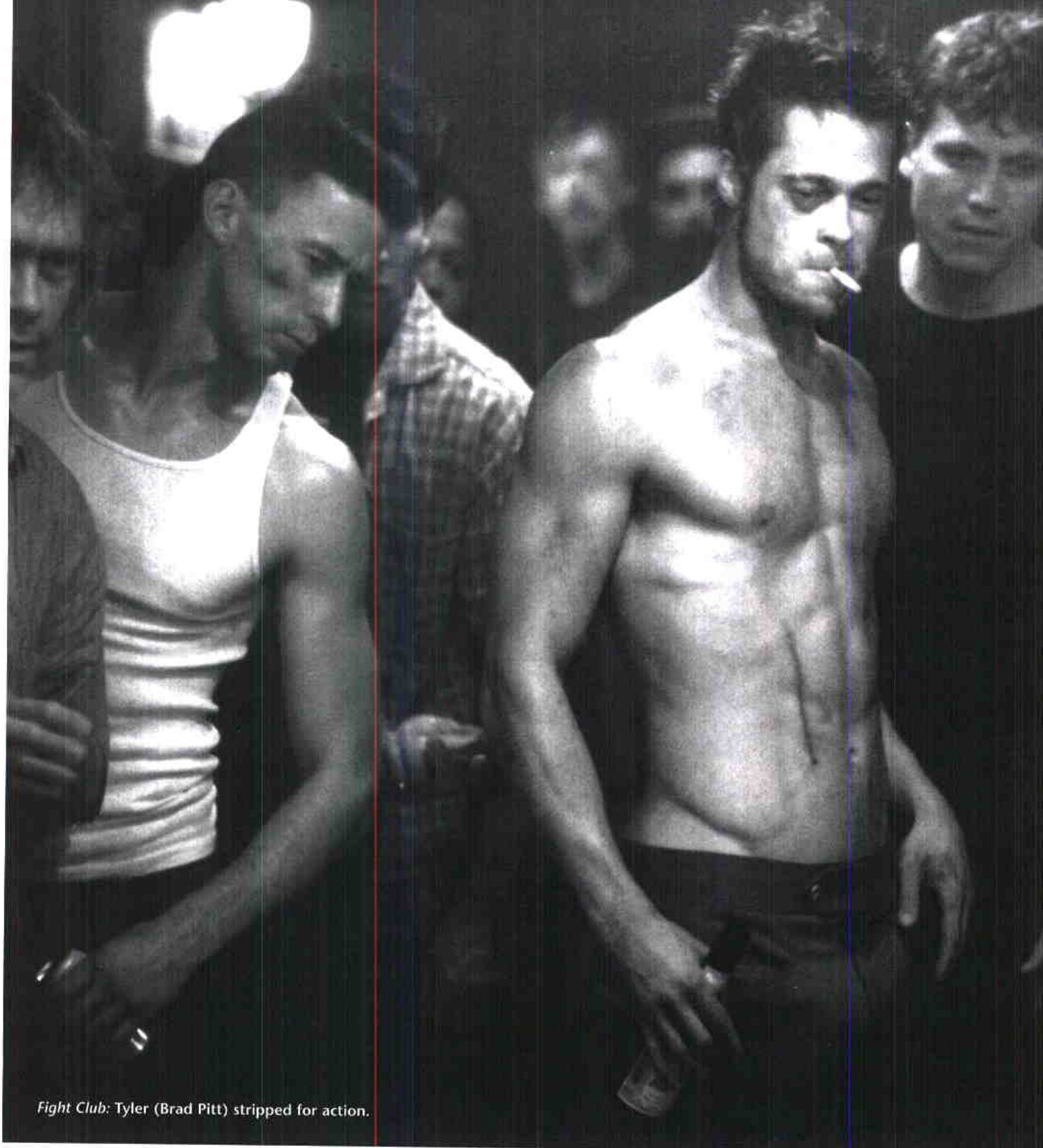
Fight Club: Tyler (Brad Pitt) stripped for action.

realistic scene of Tyler threatening Cornelius, is still superimposed. These artificial looking or even nonhuman images (they do not represent a human point of view—Cornelius's point of view—but the independent point of view of the camera) are meant to represent Cornelius' thoughts. This image sequence is all the more jarring since there is absolutely nothing to prepare us for it, no transition from the realism of the opening scene to the disturbing, almost hyperreal quality of the digitized images. The same voice we hear superimposed over the realistic images continues speaking over the digitized ones. From a Bergsonian point of view, the use of such digital images to represent 'internal' thoughts is, in fact, completely justified.

The digital images are less spatial in comparison to other, more realistic images. Rather, through their very speed they compress space and thus represent it in terms of time. In the opening scene, Tyler is standing by the window on top of a skyscraper; the camera moves 'through' the glass and then plunges down, reaches the ground, and falls further down into the basement where the van with the explosives is waiting. If this were shot realistically, at a normal speed, the sequence would have had to consist of separate shots taken at various points: either a camera would have to be placed on every floor of the skyscraper or the whole sequence would have to be divided into a shot from above, a shot at ground level, a shot

than a more realistic approach. It is precisely because the computer generated image is not interested in the meticulous representation of visual details that it speeds over them, creating the impression of being less extended, and instead more saturated with time. It could be objected, perhaps, that the mere speed of an image does not make it more of a mental image or an image of duration: after all, could not the same effect have been attained by merely editing together a series of very short images, alternating them very fast? There is a great difference between the two, however: a fast, computer generated image is continuous, but many images edited together create the impression of speed only by disrupting the continuity of what they are trying to represent. The very nature of editing is discontinuity: even when editing creates a unified impression or a certain mood, it still attains this through the discontinuity of multiple images. Computer generated images, on the other hand, are capable of imitating or simulating continuity or duration.

In addition to the distinction between 'natural' and 'computer-generated', the film also challenges the distinction between the literal and the metaphorical: it treats the metaphorical literally and the literal metaphorically. For instance, when Cornelius is advised to "step into his cave" (a metaphor for getting to know oneself, purposefully isolating oneself from the world), the camera actually shows us Cornelius, dressed in exactly the same suit he is wearing in real life, in a cave covered with ice. Conversely, later on, when he and Marla are having a conversation that threatens to precipitate Cornelius's realization that he is Tyler, Tyler (Brad Pitt) interrupts the conversation, addressing Cornelius from the basement: the unconscious, which is spatially envisioned as a realm *under* consciousness, is thus represented literally as a space *under* the rest of the house. Another instance of this tendency to treat the literal and the metaphorical as interchangeable is the director's choice to use a different actor to play the part of the imaginary Tyler. By making this decision, the director does not have to deal with the difficulty of using the same actor as two different people in one and the same shot (which would require a lot of editing). Instead, he treats the imaginary Tyler as just another image, as real as any other images. Conversely, when the imaginary Tyler 'dies' at the end of the film, he dies like a real person (we see the bullet make a hole in the back of his head). At the same time, however, the realistically depicted death of the imaginary Tyler remains metaphorical since Cornelius himself survives.

Even from a retrospective point of view, it is impossible to situate in time the moment when the real starts producing the unreal, the moment when Cornelius invents Tyler Durton. At first, it seems it must be the moment when Cornelius meets Tyler on the plane. However, the incident with the vibrating suitcase casts doubt on this hypothesis. Cornelius is stopped by airport security because of a suspicion that his suitcase might contain a bomb. It is irrelevant whether this is indeed Cornelius's suitcase or he and Tyler switched cases, because we know that they are the same person, hence there is only one suitcase. If there are indeed explosives in the suitcase, this means that Cornelius has been producing explosives from soap

of the basement. A realistic effect would have been achieved only at the price of interrupting and fragmenting the time it takes the camera to move from one point to another. Since this particular sequence is supposed to express Cornelius's thoughts or memories—we know that from the voiceover recounting the plan of the Demolition Committee—a realistic treatment of his thoughts would have had to slow them down and "spatialize" them (to use Bergson's expression).

The advantage of the computer-generated image lies in its capacity to approximate (or simulate) the immediacy or the speed of Cornelius' thoughts. Thus, in this case, an artificial means of representation—digitization—represents time better

well before we see him meet Tyler on the plane. In another instance, Cornelius is surprised when Marla calls him at the house on Paper street, but she tells him that he had given her the number himself. He gave her the number while he was still going to support groups, and *before* he met Tyler on the plane, *before* he blew up his own condo, which means that he must have been living in that house *before* he blew up his apartment. This lack of correspondence between the visual story and the voiceover is necessitated by the point of view of the film. Thus, there is a delay between the moment Cornelius' imagination externalizes Tyler as a separate human being and the actual moment when the split of Cornelius into two personalities takes place. But regardless of what moment in the film the director chooses to dramatize the appearance of Tyler (the split), Tyler will have always already appeared. The split cannot happen at exactly the moment in which we see it happen, because that would presuppose that Cornelius is conscious of it. The only way to suggest that something has happened, of which Cornelius is yet unaware, is precisely to present it as something that has already happened. Only if Cornelius is already Tyler *before* Tyler actually appears will the film make psychological sense, and it will make psychological sense only retrospectively. This psychological justification of the film is in accordance with Sartre's identification of the unconscious with the past, the given, the unself-conscious, that which already and simply is. The only way to present Tyler as Cornelius' alterego, of which Cornelius remains unconscious, is to present it as Cornelius's past, as something Cornelius already is, but to which he cannot be reduced.

It remains unclear, however, at what point the history of Cornelius' transformation from Cornelius into Tyler (history being a forward movement) slips into the retrospective account of this same transformation (i.e. what happens in the apparently linear sequence of events does not coincide with what must have happened retrospectively, since the invention of Tyler must always precede the visual dramatization of that invention). It is impossible to determine the point at which time flowing forward meets time flowing backwards, and history (events as they happen) becomes a story (events as they are said to have happened, the projection or recording of events); the point at which the present coincides with the past, or, put in yet another way, where an event is no longer an event but its own commentary on, or interpretation of, itself. The difficulty in differentiating between what is happening and what will have happened, between the naïve point of view of Cornelius and the self-conscious point of view of Cornelius=Tyler, whose flashback *includes* Cornelius's naïve point of view, is similar to the difficulty in distinguishing an original from a forgery, which Umberto Eco discusses in "Fakes and Forgeries." Eco observes that exactly the same verification procedures are used to establish the validity of both originals and forgeries. Not only do we have to establish that there exists somewhere an original, of which the forgery is an imitation, but we also have to establish that the original is indeed the original i.e., we have to prove that the original is not itself a forgery, which leads to infinite regress. The difference between an original and its forgery might be compared to that between

an objective and a subjective account of an event. Films like *Fight Club* and *Mulholland Drive* suggest that the difference between "what happened" and "what must have happened" can no longer be reduced to the neat opposition between "subjective" and "objective." We believe what we see are the events as Cornelius perceives them; at the end, we find out that what we saw was Tyler's version of what must have happened. *It is not a matter of confusing the objective with the subjective but of confusing two different levels of subjectivity*: within the subjective, we confused pre-reflective (Cornelius) with reflective consciousness (Tyler=Cornelius). In *Mulholland Drive* we believe we see events from Camilla's point of view and later we find out that what we saw was a mixture of Betsy's memories, nightmares, dreams: *we confuse one subjective point of view with another.*

Wim Wenders' *The Million Dollar Hotel* (2001), like *Fight Club*, splits the point of view between the point of view of the protagonist as a character in the film—a character, therefore, subject to the limitations of film or narrative time—and that of the voiceover, which is also the point of view of the already dead protagonist. Once again, *the visual aspect of the film does not correspond to the linguistic or narrative aspect* (the voiceover in which the point of view is embodied). We observe Tom-Tom (the protagonist) engage in the sort of activities typically associated with retarded people, but the voiceover does not belong to a retarded man: it is a sophisticated, self-aware voice capable of ironic asides (when Tom meets agent Skinner for the first time, the voiceover comments that Skinner realized pretty fast that Tom was a little slow in the head). The point of view is split not so much between the past when Tom was alive and the present when he is dead (still, whose present is it if he himself is no longer present?); rather, the necessity of the split is dictated by the different functions of the protagonist's point of view: whenever the point of view has to establish certain facts or provide some necessary information to the viewer, the voiceover sounds rational, coherent, self-conscious, and whenever the focus is shifted to character development, the point of view becomes that of an awkward retarded man with a tender heart.

Christopher Nolan's *Memento* (2001) provides another instance of the purposeful incongruity between the visual element of the film and the point of view from which the story is told (the voiceover). The images in the film intentionally lag behind the story so that events that we see *later* in the film have actually happened *earlier*. Interestingly enough, the malfunctioning of the protagonist's memory is not used as an excuse for the film not to concern itself with consistency. In fact, precisely because there are no time anchors and events are fairly indeterminable, the film is extremely precise in the ordering of scenes. Even the kinds of foreshadowing used here and in *Fight Club* are similar: the subliminal images of Tyler (which retrospectively suggest the beginning of the splitting of the point of view) are matched by the equally subliminal substitution of the image of Sammy in the psychiatric asylum with the image of Leonard (which foreshadows the discovery that Leonard has confused his own life with Sammy's). As in the case of Tyler's double consciousness—at one level he knows he

has invented Tyler but at another level he believes Tyler is a real person—*Memento*'s Leonard also lies to himself unconsciously. The film unfolds forward (despite the backward presentation of events) so that Leonard does not know (and we do not know either) the truth, but retrospectively we have to assume that Leonard knew and at the same time did not know the truth from the very beginning.

The epiphany is moved from the end of the film, where it usually belongs, to the beginning. In a less complicated film, the story starts out disordered and moves toward greater clarity, toward a single point that would retrospectively make sense of everything that has happened. It is important to notice that although this traditional type of narrative seems to rely on the most common notion of time as flowing forward, the truth is that in such a film time flows backwards insofar as all the events are governed by the same *telos* that will account for them retrospectively. The epiphany only appears to come at the end of the film, whereas in reality it has always already happened but is artificially delayed so that we can witness how the events led up to it. Time flows backwards, from a point in the future (the end of the film, the epiphany) back toward the past, imbuing events with their predetermined significance. Conversely, in a film that explicitly places its end in the beginning, the direction of time is reversed so that, counter-intuitively, time flows forward. Situating the epiphany in the beginning of the film has the effect of liberating the rest of the film from the need to follow a certain predetermined course. Thus, although it might seem natural to view time in the traditional film as a form of discovery—a movement from ignorance to knowledge—and, conversely, to regard time in the other kind of film (the film that starts from the end) as a reconstruction, in fact these two interpretations should be reversed: whenever the story moves forward, it is in fact reconstructing events in light of a predetermined end, and whenever the story moves backwards, it is in fact taking the form of discovery or exploration.

Placing the end at the beginning does not make the film predictable but in fact liberates it from predictability. When time unfolds forward in a film, the elements of the story that will be retrospectively important have to be given additional emphasis at the moment in which they are presented. Thus, even though while we are watching the film we are not supposed to know what is going to happen the next moment, we must nevertheless notice certain elements rather than others in order to understand the end of the film. The film must create the false impression that anything could be important (that the end cannot be known until we actually get to the end), but at the same time it must make sure that certain things are more important and more plausible than others (otherwise the film's end would seem arbitrary). On the contrary, a film that starts from the end does not have to show how all events contribute to the ending; cause and effect relationships are loosened up. This is particularly evident in Nolan's *Memento*. Given the foreknowledge of the end, one would expect the rest of the film to present clear cut causal relationships between events, but this is not what happens: although each sequence of scenes is clearly framed by beginning and end (the beginning of one sequence is the end of the previous one), what happens in-

Fight Club: Edward Norton, Brad Pitt.

between these two invariable, stable points is not always comprehensible and justifiable in terms of causes and effects.

The tricky nature of *Memento* lies precisely in the obvious way in which it flaunts its structure, seducing us into believing that once we have figured out the structure of the film we know everything and the only thing we can expect from the rest of the film is the backward unfolding of events until a beginning is reached. However, the point of view complicates things significantly. In the film's final scene, Leonard is driving down the road, thinking to himself: "I have to believe in a world outside my mind. I have to believe that when I close my eyes, the world is still there. Is it still there?...Yeah." Leonard has been and will continue to live in a world he has himself fabricated. His epiphany—the realization that he has been lying to himself—takes only a few seconds, during which he consciously decides to continue lying to himself, a decision he immediately forgets as he does everything else. Although the film tries to represent events exactly as Leonard experiences them—the film purposefully deprives itself of short-term memory to approximate its protagonist's condition—in reality this technique is inappropriate as it actually presupposes an exceptionally good memory. With every single scene recollected, Leonard has to 'leap' further and further back into the past in order to reconstruct the whole scene leading up to the beginning of the previous scene. This means that he has to 'leap' twice: once from the present into the past and the second time from a moment even further back in the past back to the first moment in the past.

Although visually the film's epiphany occurs at the end, on the level of narrative it happens in the beginning or rather in the middle insofar as the film has the structure of an infinite loop, without beginning or end. If the film were just an ordinary flashback, the epiphany would merely coincide with the origin. However, such an origin is inconceivable given that the protagonist is an unreliable narrator: deprived of short-term memory, he cannot tell (and neither can we) at what point he must have started lying to himself. Since there are two levels of consciousness in the film—Leonard's pre-reflective knowledge of what really happened, and, on the other hand, his ignorance/forgetfulness of what really happened—and since the former can exist independently of the latter (as Sartre has shown), it is impossible to determine the point at which the two consciousnesses diverge from each other, i.e. Leonard cannot remember the moment when he started lying to himself (which would be the real beginning of the film). Leonard cannot be conscious of the moment when he started forgetting (when he chose to forget) and lying to himself—if he were conscious, he would not have forgotten it. Memory is both the essential standard for determining what is real and what is not, and the least reliable standard for such a determination: on one hand, memory is selective and thus subjective but on the other hand, if one does not remember having done something, he is as likely to have done it as he is not to have done it, just as he could have done it five minutes or five years ago. Thus, when memory functions properly, it is an unrealizing (selective, imaginative force) but when it malfunctions, the distinction between real and unreal is suppressed (which implies,

paradoxically, that this distinction had always been precisely the work of memory).

Memento is structured like a flashback but it is not clear who is trying to remember what happened. Leonard's 'condition' places the film in an impossible situation: if Leonard has forgotten that he has already killed his wife's attacker, what is there to guarantee that he remembers killing Teddy? Since the events we see unfolding before us have already happened—Leonard has already killed Teddy—he must have already forgotten about it. But then whose flashback constitutes the film? Who remembers Teddy's murder and the events that led up to it, if it is not Leonard? It is not that Leonard, having killed Teddy in the first scene, is trying to reconstruct the series of events that led up to that murder: Leonard is merely trying to find his wife's killer; it is only 'the film itself' that is trying to 'remember' how he got to the point of killing Teddy. The point of view is split between Leonard's pre-reflective and reflective consciousness (in the same way it is split in *Fight Club*): it cannot be determined whether the story is told from the point of view of Leonard, who does not yet know that he will have killed Teddy, or from the point of view of Leonard who has *already* doubted himself for a moment after Teddy has told him the truth. Visually, Leonard's realization comes at the end, which suggests that the entire story must have been told from the naïve (pre-reflective) Leonard's point of view, but since from the very beginning of the film we already know that Teddy will have been killed, and since we have to follow the logic of the film (events happen backwards), the epiphany must be situated in the beginning, which would suggest that the whole story is told from the point of view of Leonard who knows (at least for a moment) that he has suppressed the memory of having killed his wife's killer and the memory of his wife's suicide.

Following, the film Christopher Nolan made before the more popular *Memento*, also employs the flashback technique (the protagonist is telling his story to a detective) accompanied by a voiceover, which problematizes the film's point of view. The point of view is, once again, split between the two visibly distinct personas adopted by the protagonist (he changes his appearance to look less like a thief, but at what point in time that happens remains unclear). Like *Fight Club*, *Memento*, *The Spanish Prisoner*, and *Open Your Eyes*, *Following* pursues a purposeful incongruity between the visual and the purely narrative (story) aspect of the film. This incongruity is not self-evident, revealing itself only retrospectively. For example, the film opens with the protagonist wandering in the streets and following different people, while the voiceover explains his reasons for doing so (boredom, loneliness). However, the end of the film makes it clear that the man the protagonist is following in the opening scenes, has actually been following him and, having gradually won his trust, uses him as a decoy to cover up his own criminal deeds. It is true that the subject matter of all these films justifies and perhaps even demands such a rift between images and story, insofar as all of these films deal with different forms of deception and self-deception.

It might seem, at first, that the linguistic element of these films (whether or not it is embodied in a voiceover) is privi-

leged over the visual element, which is eventually declared a source of deception. One might be led to believe that the narrative corrects the illusions created by the images, that truth is revealed exclusively by language (by the story). However, much more is demanded of the images than of the linguistic element of these films. Since each of these films must both deceive in a convincing fashion and reveal the deception in an equally convincing fashion, the visual representation of events must be so carefully orchestrated, so ambiguous—yet without seeming unconvincing—that when the film is seen *prospectively* the images would coincide with the story, but when seen *retrospectively*, the images would diverge from the original story and coincide with a different one (with the truth). In a sense, the images are expected to 'carry out' two different films at the same time: even after the deception has been revealed at the end, the revelation of the truth should not invalidate, retrospectively, the untruthful story the images have told.

The point of view in *Following* is as unreliable as that in the other films discussed here. The story is told as a flashback but it is intermingled with memories the protagonist must have imagined, since there is no way he could have witnessed them. (For example, he 'remembers' a conversation between two characters at which he was not present.) As in *Fight Club* and *Memento*, where it cannot be established whether or not the story is told from the point of view of the protagonist who has already become aware of his deception, in *Following* it appears at first that at the time of telling the story to the detective the protagonist (Bill) does not know that he has been deceived—the lack of chronology in the recounting of past events suggests that the person recounting them cannot yet make sense of them—but by the end of the film it has become obvious that the protagonist already knows quite a lot (although he is still unaware of the final twist, the murder of the woman he loves, he already knows that he has been deceived). As he is telling the story, Bill has already realized his deception, which means that the only purpose of the flashback is to reconstruct his way to that realization. The events are already ordered in a meaningful sequence in his mind but now he deconstructs their order to see how exactly he must have pieced them together. However, this becomes clear only retrospectively: while we are watching the film, we assume that the flashback is from the naïve, unknowing point of view. As in *Time Regained*, memory here works by leaps from one memory to another rather than by always going back to the present in order to leap into a particular moment in the past. One remembers always from within the past, not from a stable reference point in the present, which is why recollected events are never chronological: one can leap into an earlier memory and from there 'remember' an event that happened much later (remembering forward).

Following (*The Spanish Prisoner*, too, as we shall see) deals with deception, hence with representing the play between the different levels of knowledge among characters. In both films, once it becomes clear that events have been unfolding according to a plan (of which the protagonists were unaware), we are faced with the difficulty of distinguishing events that are part of the plan from those that are merely accidental. (For example, how could Carl have predicted that Bill would call him to ask for advice about weapons, specifically about a hammer? Or why does the woman, who is supposedly working for Carl, tell Bill about the missing earring, raising his suspicion when he does not find it where it is supposed to be?) The discrepancies between the protagonist's knowledge (with which we identify) and the knowledge of other characters have the effect of surrounding every event with the mysterious aura of self-sufficiency or inexplicability. The non-chronological representation of events creates the impression that every event we see has been preceded by another, very significant event that could explain it, but to which we are denied access. The focus is not on what happens but, rather, on what *could have* or *must have* happened before it: *something happens* means, first of all, that *something else happened before it*. For instance, we see Bill hiding a hammer under his coat, but we do not know why he is doing this until several scenes later. Although the film does not deal with the loss of short-term memory, it is structurally similar to *Memento* in the way it presents the effects of events *before* their causes. Events are either delayed or represented prematurely, in advance of our ability to comprehend them. And although Bill, unlike Leonard, has not lost his short term memory, there is something amnesic in the recounting of events: we never know what happened right before the particular event we see represented, as if Bill's short term memory has been erased. Although it may appear counter-intuitive, the purposeful withholding of the causes of events emphasizes the fact that events are never accidental.

The treatment of time in *Fight Club* and *Memento* is intricately connected with the subject matter of both films, self-deception, and thus with point of view. All temporal complications and confusions result from the representation of two levels of consciousness—pre-reflective and reflective—and the various degrees of delay or coincidence possible between them. Although David Mamet's *The Spanish Prisoner* (1998) is concerned with deception rather than with self-deception, it still poses some of the same questions the other two films deal with. In particular, it dramatizes the impossibility to determine the origin of a sequence of events even when, contrary to common sense, that sequence turns out to have been predetermined, as is the case with the confidence game called "The Spanish Prisoner." The difficulty in distinguishing the real from the unreal in this film is already inherent in the misleading title: although the film provides a definition of "The Spanish Prisoner" confidence game, the protagonist does not fall victim to it but to an entirely different (and anonymous) confidence game. The protagonist is first tricked into believing that what he sees and experiences is real (his business trip to an exotic island where he unveils a secret "process" he has been working on). Later, he is led to believe that he has been tricked by means of an old confidence game, but his conmen lie to him that he has been tricked in order to trick him further into believing that they are going to protect him from the person who supposedly swindled him. They need him to believe that he has been conned so that they can con him. The film establishes something as real, then questions its reality, declares it unreal, and finally reaffirms its reality, without ever offering a stable reference point. For example, in the beginning

of the film the protagonist meets a woman who jokes that she is an FBI agent, implying that she is not. However, later he discovers (he is tricked into believing) that she is indeed an FBI agent. Finally, it turns out that she is not an FBI agent but merely pretends to be one (along with an entire fake FBI team). Thus, the protagonist is most successfully tricked when he is led to believe that when someone is lying they are actually telling the truth.

In *The Spanish Prisoner* (as well as in *Open Your Eyes*, *The Sixth Sense* and *Run, Lola, Run*,) it is difficult to determine the point at which the confidence game begins, the point after which, retrospectively, we will have to assume that everything was part of a plan. Even if we acknowledge the cleverness of the conmen, it is hard to believe that everything that happens in the beginning of the film (on the island) has been planned. It seems incredible, for instance, that when the protagonist is leaving the island, his conmen know for certain that he will look back and see the "FBI agent" give his secretary her card, or that he will remember that the secretary made an album with memorabilia from the island and, further, remember that the FBI agent's card is in that album. On one hand, there are some carefully planted clues (the book, the flowers, etc.) that appear to be part of the confidence game since the conmen draw the protagonist's attention to them in a very obvious way, but, on the other hand, it is precisely these details that

end up raising the protagonist's suspicion. The film is structured as a confidence game within a confidence game, to which the false climax attests: the protagonist must be tricked into believing that he was tricked, he must become self-aware in order for his self-awareness to be put to sleep. He must believe that someone is lying to him, so that he can really be lied to. By drawing attention to itself, a lie does not simply uncover itself as a lie but in fact gains credibility. Even the end of the film, though seemingly solving the puzzle, cannot help us determine retrospectively the origin of the unreal, the point at which it started diverging from the real. That the whole series of events turns out to have been planned in advance, makes it not less but actually *more* difficult to distinguish retrospectively chance events from events that happen because they were planned. There is so much pressure to explain how every single detail was part of the plan, to make it fit into a strict causal relationship with every other detail in the story, that the more strongly the film insists that events were planned, the harder it is to reduce them to such a plan.

It is not so uncommon for a character in a film to realize that what he thought was real is, in fact, unreal. A film can get away with the wildest of dreams, fantasies, unrealities as long as there is still a point of view rooted in the real, even if it is not the dominant point of view in the film. In M. Night Shyamalan's *The Sixth Sense*, however, such a real point of view

is lacking. The entire film unfolds (retrospectively) from an unreal point of view—at the end of the film the protagonist discovers that all that time he has been dead—and it dramatizes the process by which the unreal becomes aware of its own unreality. Thus, the only source of the real in the film is the mere realization that nothing of what we have seen has really happened, that it has been the imaginary experience of a dead man who refuses to believe he is dead. Though the events take up almost two hours of film time to unfold, in reality they are just the dream or hallucination of a man seconds before he dies. The real emerges only as its own self-negation, circumscribed on all sides by the unreal, just as in *The Spanish Prisoner* an unreal (fake) confidence game is framed by the 'real' confidence game. The uncovering of the unreal (the inner or fake confidence game) refers us only to something equally duplicitous (the outer or real confidence game). In both films the real is the result of the unreal flaunting its unreality: attaining self-awareness the unreal becomes real, just as a lie, by drawing attention to itself, passes for truth. The real remains suspect, nevertheless, since the unreal is not supposed to 'know' that it is unreal, while a lie is supposed to disguise itself rather than uncover itself purposefully.

The premise of *The Sixth Sense* is similar to that of *Fight Club*: the story is told from the point of view of an imaginary character, in this case a dead man and revolves around the protagonist's 'realization' that he is dead. The film's irony lies in the fact that the dead man is a psychologist trying to help a little boy, whose psychological problem consists precisely in his claim that he sees dead people. A year before the action in the film begins, the psychologist has been shot by a former patient of his, whom he treated when the latter was a little boy but whom he failed to cure. The boy, now a grown up man, returns to avenge himself on the psychologist he holds responsible. A year after he has been shot, the psychologist begins treating another boy, whose case is remarkably similar to the earlier one. This is the intriguing part: since the man who shot the psychologist was, twenty years ago (when he was the psychologist's patient), suffering from the same "psychological disorder" as the new boy—he, too, saw dead people—it is conceivable that even at that time, twenty years ago, the psychologist was already dead. Of course, this is not what the film has tried to have us believe: at the end of the film, the psychologist realizes that he was shot and killed only a year ago, not twenty years ago. And yet, at one point in the film, while listening to a recording of the man who shot him, a recording dating back to the time when the man, still a child, was his patient, the psychologist hears for the first time the boy complaining that he is cold. Since the boy in the present (the second boy) also complains of being cold, it makes sense to suppose that if both boys respond in the same way to the psychologist and exhibit the same symptoms, then in both cases the psychologist must have been already dead. Thus, the film forces us to suspend all disbelief and believe not only that the present story (the second boy) is a dream recounted by a dead man, but to suspend all disbelief about the past as well and never to be certain whether the point of view character (the psychologist) was ever actually alive (real). It is difficult to say whether the film

achieves this level of indeterminacy of the point of view accidentally—that what I have pointed out here are just inconsistencies in the storyline—or the film purposefully refuses to establish the reality of the point of view. If the latter is true, the protagonist's epiphany would be a doubly false epiphany: not only does the protagonist realize that he is dead, but he ascribes his death to the wrong moment in time since he must have been dead for twenty years, not for one.

Furthermore, what would be considered an abnormal and unreliable point of view—that of a psychologically troubled child who claims to see dead people—establishes the reality or unreality of another character's point of view (the psychologist's), whose reliability and reality we simply take for granted. And vice versa: the fact that the psychologist has been dead for a long time confirms the reality or authenticity of the boy's visions, which would have otherwise remained groundless. *Thus, two aspects of the unreal derive their reality from their interdependence: the psychologist must be dead because the boy sees him, and, conversely, because the psychologist is dead, the boy must really see him i.e., he is not hallucinating.* There is not a single point of reference in the real against which to evaluate the unreal: although the psychologist realizes he is dead, his epiphany does not take us out of the unreal, does not return us to another, real world. That the psychologist eventually becomes conscious of his own death does not detract from the fact that he is just a vision in the mind of a troubled boy or a voice in his wife's dream. How real could the epiphany of an unreal character be (unreal in the double sense of being dead and being a mere vision in a child's mind)? Even when the unreal is recognized as unreal (or perhaps precisely when it is recognized), it is impossible to trace its appearance in real time. Thus, *since the unreal remains temporally indeterminate, it is as though the unreal has always already appeared.* In *The Sixth Sense* (as in all the films considered here) the point in time at which the unreal appears (the psychologist dies, turning into a vision in the boy's mind) remains unknown: it could have happened a year ago or twenty years ago. In fact, the only 'evidence' we have of this man having existed at all is the wedding ring on his unreal/dead finger. To the extent that time fails to serve as a criterion on the basis of which we can distinguish the real from the unreal—the unreal does not have a beginning or end—time itself becomes unrealized. Metz posits *unrealization (irréalization)* as constitutive of every narrative act. Regardless of how realistic a film is, "because it is perceived as narrated [it has] already been unrealized"(21). However, it is precisely the unrealization carried out by cinema that turns it into a kind of "natural signification," to use Sartre's words, or into a "form of *perception*"(28), to use Metz's words.

Alejandro Amenabar's *Abre Los Ojos (Open Your Eyes*, 1997) provides another instance of the derealization of time. The protagonist of this film, like *Memento*'s Leonard, is suspected of having concocted a story (feigning madness) to hide what he actually did (murdering his girlfriend). As in *Memento* and *Fight Club*, the moment when the real slips into the unreal is difficult to determine: just as Leonard cannot remember the moment when he chose to forget the truth, Cesar cannot remember the moment of "the splice" by means of which his

life has been prolonged into a waking dream, a virtual existence. The story is told (as in the other two films) as a flashback, or at least it seems that way: Cesar is in a psychiatric asylum in the presence of a psychiatrist who is trying to help him remember the events that led to his facial surgery and to his imprisonment. Retrospectively, the framework of the film is unreal since at the end of the film it turns out that the psychiatrist himself is just a part of Cesar's waking dream. Cesar's attempts to remember what really happened remain always framed by this unreality. Within this waking dream (the conversations with the invented psychiatrist), Cesar dreams of what really happened. There is a complete reversal of the usual hierarchy of living and dreaming: *Cesar is living a dream and dreaming about his real life*. Like the protagonist of *The Sixth Sense*, who realizes he has been dead for an entire year, the dreaming Cesar realizes he has been dead for 150 years.

A recurring motif in many of these films is the dream—supernatural (*The Sixth Sense*), futuristic (artificial perception or digital self—*Open Your Eyes, The Matrix*) or psychologically abnormal (*Fight Club, Memento*)—from which the protagonist must wake up. The real resurfaces in Cesar's consciousness whenever there are unpredictable errors in the waking dream program. Both in *Open Your Eyes* and in *The Matrix*, such errors are manifested in repetition: the suspicion arises that something in the matrix has been changed when Neo has a déjà vu; similarly, Cesar becomes aware of the malfunctioning of the computer program when the psychiatrist starts repeating words that Cesar has said in real life, before the accident. While the waking dream program does everything possible to conceal from Cesar the fact that he is living a dream, Cesar's unconscious is, from the very beginning, trying to become conscious by means of inventing the figure of the psychiatrist. By inventing the psychiatrist (Cesar did not kill his girlfriend, who simply died in the car accident; there is no murder and no trial and there is no reason for him to be in a psychiatric penitentiary) Cesar's unconscious incriminates itself insofar as the presence of such a figure presupposes that the person is hiding something from himself. Thus, by an odd gesture of doubling—the dream points to its own unreality by inventing the typical framework (psychiatrist—patient), within which dreams are analyzed—the unreal manages to reconstruct *imaginatively* the moment of its own appearance, the moment when Cesar was made to forget that he is dead. Although the film takes the form of a flashback—Cesar recounting his memories to the psychiatrist—it is only an imaginary flashback since in reality Cesar is not in a penitentiary and there is no psychiatrist. However, since the contract he signs with Life Extension (LE) offers him the opportunity to write the script for his own life, then everything that happens in the film must have been his choice, including the imaginary flashback he has in the presence of the imaginary psychiatrist. Thus, he is dreaming but at the same time he knows, perhaps pre-reflectively, that he is dreaming, and from the very beginning of the film he wants to wake up from the dream, which is why he invents the person most likely to help him wake up, a psychiatrist.

Since all events must have been invented by Cesar, it is as though Cesar has unconsciously planned his awakening from the dream. Just as the unveiling of the confidence game in *The Spanish Prisoner* makes it difficult to distinguish between events that were part of the plan and absolutely chance events, since there are no criteria for determining the reliability or success rate of the Life Extension program, we have to assume that whatever happens, does so because it was part of the plan. Cesar begins breaking through the waking dream when one day (in the penitentiary, which is also a part of the waking dream) he happens to see a TV show on the topic of cryonics. The show triggers his memory—which is his only connection to the real—and eventually he is able to return to the LE office, where he is finally told the truth. Of course, since at that point he is still dreaming, the LE office must itself be part of his dream. Thus, the dream informs the dreamer that he has been dreaming. Since Cesar is in control of his virtual life, he must have *chosen* (planned) to hear that particular TV show: it is no accident but yet another unconscious attempt on his part to wake up. From the very beginning, then, he has been doing two mutually exclusive things at the same time: *he has been dreaming his life the way he wants it to be, but he has been, at the same time, creating all the necessary conditions for his eventual awakening*. Although he has absolute freedom—he is dreaming his life—he is unable to take advantage of it, because he does not know that he is in control of what he dreams. He can invent his life only at the cost of forgetting that he is inventing it: consciousness has the absolute power of manipulating reality only at the cost of remaining unconscious of its absolute power. The virtual can supplant the real completely only at the cost of collapsing the difference between the real and the virtual: the subject can never be aware that the virtual has supplanted the real. However, *Open Your Eyes* suggests that as long as there is a subject, absolute simulation (the complete supplanting of the real by the virtual) is impossible: the real ends up reclaiming its territory (even while he is still dreaming, Cesar already feels somewhat unreal, as if he instinctively knows that he is dreaming).

Although the point at which the dream has begun is specified—'the splice', Cesar learns at the end of the film, was made at the moment he wakes up in the street—the distinction between the real and the unreal is not at all clear visually. Thus, we cannot say that all the scenes before the moment of the splice represent real events, while all those following that moment represent Cesar's virtual life. The scenes with the (imaginary) psychiatrist appear early in the film and, in fact, they claim to be the reference point for all of Cesar's flashbacks. Even though we know, retrospectively, when the splice occurred, we are still unable to distinguish clearly the real from the unreal, because the whole film is determined by Cesar's point of view—a *virtual* point of view, since he is living a dream. That the origin of the unreal can be situated temporally (by determining the moment of the splice) means that it is still possible to subordinate the unreal to the *real* (to *real time*), but this does not change the fact that the whole story is told from a *virtual* point of view (the point of view of the waking dream, which has always already begun). It is inconceivable that the real can be (re)created from the virtual, that the wak-

ing dream can, by its own effort, lift itself up, *a la* Baron Munchausen, becoming aware of its own unreality. Despite the differences between *Memento* and *Open Your Eyes*—the protagonist of the former realizes just for a moment that he has been living in a dream only to return to that dream, whereas the protagonist of the latter chooses to end his virtual life—in both films *the distinction between the real and the unreal is established in the same way i.e., from within the unreal.*

The diverging of the real from the unreal *within* the unreal is analogous to the way in which recollection functions. To recollect one does not need to situate oneself in the present, 'leaping' back into the past until one 'hits' the right moment in time; rather, one always leaps from one memory to another, without necessarily leaping back to the present. Recollection does not require a stable reference point in the present since it is atemporal by nature or at least it functions in a time of its own, an imaginary time. Two very different films demonstrate this point well: Raoul Ruiz's *Time Regained* (1999) and Terry Gilliam's *12 Monkeys* (1995). This is how Marcel, of *Time Regained*, recollects his past: rather than having a stable point of view in the present (Marcel on his dying bed) from which the story would leap back into different moments in the past, the film leaps from one recollection into another, moving forward and backward in time, deliberately producing such temporal inconsistencies or absurdities (but only from the point of view of a linear time) as, for instance, having an *earlier* memory serve as a point of reference for a *later* memory. For example, in one scene the adult Marcel is reading a letter from Gilberte, in which she tells him about the war. On the screen we see *both* the adult Marcel and the young boy Marcel standing behind a film camera, projecting a film about the war which, from the boy's point of view, has not happened yet. Thus, the child Marcel is *remembering forward*. Since the camera moves from one memory to another, without going back to the present, the point of view is multiplied indefinitely: there is not a single privileged point of view from which recollection begins. The point of view of each memory is simply the point of view of the memory that came before it, and since the order of memories is never predetermined, there is never a point of view to which all memories are subordinated.

The lack of a privileged point of view is further reinforced by the superimposition of images representing different memories. If a certain recollection lacks clarity, the camera does not attempt to 'correct' it by returning to the present in order to go back to that memory again; instead, those parts of the recollection that appear incoherent are rendered 'readable' by means of reconstructing older memories, thereby creating a context against which the problematic memory is then repeated (usually different parts of it). In other words, one recollects better by expanding the field of recollection behind the particular memory, exploring older recollections, and then moving from those older recollections to the original one. *The past can be understood only through the past, not through the present.* The revitalizing power of memory manifests itself cinematographically: in the scenes representing Marcel's recollections, there is a profusion of light flowing from the back of the scene, making the contours of the recollected human figures stand out. By contrast, every time the camera returns to the present, to the room in which the old Marcel lies dying, there is barely any light, and Marcel himself is hardly visible lying on the bed. In general, the older the memory, the more light there is in its visual representation. The use of light supports my earlier claim that a certain memory is better understood, and more clearly recalled, by throwing more light on memories that are even older than it rather than by throwing more light on the present. Further, flashbacks are embedded in one another rather than proceeding in an ordered sequence from the present. The mutual embeddedness of multiple and various recollections is illustrated by their visual coexistence on the screen. For example, we see the adult Marcel walking in the street, then freezing in his steps, as the little boy Marcel passes him by, accompanied by his mother. The two Marcels, obviously belonging to two different recollections, go to church where a third Marcel, emerged from yet another memory, observes them.

The representation of the work of memory in *Time Regained* illustrates Deleuze's idea of a "crystalline regime of images" (*Cinema II*) in which images are not subordinated to a single privileged image but all images reflect one another indiscriminately. Memory seems to exemplify best what Bergson and Deleuze believe to be the nature of our mental life: the irreducibility of any single experience to a cause or to another experience. Recollection is not an act by which a certain, definite subject communicates with his past which is somehow outside him, but a process in which multiple recollections communicate with one another. If the subject is defined as a certain unity persisting in real time, a time whose direction is determined by the difference between past and future, then the time of memory is imaginary time. Whereas in real time the present is the privileged point of view determining all other points of view, in imaginary time the point of view can be anywhere. Because of this flexibility of the point of view in recollection, recollections appear imprecise or distorted. It is a common belief that our memories are partly recollected and partly imagined. Imagination is typically associated with untruth or falsity. However, our recollections are 'imagined' not in the sense that they are distorted versions of what actually happened; rather, since our recollections are not dominated by a certain point of view, they allow time to flow in any direction. 'Truth' is a notion derived from one privileged dimension of time, the present, and is therefore applicable only to the present. A memory cannot be 'true' or false' in the traditional sense of these terms. The imaginary time of recollection is not a false or unreal time: it is as real as the time by which we live our life in the present, but it accommodates things and events that would be considered 'impossible' or 'false' in what we call 'real time'.

That recollection takes place from within the past, not from a point in the present, reveals the *self-referentiality, self-reflexivity*[3] *or self-sufficiency of events in imaginary time*. An event that happens in imaginary time does not need to be referred to some outside point of reference that would ascribe credibility or meaning to it; the event creates its own time and is meaningful in itself. When recollecting, one is always already in the

past. Films like *Fight Club, The Sixth Sense, The Spanish Prisoner, Open Your Eyes, Mulholland Drive, Memento,* and *Following* are well aware of this, which is why they necessarily fail to locate the specific point in time (in the film) when the real and the unreal, or the present and the past, begin diverging from each other. In a sense, these films do not have a beginning or they begin, following Aristotle's advice, *in medias res.* Such a strategy remains faithful both to the real and the unreal, refusing to reduce either one to the other. The unreal is not simply decreated from the real, but neither is the real a mere side effect of the unreal. The two do not originate in some common source; rather, their difference is always already there, which also guarantees their co-existence. The difference between imaginary time and real time is clarified by Marcel's reflections on the atemporal nature of memory. Contrary to common sense, Marcel observes, memory does not open up the gates of time but carries us beyond time. Marcel is not afraid of death because, he explains, the moment he recalls the taste of the madeleine he has already become extra-temporal. The past is preserved not within the subject, who is himself a temporal being, but in a realm beyond subjectivity, hence beyond time. Not only does memory not have a beginning: it does not have an end either. Time itself is finite, but memory, which surrounds time on all sides, is eternal. It is misleading to speak of eternity as a characteristic of time, as if to produce eternity all we had to do is 'stretch out' time. Eternity is not just 'a longer time': time and eternity differ in kind.

12 Monkeys, like *Time Regained,* represents the intertextuality of memory. James (the protagonist) is sent from the future back to 1990 and 1996 with the mission of tracing the path of a virus that has already wiped out almost the entire human race. From James' point of view, the present (to which he is sent back) has already happened and he is reliving the past (which for the people of 1990 and 1996 is the present). James' experience of the past differs significantly from that of the people of 1990 and 1996; this becomes clear when James is sent, by mistake, to the wrong year and he finds himself in the trenches of World War I. From the point of view of someone for whom 1996 is the present, WW I would be the past, but from the point of view of James who possesses foreknowledge, the past is shaped by the future. His presence in the trenches of WW I changes the past and is figured in the historical books and photographs of that period. In a lecture delivered in 1996, James' photograph appears in a slide from WWI. Had he not been sent back to the wrong year by mistake, he would have never appeared in the historical records of that period. His sudden appearance therein suggests that the future actually determines what part of the past will have become as important as to be believed to have happened at all. While attempting to argue that the past is not dead but is constantly shaped and reshaped by the future, the film continues to rely on the universal assumption that the present is more real than the past. On several occasions, James observes that the human mind is not meant to exist in two dimensions (the present and the past) simultaneously, because then it cannot tell the real from the unreal. But since James himself exists simultaneously in the present and in the past, it cannot be established with certainty

that he is indeed a man sent back from the future or simply a madman. While he can certainly predict events, because from his point of view they have always already happened, he often wonders whether he is dreaming or imagining that he has been sent from the future, whether he is really insane and the people who supposedly sent him back to the past are just figments of his mad imagination.

Compared to David Lynch's *Mulholland Drive,* the story of *12 Monkeys* appears as simple and transparent as can be. Only towards the end of Lynch's film do we realize that the events in the film lack any sort of temporal unity and are, in fact, the invention of a mad woman. The temporal discontinuity of events is mainly due to the fact that the film purposely does not distinguish between several different psychological experiences: dream, memory, and wishful thinking or imagination. While wishful thinking is usually directed towards the future, memory is always directed towards the past (a dream can be directed either towards the future or towards the past). To treat them as equivalent means to treat the future and the past as equivalent. For instance, when we see Camilla almost killed, we do not know whether Diane (the protagonist) is remembering or imagining (wishing) this. Since Diane's point of view is not anchored in the present, the past or the future, she could be (1) imagining Camilla's death, (2) remembering how she was imagining it, (3) remembering it now, in the present, (4) wishing for it from the past, (5) wishing for it from the present, and so on.

The film starts with Diane's memory/dream and ends with an account of the real events that occasioned Diane's dream. Since Diane's death happens within the dream and the dream equivalent of Diane, Betty, survives it—the dream continues—Diane's suicide at the end does not seem that final or convincing: we do not know that it is the real death of the real Diane or just another psychotic episode, a memory or a dream. Many of the events and characters that we have seen in the dream part of the film reappear in the reality part and vice versa. For example, we see Diane dead in her dream/memory, and we eventually see her commit suicide in reality. Another instance of this doubling, of the same event happening in two worlds, is the car ride with which the film opens (but this repetition becomes obvious only retrospectively, after the second time it happens). The first car ride is Diane's dream: she imagines/dreams about Camilla's murder, which later will turn out to have been planned by Diane herself. The second car ride, which we see in the realistic part of the film, is a memory of what actually happened one night, a memory after which the dream car ride is obviously modeled. The failure of Diane's plan starts the dream, whose purpose is to explain (by confusing us) how we got to that point, what in reality motivated Diane to want to kill Camilla. The real question is this: When does Diane's dream begin? From a logical point of view, she cannot start dreaming it before she meets the gunman, for example, and yet we see the dream long before that. As in *Open Your Eyes,* where the dream has always already begun (even before the splice has occurred), here too the dream visually precedes its place on the temporal storyline. The nature of the dream demands that it be impossible to determine the origin of the dream since if that were possible, the person would no longer

Run, Lola, Run: Moritz Bleitreu and Franka Polente.

be dreaming but would wake up. Because Diane cannot be conscious of the fact that she is hallucinating or dreaming, the film cannot be aware of it either and has to disguise the point at which the dream begins. The distinction between subjective and objective vanishes:

> We run in fact into a principle of indeterminability, of indiscernibility: we no longer know what is imaginary or real, physical or mental, in the situation, not because they are confused, but because we do not have to know and there is no longer even a place from which to ask....already, when Robbe-Grillet provides his great theory of descriptions, he begins by defining a traditional 'realist' description: it is that which presupposes the independence of its object, and hence proposes a discernibility of the real and the imaginary. ...Neo-realist description in the nouveau roman is completely different: since it *replaces* its own object, on the one hand it erases or *destroys* its reality which passes into the imaginary, but on the other hand it powerfully brings out all the reality which the imaginary or the mental *create* through speech and vision. (Deleuze, *Cinema II* 7)

The neo-realist description achieves

> a vision which is purely optical. ...The event is no longer confused with the space which serves as its place, nor with the

actual present which is passing....[A] time is revealed inside the event, which is made of the simultaneity of these three implicated presents, from these de-actualized peaks of present. ...An accident is about to happen, it happens, it has happened; but equally it is at the same time that it will take place, has already taken place and is in the process of taking place; so that, before taking place, it has not taken place, and, taking place, will not take place...etc. (100)

By 'purely optical vision' Deleuze means the representation of an event as absolutely self-sufficient, unburdened by a context i.e., by other events that serve as causes or effects. These are the characteristics of Deleuze's time-image (or the mental image[4]), the image that exists for its own sake only, not to further the plot or as a necessary part of characterization. Such an image, devoid of any purpose or end, can no longer be classed as 'real' or 'unreal' since it is both: the event it represents could have

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3 Fuery analyzes instances of excessive self-reflexivity in cinema—those elements of a film, which belong both inside and outside the cinematic frame—using the Derridean model of the *parergon* (borrowed from Derrida's *The Truth in Painting*). See Fuery pp. 152-157. One of the examples of the parergon Fuery provides—what he calls "excesses of time of the film"(155)—is an appropriate description of Deleuze's time-image. The parergonal model could prove useful in studying time and point of view paradoxes in the films discussed in this chapter. In fact, Fuery claims that "all elements of cinema...can be imbued with the quality of the frame, and hence *parergon* and liminality"(157).

happened but it could have just as well not happened. It is in this sense that Deleuze argues that the event will take place, has taken place, and is taking place, all at the same time. *Mulholland Drive* is a perfect example of "purely optical vision": because events are decontextualized, presented without any explanation, what has taken place precedes what will take place, or what will take place precedes what is taking place.

What makes the films discussed so far interesting is that they tell two stories simultaneously, usually two stories opposed to each other: either the images tell one story and the voiceover tells a different story or, if there is no voiceover, at a certain point in the film there is a sudden shift in the point of view or a sudden revelation of the real nature of the point of view. However, the discrepancy between the purely visual and the narrative aspect of the film and the sudden changes in the point of view never have a corrective function. Even when the particular discrepancy is explained, it does not retroactively negate that which has caused the discrepancy i.e., images are not less 'true' than the story they contradict nor is the story less 'true' than the images it contradicts. Thus, even what might be considered 'gimmicky' films (such as *Memento*) leave us with a sense of indeterminacy (indeterminacy of time and of point of view).

While also concerned with the theme of time—particularly with the distinction between accident and destiny, repetition and singularity—Tom Tykwer's films tend to affirm the singular or the *absolute* nature of events. An event is absolute if it is absolutely determined or carrying the highest degree of significance. Sissi, the protagonist of *The Princess and the Warrior* (2001) wants to find out if what happens to her—she is hit by a truck but a stranger saves her life—is merely a coincidence or fate. The film represents events as destined not in the sense of predetermined by the filmmaker but destined in a *quasi*-mythic or even metaphysical way. Thus, at a crucial moment in the film, Sissi tells another character (a bank guard who is about to shoot the stranger who saved her life): "You can't shoot now. This is not part of the plan." Sissi appears to be addressing the filmmaker himself, commanding him not to 'make' the bank guard shoot because this would not be part of the destiny she believes she is uncovering. At that moment, the film's subject matter (Sissi's belief in destiny) seems to determine what will happen. The protagonist appears to be writing the film rather than being a puppet manipulated by the filmmaker. Of course, even this impression of the protagonist's absolute freedom has been planned: namely because the subject matter of the film is destiny can the protagonist create the impression that even the film itself is part of that *quasi*-mythic destiny. Destiny works on two levels simultaneously: as subject matter and as meta-narrative (a comment on the making of the film, on the purposeful representation of events as destined).

The Tykwer's 1999 hit *Run, Lola, Run* opens with the following quotations:

"We shall not cease from exploration.
And the end of all our exploring
Will be to arrive where we started
And know the place for the first time."
(T.S. Eliot, "Little Gidding")

"After the game is before the game" (S.Herberger)

The first quotation is concerned with the idea of habituation and defamiliarization: the first time we are involved in something we do not yet fully realize the significance of that involvement because we do not yet know ourselves. On one hand, then, the quotation is about the acquiring of reflective knowledge: at the end of the process we know something about ourselves that we didn't know before. On the other hand, however, we can acquire that knowledge only by returning to our starting point. The quotation implies that what matters most in our search for an answer to the question we have asked is to know what made us ask the question in the first place (hence "knowing the place for the first time"). The film presents three versions of the same storyline—Lola trying to find money for her boyfriend in 20 minutes—a technique both Bergsonian and anti-Bergsonian. On one side, the kind of repetition the film deals with illustrates the existence of something like 'pockets' of virtuality, from which are released infinite variations of the storyline, depending on the point in time we select. However, the division of the 20 minutes each loop takes up into specific points, which act as origins for the variations, is completely un-Bergsonian in nature. The film portrays time as the continuous creation of the new but, at the same time, it attributes each variation to a specific moment in time: the first time Lola runs into the woman pushing a stroller, we see the woman's life in a sequence of snapshots, but the second time she runs into her (at a different moment since the repetition, as we shall see, is delayed) we see the woman's life in a different sequence of snapshots. From a Bergsonian point of view, the film seems to be reducing the new to a specific origin. After all, if a certain sequence of events is possible only at one particular moment and impossible at any other moment (at another moment a different kind of variation is possible) the new can be predicted: as long as we know at what moment Lola will run into the woman, we already know the kind of life the woman will have had (in fact, we can rewind the tape as many times as we like, and every time we will see the exact same sequence at this particular moment).

The second quotation with which the film opens—"After the game is before the game"—merely complicates the problem of the new. The quotation implies that there is no qualitative difference between the end of an event and its beginning, that everything that happens after the event has, in a sense, already 'happened' before the event, the event being merely the externalization or realization of what was already given. In Bergson's terminology, the event is regarded as a mere possibility, which is then actualized, rather than as a virtuality, which can never be given in advance. This quotation posits that what we know after the game, we already knew before the game: the game itself was possible precisely because we knew what the game would bring, though it was a kind of unreflected knowledge. Thus, the only difference between *before* and *after* the game is the level of reflective knowledge attributable to them: these are not two different moments but the second moment merely manifests what was already latent in the first moment. This

kind of model—the model of *the possible* as what exists first in order to be manifested or actualized later—does not leave place for the new (if we follow Bergson). In fact, the first quotation suggests something very similar as it situates the new not at the end of an event but at the beginning, a beginning to which we return: again, it is a matter of acquiring higher degrees of reflective knowledge.

Run, Lola, Run suggests that the new does not happen before (or unless) it is repeated. Hence a definition: *the event is that which happens twice*. This view of repetition is not entirely without precedent. In *Repetition* Kierkegaard argues that our entire life must be brought before us so that we attain the elasticity of "a genuine repetition...recollected forward" (131). Contrary to common opinion, repetition is not the reification of life but the very emergence of life: "When the Greeks said that all knowing is recollecting, they said that all existence, which is, has been; when one says that life is a repetition, one says: actuality, which has been, now comes into existence"(149). Life precedes itself: it is actual but it is not really 'noticed'; it is not 'lived' unless it is repeated. Life appears by withdrawing from itself, repeating itself. The new cannot appear before it is repeated and then it appears precisely because it is repeated, "for the very fact that it has been makes the repetition into something new"(149).

The idea that an event really happens only after we have become conscious *that* it happens—i.e., after it has been repeated—presupposes that we can distinguish, within the structure of the event, two 'stages' or 'modes' of the event: the mere *happening* of the event and the fact *that* it happens (our reflective consciousness of the event). The pure event is merely a useful hypothetical notion, similar to the Sartrean notion of a pre-reflective consciousness: in reality, the event does not happen unless we are reflectively conscious that it happens. The general thrust of the two quotations introducing *Run, Lola, Run* is this: admittedly, things happens independently of us, but, at the same time, nothing happens unless we know that it happens. The difference between two moments in time—for example, between the beginning and the end of an event—is 'measured' in terms of the level of reflective consciousness we attain. The more reflectively conscious we are of an event, the more real it is. It is almost as if time is possible at all only because we are never conscious of events the first time around. If we were always already conscious that something is happening, time would not exist (since time is precisely the difference or delay between pure event or pre-reflective consciousness and reflective consciousness). Put differently, the existence of time 'proves' indirectly the reality of pre-reflective consciousness, the non-coincidence of events with the reflective consciousness of them. This notion of time as embodied in various levels of consciousness (consciousness as various modes—contractions and expansions—of time) is Bergsonian in nature insofar as it construes all our experience as a form of déjà vu. It is important to clarify that the argument that what makes time possible is the difference between pre-reflective and reflective consciousness does not suggest that time is merely subjective. Both Bergson and Sartre believe that pure memory (Bergson) or pre-reflective consciousness (Sartre) do not belong to subjectivity. Time is the difference between an event and our reflective consciousness of

it, but since pre-reflective consciousness is not outside us but constitutive of us, time is not outside us either. Time is neither a subjective creation, nor an absolutely objective realm independent of us. Time 'consists' of pure events (pre-reflective consciousnesses) and their repetitions (reflective consciousnesses, causes and effects).

When Lola runs into different people, we witness repetition. Despite the fact that she is always following the same route and running into the same people, in the same order, this is not a repetition of the same, because every time she is a little bit late. This slight delay is reflected in the different kinds of lives we see attributed to the people she runs into three times. Her meetings with these people constitute a paradoxical combination of pure accident and destiny. On one hand, the kind of life (presented as a super-fast sequence of snapshots that are almost incomprehensible unless watched in slow motion) unfolding in the case of each person she meets appears absolutely accidental (one variation seems no more necessary than the others), but, at the same time, it is precisely because Lola runs into a person at a specific moment that only one of their infinite possible lives is represented. Anything could happen (time is infinity and unpredictability of variations) but, at the same time, at a particular point in time only one thing happens. Had there been no delay, had Lola run into other characters at the exact same moment every time, the fact that every time we see different sequences of snapshots would have to mean that at each particular moment in time there is an infinite number of possibilities, of which only one is realized. However, the idea that each moment 'contains' infinite variations fails to explain why one of these possibilities is actualized rather than any of the others. On the other hand, the introduction of a delay in the repetition allows for a more radical notion of freedom. It is not true that anything is possible at any moment. "Now" is not indeterminate: what happens 'now' is no longer possible at another moment. We are used to thinking of repetition as superimposing itself exactly over what has already happened once. Paradoxically, the only way to show that repetition is never the exact repetition of the same but in fact the production of the new is to introduce a slight delay while still keeping the structure of repetition.

Run, Lola, Run is not concerned with enumerating possibilities. In this, the film is faithful to Bergson's distinction between the possible and the virtual. The possible precedes and is exhausted by the real in which it is actualized. The model of time according to which moments are made up of infinite variations

4 The crisis of the action image is marked by the appearance of a new kind of image Deleuze calls "mental image." Deleuze lists five major characteristics of the mental image. First, "the image no longer refers to a situation which is globalising or synthetic, but rather to one which is dispersive. The characters are multiple, with weak interferences and become principal or revert to being secondary"(*Cinema 1* 207). Second, "[l]inkages, connections, or liaisons are deliberately weak. Chance becomes the sole guiding threat. ...Sometimes the event delays and is lost in idle periods, sometimes it is there too quickly, but it does not belong to the one to whom it happens..."(207). Third, "the sensory-motor action or situation has been replaced by the stroll, the voyage and the continual return journey...It [the action] happens in any-space-whatever...in opposition to action which most often unfolded in the qualified space-time of the old realism"(208). Fourth, the only thing that provides any kind of consolidation or 'totality' are cliches (psychological clichés as well as clichés determining a certain time period) (208). Fifth, the plot is no longer important (209).

expresses best the idea of the possible: the possible is never absolute because anything else could have happened in its place. On the contrary, the virtual is what will have been possible but which is never already given. We cannot predict the differences that will 'result' from the fact that Lola is a little late every time. These differences (the different snapshot sequences) are not already given as possibilities for each of the secondary characters; rather, each character's life differs from itself. To say that a moment contains multiple possibilities is merely to stretch out the moment while still positing its identity with itself. The new is not produced from multiple (even infinite) possibilities.

At first, the extremely fast, carefully edited sequence of snapshots (accompanied by the unmistakable sound of a photo camera) may seem as a severe disturbance of the inner continuity of Bergsonian time. However, the editing together of a series of photographs, although it seems to divide time into frozen frames, remain faithful to the Bergsonian notion of consciousness as existing at various levels of condensation (contraction) and dilation (expansion). It is impossible to tell which of the snapshots of the woman with the stroller belong to her future and which to her past: some of them seem to explain how she stole the child, while others appear to refer to her future (the shot of the social workers taking away the child). The question is whether these are the memories and fearful anticipations of the woman herself (which would justify the visual condensation technique as the best approximation to the condensation work of memory), or they do not reveal the woman's consciousness but only that of the camera.

It is necessary to present the different lives of these secondary characters because they illustrate the different outcomes of Lola's run as a result of her delay. The only difference between Lola and the other characters is that the film has bestowed upon her the privileged status of a protagonist. Nevertheless, one can very well imagine condensing Lola's three runs into three snapshot sequences and expanding the condensed three versions of the secondary characters' lives into an entire movie. Since every time Lola runs into one of these characters nothing else changes (except the sequence of snapshots), and since the delay each time is so insignificant, we can assume that were we to carry this experiment to an extreme—shrink the delay to zero, which would mean that Lola will run into the woman every time at the same moment—even then the moment she runs into the woman every time would be different. *The delay is necessary not to demonstrate that different things happen at different times, but that each moment differs from itself.* Difference does not happen between moments; rather, each moment differs from itself.

The only difference between the snapshot sequences of the secondary characters' lives and the different scenarios of Lola's meeting with her father and his lover seems to be that whereas the possible lives of the secondary characters are maximally condensed, her meetings with her father are dramatized, elaborated, expanded, in general treated cinematically, as a story within a story, whereas the lives of the secondary characters never become narratives but remain only a series of photographs. However, there is another, more essential difference between these expansions and condensations of the characters' lives in time. There is no reason to believe that it is because Lola runs

into the people in the street at different points in time that we are presented with different possible scenarios of their future and past lives i.e., Lola's delay does not *cause* the differences in their futures/pasts. Thus, we have to read these incidents metaphorically or symbolically. We are faced then with two possible (and opposite) interpretations: either these incidents suggest, in an intentionally exaggerated manner, that the smallest accident has the gravest significance (destiny) or, on the contrary, that everything that happens is purely accidental (in that case, the incidents undercut their most obvious meaning, the assumption that there is a causal relationship between all of them). The film never really demonstrates a preference for one of these two alternatives, but oscillates between fate (only one event is possible at a given moment in time) and pure chance (any event is possible at any given moment in time). This is not the case with Lola's meetings with her father, however, whose purpose is to affirm the reality of fate. It is precisely because Lola arrives at the bank a little later every time, and interrupts the conversation between her father and his lover at different moments, that she ends up with different pieces of information on the basis of which to act (significantly, the last time she is so late that she is 'lucky' enough to miss her father and is thus spared the painful discoveries of the previous two meetings: that her father is not her real father and that he is thinking of leaving his family to marry his lover). Thus, this aspect of the storyline suggests that at a specific moment of time only one outcome is possible.

The transition scenes between the first and the second, and between the second and the third run might be a clue that these two runs that seem to end tragically are not real (perhaps they are the worst case scenarios Lola imagines before she even starts running) and that they have mostly a symbolic meaning (they are a sort of a test of Lola's relationship with Mani). However, the third run is not structurally different from the other two and does not seem more necessary or real as an outcome. In fact, the third run seems the most unlikely or the most accidental in its happy outcome: the only reason Mani is able to pay the drug dealers on time is that the blind woman standing in front of the phone booth tells him to wait, and it is exactly at that moment that he sees the bum with the bag of money pass him on a bike. Even the way in which this third time (the third time is always the happy one in fairy tales) Lola finds the money—winning at a casino—stresses the accidental nature of the happy ending.

That the third run might be just a clever manipulation of the story so as to produce the desired happy ending is clear from what seems to be the film's deliberate failure to take into account the delay from the first and second run and the necessary changes that ought to have resulted, in the third run, from that delay. Although some of the secondary characters are treated consistently—e.g. we see yet another possible life of the woman with the baby stroller—the stories invented for other characters are clearly manipulated so as to produce the desired happy outcome: the man on the bike 'accidentally' meets the bum who still has the bag with the money; the bum buys the bike from the man; the blind woman waiting in front of the phone booth tells Mani, who is about to leave, to wait thus giving him a chance to notice the bum riding the bike past them.

And most important of all, the problem with Lola's father is solved because she misses him and never finds out that he is not her father or that he has a lover. The father himself is spared his lover's confession that she is pregnant with someone else's child, because just when she is about to confess, he gets a phone call and has to leave.

There is an obvious temporal inconsistency between the third happy version of the story and the previous two. The first time, the conversation between the father and his lover is interrupted when she tells him she is pregnant; the second time it is interrupted a little later (since Lola is running late, which delays all other incidents as well), when she admits that she is pregnant with someone else's child and a fight between them ensues; the third time, the conversation *should have been interrupted still a little later*, perhaps during the fight or after it, but instead the scene is *moved back in time* and Lola's father does not even hear that his lover is pregnant with another man's child. Thanks to this manipulation of time, Lola arrives at the bank too late and 'luckily' misses her father (even though the previous two times she was on time despite the fact that she was running late). The red ambulance sequence is manipulated in a similar way. The first time, the red ambulance stops abruptly in front of a huge sheet of glass a few workers are carrying across the street; the second time, since Lola is running late, the ambulance fails to stop and goes through the glass; the third time, the event is *moved back in time* and the ambulance never goes through the glass. Instead, Lola gets in the car and magically saves the life of the dying man lying inside.

In general, the problems caused by the delay during the second run are solved by the purposeful manipulation of what was supposed to happen in the third run. It is only when we become aware of this manipulation of time that the first two runs, which seemed to us completely accidental and random, appear retrospectively to have been governed by fate. By contrast, precisely the clever manipulation of events in the third run, and the presence, however vague, of a desire to get things right this time (the desire of the characters, but also the desire of the film itself, as if it felt the pressure of the fairy-tale form, which relies precisely on repetition and final resolution of the conflict the third time around) reduces events to sheer accidents. At first, it might seem that such manipulation of time is sure to compromise the reality of what happens. Indeed, it is tempting to argue that the first two runs, precisely because they appeared fated and have tragic consequences, are more realistic than the third run, whose representation tampers with time so blatantly. However, the opposite is true: as soon as we realize that "realistic" is not necessarily the same as "real," that in fact they are opposed to each other, we understand that if fate is realistic, accidents are real, and they are real namely because they involve an active subject, who is always driven by a certain end and works against obstacles to attain that end. There is no room for subjectivity in the first and second run, because everything is destined and so is the subject: if Lola arrives at a specific point late, there is only one thing that can happen; if she is early, the same holds true. The only moment during these two runs that fate is overcome is at their respective ends, when first she and then Mani decide they do not want to die (which is what makes

possible the second and the third run). The third run, however, introduces an element of inconsistency, unpredictability, unjustifiability, contingency, i.e. it introduces Lola as a free subject: if Lola is early, events unfold as if she were late, and if she is late, everything happens as if she were early. Only the last run shows what it means to be "on time." One cannot be on time in a simulated i.e., destined/fated world: time as such does not exist in such a world. Time can be manipulated only if there is chance. Lola can arrive on time with the 10 000 marks only if it is impossible to predict whether she will be on time or not.

Given the important place of fiction or imagination in phenomenology (for example, Husserl's idea of "imaginary variation" as a method for revealing the essence of things) perhaps we could conceive the relationship between the unreal and the real according to the same model (the model provided by the analogy I drew in the beginning of this essay, an analogy between repetition or déjà vu, on one hand, and the two aspects of consciousness, on the other hand). This is, in fact, what Deleuze tries to do with his notion of the time-image as a manifestation of Bergsonian pure memory. The nature of time, Deleuze claims, is falsification, by which he means the rendering of beings/things/events as impersonal, infinite, or unrecognizable. The unreal, then, would be precisely the infinity of time, the infinity or indeterminability of pre-reflective consciousness. To conceive the relationship of the unreal to the real as analogous to that of the pre-reflective to the reflective would suggest that the unreal does not need to be reflected or realized (made real), whereas the real always presupposes an unreal. This, however, does not mean that the real is merely simulated: to argue that the real is produced or dissociated from the unreal does not in any way threaten the validity or truthfulness of the real (just as reflective consciousness is not less authentic, or more artificial, than pre-reflective consciousness). Perhaps the most important implication of the idea of an infinite universe and of an infinite mental life is the lack of criteria for distinguishing the real from the unreal. The concept of infinity is incommensurable with the idea of determination or delimitation, on which the real depends.

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