

Not Becoming-Posthuman in the Ultimate Postfilmic Posthuman Male Fantasy: Queer-Feminist Observations on James Cameron's *Avatar* (2009)

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Abstract:

This article examines mainly the following: In what way is the digital mobilized in *Avatar* and in what complex ways are the filmic and the digital mutually constitutive? If one ever assumes, that cinema has some kind of (historically changing) specificity, if not an essence, but as a medium, and if one further assumes that cinema is a cultural technology, then what types of images, what kind of narratives and discursive strategies are enabled through the digital in conjunction with the cinematographic in *Avatar*? Furthermore, if cinema is supposedly, in a Deleuzian fashion, a system with specific features to reflect on, to show and to tell mainly about time, movement and their cognition, then what does *Avatar* tell us about the relation to the real, about lived, embodied time proper and therefore about subjectivity in general? What kind of subjectivity is addressed here? Closely related to this question is the last one, very seriously raised, if *Avatar* can ever be called a serious reflection on the philosophy of the subject brought to the fore by Rosi Braidotti as Zoëism. This article will, finally, answer this question negatively in showing that *Avatar* is the ultimate postfilmic posthuman male fantasy in the spirit of capitalism's schizophrenic spectral logic.

Preliminaries

1 With *Avatar*, as it was widely acknowledged in press and film criticism alike, James Cameron had gone viral – again, not only in terms of another elegiac U.S.-American Narrative – like *Abyss* (1989) or *Titanic* (1997) – but also in the sense of vaulting cinema into its next phase of digital enhancement. Critics excelled in mentioning the specific 3D-cameras, Cameron had have built for this special occasion, the improved motion-capturing device which recorded the actor's movements and facial expressions in front of a blue screen but whose results (data) could be seen within the simultaneously generated graphic context of the environment of Pandora planet.¹ Much has been written since, about *Avatar*'s digitally enabled world of spiritual enchantment – even if criticised by religious groups for neo-paganism or natural religion respectively² –, of a collective society living in total harmony with the conditions and requirements of a globe in a seemingly natural state. This has been mostly interpreted as an

¹ See for example Appleyard, Rodney. „‘Avatar’. World of the Na’vis“ inside film: FX, Issue 129 (March 2010): 32-34 and Turan, Kenneth. „A dazzling revelation. James Cameron's ‚Avatar’ restores a sense of wonder to moviegoing that's been missing.“ Los Angeles Times. Dec. 17 (2009). 24 pars. But also Kimberly N. Rosenfeld, who is critical about *Avatar*'s content and stresses the shift to the posthuman in comparison to Cameron's former Terminator-series; see Rosenfeld, Kimberly N. „‘Terminator’ to ‘Avatar’: A Postmodern Shift.“ Jump Cut. A Review of Contemporary Media, 52 (Summer 2010). 28 pars.

² An enchantment so intense, so compelling and convincing, that there is much rumor about people who wanted to commit suicide after leaving the movie theater and being confronted with an ever so harsh, cruel and ugly ‚reality’. See Boucher, Geoff. „‘Avatar’ is a Pandora's box of pop culture.“ Los Angeles Times. February 3 (2010). 5 pars

expression of (counter-cultural)³ *zeitgeist* in the light of pressing social problems such as global warming, increasing pollution, augmented technization of human living, hyperaggressive and -exploitive capitalism and so on.

2 But also critical voices were raised, from celebrity philosopher Slavoj Žižek to unknown-logogram directors on YouTube⁴, that pointed fingers at the movie's legacies of Euro-American Imperialism (Pocahontas-Story), of the myths of the white man's supremacy and redemption, especially in comparison to other wellknown movies like *Dances With Wolves* (Kevin Kostner, USA 1990) and *The Last Samurai* (Edward Zwick, USA 2003).⁵

3 Some critics – media-wise-guys, like media theorist and internet specialist Ken Hillis, in analytical accordance with Klaus Theweleit,⁶ called the network that connects the trees, animals and the Na'vi on Pandora by its real name: It is a global network, wired and WiFi based, just a little bit more biological wetware, with an allusion to a global brain (as the Sigourney Weaver-character, scientist Grace Augustine, puts it) and its electronic impulses and synapses like a fully biological version of a global village à la McLuhan. Interestingly enough, Hillis interprets the function of the connectedness of the Na'vi among themselves and with their environment on the semantic level as a Neoplatonic fantasy, wherein a deity engenders all matter. That is to say, all the living creatures on Pandora are meant to signify the embodiment of the one and only godly Spirit (Eywa). Though speaking of material hard wires, he sees in them the bodiless substance of transcendental abstraction.

4 What strikes me when I read those interpretations is, generally speaking, their double strand of argument: Either, there is first the technique that attracts the interpreter's awareness, which is finally at such an advanced stage to fulfil a director's longlasting dream or is now the ultimate means to catch the audience's eyes and nerves. Or, there is a foregrounding of the level of content, of semantics or of the narrative of the film, to whose' old imperialist story the technology is just a very sophisticated supplement. In each case, though, the technique (technical reproduction of signs) and the cultural (cultural production of signs) seem to be ominously exterior to one another. Contrary to this dichotomous view on *Avatar*, I will argue in this article, that it is exactly the specific mutual constitution of technical reproduction and

³ See especially Davidson, Rjurik. „Avatar. Evaluating a Film in a World of its Own.“ *Screen Education*, 57 (2010), 10-17.

⁴ See Žižek, Slavoj. „Return of the Natives.“ *New Statesman*, March 4 (2010). 18 pars. and (the clip of) jxhensely. „The Progressive Racism of James Cameron's 'Avatar'.“ YouTube. January 10 (2010).

⁵ See MacNamara, Alison, *Anti-Racist Social Work*, Lisa Moy. „An Anti-Racist Critique of 'Avatar'.“ and also Newitz, Annlee. „Wen Will White People Stop Making Movies Like *Avatar*.“ *io9: we come from the future*. November 3 (2009). 15 pars.

⁶ Theweleit, Klaus. „Menschliche Drohnen“ („Human Drones“, transl. by C.K.). *Spiegel online*, March 3 (2010). 18 pars.

cultural production which lies at the very heart of the movie's theme and is worth scrutinizing: the complex relations between materiality and immateriality, between real and virtual, between matter and idea, between embodiment and disembodiment that is broached with digital technologies per se.

5 As a movie *Avatar* does not only joyously allude to actual digital environments on a semantic level but also is heavily based on digital technologies. Approaches that do not take into serious account that what we deal with here is a film *as* medium that tells/shows something about digitality by which it is simultaneously starkly inflected do lose a great deal of not only the meaning of the film but also of how digital technologies challenge film as a site of cultural production and meaning – as a cultural technology. To make it more obvious: The movie's body is intruded by the body of the computer. But that is not just a way of integrating a new tool that make some director's fantasies come true, because the body of digital technology has, if not an essence, but also epistemological, discursive and narrative features of its very own – what I will call “the digital” in the course of this article. Thus, the movie as film (as medium, as discourse and story) deals with not only the body but with the epistemological, discursive and narrative meaning of the digital alike – including the bodies it calls into being through this. Let me state clearly what I am saying and am not saying here. I do not accuse those interpretations wrong that come to the conclusion – on the semantic level – that *Avatar* is a racist movie about U.S.-american white supremacy and imperialism. But claiming that *Avatar* is a mere reproduction of the Pocahontas-myth in a new shape is losing the option of registering the movie's qualitative difference to the myth as a (contemporary) movie. Nor do I think Žižek is beside the point with his pop-lacanian result in saying that the ugly world of the bad humans is the needed phantasm for the two lovers' perfect world not to desintegrate. I have done that with his conceptual help referring to the trilogy of *The Matrix* myself some years ago (see *Imagendering II. Gender and Visualization*, gender forum 13/2006). My attempt here is just to stress the mediality of both the movie as film/medium and the digital technologies insofar as it is by their specific features that this world comes into being. Garrett Stewart stresses within this context that nowadays postfilmic cinema is inflected very much by the digital even if digital technologies are not explicitly addressed but modify film on a more deep-structural level – what he calls narratography. He has reconstructed a whole typology of the digital changing the discursive and narrative organization of film.⁷

6 The questions I am asking therefore in this article are the following: In what way is the digital mobilized in *Avatar* on a technical and a thematic plane and in which complex ways are

⁷ See Garrett Stewart. *Framed Time. Toward a Postfilmic Cinema*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007.

they mutually constitutive on the level of filmic discourse and story? If one ever assumes, that cinema has some kind of (historically changing) specificity, if not an essence, but as a medium, and if one further assumes that cinema is a cultural technology, then what types of images, what kind of narratives and discursive strategies are enabled through the digital in conjunction with the cinematographic in *Avatar*? Furthermore, if cinema, in a Deleuzian fashion, is supposedly a system with specific features to reflect on, to show and to tell mainly about time, movement and their cognition, then what does *Avatar* tell us about the relation to the real, about lived, embodied time proper and therefore about subjectivity in general? Closely related to this question is the last one, very seriously raised: What kind of subjectivity is produced and addressed in *Avatar*? Can it be grasped by the philosophy of the subject brought to the fore by Rosi Braidotti as Zoëism? In the philosophy of Zoëism the subject is captured beyond the phallogocentric logic of the One with its derivatives of imperialism, racism, disavowed posthumanism, and spectral, schizophrenic capitalism as a non-unitary, nomadic, diasporic entity that constitutes itself mainly through embracing not the sociopolitical (bios), but the lively side of itself (zoë) which it shares with all other living creatures. On a metaphysical level, this literally means not only seeing and accepting the Other but also being deliberately and uncompromisingly lived and thought through the Other, without any repugnance or denial. Deleuze' concept of becoming (Other) evidently resonates in this concept of feminist material posthumanism. Is there - one could ask the question differently - any "becoming" in *Avatar*?⁸

7 I will try to answer this questions within a Deleuzian framework, that I find very apt not only for thematic and/or theoretical reasons but also for the reason that it enables us to contextualize the question of the digital within cinema historically. Further thoughts to clarify this will be elaborated by the help of Garrett Stewart's observations, following herein much Deleuze' own, on the cinematic in the aftermath of the intrusion of the digital. Within this theoretical framework, I will address firstly the concept of the digital with its phenomenological, its epistemological, its discursive and narrative facets and therefore its cultural meaning in very broadly terms. Then I will, secondly, specify this in the context of film and cinema with direct respect to *Avatar* and show the consequences concerning, on the one hand, the lived and embodied time, and on the other the so constituted (male) subjectivity. Finally I will show, following my question about *Avatar* possibly enabling an other subjectivity that is indeed in accordance with the posthuman but beyond the spectral, schizophrenic system

⁸ On this occasion I want to thank all my students who participated in the course American Film History in summer term 2010 and who gave me a hard time in clarifying some points for myself in the controversial discussions we had on *Avatar*, but also gave me great impulses for the arguments I will develop here.

of the euro-, androcentric unitary, white male subject as we know it, that it cannot – despite some very alluring signs thereof which should be taken very seriously for the time being – be read as such. (Please cut into smaller sentences) This is so, because in the ultimate conclusion, *Avatar* is *the* cinematographic-digital (postfilmic, in Stewart's words) fantasy of schizophrenic posthumanism according to the heterosexual, white, western logic of the One who fantasizes himself out of his body along with his mind to be a warrior's body (and not a mind at all) that is but of the quality of a spectral shadow along with the whole seemingly 'biological-natural' environment – unmarked from the scars, the cruelties, the inequities and the deaths of the (social, political, historical) real.

Grasping the Digital

8 There are many ways to interpret the phenomenology, the communicative and aesthetic characteristics, the social roles and functions of digital technologies in the first place. And there might be a good reason for that, in so far as digital technologies not only address the broader question about the overall relationship between technology and humanity (interface), but also the problem of it being a medium to record, store, process, select and proliferate data in a specific manner. Following Marshall McLuhan's observation that you can judge a society by the media it uses (but does not reflect on), we can conclude that the digital has some special characteristics far away from other media like books, photography or film. The problem to grasp them starts when one tries to catch its features on the basis of technics.

9 Much has been written about the fact that the technics of the digital is to be broken down to a fully electronic device that has implemented Turing's universal calculating machine, runs algorithms in time within a John v. Neumann's hardware architecture according to Boole's binary algebra.⁹ Seen accordingly, we face with this methodological move the first (political) decision that contextualizes digital technology historically (beginning in the 1930ies, in the advent of World War II, in the context of geopolitical ambitions of the U.S., Great Britain and Germany alike). But that is legitimate, in so far as most of the digital technologies we live with today are in fact still the described ones (like PCs oder laptops) or derivatives of them. Some theorists have in succession asserted that the impact of digital technologies had created a radical break with what Michel Foucault called *epistème*, that is to say, they create a new Order of Things on the

⁹ It is not possible to give an encompassing overview to the debates about what the digital is or does. I will just mention a few authors whose positions are crucial to the topic, as Friedrich Kittler, Bernhard Dotzler, Wolfgang Hagen, Georg Ch. Tholen and Wolfgang Ernst on the side of the German debate, Lev Manovich, Mark B. Hanson, David J. Bolter/Richard Grusin, Alluquère Stone, Sherry Turkle, Katherine N. Hayles, Donna Haraway, Ken Hillis and Sean Cubitt on the anglo-american front, Pierre Lévy, Bernard Stiegler and Gilles Deleuze in the french corner.

basis of a new order of organizing knowledge beyond the age of classic representation (ultimate end of Gutenberg-galaxy, so to speak). The argument is primarily based on the technical phenomenology of digital technologies.

10 In contrast to other (“analog”) media, digital technologies have nothing to show in the first place; due to their physical base, they do not transport any “contents”, they just create the proceeding differential states of an ON/OFF-logic. In this sense, the data they record, store, select and process, have no connection to the belonging referents whatsoever, except in form of implemented, thus, processed abstract-mathematical formalisms. Abstraction is driven further in the sense that what is transmitted in digital environments is not a message but information. Information, however, is supposed to be weightless because it is nothing physical as such but only a state of difference. Something that makes sense of something in the realm of the digital must, thus, comply with information that has its constitutive opposite, its non-signifying other, which is noise. But here, again, we have to face another (political and historical) decision that sets a standard how to interpret digital processing when one lumps information together with the terms pattern and order (entropy) in opposition to noise together with randomness and chaos (negentropy). Within this conceptual framework, Katherine N. Hayles has impressively shown, that digital technologies operate mainly on the mutual constitutive relationship of pattern and randomness, which is to say, that they, in the course of their operations in time, exceed exactly the logic of an exclusively binary difference.¹⁰ The machine does not stop there but takes binary difference to generate difference as complexity (the behavior of clouds, of shock waves, also of swarms and of human crowds for example). One central outcome of this, often seen in Computer Graphics and Animation in film, is the generation of seamless continuity, the malleability and manipulability of timespace of digital “images”. This chiasm between a relatively static binary difference and proceeding complex, sometimes unforeseeable patterns lies at the very heart of the onto-logic of the digital.

11 After all, digital machines usually do this by themselves. Which is to say, they organize knowledge (of the world in general, of our senses and motoric skills in particular) as amounts of data in abstract-mathematical terms, in time and on their own. For that reason one can claim that digital machines have agency which we can call their mediality. The only conclusion one can draw from this is that digital machines are in no way just tools, „extensions of man“

¹⁰ Hayles, Katherine N.. *How We Became Posthuman. Virtual Bodies in Cybernetics, Literature, and Informatics*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999. Hayles observes brilliantly how the epistemology of the paradigm pattern-randomness intervenes in the older, binary structured one of absence-presence and how the cooperation of both creates with reference to the opposition of materiality-immateriality new patterns of writing in literary texts. Inasmuch as my attempt in this article is to elucidate how film as medium deals with what I call the digital, my approach stands in close proximity to Hayles’.

(McLuhan), that is, prostheses for neither human's powers nor for their senses. The relationship humans have to digital machines is in fact that those machines can simulate very closely almost all human capabilities (from calculating, producing knowledge, representing and symbolizing to perceiving, sensing and acting) – in a state of half-autonomy. But, because they do this in a fashion only partially conceivable to humans, one has to be careful about the claim of the break in the episteme. For, we have to use our familiar ways of perceiving and producing knowledge when we reflect on the digital – including the binary logic of language (absence – presence) with its textural procedures of metaphor and metonymy.

12 It is in this very sense that the digital is not only technics that intervenes in the social but is constituted through the (traditional) ways we make sense of the world, discourses produce their objects and narratives organize the meaning of the world and of ourselves. Even if one can undeniably acknowledge that digital machines and technologies have a great impact in terms of their above described mediality, the process by which they refashion the social sphere in general and the category of the subject in particular and vice versa is still a continuous and open one.

13 In sharpening the focus concerning this mutually constitutive relationship between the digital and its mediality and the social as the realm of human agents, I would like to draw attention to the configuration of the interface between human and machine – because that is what it is about in a nutshell. The human-machine interface is constituted as a site of a double mutually constitutive envelopment which unfolds in the ever changing course of historical time: The digital is constituted by the ways of humans producing and materially organizing knowledge of and symbolizing their world and themselves, of which the digital is part as a means to record and to produce this knowledge as well as to reflect upon it. Through is, the world and human subjectivity is already reorganized by the digital as technology, as medium, but also as discourse with respect to the human's production of knowledge, of symbolizing the world and themselves. And because the question of how something signifies or exists on a material (organic or non-organic, let alone, physical) basis is of such central relevance to both terms, I would like to add to the concept of interface the dualism materiality-immateriality.

14 One could bring this into a more systematic shape. If you put those two axes together, machine-human, materiality-immateriality, with the axis machine-human as assumed continuum on which there is the interface on every spot as constitutive difference (endless mutating configurations), among which the endpoints figure the extremes that do not account for the other term at a time (machine equals technics, human equals human), then you can reconstruct a three/four-dimensional space of knowledge of this interface. In this spacetime you

can inscribe a great variety of interface-configurations that range from theories of cybernetic machines (machine-material), above symbol theories (human-immaterial), to theories of signifying difference, like the calculus of the symbolic within Lacanian Psychoanalysis or the structural anthropology of Lévi-Strauss (middleground of human-machine, material-immaterial). Central to my point is that those subject-like machines uncannily are in one sense as human as subjects in that they are always also submitted to repetitivities, regularities, recursivities and to feedback loops of their physical and psychical material base. In epistemological terms, both sides are always integrated in one another, reflected upon and actively produced *as* difference in each case.

15 What is of my concern here in particular, yet seen in this epistemological light, is to ask what happens if the interface of the digital-human is carried to film (and cinema, respectively) that possesses a mediality in its own right. Even though film is a medium usually subsumed under the rubric of “analog media”, it is nevertheless an electro-opto-mechanical technology that likewise deals very much with the senses, the movement, the corporeality, the affects and the processes of cognition of those entities we are used to call humans. It differs, however, from the digital in an epistemological and historical way. That is why I will elaborate on this further in the next paragraph with the intention to illuminate the impact of the clash between the digital and the filmic. This scenario is called remediation by David Bolter and Richard Grusin,¹¹ postfilmic narratology by Garrett Stewart. What I am mostly interested in here is to see what happens with those constituents of sense (seeing), motory skills (movement), of corporeality (bodies), affect (conjunctions) and cognition (thinking, reflecting, hence, “subjectivity”) in time/space when the filmic and the digital come together to generate a specific posthuman-postfilmic body/affect/mind in *Avatar*.

The Digital in Postfilmic Cinema with Deleuze concerning *Avatar*

The Digital and the Filmic

16 To start with, *Avatar* is not the first movie inflected by CGI of course. The history of this “intrusion” is about twenty-five years old.¹² We are not talking about a new phenomenon. With *Avatar* it is the staggeringly extent to which the digital has spread itself across the entire film. But one has to be careful about drawing conclusions from that. In my view, it is not so

¹¹ Bolter, David, Richard Grusin. *Remediation. Understanding New Media*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1998.

¹² The U.S.-american movie *Young Sherlock Holmes* (Dir. Barry Levinson, USA 1985) is the first one to be solidly recorded in using CGI, to a very small extent indeed, in the form of a picture of a knight in a church window that jumps out of it and begins to move.

much about affirming the movie's seemingly peculiarity with reference to its use of the digital ("stunning", "outstanding"), but more about thinking of larger historical processes of standardization in use and normalization in consuming those kinds of "images" and movies. Therein, as Stewart has convincingly shown, intersected are at least three strands of cinematic traditions, each of which carries its own discursive, narrative and semiotic traditions along, as "the european", "the U.S.-american" and "the Asian" (more Japan and China than Thailand and/or India) that models or uses up the digital in different ways. To think of the digital transforming the filmic – and vice versa – one has to come to terms with how cinema deals with the registration of movement, of bodies in space, of how this is shown (gaze) and what affects, which cognitions (will to power) are produced hereof – with time as vector to all those components.

17 When we think of cinema in archaeological terms, it was always already a „machine of the visible“ (Jean-Louis Comolli),¹³ first seen as a technical device that gave the spectators the opportunity to see the world as moving picture, other objects, human and nonhuman alike, for the sake of something thrilling, frenzy, as Tom Gunning has shown.¹⁴ But it was also, from the start, a device that exerted a will to power, that dwelled on the power to see and to know and the lust of this power to see and know, insofar as particularly the (moving, living) objects shown (especially gendered, but also "deviant" bodies) could be controlled, stigmatized or normalized by the way they were brought into sight, initially mainly through gaze and repetition, as Linda Williams¹⁵ and Lisa Cartwright¹⁶ brilliantly demonstrate in their works. The power to control manifested itself very quickly, first, in the manipulation of the recorded – think of the "invention" of the stop-motion-trick through Georges Méliès in the first decade of the 20th century. Secondly, as Mary Ann Doane states,¹⁷ confronted with an exuberance of recorded time, space, movement and bodies on the one hand and the possibility to control these with mainly cutting and montage (editing) on the other, euro-american cinema changed into a system that organized selectively the overwhelming amount of analogue data to find its form as narrative cinema.

¹³ Comolli, Jean-Louis. „Machines of the Visible“. The Cinematic Apparatus. Eds. Teresa de Lauretis, Stephen Heath. London/New York: Macmillan/St. Martin's, 1980. 121-142.

¹⁴ Gunning, Tom. „The Cinema of Attractions. Early Film, Its Spectators and the Avant-Garde.“ *Early Cinema. Space, Frame, Narrative*. Ed. Thomas Elsaesser. London: British Film Institute, 1990. 57-62.

¹⁵ Williams, Linda. *Hard Core: Power, Pleasure, and the „Frenzy of the Visible“*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989.

¹⁶ Cartwright, Lisa. *Screening the Body. Tracing Medicine's Visual Culture*. Minneapolis/London: University of Minnesota Press, 1997

¹⁷ Doane, Mary Ann. *The Emergence of Cinema Time: Modernity, Contingency, the Archive*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002.

18 This is exactly the starting point for Deleuze's reflections on cinema as a system of signs of movement and time, affect and cognition that unfolds in historical time, and for which he tries to find terms to reflect on in a philosophical fashion, or, the other way around, to acknowledge, that since the beginning of the 20th century, cinema is the system (a prelingual, -signifying matter, in Deleuzeian terms) that shapes not only our senses and our movement (Benjamin) and our affects (Gunning) but also our ways of thinking – it is the condition of possibility of philosophy as such. Henri Bergson, who is his referee in this transaction, always denied that cinema, in his understanding, could ever restore subjectivity in the sense of lived, embodied time (*durée*). He was a sturdy humanist in this respect, clinging to the anthropological in humans. Deleuze, in contrast, whilst trying to show cinema's power to produce something like "subjectivity" (which he does not call as such), acknowledges exactly that the human condition is always already determined by the human-machine-interface.

19 His point of entrance in elucidating his concept of cinema is cinema's technical process of recording (time), whereby the initial recorded world is moved by the transportation of the frames of the film strip. Admittedly, this can not be *durée* in the Bergsonian sense, as Deleuze makes clear. But cinema finds a solution to the problem of emancipating itself from this blunt extension of technical movement and time in that it begins to transmit them from the tracking of the frames to movement within the film itself. This is exactly the essential meaning of movement-image. For Deleuze, cinema as a technical automaton, a system of prelingual, presignifying matter constitutes itself historically along two lines: The production of signs as terms that can be reflected upon is connected to the mental automaton that tries to get his autonomy from the recorded world by reflecting upon it and upon itself. The production of signs as inner processes (like dreams, hallucinations, obsessive ideas), however, is connected to the psychic automaton, which is also autonomous like the mental automaton, but not able to think, but just to act. The image type of time-image corresponds to the former, the latter to the image type of movement-image.

20 In historical terms, cinema loses its faith in the movement-image and its corresponding characters and stories in the aftermath of World War II and concentrates on the time-image. The concept of the time-image comprises a subject which has lost connection to a stable "reality" entirely. To put it differently, the subject cannot live in a presence – which is a historical and therefore a social and political presence of the worst kind – any more.¹⁸ As a

¹⁸ Deleuze makes explicit reference to the usurpation of cinema through the Nazi-regime in this context which leads him to the observation that there is always a will to power inherent in cinema as a mental automaton. Hitler, Deleuze writes, as a mental automaton, subsumed the movement-image as the psychic automaton of the subjected masses in Nazi-Germany. To break this historical spell, to restore a new psychomechanics, as Deleuze states, one

consequence, it splits itself into a vector of past and future, but not in the sense of a past that is followed by a presence that is followed by a future, but into the virtual and the actual, whereby affect is their contingent, abrupt, unforeseeable connection. Time-images are those entities that actualize something like the past and/or the future of a subject, that enables it to reflect on them, which is to say, on its own past and its own possible future as a subject (in contrast to memory and history). The be-coming images have no prescribed order, they appear in terms of probability, their timespace is very particular in accordance with Einstein's specific "Theory of Relativity". By this means, the reflecting subject is the effect of the uncalculable clash of the virtual and actual of a past/future, that could be in a sense individual but also sociohistorical. According to this and related to the problem of presence is that the e/affected "subjectivity" does itself not move but is transformed into a viewer of general incidents as it is of its own life.

21 In the last chapter of the second volume of his Cinema-books, Deleuze then, addresses the digital. But not in the sense of "computers in film" (he refers explicitly to Kubrick's *2001: A Space Odyssey* from 1969) or "digital technologies" in the first place, but he asks what kind of mental and psychic automatons arise from information theory and cybernetics. There he makes the connection between new kinds of images, characters and stories and the condition of possibility of their appearance explicit: „New automatons could not take hold of those contents if form was not changed by a new automatism. The modern configuration of the automaton is the correlate of an electronic automatism.“ (254) His conclusion reads as follows: „The electronic image, that is, the tele or video image, the upcoming digital image – is either going to change cinema or to replace it, which will lead to its termination.“ (254)

22 He goes on by describing the new type of image that comes along with the electronic automatism: those images have no hors-champs, they have a reversible front and a back without being adaptable to each other, they rotate and are permanently reorganized. As a consequence, the vertical loses its privileged alignment position of the cinematic (screen) in favor of an omnidirectional space that endlessly changes its coordinates and angles. Those images are more like informationboards, opaque surfaces on which the data are enregistered. Information replaces nature, Deleuze writes, and electronic surveillance (third eye) substitutes nature's eye. This new automatism is not valuable in itself but one has to watch out for a power to art with a strange and ominous will to express itself in unmotivated movements. So far, Deleuze comments, one does not know where this new automatism does lead cinema altogether. He only

has to watch out for new connections between the mental automaton and the psychic automatons. The emancipation from the usurped movement-image is, in this sense, found its way first and foremost in the time image.

states that it is some kind of transformation of the time-image exceeding itself in an unknown direction. One has to keep in mind that Deleuze, publishing the book in 1985, could not foresee all those upcoming movies generated with CGI, but he was talking about the films of Syberberg, Fellini and Kubrick (until the beginning of the 1970s). But, in a very strange way, Deleuze's typology of images of the digital resounds very much the images we are confronted with nowadays, especially in *Avatar*.

23 Stewart writes, that this has to be interpreted as some kind of writing *avant la lettre* by Deleuze, but he also makes clear, that those images and the corresponding movies are more a kind of mockery, a satire or ironic commentary on Deleuze' mutation of the time-image. Because, what Deleuze describes and anticipates as an overcoming of the time-image under the verdict of information is exactly a type of image that escapes from a totalizing view which is inserted by the regime of information, that grounds its power on endless perturbations of hollowness on the one hand, but that is able to state something new beyond this regime of information on the other (creation beyond information). The new subjectivity that corresponds with those types of images would be a „pure informed person“ (258), who could receive in his (!) visible body a pure speech act of the inventive creation kind.

24 But, as Stewart clearly shows in his typology of european and U.S.-american postfilmic movies from the 1990s onwards, this new kind of mental and psychic automaton, anticipated by Deleuze, is nowhere to be seen. Rather, those types of images are ever more unmotivated, reversible images that endlessly change their angles and vectors in which the correlated subjects are thrown. He speaks of timespace-images in this respect and he sees the central feature of the narrative organization of those movies in something he calls temportation. With temportation, past and future alike are actualized in random ways that evacuate all lived “human” time (presence) entirely. For in most of the films Stewart discusses, the strange elapse of time which is the onto-logic of the new digital images, produces an abberant construction of past-presence-future, that rather consists in feedback loops and resursions than in flash backs or back projections. Some of those narratives tell their hero's story from beyond his already happened death. Stewart describes how difficult it is not only to differentiate reliably the levels of story as reference points (reality vs. dream, fantasy) but also to make sense of the successive order of things, hence, lives of the mostly male protagonists altogether. The general tendency of these movies, Stewart remarks, has to be interpreted as fantasies that have no connection to reality with its political and ethic demands and consequences whatsoever. His conclusion with special reference to the more technical Hollywood gothic reads as follows:

With assumptions not only escapist but reality denying, such films of tempotation in the mode of the ontological gothic seem to imply, or pander to, a sociology of looking detached from causation and consequence. And in this, as guessed [...] they may well solicit acquiescence not only in a culture of fantasy but in a politics of the unreal. (205)

25 Even if Stewart is able to demonstrate his thesis by means of convincing interpretations – from *Johnny Mnemonic* (David Longo, USA 1995), *Being John Malkovich* (Spike Jonze, USA 1999) and *The Thirteenth Floor* (Josef Rusnak, Ger. 1999), via *One Hour Photo* (Mark Romanek, USA 2002), *La Mala Educación* (Pedro Almodóvar, Sp. 2004), to *Eternal Sunshine of A Spotless Mind* (Michel Gondry, USA 2004) and *Caché* (Michael Haneke, F 2005) – this all sounds very much like „male subjectivity in crisis“ that transmogrifies itself into escapist fantasies that are enabled by the digital to overcome the burdens of social reality. And I will not disagree entirely, but will, firstly, change the angle of perspective a little bit in order to, secondly, show the contrasting specificities of *Avatar* in this context.

***Avatar's* Digitalism and Male Subjectivity**

26 The first thing that catches one's eye when watching *Avatar* is that there is no such troubling organization of time and space on the level of narrative. When we see Jake Scully for the first time, he lies in a cryotank, waiting to be retrieved from the tank by some medical person while being shipped to Pandora. Interestingly enough, the film finds an image for such precarious situatedness in the world without any reliable reference points in a time and space leaping universe. It freezes those ever changing coordinates and vectors of timespace of which Stewart is talking in one single frame, when we see the room filled with other cryotanks where people float weightlessly around in any direction.¹⁹ Insofar as the movie frames an ontological problem (troqued spacetime of the subject's mindfucking tempotation) in one picture and thereby reduces it to a mere question of visibility (aesthetics), one can read this as an allegory of how the film belittles the problematic of the subject's vanishing reliable relation to a stable world in general.

27 The organization of the following story is very traditional in the sense that first we have a parallel-montage that informs us about the circumstances of Jake's opportunity getting into the Avatar-project: firstly, the death of his twin brother (monozygotic), who was not only the Ph.D. scientist and partner of Grace Augustine in the project but shares identical genes with Jake and therefore can be called his („natural“) clone; secondly, the lucrative offer he gets from

¹⁹ This kind of regulating, of appeasing the timespace-image with its endlessly changing coordinates and angles within some regular frames is repeated in those many shots where either humans ‚fly‘ around in their technical devices or the Na'vi fly on their dragon-horses. I will talk about the epistemological consequences of this analogies and their power to undermine a clearcut difference between the Na'vi and the humans later on.

the company's executives. It is a common way to confront the spectator with a part of the past as preconditions for the story's unfolding future.

28 We get familiar with Jake's own past as a corporate soldier who was injured in one of his war missions so much that he now is paralyzed from the legs down, sitting in a wheel chair.²⁰ This is paralleled to the transport to Pandora planet. When the star glider stets off from the interstellar station all events are set in a traditional cinematic present, which is the main organizing principle of the movie. There are two slight exceptions to this when Jake reports, in terms of content, his experiences among the Na'vi to his coherently (up-)dating videolog, that is in visual terms a direct address to the camera and the spectator. He reports past events that are shown subsequently in the following sequences.

29 On the level of narratography, we can resume, that this is a very *filmic* way of staging the events, which means, *Avatar* goes beyond postfilmic cinema and its ways to deal with the digital as timespace temportation just to go back to good old patterns of filmic narrative. In sum, the male hero, Jake Sully, has no problem to orient himself within this narrative and to make sense of the recorded world. On the contrary, he is not only a reliable narrator, with full overview of and full authoritiy over this represented world, but also in full control of it and himself.

30 This tendency to order things traditionally, to generate order and stability referring to the levels of time and the organization of space also holds seemingly true of the other area into which Jake immerses himself, the (for humans) life-endangering environment of Pandora's surface. The transition is visually staged through the flight (of the human spirit?) through a tunnel that could be the spinal cord, but at each endpoint the hero finds himself, together with the specator, on a plane of story that is always already familiar to him/her.²¹ But in opposition

²⁰ This is what makes him a 'broken character', a less manly man, within the logic of its militaristic, masculinist and capitalist environment. Yet, within the semantic logic of the film as a whole this precondition is needed to show exactly what makes him more exceptional than the other men around him. This, insofar as he is the one to overcome his bodily disability through first his development as a leader in the world of the Na'vis and then, second, in distancing himself in an ethical fashion from the 'bad humans' whilst deciding to handle himself over to the quite risky substantiation-process of Eywa. The disabled male person, degraded and stigmatized, the film seems to say on the semantic level, is in the last consequence the bodily, mentally, and ethical strongest and most reliable. On the level of narratography, as I will show later on, things look differently.

²¹ Slavoj Žižek, in his article, made a very interesting observation that underscores easily his thesis of Pandora being a phantasm: He states that on an aesthetic level the world of the Na'vi could be compared to the world of the toons in the movie *Who framed Roger Rabbit* (Di. Robert Zemecki, USA 1988). In this movie there are two registers of representation, one of realistic referentiality, the other the animated cartoon. The specificity lies in the two registers cooperating smoothly together on a semantic level, but are kept clearly separate on the ontological level as on the level of visibility. In my view, Žižek is correct and wrong at the same time with his comparison. The crucial point here is, however, that in *Avatar* the digital technology eradicates the difference of the two registers on an ontological level whilst generating a seamless continuity between exclusive CG images and the images of realistic referentiality. As a consequence, what appears as difference between humans and Na'vis on the level of visibility does not come from their different aesthetics in technical terms ('cartoon' vs. 'realism') but from their asserted differences as living entities on two levels: firstly, we, as humans, assume, that aliens would look

to a movie like *The Thirteenth Floor* for example, where two radical different levels in an ontological sense (reality vs. virtuality) exist to indicate the subject's very problem to differentiate those two in terms of referentiality per se, in *Avatar* what looks like different levels of narrative at first glimpse is just one.

31 The world Jake inhabits at one moment or the other is never called into question, he is always somewhere on Pandora, either in the shack, or on the station, or in his avatar in the "outback". As a consequence, the existential problem of undecidability of a "reality" for the subject is transformed into the epistemological phenomenon of telepresence and the concept of the avatar in Cyberspace.²² Undeniably, Jake exists sometimes at two spaces at the same moment (bodily and mentally), which is definitively a kind of torqued timespace-experience for the subject, but not in terms of the subject's ontological problem of (not) having a stable relation to the world in the sense of referentiality. In this very sense, *Avatar* is beyond the problematic of lived time as engendered by the digital in film in Stewart's terms. But, notwithstanding or not least because of the usage of digital technology, it is so in a reactionary way, since it generates one plane of narrative in which it totalizes the phenomenon of going into Cyberspace and coming back whenever one wants.²³

32 But it is not only one unquestionable level of referentiality, produced by the narrative, that is at stake here. This apparently narrated world as a whole is reenforced by the digital technology's production of a seamless continuity of CG images and indexicalic film images that eradicates their difference exactly on the ontological level. As a consequence, the film generates one whole world in which all differences are not ontological differences, but just differences on the level of visibility – what I will call the spectral character of the images. Which means, by analogy to the theme of telepresence, where the problem of an ontological undecidability of referentiality induced by the digital as the problem of the subject's lived time is shifted to the epistemological problem of using an avatar, ontological difference in terms of different registers of referentiality is transformed into difference of mere visibility.

33 The related problem is, that the ontological difference to the Other, which is also a constitutive part of the subject's lived time that is troubled by the intrusion of the digital as the (colonial, imperial) past's returning – like in Haneke's *Caché* for example –, is once more

differently. So this is a question of imagination and fantasy and its fictional realization; secondly, Cameron wants to make us believe in a political sense that Na'vis and humans are essentially different.

²² In Cyberspace an avatar is an electronically generated, symbolic, customized body/persona 'image' that substitutes the subject in the world of Computer Games and/or social environment, like MUDs or Second Life for example. I will elucidate the specific usage of the avatar in *Avatar* later on.

²³ Even if one can acknowledge that those moments in the movie when Jake is in two different places at the same time are states of enheightened vulnerability of the subject.

reduced from an ontological problem of a “mindfucking”, troqued timespace that the subject cannot hold on to a simple level of epistemology and semantics where it can easily be regulated and controlled. For *Avatar*, this means that the difference between the Na’vi and the humans is primarily an evidently visible one (tall, blue catfish creatures vs. humans) which looks like the difference between indigenous people and capitalist, militaristic, exploitive (Nature and other people alike) people at the first glimpse and which is then, in turn, supposed to be an essential (‘natural’, ‘biological’) one, thus, it is naturalized.

34 But, as it is the fate of every double logic, even the differences generated by those spectral images are not stable ones. Following Klaus Theweleit, who very poignantly states, that the essential difference between humans and Na’vis does not lie neither in their descendance from different planets, nor in their different genetic equipment, but more in their technologies and the different usages thereof, the Na’vi are neither just a simple indigenous people nor „noble savages“ but they are a people that has the even more sophisticated digital technology that connects all creatures on the planet, because it doesn’t look like a technical network, with plugins, cables and apparatuses anymore but like something wholly biological and organic. The human, in turn, is tied to old-fashioned wired technology and big, clumsy mechanical machines. As a result, those differences as spectral images can not be more than two different sides of the same coin (or two positions on an endlessly divisible continuum), set up as a positive and a negative one in the first place, with the apparently condemnation of the negative, the human side.

35 I do not disagree with Theweleit entirely, because I think he is very correct in his estimation of the Na’vi as a posthuman networked, media-ecological society that comes along in a natural shape. But if one sets the difference between advanced “new technology” (Na’vi) and “old technology” and judge the humans as presumably old-fashioned “moderns”, one does not only reify a clearcut difference between Na’vi and humans once again, but loses exactly sight of the human’s world’s undercurrent – which is as posthuman as the Na’vi’s but in the shape of the “old-fashioned” posthumanism according to the tradition of European Enlightenment, of teleologic development and technics as tool for the male, heterosexual, euro-, androcentric Subject’s perfectibilization, as with the old idea of a human spirit that will one day get rid of its flabby, fleshly decomposing body entirely and substantiate in a new, much better substrate like the computer-machine for example. The world of the humans is full of such devices, which are not questioned at all but celebrated semantically and also prominently on the level of visibility, like cryotechnology, like star wars, like experiments with hybrid-cloning (Na’vi and human DNA), like Xenotransplantation (Jake would “get his legs back“ in any case)

and the like. Moreover, they do have advanced holography-technologies and wireless dataprocessing, encompassing ubiquitous surveillance almost everywhere.²⁴ Those kind of technologies are very similar to the ones the Na'vi use (they just do not look like that), not just with respect to their usage but exactly with reference to their power to transform the society into a network-society in general and the subject into a knod within this web in particular, whose cognition and knowledge is shared and actively produced by other such knods.

36 This is symptomatic for the subject's existence in the condition of schizophrenic capitalist posthumanism: The humans do live in a posthumanist condition whilst still thinking machines and media as tools, as mere amplifiers of their own capabilities, hence assuming a coherent subject to which the machines are exterior. Which is confirmed by the film's narrative insofar as the difference between the Na'vi's and the humans' use of their technologies is that of the right or wrong means to an end.

37 But because the Na'vi, on the contrary, are already in a post-posthumanist relationship of mutual constitution of "machines"/technologies and "subjectivity", that just does not look like that any more because it is naturalized, one has to address the following. If one assumes that the differences between the Na'vi and the humans are just visible, hence, superficial ones, and that their categorical difference lies in their relationship to their technologies, and if one further assumes that this difference is not that categorical either but more subtle (bad old posthumanism vs. good new posthumanism), one might ask the question seriously what is really at stake with the Na'vi's posthumanism. Can the Na'vi, not in opposite, but in comparison to the (posthuman) humans present a new philosophy of posthuman subjectivity in the sense of Braidotti's Zoëism? Within this philosophy the subject is not unitary, but multiple in full acknowledgement of the Other (as femininity or alienness or matter) as its constitutive side, but not as Difference of/to the male, heterosexual, euro-, androcentristic One, but as becoming-Other (woman, alien, zoë), becoming a nomadic multiplicity in transposition.²⁵ To finally answer this question I have to make a small detour via the topic of the avatar in *Avatar*.

Not Becoming-Posthuman - *Avatar* as Ultimate Cinematic-Digital Posthuman Male Fantasy

²⁴ In this sense, the war between Na'vis and humans is neither one human knowledge vs. Pandora spirit, nor creatures vs. civilized, but rather a war of information technologies. This becomes clear, when the datastorage of the helicopters fails because of the indecipherable 'noise' that is produced around the Floating Mountains of Pandora which could be read as some strategic resistance to any invasion on a very high-tech-level.

²⁵ See Braidotti, Rosi. *Transpositions. On Nomadic Ethics*. Cambridge, UK/Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2006.

38 On the level of narratology, the digital as the evacuation of the subject's lived time through troqued timespace, of undecidable referentiality, of the split between actual and virtual is totally regulated in *Avatar*. The film's main strategy of doing this is to shift this ontological problem to the phenomenon of telepresence within the diegesis where it is totalized. Jake (together with Grace and Norman) is able to immerse himself into the life-endangering world of Pandora whilst his mind is transmitted into his avatar. By the same means, the problem that goes along with the topic of avatar is reduced to a simple matter of matter. The avatar in Cyberspace is an electronically generated symbolic image of the body/person of the human subject at the interface of the computer. As one would assume this relationship is a more distant one that Jake has to his avatar. Yet, this is by no means a simple but a complex matter that comprises exactly not only the symbolic or semantic level, but also that of affect, of bodily and also psychic conditions. What one has to acknowledge when thinking about avatarism in Cyberspace is that the subject is neither transparent to itself in all its aspects nor is it coherent per se, but has to create an imaginary body-image of itself that holds together its disparate components – as Jacques Lacan very clearly stated in elucidating the subject's constitution within the mirror stage. An avatar in Cyberspace is the figurative allegory of such a body-image.

39 Jake, instead, has no body-image of himself but incorporates this image entirely on the basis of the film's reductionist version of the epistemology of the avatar. In this, the relationship between human and avatar is reduced to a crude materialism, insofar as it is connected to the bodily matter and thus biologized. This reductionist version of the avatar, furthermore, strongly echoes the old mind-body-dualism. It looks as if one can transmit one's mind into this inanimate puppet one can enliven with one's mind, but which then returns into an inanimate thing as soon as one's mind comes back to the science lab. To look the other way around: The bodily matter of the human that is transmogrified into the avatar also is something that can easily be left behind, except that it would fall totally apart and therefore has to be nurtured (Jake has to eat; but neither to sleep nor to shit, by the way).

40 There is, hence, some overt preference of spirit over body along these terms. The body (of the avatar and the human alike) is almost reduced to some piece of meat, like in the *Visible Human Project*, where the snippets of a former human are everything that is left whilst its zombielike resurrection in the digital realm proclaims its wholeness. This is so much so, that one can even stage a paraplegic character who's ability to move is very much dependent on a technical apparatus, but that is legible as recognition of difference on the semantic level. What happens, for example to Grace's avatar after she is „gone with Eywa“? The movie just drops it/her. At this point we have to address the other side of this double logic.

41 The avatar is not just a general medium, insofar as it has to be individualized, in *Avatar* this means coming to terms with organic matter once more. Which means not everybody (!) can transmit him- or herself into just any avatar, but it has to be the fitting person. Think, for example, of the Max-character, Grace's black assistant in the lab, who belongs to the chosen ones that are allowed to stay on the planet of Pandora after the war. Contrasting Norman, who possesses an avatar, Max not only never had one but also has to stay on Pandora in his human shape. Why, one could ask in casual language, couldn't he not just use Grace's? Which would have been not only a black-queer impersonation – a little like what is happening in *Being John Malkovich* – but it would also have exactly called into question the traditional male, logocentric mind-body-dualism and the traditional male, logocentric posthumanist anti-essentialism all at once.

42 But instead, in *Avatar* not only subjectivity is re-essentialized, but its own male, logocentric posthumanism is reaccomplished in a racist fashion. One can take this racism even further in the following sense: Apart from the fact, that the avatar is the product of DNA-mixing, which is to say, a hybrid of human and Na'vi, and in that sense a real cyborg in Donna Haraway's terms, the avatar's body is not only a medium for the human's mind but also the sign of that human's personality. Mind, in this occasion, is now reduced to matter in the sense that it can leave a mark on the face as its expression. But strangely enough, just on the face, the rest of the body is standard Na'vi body, effacing for example one's specific 'human' features of identity, as paraplexis in Jake's or age in Grace's case.²⁶ To sum this up: The hybrid avatar is an entity in which a human mind navigates a Na'vi body, which in the face has to express the human's personality. One could call this imperialism/colonialism on deepest level of interface-technology.²⁷

43 When one returns the gaze once more, one can see that the concept of the avatar in *Avatar* follows exactly the logic of traditional white, male logocentric posthumanism, insofar as it figures the following: Mind presides over matter, one can easily transmit one's mind into different substrates without damage, leaving bodies almost entirely behind; bodies in turn are just blunt matter to be used and formed by preferably the mind's, features and, additionally, abilities and norms of (good, hence, politically and ethically correct) white people, males by

²⁶ Considering that, the bodies that are produced in *Avatar* are obviously not only standardized but also normalized bodies that are stronger, more beautiful, with more capabilities than 'normal' human bodies could ever obtain.

²⁷ And I would go even one step further in analogizing exactly this to the digital technology of motion-capturing that Cameron used in shooting *Avatar*. With respect to the actor's personal facial features which were turned into visible signs on the Na'vi's bodily surfaces, one can say, that the difference in bodily conditions between white and black actor's (figuring most of the Na'vi) were inscribed as racial difference in the body of the film.

preference.²⁸ Bodies as matter, as pure flesh are just as malleable as to the white mind's/man's will (that's exactly where I see Killis' Neoplatonic Twist in). Apart from that they do not matter at all, which is to say, all differences, like race or ethnic descent or age or gender are just a secondary imprint on the body's surface but nothing that is always already the material-semiotic substance of cultural or social or political or historical issues. Jake's substantiation into a Na'vi can be seen as the final step or crowning conclusion to this neoplatonic version of male logocentric posthumanism. When Jake "goes with Eywa" he finally leaves his old, crippled human body behind and in his avatar impersonates the ultimate posthuman male fantasy come true and with it the totalizing of the spectral images of this one whole world which reifies the status of fantasy anew.²⁹ Ultimate in the sense, that the transition, which is an inherently technical process, is so complete, so perfect, that one does not even need a medium any more, neither for the transmission nor as source/receiver, but only Nature and Biology.

44 What he immerses himself into is something whole and completely virtual at the same time, something that forecloses the real as ontological problem of referentiality, as mindfucking, torqued timespace of the subject's lived time, of the return of the other as ghost of the subject's past/future – all the aspects that are brought up by the intrusion of *the digital* as a new automatism into cinema as film, pressing the time-image out of its shape. On the contrary, *digital technology* in *Avatar* generates and reinforces Jake's true fantasy that lends him over to a world where everything seems to be connected, transmutable from one substrate into the other, a world of a collective in full harmony with its environment, that moreover approves of differences beyond any asymmetry. It is in fact the ultimate posthuman male fantasy in its ultimate escapist fashion. It denies in its entirety the scars and pains of deaths, losses and asymmetries, the wills to and the clashes of powers, but also the lust, the joys, the desires of/in the real. Instead, it creates a world as a whole, stable and organized one, that seems to be beyond the capitalist, exploitive, racist, sexist, militaristic facets of (post-)human existence. It effaces (colonial/imperialist) history, politics, technology and ontological difference all at once, to which correlates a stable, coherent male subject that becomes the successful, invincible leader of this perfect virtual world, thus, a fantasy, of which it's seemingly grounding in nature and biology is its ultimate closure.

²⁸ This becomes clear when comparing the long, tedious process of winning the Na'vi's confidence by learning their language, teaching them English, and so on, but failing in the end wholesale on Grace's side, whereas Jake becomes the Na'vi's glorified leader and successful warlord after a couple of months.

²⁹ It would be wrong to say, that whilst his mind leaves his body, Jake will be transposed fully into his avatar. That would be the humanist version of the transaction. The posthuman outcome prescribes that Jake's new life in his avatar is only possible via the connection to the Tree of Souls (hardware)/Eywa (software) who 'resurrects' him. This is the anti-essentialism of traditional posthumanism.

45 To conclude this article with a last turn to the philosophy of Zoëism it should by now have become obvious that this male fantasy, generated out of spectral images, operates according to the logic of white, male, phall-logocentrism and of white, male logocentric posthuman anti-essentialism alike which is not that of a non-unitary, non-heteronormative, multiple, nomadic posthuman subjectivity, a becoming-posthuman in Braidotti's terms at all. Alas, there is no becoming-posthuman in *Avatar*.

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