"Personal Identity and Dystopian Film Worlds"
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Abstract: *To speak of personal identity and cinematic worlds means to speak of "reference" in fiction and of the reception and personal appropriation – not only intellectual – of that fiction. This study deals with the personal "refiguration" of fictions according to the hermeneutics of Paul Ricoeur, making reference to three films that depict dystopian worlds:* Blade Runner, Brazil, *and* The Truman Show. *Author's understanding is that "refiguration" is to be considered as being a personal moment. A moment implying two things: the intellectual (technical) "comprehension" of a text, and the "application" of the meaning of that text by a person to his or her life. Aware that both things are not chronologically separated and must be articulated by that person.*

Key words: *Film, cinematic, spectator, person, reception, lecture, sense, meaning, story, narrative, drama, hermeneutics, literature and philosophy.*

1. Introduction: concepts involved

To speak of "Personal Identity and Dystopian Film Worlds" means to speak of "reference" in cinematic fiction and of the reception and personal appropriation – not only intellectual – of that fiction. To put it briefly, I will speak of the personal *"refiguration"* of fictions according to the hermeneutics of Paul Ricoeur, making reference to three films that depict dystopian worlds: *Blade Runner* (R. Scott, 1982), *Brazil* (T. Gilliam, 1985), and *The Truman Show* (P. Weir, 1998).

I consider the possible worlds[1] in these films as "virtual", not because they are dystopian[2] or close to science-fiction, but rather for being different from the "real" world in which we live, and for allowing us to gain a better understanding of ourselves and our own worlds. They are virtual because in order to talk about their characters, plots and actions we adopt – in the words of W. Kneale – the *"de dicto"* modality; whereas to speak of ourselves as persons we adopt the *"de re"* modality in the real worlds in which we interact with such fictions when they reach us.

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[1] This idea of a *possible world* does not adhere to Leibniz's metaphysics and logic, nor is it defined by modal semantics; neither does it deal with the non-current as seen through various degrees of possibility, probability and virtuality. It is rather the "poetically possible" according to the idea of *verisimilitude or necessity* found in Aristotle's Poetics (1451a 36-38). To begin with, the idea of the possible gathers around that which is habitual (*to eikos*, as well as *praxeos*), that which "everybody likes", which is *captivating*.

[2] According to the Oxford English Dictionary, the term was coined in the late 19th century by John Stuart Mill, who also used Bentham's synonym, cacotopia, at the same time. Both words were based on utopia, analyzed as eu-topia, for a place where everything is as it should be; hence the converse "dys-topia" for a place where this is certainly not the case. Often, the difference between a Utopia and a Dystopia is in the author's point of view. A dystopia is any society considered to be undesirable, for any of a number of reasons. The term was coined as a converse to a Utopia, and is most usually used to refer to a fictional (often near-future) society where current social trends are taken to nightmarish extremes. (From "Wikipedia").

My understanding – in line with Ricoeur's "mimesis III" and Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics – is that "*refiguration*" is to be considered as being a personal moment, a moment implying two things: the intellectual (technical) "*comprehension*" of a text, and the "*application*" of the meaning of that text by a person to his or her life. Aware that the two things are not chronologically separate. "Nonetheless, from an epistemological point of view, *comprehension* and *application* are separate; otherwise, comprehension would be merely arbitrary. For this reason, in order to describe that moment, Ricoeur coined the term '*refiguration*"[3], which is the one I use here. If I did not make this distinction, rather than working as promised in Ricoeur's shadow, I would be operating in the shadow of Richard Rorty's ludic subjectivism. A view I cannot share, as I prefer that offered by Umberto Eco in his "meaning of the text".

The conversion of a text into a "work of art" is not an automatic or irrational phenomenon. At the least, we can investigate to see if it exists and – if it does – evaluate what justifies it in the "possible world" it presents. The world that offers us a film "*de dicto*" is not a mere mirror image of the world we inhabit "*de re*", yet it presents itself as something "that can be inhabited, that can be welcoming, strange, hostile"[4], something with which it is possible to establish "a game strategy, even a strategy of combat, of suspicion, of rejection, enabling the reader to create a distance in his appropriation"[5]. However, it is only possible to "speak with propriety of '*world*', when the work interacts with the spectator or reader and the process of *refiguration* causes the horizon of his expectations to waver; only in the extent to which it is able to *refigure* this world does the work reveal itself capable of a world"[6].

One possible way of creating a distinction between two operations, which, like *comprehension* and *application*, overlap, is to speak of a "first perusal or navigation" of the text, always essential, technical-structural in character and attentive to a *comprehension* of the **surface structures** of the narrative and dramatic content. And a "second perusal or navigation" concerned rather with a hermeneutical analysis of the **deep poetic structures** of the text, if they exist. In other words if, (1) the text is endowed with an organic configuration in the strong Aristotelian sense, of poetic myth understood as "*mímesis praxeos*"[7], a subject I will not discuss here, and (2) the text is in a condition to be assimilated as a "work of art" by the reader or spectator.

Not everything is a work of art, not everything is mere entertainment. It is wrong to confuse the comprehension of a possible world with its artistic density, or to deduce the comprehensibility of that possible world on the basis of subjective pleasure. Art adopts a distance from reality, knowing that it is part thereof and that there it must return. As Ricoeur recalls: "if art did not have, despite its initial withdrawal, the capacity to return and burst in among us, in the bosom of our world, it would be entirely innocent; it would be condemned to insignificance, reduced to mere diversion, and limited to constituting a parenthesis in our daily concerns"[8].

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[3] Vicente Balaguer, *La interpretación de la narración.La teoría de Paul Ricoeur*. Eunsa, Pamplona, 2002, p.133.
[4] Cf., among others, Various Authors, *Con P. Ricoeur. Indagaciones hermenéuticas*, Ed. Azul, Barcelona, 2000, p. 160.
[5] P. Ricoeur, *Tiempo y narración*, vol. I, Ed Cristiandad, Salamanca, 1987, p. 42.
[6] Various Authors, *Con P. Ricoeur. Indagaciones hermenéuticas*, cit., p. 160.
[7] Cf. Aristóteles, *Poetics*, VI, 1449 b 24, 1450 a 4.
[8] Various Authors, *Con P. Ricoeur. Indagaciones hermenéuticas*, Ibid.

I have chosen to talk about dystopian films because in this way it is easier to show that the initial distancing and the subsequent returning of the possible worlds in this kind of cinema, contrast this dual journey, there and back, with our experience as human beings – deeper and more stable than the contextual *Umwelt*, and than the *Welt* too, even when the latter is only cultural and intertextual. It is a process in which the creative pendular movement responds, on the one hand, to the duality or epistemological level of *comprehension* of the narrative and dramatic structure, and on the other, to the personal *assimilation* of the meaning offered by the possible worlds as a whole.

It remains clear that "as the distance from reality increases, the impact of the work of art in the world of our experience is strengthened. The greater the withdrawal, the more vivid the return to reality, as if coming from further away, as if something infinitely more distant visited our experience"[9].

However, this is so provided we assume – once more in accordance with Ricoeur's hermeneutics – that *reference* in cinematic texts undergoes the same metaphorical process as in literary ones. In other words, they lack the clear empirical reference found in the affirmative statements of everyday language, and they try to create – raising philosophical questions about communication[10] – a new reference, a particular world with its own meaning. And this meaning will only manifest itself in the *refiguration* (1) if it exists as something that can be equated with the stability of Umberto Eco's "intentio operis"[11], and (2) if there is somebody who – without appropriating it in the way explained by Richard Rorty[12] – can revitalise it by contrasting it with the meaning of his own life, "proposing a world in which I – as reader or spectator – might be able to live and exercise my own capabilities"[13]; and I might also promise and forgive in accordance with H. Arendt. The ludic suspension of "the references that define an active and concerned existence"[14] does not bring about the suspension of all final references. They survive through the individual's own capacity to broaden his mind as a result of "understanding himself in relation to the text". This, after all, is the object of hermeneutics and the social sciences.

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[9] Ibid., p. 161.

[10] Ricoeur affirms that one of the tasks of philosophy is to "render communication problematic". The reason he gives is acceptable, because "communication is itself a transgression, if it is understood in the sense of overcoming a limit or a distance that is, in some way, insuperable" [in *Discours et communication*, in *La communication,* Actes du XV Congrès de l'Association des Sociétés de Phliosophie de langue française, Montréal, 1971. (Montmorency, Montréal 1973, II, p. 25). Taken from Paul Ricoeur, *Filosofia e linguaggio*, (edited by D. Jervolino), Ed. Guerini, Milan, 1994, p.XVII.].

[11] Eco rejects Rorty's critical view which holds that the only existence a text has is that which supplies it with the series of answers it provokes, or – to express ourselves with the irony of T. Todorov – he rejects the idea that a text is just "a kind of picnic in which the author supplies the words and the readers supply the meaning" (Cf. U. Eco, "Interpretation and History", in Stefan Collini (Ed.), *Interpretation and Overinterpretation*, Cambridge, 1996, p. 24).

[12] Rorty says that "we pragmatists love to blur the distinction between finding an object and creating it", (Cf. R. Rorty, "The Pragmatist's Progress", in Stefan Collini (Ed.), *Interpretation and Overinterpretation,* op cit., pp. 97-106). Yet there is a distance that it is as well to maintain between the capacity to "understand" and that to "appropriate" or "re-describe", when what is at stake is the meaning of dialogic or quasi-dialogic communication such as that constituted by the reading of a text. As E. Goodhearth correctly says: "Rorty understands the risks of re-description and seeks to obviate them confining this task to the private sphere. However, as his own practice makes clear, re-description has potentially coercive public implications. Rorty's problem increases when he identifies re-description with intellectual life. And a conversation between re-describers can be like a dialogue between the deaf, which is not a real dialogue at all. As J. Habermas and other Enlightenment thinkers have shown, intellectuals also have the capacity to listen to one another, to place what the other says in their own terms, and even to change their minds. Intellectual life is tension between understanding and appropriation. In Rorty's view there is only appropriation, in other words re-description" (Eugene Goodhearth, *The Reign of Ideology*, Columbia Un. Press, NY, 1997, p. 51.

[13] P. Ricoeur, *Tiempo y relato*, I, op cit., p. 122.

[14] Cf. G. Gadamer, *Verdad y método*, p. 144.

2. Paths of comprehension (first perusal or navigation)

It could be said that in immersing ourselves in the possible worlds of these three dystopian films, and doing so from the focalising point of view of their protagonists, we find ourselves facing three paths very similar to what Ricoeur calls "parcours de la réconaissance"[15]; situations in which personal errors and oversights lead to grave misunderstandings, because nobody is wrong about himself without being wrong about others.

2.1. Blade Runner

From a first perusal of *Blade Runner* – both the commercial version of 1982 and the "director's cut" of 1991 – it is clear that Deckard, our "*lazarillo*" or "blind man's guide" in the dystopian world, is the protagonist, the best hunter, "blade runner", or deactivator of humanoid replicants. Yet at the end of the day he is not that good, as on two occasions it is the replicants who save him from death. One of them is Rachel, with whom he seems to fall in love – according to the codes of the cinematic genres adopted – and the other is Roy, leader of the replicant group. Roy – having killed, among others, his father-designer who proved incapable of prolonging his life, in a somewhat Freudian scene with transcendent pretensions – ends up saving the life of his much-battered adversary, Deckard, in a "*climax*" with paradoxical Christological allusions. Roy wounds his own hand with a nail, as if in a crucifixion, but only in order "to feel alive" (he has no-one to redeem), while in his other hand he carries a dove which, when he "shuts down", flies up towards the sky which, for the first time in the film, is blue. Motivated by the evident diegetic features of the film, it is about this, as well as about the progressive "humanisation" of the replicants, that everyone who has seen both versions talks about.

It is sufficiently clear that the semantic field in which the conclusion of the film takes root and blossoms is that "this life (the only one there is) is not worth the trouble of living". When Deckard discovers the "origami", making him, and us too, think he is a replicant, he remembers (and we hear) the voice of his supervisor shouting, "it's a pity she won't live, but then again who does?". And everything ends there, with the closing of a door and a lift going down.

2.2. Brazil

Terry Gilliam planned *"Brazil"* with a twisted happy ending, in which a man triumphs over his enemies by going mad. "Is it really possible to make a film in which the happy ending consists of a man going mad?"[16].

It is easier to say what *Brazil* is not, than to say what it is: "*Brazil* is not a remake of *1984*, as many critics have assumed. … What interests Gilliam is the loss of passion in bureaucratic societies, people's inclination to surrender their individuality in exchange for

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[15] Ed. Stock,. París, 2004. Especially, cf. the conclusions, pp. 357-377.

[16] Cf. Jack Mathews, *The Battle of Brazil. Terry Gilliam vs. Universal Pictures in the Fight to the Final Cut*, Applause, NY, 1998, p. 46.

the comfort and security of being within the system. He is also concerned with the price that, in the end, must be paid for this. The inexorable march towards conformity is necessary, but it is not natural, and the only way out that cannot be punished is through fantasy. Gilliam was not trying to say anything about the future. Those who study the film carefully will see that it contains nothing futuristic. It is about how we live today"[17].

How does *Brazil* deal with these matters? Any attempt to create a synopsis of the story will always be inadequate. We can say that, "the film follows the character of Sam Lowry, an employee in the documentation department of a large bureaucratic government organisation. Sam's view of the world alternates between being trapped as a simple 'cog of the machine' in a depressing world of paperwork, and escaping from his gloomy existence to become the hero of his own elaborate dreams. His life and dreams begin to run together, … and his dreams become reality at the same time as his life falls apart. Eventually the government throws him in gaol, having found him guilty of no less a crime than 'wasting the Ministry's time and paper' after Sam has begun a turbulent pursuit of the girl he sees in his dreams and then meets in real life, and whom the Ministry – for no real reason – was seeking as a terrorist suspect."[18]

2.3. Truman Show

Richard Corliss describes *The Truman Show* in *Time* (1 June 1998): "What a wonderful world Truman Burbank inhabits – a town of pretty houses and smiling people. On Seahaven Island, the streets are spotless, the traffic is orderly, the weather glorious, from seductive dawns (let's get out of bed!) to sunsets worthy of Turner's brush. He's headed for his honourable job as an insurance salesman, then home to his blond, bedimpled wife Meryl, perhaps off for a late brewski with his best friend, Marlon. You have it all, Truman: good afternoon, good evening and good night! Except for one thing, folks. The whole kit and kaboodle is *fake*".

The world of *The Truman Show* is a fairly long way from our own daily world, though it does bring together some of our fears, hopes and paranoia. I am referring to the entire world of *The Truman Show* and not to the "world" of the character Truman Burbank, because Truman has no world, not even a fictitious world within the fiction of the *Show* in which he lives. For this reason, his adventure begins as that of a "prisoner in paradise" and culminates with his flight from the "wonderful world" in search of the "real world".

3. Refiguration and paths of application (second perusal or navigation)

As I have demonstrated that the meaning of the films remains open, and that refiguration is a personal matter, I would not like to force you to accept "my" application of these possible poetic and dystopian worlds. Yet I can invite you to consider the following:

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[17] Jack Mathews, *The Battle of Brazil*. op cit., p. 22.
[18] Interview filmed on 29 June 1991, for *The South Bank Show*, partially reproduced in David S. Cowen, *Brazil FAQ*, (http://execpc.com/~esch/home.html).

Ricoeur recalls that errors and oversights in the paths of recognition of our own identity – not only in diegetic worlds but in our real life – have a dominant characteristic indicated by Pascal: "L'essence de la méprise consiste à ne la pas connaître"[19]. The error is redoubled by the fact of not knowing itself. For this reason, actively contemplating that error in the refiguration (or paths of application) of a story can disrupt its diegetic reduplication; and this, without doubt, gives us the opportunity better to know our own nature, as well as that of the world in which we live.

As I have said, the "second perusal or navigation" of a possible world – which usually happens when we are faced with a work of art – obliges us to make a personal identification, not so much with the characters of the possible world, as with the world itself considered as a whole. Our identity as people has the characteristic of shared relationships to which – with Ricoeur – we will refer using the strong Greek expression of sociability, "*allèlôn*". We people are, in principle, "**one-and-the-other**". Characters are, in principle, "**one-or-the-other**".

3.1. Blade Runner

On the subject of the "thematic" content of *Blade Runner*, it is not, I feel, the humanisation of replicants that is important in the end. I agree with Philip K. Dick, who says precisely the opposite: "the theme of my book is that Deckard has become dehumanised by hunting for androids"[20]. Another important factor, I would add, is the disappearance of any kind of transcendent horizon, which, at least in Dick's novel, appears with Mercer, a false preacher whose creed is "there is no salvation"[21].

In line with George Steiner[22] in his controversial intuitions into literary and artistic works, we can say that the meaning of "refiguration", as relates both to life and epistemology, implies a dialectical context. Steiner states that "where *God's presence* is no longer held as a supposition, where *His absence* is no longer felt as a heavy and, in fact, overwhelming burden, certain levels of thought and creativity become unattainable"[23]. Turning now back to *Blade Runner*, I believe that its transformation from a simple text into a very worthy work of art is based precisely upon the *diegetic presence* of this "supposition of a lack of transcendence experienced as an overwhelming burden". This, obviously, is in itself a symptom of the transcendental possibilities added by those who relate actively to the meaning - sense of the film.

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[19] *Entretien avec M. de Saci sur Epictète et Montaigne*, op cit. in P. Ricoeur, *Parcours de la réconaissance*, op cit.

[20] Cf. Interview with Philip K. Dick, by Paul Sammon, in "The making of Blade Runner", *Cinefantanstique*, 12:5/12:6 (July-August, 1982), p. 27. Quoted by Gregg Rickman "Philip K. Dick on *Blade Runner*: "They Did Sight Stimulation On My Brain", in *Retrofitting Blade Runner*, Ed. by J.B. Kerman, Bowling Green, 1991, pp.103-109.

[21] Cf. Gabriele Frasca, epilogue of Philip K. Dick, *Ma gli andoidi sognano pecore elettiche?,* Fanucci Editore, Rome, 2001, p. 280. The meaning of the original novel palpitates in *Blade Runner*, though we may not see it very clearly: that "love for one's own prosthesis, the 'narcissus as narcosis' of which MacLuhan spoke, here becomes love *with* the inanimate (…) as an emblem of a complete and literal disintegration" of human beings. And the great capacity for empathy of which the humans are so proud, and that distinguishes them from the replicants, is nonetheless just the nth falsification of true feelings" (Cf. *Ibid*, pp. 282-285), precisely because it does not perform its true function: that of informing the subject about the state of development of his spiritual life.

[22] In a text, says George Steiner, "the context is always dialectic. Our reading modifies the communicative presence of its object and is, in its turn, modified by it", in *Presencias reales. ¿Hay algo en lo que decimos?*, Ensayos, Destino, Barcelona 1991. pp. 181-182.

[23] George Steiner, *Presencias reales*, op cit., p. 278.

Confronted with this necessary possibility, I feel a refiguration or personal identification with the overall meaning of *Blade Runner* is possible, rather than the uncomfortable alternative of just identifying with some of its characters. Of course, a possible world in which the tendency to a dehumanisation of Deckard coexists alongside the humanising tendency of the "replicants" is fascinating, a kind of game of mutual exchanges or changing traits of the characters[24]. But it is not the humanity of Deckard or Rachel, "one-or-the-other" that is being contested. What is being contested is the adventure of knowing[25] our own personal humanity – what Ricoeur understands as "one-and-the-other" in translating our social dimension according to the Greek "*allèlôn*". An adventure that calls us to explore some of the extreme possibilities, between what is humanly honourable and dishonourable. Here, in *Blade Runner*, between the natural and the artificial.

3.2. Brazil

The possibility we have just mentioned also facilitates an appropriation of Gilliam's *Brazil*, an appropriation that, in principle, respects its meaning - sense. Gilliam is clear when he speaks of "the feeling that things are out of control. It is as if the world were dreaming". And when he adds: "in some way, writing Brazil was like a kind of swindle: we give no answers. We only highlight things that are obvious, but they are obvious things that people almost never take into account."[26]

The bureaucratisation of the world of *Brazil* is not far distant from a management-based ideology: the strictly *scientific* and *self-sufficient* organisation of means in relation to ends identified with a tautological view dominated by *efficiency*. The *bureaucratic individualism* denounced by MacIntyre acquires meaning in the ideological regimes of both socialism and liberalism. Thus the bureaucratic conformists of *Brazil* become a mirror, an almost universally uncomfortable reflection. If we consider Sam's dreams, we see that in them he becomes a kind of Icarus or guardian angel with wings and silver armour who at times seeks to free his girl, Jill, who is calling for help from a cage. Sam fights with a giant samurai[27] and, having beaten him, removes his mask to discover the samurai is none other than himself.

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[24] This is a recurring phenomenon in numerous narrative and dramatic works considered artistically important for other reasons. I have studied the subject explicitly, with reference to such works as "Thelma y Louise" or "Brazil", taking the simultaneous and progressive "Quixotisation" of Sancho and the "Sancho Panzerisation" of Alonso Quijano, in the work of Miguel de Cervantes, as a model of this classic narrative and dramatic cliché. Cf. Juan José García-Noblejas, *Comunicación borrosa. Sentido práctico del periodismo y de la ficción cinematográfica*, Eunsa, Pamplona, 2000, pp. 143-152 and pp. 153-206, respectively.

[25] According to Kundera, the spirit of cinema – cinema that is not mere entertainment – like the spirit of the novel, is the spirit of complexity – something far distant from the spirit of our times exemplified by the particular standards of appropriating reality on the part of the mass media, uniformly camouflaged by ideological diversity. "All novels tell the reader that 'things are not as simple as you believe'. This is the eternal truth of the novel. ... The exclusive raison d'être of a novel is to uncover what only a novel is capable of uncovering. A novel that does not uncover some aspect of human existence thus far unknown is immoral. Knowledge is the novel's only morality" (Milan Kundera, *The Art of The Novel*, Harper & Row, NY, 1988, pp. 5-18).

[26] The horror of many of the scenes in Brazil is accompanied by a certain tenderness and, at times, by a logic that is both perfect and out of place. Numerous posters cover the walls of streets and offices of this diegetic world. Some say, for example, "Information Is The Key To Prosperity", "Help The Ministry Of Information Help You", "Be Safe: Be Suspicious", "Suspicion Breeds Confidence", etc. "Happiness: We're all in it together", says one poster, an exact reproduction of one that appeared in the streets of all North American cities during the Depression. That "we're all in it together" is something that Gilliam wants to make very clear, both in the ironic meaning of life in *Brazil*, and in the meaning of our own lives after seeing *Brazil*. (Texts taken from the notes included in the DVD edition of *Brazil*, © 1998 Universal Home Video Inc., and from those included in the CD, © Milan Entertainment Inc., 1993).

[27] Amidst the many possible riddles the film contains – like Alice in Wonderland – Gilliam himself takes pleasure in creating more confusion, from the amusing to the ironic: Sam's quixotism in fighting the giant Samurai who turns out to have his own face is (according to Gilliam in a question and answer session on-line with AOL) nothing more than a poor play on words. The word 'samurai', divided into two syllables: "Sam or I", or perhaps "Sam, you are I".

The spectator's role consists in fighting with the meaning of this dystopian and uninhabitable world, which the protagonist leaves only in dreams and (finally and "happily") in insanity, having been lobotomised and with the stigmata of the crucifixion on his left hand. The spectator, if he feels the film to be a work of art, seeks to unify the natural absence of any answers in the context – once again – of his own reflection or personal refiguration.

In this case, and contrary to *Blade Runner*'s tragic tone, *Brazil* offers us a satirical tone; one that seems to try to distance our thoughts from any strong mimetic relation – in the Aristotelian sense – to the possible world; because it seems we can only think in terms of individual alternatives: "one-or-the-other". In my view this is not so: although the spectator's personal identity continues to be at stake, the means to stabilise the meaning of that identity in *Brazil* are to be found – the same as in *Blade Runner* – in the exploration of some opposite ends of our humanity, between what is humanly honourable and dishonourable, in accordance with the well-known Greek *allèlôn*: "one-and-the-other". But instead of placing ourselves between the natural and artificial poles, we are offered a chance between dreaming idealism and wakeful reality to bring together into a single entity all that we have experienced vicariously through Sam-asleep and Sam-awake.

3.3. *The Truman Show*

Concerning *The Truman Show*, there is less to say from the point of view of refiguration. Or what there is to say has less solidity and artistic merit if we compare it with the other two films.

Kafka said that "we live as if we were the only lords, and that makes us slaves". This perhaps is what has happened *to the people, not to the 'system'*, in the truly Kafkaesque world[28] of *Brazil*, and its certainly what happens in *Truman*. Not because it involves an "I" who is "unsupportive" with respect to others, but – and this is the strong point of *The Truman Show* – because the Truman character is a pure individual surrounded by actors who, socially speaking, are perfect "unsupportive Is", mere masks. And a pure human individual is not a variant of Robinson Crusoe; he may, perhaps, be a kind of pathetic Tarzan surrounded by abstract personages and not by personally living beings.

From this point of view, we "understand" what Niccol and Weir[29] are telling us in a *Truman Show* replete with names and allegorical actions. In any case, in *The Truman Show* we can also seek a correlation of the type "one-and-the-other". It is true that our personal condition comes up against a correlation of dubious balance between "Truman-becoming-a-person" and "Truman-no-longer-being-a-*pseudo-person*" or pure individual; yet we find

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[28] In the face of the supposed Orwellian connotations with which it is attributed, *Brazil* presents a Kafkaesque panorama. Suffice, for example, to re-examine Kundera's own categories of the "phantasmagorical nature of reality and the magical reality of the archive", or "the punishment that ends up encountering the offence that originated it", the totalitarian spirit that converts the whole world into an "employee", the anguish of "feeling oneself excluded", etc., in *op. cit.,* pp. 99-117.

[29] In the words of the scriptwriter Niccol: "We decided to make him a prisoner in paradise." We toyed with various endings – Truman stumbles into a Truman Burbank memorabilia shop, Truman is reunited with his lost love, Truman decides he loves life on TV – and finally devised the current ending, nicely abrupt and ambiguous. "We felt the viewer could write a better ending of the next years in Truman's life", says the director Weir. (Cf. *Time*, 1 June 1998).

ourselves unable to acquire the necessary "comprehension" of the diegesis, which in this case has too many loose ends and too many pseudo-transcendent allusions. There are some thought-provoking ideas, but the ones that have been developed in the form of a "love-conquers-all-story" are much less rich than the narrative and dramatic implications of the protagonist's own pseudo-identity. We find that the protagonist's narratively closed universe – in which he lives a pseudo-marriage, a pseudo-friendship, a pseudo-job, etc. – remains unexplored; aporias that would be interesting for "refiguration". Yet, this does not only have to do with the spectator's application of the meaning of the story to his life; if a satisfactory "comprehension" of the possible world and its inhabitants is not achieved, no such "refiguration" takes place, whatever the expectations may be. And this, in my opinion, is what happens with *The Truman Show*.

4. Conclusion

I shall close now. I trust that – with this incursion into dystopian worlds – I have thrown some light on that dark moment of the refiguration of fiction. Many other things could have been considered, such as the condition of mimesis and poetic catharsis, which underlies everything that has been said. We will leave them for another occasion, though I cannot avoid mentioning two authors because they will serve to recapitulate what we have said.

When Georges Steiner studied the "Grammars of Creation", and re-examined the history of art, he ended up by suggesting that, in order to be able to work, artists need at least a hypothesis of a transcendent God. Determining if such a thing effectively exists in an Aeschylus, Dante, Bach or Dostoyevsky way on the one hand, or in Beckett on the other, is left up to those who refigure their works, either applying or not applying the human condition of "guests of creation"[30].

When Amélie O. Rorty asks herself about the subjects of fear and pity associated with the poetic catharsis of tragedy, she responds with great confidence: "For whom do we feel fear and pity? For the tragic hero? For ourselves? For all humanity? For all three; for all three together"[31]. We have to enter the diegetic world of the characters with *comprehension* (fear and pity for the hero), and we have to leave that world with *refigurative* application (fear and pity for ourselves and for all humanity), as we return to the real world of people. Without refiguration of this kind, genuine cognitive **poetic pleasure** is not possible; and that, in the final analysis, is what we are interested in.

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