

AVATAR CAT PEOPLE - THE OTHERS IN 3D

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"Ever since I went to see *Avatar* I have been depressed. Watching the wonderful world of Pandora and all the Na'vi made me want to be one of them.(...) I even contemplate suicide thinking that if I do it I will be rebirthed in a world similar to Pandora and the everything is the same as in *Avatar*."

This quote from an Internet forum illustrates what numerous news agencies had reported on extensively, the new condition registered in thousands of people after watching James Cameron's *Avatar*: PADS – Post Avatar Depression Syndrome. These people are falling into a deep depression at their inability to access a world in reality as beautiful, entrancing and spiritual as Pandora, having to live their "gray, flat lives."¹ It is not a hard task to detect in these escapist occurrences the use and reception of visual environments as powerful narcotics. In his explorations of the effects of specific environments created by capitalism, Walter Benjamin introduced the key element capitalism uses to control and mold human senses – by creating phantasmagorias, spectacular, all-immersive environments and experiences whose goal is "manipulation of the synaesthetic system by control of environmental stimuli."² Nevertheless, when compared to drug intoxication:

phantasmagoria assumes the position of objective fact. Whereas drug addicts confront a society that challenges the reality of their altered perception, the intoxication of phantasmagoria itself becomes the social norm. Sensory addiction to a compensatory reality becomes a means of social control.³

¹ Piazza, Jo. "Audiences experience 'Avatar' blues" (http://articles.cnn.com/2010-01-11/entertainment/avatar.movie.blues_1_pandora-depressed-posts?s=PM:SHOWBIZ, visited February 15, 2010).

² Susan Buck-Morss, "Aesthetics and Anaesthetics: Walter Benjamin's Artwork Essay Reconsidered", *October*, Vol. 62, Autumn, 1992, pp. 22.

³ *Ibid*, pp. 23.

As Susan Buck-Morss has formulated, the perceptions of technoaesthetics is “real” from a neurological point of view, and the problematic goal of phantasmagoria is “manipulation of the synaesthetic system by control of environmental stimuli. It has the effect of anaesthetizing the organism, not through numbing, but through flooding the senses.”⁴

In this paper, I propose to take a closer look into the film *Avatar* as a product of the permanent need of capitalist system to produce and reproduce new types of phantasmagoria. One of the missions given to new 3D films is their power to bring back the masses of human bodies to cinemas. In return, people are given a chance to get immersed into this totalizing experience of collective hypnosis. Nevertheless, in this pseudo-trip, instead of awakening, their senses will be numbed by overflow of stimuli; instead of changing their perception, they will be reconstituted as subjects split into mind and body; through flooding of the senses, they will be anaestheticized enough not to do anything about the real problems once they leave the cinema.

On the other side, as Susan Buck-Morss has noticed, beside having this potential of becoming technoaesthetics, films provide a new schooling for our mimetic powers.⁵ Mimesis, according to Benjamin, is “the compulsion to become the Other”⁶ or the capacity “to other.”⁷ Being a story about the possibility of changing ones’ own skin and becoming the Other, *Avatar* makes a great example on which to examine what is happening with these allegedly new ways of approaching an old question. In other words, the main question to pose here is on the benefits of upgrading our experience to a third dimension when it comes to the potential of becoming the Other. As careful observers, we should be alert to look for the proofs in this visual tool that will reassure us we are dealing with a true mimesis – the humankind has already been

⁴ *Ibid*, pp. 22

⁵ See more in: Buck-Morss, Susan. *The Dialectics of Seeing* (1991).

⁶ Taussig, Michael. *Mimesis and Alterity – A Particular History of the Senses*. Routledge, Chapman and Hall, Inc., New York, London, (1993), p.xviii

⁷ *Ibid*, p. 19

introduced to the horrifying consequences of political practices based on double mimesis, or *mimesis of the mimesis* that fascism so strongly mastered.⁸

As a final result, we might be able to formulate an answer why *Avatar* has failed in so many battles it proclaimed to have been fighting, having produced as a consequence nothing more than a post-avatar depression. Nevertheless, this ultimate example of yet another phantasmagoria has more stories to tell than what might seem at first glance. I will try to take a look through the cracks left in the narrative of this perfect image, testing if its proclaimed ecological activism did not become "a poorly executed ideogram" of a much more dangerous story.⁹ This way, we might learn on the ways in which new phantasmagoric creations in 3D are used to mobilize our senses in order to gain mastery over the otherness they mimic to portray.

Cracks in 3D: From Navy to Na'vi

Due to the mimetic power of cinema, we are not left with mere verbal descriptions of such and charged to imagine the visual life of main character's adventures on our own; instead, we are given the privileged position of following and identifying with him, experiencing through our own eyes the 'authenticity' of the world he is traveling through. So, who is our guide?

As we are told from the very beginning by the narrator, who is also the main protagonist, his name is Jack Sully and he is an ex-marine, paralyzed after an army mission, now leading his life in a wheelchair. He has had a twin brother, a scientist, who was robbed and killed a week before he was supposed to leave the Earth and join the special program on the planet of Pandora. The program was financially supported by a corporation wanting to get hold of Pandora's *unobtanium*, a magic mineral that has become the main source of energy on Earth. The scientists are hired to collect

⁸"Fascism is more than outright repression of the mimetic; it is a return of the repressed, based on the 'organized control of mimesis.' Thus fascism, through the mimesis of mimesis, seeks to make the rebellion of suppressed nature against domination directly useful to domination." *Ibid*, p.70

⁹ A term used by Marcel Mauss and Henri Hubert to describe the lack of realism of magically effective mimetic images. For more, see in: *Ibid*, p. 51-52

information, establish contact with the native population, and use diplomatic means to obtain the unobtainable. In order to come even closer to the native population called the Na'vi, the program developed new expensive creatures, or more accurately, new bodies created from the human DNA and the DNA of the Na'vi. These new bodies are large and blue, just like the Na'vi, with the facial features after their human donors. Nevertheless, the humans are the ones able to command them. Having the same genome as his twin, Sully was able to replace him and successfully synchronize his nervous system with his brother's avatar in order to control and 'drive' it. In return, he will start to feel his avatar legs, learning to jump and fly thanks to this new body.

The main storyline is rather simple – on the first day of the mission as an avatar, Sully gets into trouble due to his curiosity, and ends up in the hostile forest having to defend himself from the wild beasts. He is rescued by an aboriginal princess who, following the positive signs of their Sacred Tree, takes him to the village. The tribe decides not to kill him, as he is the first warrior they have met from the Earth, and the princess is assigned to teach him everything she knows. He falls in love with her, with the forest, and with their 'authentic' way of life, which makes him abandon his mission of obtaining the unobtainium, becoming their leader and defeating the evil corporation. At the end, Sully commits a human suicide, allowing his soul to be transferred to the avatar body, and continuing his life among the Na'vi.

Notes in my imaginary diary after watching *Avatar* would definitely reveal my decision to be seduced by this 3D spectacle, its visuals and possibilities of flying; I went to the cinema wanting to totally immerse myself in this virtual world, becoming passive in the hands of the great film master. Nevertheless, my attempt for total hallucination was disturbed by two scenes, two gestures that caused irreversible 'cracks' in the 3D screen in front of me, revealing some hidden dimensions behind this self-proclaimed masterpiece.

Therefore, I would like us to zoom into two scenes that coincidentally took place during the *krisis*, the crisis in its original Greek meaning as the decisive day of the

battle.¹⁰ The night before the big battle, princess Neytiri explains to Sully that their main deity cannot help his prayers and help them win the battle: "Our Great Mother does not take sides, Jake. She protects only the balance of life." Nevertheless, during the decisive battle, the wild beasts of the jungle join the fight against the human aliens, bringing the ultimate victory for the Na'vi. In this gesture, Neytiri sees the answer to Sully's prayers. What actually happened here is the illustration of the evolutionist interpretation of succession of paganism by a monotheistic religion. According to this, the god is not anymore a simple mediator who balances the circulation of life energy, but an ethical agent able to judge the good and the bad ones. As we have learned, Sully has also managed to unite all tribes, becoming the ultimate leader and the savior of Pandora, breaking the illusion this story was a futuristic one. Rather, what we encounter here is a retrograde phantasm – a phantasm about the birth of the nation state and ethics of early Crusades, backed up by the blessings of a God who is now able to chose between sides in opposition. In this interpretation, the winners are always on the side of the good.

The second gesture that opened up another crack is in one of the final scenes of the battle. In here, Sully is confronted with his former commander, the Colonel, who seems the only one still left to fight this already lost battle. These are the last words they exchange before continuing their fight:

SULLY: IT'S ALL OVER.

COLONEL: NOTHING'S OVER WHILE I'M BREATHING.

SULLY: I KINDA HOPED YOU WOULD SAY THAT.

With this one sentence, Sully destroys all possible illusion we might have had regarding his identity. Instead of refusing the ultimate fight within his newly awaken ecological, hippie identity, he choses to stay a marine until the end. As he states at the very beginning of the film, 'There's no such thing as an ex-marine.'

¹⁰ "Agonia is the hottest moment of conflict, and *krisis* the decisive day of battle, as we see in Polybius, liii., c. 89." Vignoli, T. *Myth and Science – An Essay*, (1885). Project Gutenberg – Online Book Catalog. <http://www.gutenberg.org/etext/17802> February 12, 2010. p.78

These two 'cracks' are there wide open enough for us to peek into a parallel story running alongside the seemingly simple one at the surface. Although its skin might look blue and different, the body beneath is the one belonging to an era we know very well. By openly showing the animosity and hatred toward the New World Order of corporative capitalism, the makers of this film created a mimicry that should keep us away from discovering the underlying phantasm – of going back in time to the 'real' thing, when the nation states were created, when the leaders were the representatives of a god able to tell between the good and the bad, and when military was a real military. Or, in Sully's words, "Back on Earth, these guys were Army dogs. Marines. Fighting for freedom. But out here they're just hired guns, taking the money, working for the company." Thanks to these cracks, we are able to realize that instead of being a truly ecologically sentient film, it is actually an open glorification of the good-old military complex and its perversion of ethics of Christian fundamentalism.¹¹

This 'crack' is perhaps also noticeable in the name given to the inhabitants of Pandora – Na'vi: what if, instead of assuming it stands for the Natives, it actually means the Navy? In that case, the ending of the film asks for an alternative interpretation. Instead of seeing it as Sully's decision to leave his invalid, human body for newly discovered love, the final glance of his piercing new avatar eyes seems to hide the horrifying gaze of his final victory. The frightening discovery is that he is now the ultimate leader and the one in possession of the unobtainium. With the newly formed state and transformed religious system, Pandora seems to be on a good way of following the historical example of the Earth people. Hence, their final victory is perhaps their ultimate defeat. In this world, as we are shown, there is no place for scientists, only for believers.

¹¹ Even the ecological activism already preserves in itself a dichotomy between culture and nature, being more conservationist than anything else: "Identifying with nature, the ecology activists are fundamentally concerned with the reform of Culture, with creating and restoring a balance between man's needs and their fulfillment — a balance, that is, within human society—in the name of man's relation to nature. Thus they are as much "conservative" as "conservationist," for in making the distinction between man's artificial "Culture" and an innate and circumambient "nature" the core of their "message," they reassert this distinction and the ideology based upon it." Wagner, Roy, *The Invention of Culture*, The University of Chicago Press, 1975, p.146

(In) The Other Body

One of the facts revealed to us at the very beginning of the film is the origin of very expensive avatars, a result of human scientific genius who has found a way to mix humans and Na'vi. Nevertheless, taking into account how these new bodies work, it becomes clear this process of mixing was a peculiar one. As its result, we do not find true inter-raced bodies, but some kind of pseudo-mulatto. The success of science was to create bodies with a human face, but bodies that are emptied out, without mind or any sort of inner content that would regulate it. Instead, the control comes from the human avatar drivers. Thanks to the invention of this new, sophisticated being, a human commander will successfully be able to show mastery over this empty shell of a docile body.

One of the essential characteristics of this avatar body is its *one-way-ness*: the human driver will have a complete control over it and there is no resistance coming from the host. This is actually a result of the ways in which human scientists believe Na'vi body functions: equipped with a braid that works as a cable, they are able to pilot the other beings by simply plugging it into them. They ride magic horses and dragons who, once a Na'vi plugs in, falls completely under their control. In other words, the Na'vi use the bodies of these other beings as simple means of transportation, bodies to be manipulated over. Beside this 'cable', they are also equipped with a button on the neck they can press and establish a direct voice communication with each others, something particularly noticeable in the final battle. Therefore, this brings us to the conclusion that these avatar bodies are not a simple, magnified blue version of humans, but actually an embodiment of an old human phantasm of becoming machines, with plugs and holes to communicate through and with.

This (human) way of inhabiting the avatar bodies brings out the underlying Cartesian division integrated into them. Sully's final decision to 'empty out' his human

body shows upon this split, where the mind is given all the power over the sensual. This same division is, according to Simon Penny, something that is successfully integrated in the cultural specificity of Virtual Reality where the avatars were actually first conceived: "There is no need for a body at all in VR except for narcissistic or gaming purposes. All one requires is an indication of the location of your VR effectors with respect to your virtual viewpoint."¹² Why are we, then, required to see Sully's avatar body? The answer to this question brings the conclusion that instead of watching a film, what we actually follow on screen is a recording of Sully's adventures in 'something like a video game', having him successfully completing his tasks, without losing any of his lives. This position is, according to Penny, only a confirmation of the underlying *sensory apartheid* – "a confirmation rather than a liberation from Cartesian Dualism."¹³ In this way, the result is that the body becomes replaced with a "body image, a creation of mind, as all objects in VR are a product of mind. As such it is a clear continuation of the rationalist dream of disembodied mind, part of the long western tradition of denial of the body."¹⁴ Through their insistence on the 'reality' of the world on Pandora, in the expensive project to create a 'realistic' virtual world and not-a-cartoon, the authors of the film have failed in dismantling this binary opposition. Since, in the words of Giorgio Agamben, the cartoons are "the only dream we find of undivided life."¹⁵

The consequences of this split are not only felt on the level of aesthetics, or sensory perception, but on the level of political as well. Namely, the 'gamer', or 'avatar driver' in this case, is supposed to have the illusion of total control. Nevertheless, "the virtual world is a product of design, nothing is there by accident. (...) It remains the work of a particular human mind. (...) But encouraging a viewer to believe that he has created the experience is subterfuge amounting to covert

¹² Penny, S. "Virtual Reality as the End of the Enlightenment Project" (first published in: **Culture on the Brink: the Ideologies of Technology**, 1994; <http://ace.uci.edu/penny/texts/enlightenment.html>, March 1, 2010)

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ Giorgio Agamben, the summer seminar, European Graduate School, Saas-Fee, August 2009. (transcription mine)

manipulation."¹⁶ In the same way, the characters in *Avatar* are mere dolls or tools in the hands of their creator, the almighty director whose totalitarian control is more than evident. In this film, nothing happens by accident.

Behind its utopian proclamation of fight for a new better world, *Avatar* hides a skillful production of desire for (war) machines: "The utopian rhetoric, no matter how heartfelt by the inventor community, is ultimately very useful PR for the corporate merchants, it often obscures the military origins of the technology."¹⁷ Hence, what would military complex wish more for than these hypnotized bodies in the cinema, identifying with the characters on screen who get horny on machine guns and airplanes, fantasizing about destruction, dying in ecstasy. Or, in Benjamin's words:

Humanity that, according to Homer, was once an object of spectacle [*Schauobjekt*] for the Olympian gods, now is one for itself. Its self-alienation has reached such a degree that it is capable of experiencing [*erleben*] its own destruction as an aesthetic enjoyment [*Genuss*] of the highest order.¹⁸

According to Wolfgang Schirmacher, the process of cloning of the humanity has started much before Dolly. In his opinion, the predominant life technique has become cloning, performed through and by "information technology, communication, media or internet."¹⁹ The secret task of media is to conceal humanity since "by cloning with media the many ways in which a human being exists, we are also protecting the virtuality of humanity."²⁰ And with this kind of cloning, the same binary oppositions of our civilization are cloned as well. The avatar bodies in this film all belong to the category of 'primitive machines': simply following the existing formula of predominant media culture to clone humanity by showing "this is you — under different circumstances,"²¹ with it preventing any possibility for change. By changing the skin

¹⁶ Penny, S., *Ibid.*

¹⁷ Penny, S., *Ibid.*

¹⁸ Benjamin, W. *Illuminations*; quoted in Buck-Morss, S. *Ibid.*, p.4

¹⁹ Schirmacher, W. "Homo generator: Media and Postmodern Technology", New York, 1994. (<http://www.egs.edu/faculty/wolfgang-schirmacher/articles/homo-generator-media-and-postmodern-technology/>, December 2, 2009)

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ *Ibid.*

only, the same essence and divisions are being preserved in the shell of an avatar body, blocking the productive aspect of our ability to (re)generate the human being. By changing the skin only, the real possibility of mimesis is being suppressed and with it the possibility of experiencing how it is to be (in) the body of the other.

The Seduction of the Cat People

“Even as fog continues to lie in the valleys, so does ancient sin
cling to the low places, the depressions in the world consciousness.”
The Anatomy of Atavism, Dr. Louis Judd in *The Cat People* (1942)

Beside being blue-skinned, the Na'vi are actually a result of genetic engineering of another kind – the mixing of the genes of humans and cats. Their elongated bodies can do everything humans normally cannot and cats can do; on their faces, they keep the memory of both parts, mixing the human and the feline features. In the brief history of Hollywood, the first character of a cat woman named Irena was created in 1942 film *The Cat People*, followed by a remake under the same title in 1982. In both incarnations, the humans, or more precisely, women were defined as larvae from which a dangerous wild cat could emerge from. Simultaneously, this dangerous transformation was directly connected to their identity of apparent otherness: “Irena, in both films, is an epitome of difference, of a body of multiplicities.”²²

In its original version, the cat woman story was filmed as a horror. Set in 1940s New York, it focuses on the life of a Serbian émigré Irena Dubrovna. The problems arise after she has been haunted by an old (fictional) Serbian legend about a medieval king John, famous for defeating pagan practices and reestablishing Christianity in her village. Nevertheless, we learn that paganism seems to have survived through these strange cat-eyed women who are transformed into black panthers when kissed, consequently killing their lovers. Irena's troubles become evident after marrying a 'typical American' guy. Afraid that she might kill him, she does not allow him to kiss or

²² Roberts, J. “Becoming Cat, Becoming Irena.” *Enculturation*, Vol. 1, No.1, Spring 1997; (http://enculturation.gmu.edu/1_1/roberts.html), March 5, 2010)

touch her. Not even the best psychiatrist in town was able to help her and she would be killed as a wild animal in the end.

Seen from today's perspective, this film would hardly be considered a horror. Therefore, the question we should pose here is what is or what was in it so scary? One of the characters in the film is a Freudian psychiatrist who treats Irena, hence most of the interpretations of *The Cat People* have been done in the psychoanalytic key, more often revealing its limitations than helping comprehension.²³ In this mode, the cat is a "signifier of a female sexuality which is self-enclosed, self-sufficient, and, above all, objectless."²⁴ Hence, Irena's becoming is seen as happening not only on the level of cultural integration and assimilation in the modern U.S. melting pot, but shows upon the more fundamental limitations of psychoanalysis to trap the escaping female sexuality.²⁵ In the context of early 1940s America, the horror of *women-becoming-something-else* might be seen as being provoked by the changes in gender balance of working force caused by the Second World War. Namely, the necessity of the industry to mobilize women to replace men in factories seems to be the horror that made an imprint on the American imagination as well. Female emancipation was allowed during these years of necessity, but as soon as the war was over, Hollywood started working on bringing girls home.²⁶

One of the keys to approach this original version of *The Cat People* is through the concept of mimesis: "As the zoo-keeper points out, quoting the Bible, the panther is the figure of a failed mimesis: 'like unto a leopard, but not a leopard.' For the

²³ For more on this please see: Berks, J. "What Alice Does: Looking Otherwise at *The Cat People*." *Cinema Journal* 32, No. 1, Fall 1992, p.26-42

²⁴ Doane, M. "The Clinical Eye: Medical Discourses in the "Woman's Film" of the 1940s." *Poetics Today*, Vol. 6, No. 1/2, *The Female Body in Western Culture: Semiotic Perspectives* (1985), p.216

²⁵ "*The Cat People* designates female sexuality as that excess which escapes psychoanalysis; it is that which inhabits the realm of the unknowable." *Ibid.*

²⁶ In the 1944 sequel entitled *The Curse of the Cat People*, Alice, an American woman that marries the main character after Irena, will replace her office work for becoming a true housewife in an unnamed idyllic city in the American countryside. For more, please see: Berks, J. "What Alice Does: Looking Otherwise at *The Cat People*." *Cinema Journal*, Vol. 32, No. 1 (Autumn, 1992), University of Texas Press, 1992, p. 26-42

biblical text the panther is unnameable."²⁷ Hence, this version ends with Irena's death, as the result of "the inability of the characters in the film to articulate, comprehend, or confront becoming multiplicity, difference."²⁸ Irena's husband, the American hero, has only known blissful happiness in life until he has met this troubled, female, ethnic other, suffering different conditions of life. Irena as an anomaly has been skilfully removed by the hand of a psychoanalyst who, surprisingly, dies together with this problematic otherness. The underlying message offered through this Hollywood masterpiece seems more clear now – without the otherness and without the need for its repression, the world would be liberated from nightmares asking for doctors to interpret them; in the imaginary world without repressed otherness, we would all be blissfully happy and ready to serve the system without questions asked.

In his *Introduction to the American Horror Film*, Robin Wood defines the monsters in the horror films as a result of repression – the only way for the repressed other to resurrect itself is in the form of a monster. According to Wood, the roots for this lie in our repressed society where the founding activity is "the institutionalization of the patriarchal nuclear family."²⁹ What *The Cat People* does is that it creates a fictional image of the American society as a collective of happy and ignorant bodies in the service of capitalism, where the patriarchal nuclear family is the guarantee of the survival of this system. Here, any emancipatory otherness would only bring drama and depression. All possibility *to other* has been circumscribed from the beginning.

In the 1982 remake, the story seems to be adapted to the ideology of the '80s, offering a new position on the identity formation and otherness. Parting from the Eastern European medieval origin, Irena now has a French-sounding last name, and has grown up all over the place following the nomadic lives of her circus parents while they were alive. This time, New York has been replaced with New Orleans, where mystic blackness and the wild vegetation play a main role. Irena and her brother

²⁷ Doane, M. *Ibid.*

²⁸ Roberts, J. *Ibid.*

²⁹ In Wood, R. & Lippe, R. *The American Nightmare: Essays on the Horror Film*. Festival of Festivals, Toronto, 1979; p.7-28

seem to be originating from an unnamed desert in Africa, where also wild cats find their more 'natural' habitat in comparison to the medieval Balkans. At one point, her brother reveals her their family secret:

Long ago, our ancestors sacrificed their children to the leopards. The souls of the children grew inside the leopards until the leopards became human. We were gods then. We are an incestuous race. We can only make love with our own, otherwise we transform. And before we can become human again, we must kill. Welcome home.

In this new version, we see the world more open to the fluidity of identity: "The body in 1982 is a transforming site of conflict, where culture and society write the past, present and future."³⁰ Irena is allowed to take a different final step in her metamorphosis, so she turns into a wild cat forever. Nevertheless, her liberation does not take place in the wilderness of a nearby jungle; her true freedom is defined as being placed in a cage in a local zoo. It seems that we indeed do watch a film that is a product of post-colonial times, full of fluid identities and selective becomings: this society does not require repression anymore, but the caged, controlled colorful presence of emancipated otherness.

Following this Hollywood evolutionary line of imagining cat people, how does their new, blue version in three dimensions contribute to the discussion on identity formation and otherness? In their last incarnation, as the following discussion will show, the cat people are showing upon the absence of real transformation, the negation of transformation through its simulation. The multiplicity is rendered, and the blue screen of the skin has become a place onto which anything can be projected. There is no real transformation of identity, all we have is the illusion of becoming. As we have learned, *there is no such thing as an ex-marine*.

From Blue Screen to Blue Skin, and vice-versa

In the statements given about making of the *Avatar*, its proud creators have repeated numerous times this was not a simple digital cartoon and the 'real' actors did

³⁰ Roberts, J. *Ibid*.

in fact act. The images we see as a final result are not only computer-generated, but based on 'real' performances. Like in most high-budget Hollywood productions, in order to achieve this, the actors had to be filmed in front of a blue screen. Traditionally, this technique has been used as a substitute for the 'real' surrounding, giving filmmakers the opportunity to create ultimate illusion by projecting any environment they want. One of the main reasons why this particular color was chosen was because blue is the furthest color from the human (white) skin; when the blue screen is used, a (white) human being in front stays visible and does not blend with the surrounding.³¹ When applied to the skin, like in the case of Na'vi, it becomes a medium integrating the possibility to project anything over it in an environment created by humans. During the night in the jungles of Pandora, the Na'vi are turned into seductive screens onto which fluorescent details of phantasmagoria are projected upon.

Therefore, the artificiality and remoteness of the blue skin can further be interpreted as a mark of an ultimate alien, or the ultimate Other. This way, the process of human imagination reveals the status of otherness as a screen upon which things can be projected upon; this blueness is so remote that it cannot be mistaken for 'us'. According to some attempts to find the proofs for the existence of 'real' blue people, they are even to be found in the Bible as fallen angels, most of the time invisible to human race. We could even speculate that their invisibility comes from their imagined blue skin that has the ability to disappear in its surrounding, reappearing whenever human race needs them. In its final instance, these fallen blue angels seem to be there as an embodiment of human ability to imagine their Others whenever they needed them, projecting a vast variety of images over their bluescreen bodies.

When thinking further about our cultural imagination, perhaps the right step here is to bring in again the concept of mimicry. An important fact here is that the indigenous princess was actually played by an African-American actress; in the

³¹ For more, please see: "Chroma Key", http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chroma_key , March 12, 2010

process of post-production, her blackness was turned into a more politically correct blueness. Therefore, the blueness of the skin becomes not only a demonstration for a perfect mimicry used by the army for disguise in war situations (as in the case of Sully), but also the mark for the erasure of difference. The blackness of Na'vi skin was evacuated of any connotation, liberated to have (white) human imagination project anything over it. Read this way, does not the very ending of the film hide the essence of post-colonial tactics of domination: the reinvention of colored bodies with insides replaced by the dominant (white) model? In other words, *our* mind in *their* body: a perfect camouflage for inner c(o)lonization.

The remaining question here is what happens with our agency *to other* once we have switched from a two-dimensional environment of old Hollywood films to a newly generated three-dimensional one? In the old system, according to Sean Cubitt, we have been dealing with the birth of a viewer, a "subject supposed to take responsibility for the illusion."³² In the new 3D environment, the objects "operate differently. They are indifferent to the existence or otherwise of a viewer."³³ Here, the viewer has been turned into a witness. Nevertheless, what stays hidden by the illusion of visually rich worlds is the attempt to present the passivity of a witness as an active agency of an all-immersed subject. This way, a potentially dangerous multi-sensory being is turned into a witness of the events on screen for which it has no say. In 3D, the objects simply obey the pre-written script covered by the illusion of active participation. In this harmonized phantasmagoria, the Other is easily mastered and disciplined; we are allowed to keep the same body while changing the skin, the true mimesis is mastered while being repressed. In this pseudo-womb, we are staying protected from the horrors of reality where the Other constantly escapes the hand that wants to discipline it. The hypnotized, numb body will have no senses left to react to the dangers coming from both the outside and the inside. The only hope that remains is that the cracks in 3D will be enough for its awakening - the ultimate danger lies in the pleasure we feel while losing the agency.

³² Sean Cubitt, "Thinking filming thinking filming", *Journal of Aesthetics and Culture*, Vol.1, 2009 (www.polarresearch.net/index.php/jac/article/view/2122/2610 visited December 15, 2010)

³³ *Ibid.*

