

# Scopic Drive, Time Travel, and Film Spectatorship

By Laura Rascaroli

Spring 2001 Issue of KINEMA

## SCOPIC DRIVE, TIME TRAVEL AND FILM SPECTATORSHIP IN GILLIAM'S *TWELVE MONKEYS* AND BIGELOW'S *STRANGE DAYS*

*How can the dream, the bearer of the subject's desire, produce that which makes the trauma emerge repeatedly - if not its very face, at least the screen that shows us that it is still there behind?*

Jacques Lacan

Sometime around 1895 Albert Einstein, a 16 year-old schoolboy from Ulm, in Germany, began to think about what it would be like to ride on the crest of a light wave -- or, as one could say, to *surf* it. Ten years later he published 'On the Electrodynamics of Moving Bodies', a paper that dramatically changed our way of perceiving space, time, and their relationship. Given that cinema was officially born in that same year 1895, one could wonder if the new invention, with its ray of light clearly visible against the darkness of the auditorium, played any role in the young boy's reflection. Probably not. Nevertheless, the theory of relativity and cinema do have something in common -- a fatal attraction for time travel.

Einstein's theory of relativity implies that spacetime is curved, and on this premise physicists have theorised that spacetime may be bent around far enough to reconnect with itself, providing the possibility of loops. For its part, the fascination of cinema with time travel is documented by an endless list of films devoted to this subject, with their various time machines, from the ornate, Victorian device in George Pal's *The Time Machine* (1960), to the 'souped-up' DeLorean of the *Back to the Future* series. Undoubtedly, science-fiction literature also shares the same attraction; but the link between cinema and time travel is of a different, more physical nature. It is not for nothing that cinema has sometimes been compared to a time machine, in an effort to illustrate its extraordinary freedom of movement, its ability to instantaneously and plastically jump backward and forward in time. The cinematic time machine, however, is not simply a vehicle for low-cost and captivating escapism; the old metaphor accounts for a fundamental component of filmic spectatorship, one that can be better elucidated from a Lacanian perspective.

Terry Gilliam's *Twelve Monkeys* (USA, 1995) and Kathryn Bigelow's *Strange Days* (USA, 1995), two recent science fiction thrillers, offer helpful material for the discussion of this component of the cinematic apparatus. These films share more than country of origin and year of production; they both deal with an imminent future (so imminent that it is now already past) and, above all, they say similar things about cinema and spectatorship.

In Gilliam's *Twelve Monkeys*, James Cole (Bruce Willis) is a prisoner endowed with an excellent visual memory, who is sent from the dystopic future of the year 2035 to gather information on a virus that almost wiped out the world's population in 1996 and 1997. He mistakenly lands in the Baltimore of 1990, and is consigned for obvious reasons to a mental institution. Here he meets Jeffrey Goines (Brad Pitt), the psychotic son of a famous scientist and a fellow inmate obsessed by monkeys, and the psychiatrist Kathryn Raily (Madelaine Stowe). Kathryn will eventually come to believe Cole's story, fall in love with him, and help him in his search for the Army of the Twelve Monkeys, an underground group that is supposedly responsible for spreading the virus.

*Twelve Monkeys* openly deals with time travel: Cole is sent back four times, first, and erroneously, to April of the year 1990 in Baltimore; then, and again by mistake, to the France of 1917, landing in a trench during a World War One battle; and finally twice to 1996, the first time in November, in Baltimore and the second in Philadelphia, a month later. *Twelve Monkeys'* complex circular narrative implies that Cole's trips have been in fact numerous, and that the same or very similar events have happened to him over and over again, to the extent that the narrative neither has a real beginning nor a conclusive ending. The story and dialogues are full of references to *déjà vu* and the return of the past; the characters share the impression of having met before and their discussions about present, past and future are often humorously confused and confusing. The spectator is left at the end of the film trying in vain to reconstruct *Twelve Monkeys'* imploded narrative chronology, and to understand how many times James Cole has relived these episodes of his life.

Everything in *Twelve Monkeys* speaks of time and its circularity; even dreams recur, and in fact Cole continually dreams that he is a child in an airport who sees a man being shot dead before his eyes. The importance of this traumatic dream is confirmed by the fact that the subjective camera of the child's eyes witnessing the killing is actually *Twelve Monkeys'* opening sequence -- and by the fact that a close-up of his eyes is also the film's last shot.

Bigelow's *Strange Days* also opens with a point-of-view sequence. The subjective images that we are shown in this case are the vision of Lenny (Ralph Fiennes), but they also belong to a criminal, who is sitting in the back of a car, getting ready to rob a Thai restaurant. This double, embedded subjective vision is possible because Lenny lives in the Los Angeles of December 1999, and is playing back the recording of the robber's criminal act with a futuristic machine, the SQID (Superconducting Quantum Interference Device). Its sensors are able to transfer all the wearer's perceptions to a diskette. By playing it back, one can experience exactly the same perceptions, as if they were induced by a real situation.

One would hardly find *Strange Days* in a list of films on time travel. Nevertheless, I wish to suggest that the SQID is very similar to a time machine. Curiosity, safe transgression and addiction are the reasons for the SQID's popularity in the society portrayed by *Strange Days*. However, the SQID is not like a drug that provokes hallucinations, it is a device that allows people to relive their or other people's past experiences; in other words, it is a machine that sends people back in time. The use that Lenny makes of the SQID is, in fact, permeated by an evident aura of nostalgia. This is best seen when Lenny gives his friend Tex (Todd Graff), a paralytic man confined to a wheelchair, the present of a clip with which Tex can 'borrow' somebody else's legs and run on a beach along the sea on a beautiful sunny day. This clip is nostalgic because by means of it Tex can go back to the time, which is lost forever, when he had the use of his limbs. And it matters little if this time never existed.

All of Lenny's own clips are about his past life with his ex-girlfriend Faith, and he plays them back obsessively in an attempt to fulfil his wish to go back to his time with her. In his favourite clip, he and Faith skate together in a park on a lovely, luminous day. The overwhelming brightness and cheerfulness of this past moment are analogous to those found in the clip for Tex, and are in stark contrast with the constant darkness and gloom characterising the present, and the rest of the film. *Strange Days'* present, in fact, is set in a dark, degraded and socially unsettled urban landscape in which the sun is never seen.

A similar nostalgia pervades *Twelve Monkeys*. Cole is driven by one and only one desire: to go back. Back to being with Kathryn, and back to when humans were on the surface of the planet, when they lived under the sun, breathing fresh air. Their current state is, conversely, that of an underground life, led in a prison-like, dark world artificially lit, and tightly controlled by inquisitive machines built with the waste and leftovers of our modern world, and controlled by an unspecified, disquieting power of scientific inspiration.

Both *Strange Days* and *Twelve Monkeys* promote the idea that the imminent future of the (western) world is a dystopian, dehumanised, technological society in which people live detached from chance, risk, true experiences and interaction with other persons, and are either lost in a safe substitution of real life, such as that offered by the SQID, or isolated in an underground, decontaminated world, as happens in *Twelve Monkeys*. In both films, the future is dark, gloom, *Blade Runner*-like, and humans dream of a lost, past world which is remembered as sunny, fresh, real, unpredictable and, above all, full of love. Nostalgia, as I said, is the driving force both for Lenny and Cole, and it is the nostalgia for an unattainable moment, for a lost paradise, for a time of unity and congruence. Such a moment of grace belongs to a mythical past and only survives in the characters' memory. Lenny and Cole have in common their incapacity to forget, and their attachment to the memories of an age that no longer exists - or that possibly never did.

It is tempting to write off *Strange Days* and *Twelve Monkeys* as films that epitomise the postmodern paradigm, on the basis of their emphasis on an amnesiac society's nostalgia for the past. This theme is prominent in both films, but it is not the whole story. I will argue that in both Bigelow's and Gilliam's films the idea of nostalgia is used in a significant way to talk about cinema, and spectatorship in particular. I wish to suggest that, among other aspects, our two films speak of the circular scopic drive that is at the base of cinematic spectatorship, through the idea of time travel, both in the literal sense of *Twelve Monkeys* and in the loose sense that I highlighted in *Strange Days*.

Lenny and Cole's urge to relive the past is what pushes them to travel back in time or, as it could just as correctly be said, to be spectators. Both the opening sequence of *Twelve Monkeys* and that of *Strange Days* immediately present Lenny and Cole as observers. The two films open with detail shots of their protagonists' perceptive organs, more precisely with the eyes of Cole as a child, and with one of Lenny's eyes. The characters are clearly introduced as spectators -- Lenny of a SQID-clip, and Cole both of his dream and, as a child, of the airport killing.

Jean-Louis Baudry in his writings of the 1970s has identified nostalgia as one of the strongest motivations for going to the cinema. Baudry's argument is founded on his Freudian reading of the cinematic apparatus as a producer of hallucination and dream. Those theorists, among whom the same Baudry, who in the past promoted the metaphor of film as dream, believed that the cinematic spectator's situation resembles that of the dreamer, and that both regress to a primitive state in which they reach a state of illusion of varying intensity, and feel that their desires have been satisfied. The spectator's main drive would be, in Baudry's words, 'the desire to desire, the nostalgia for a state in which a desire has been satisfied through the transfer of a perception to a formation resembling hallucination, which is at play and activated by the cinematic apparatus' (Baudry 1975: 70).

I agree with Baudry in thinking that nostalgia is an important component of the spectatorial *activity*. Yet I would suggest that what has often been summarised, and dismissed, as mere desire for escapism, could rather be described as our wish to use cinema as a time machine. Cinema's extraordinary freedom of movement in space and time, its remarkable perceptive fullness, its activation of a strong impression of reality and its presentation of a coherent universe, all promise us the possibility of going back - back, like Cole and Lenny, to the mythical age of unity and congruence, to the time preceding the formation of the self, before we met our reflection in the mirror, or even before the trauma of the birth, when we were one with the universe, and did not know as yet separation, lack, and desire. On the other hand, I dissent with Baudry's description of cinema as an artificial hallucinatory psychosis, because I do not attribute the same importance as he and others have ascribed to what has been described as the spectator's dreamer-like immobility in an almost foetal position in the obscurity of the auditorium. This regressive condition is not the primary component of cinematic spectatorship. Despite the darkness of the environment, the limitation of physical movement and the concentration of attention on the bright screen and the film's happenings projected on it, it is hardly possible to maintain that spectators hallucinate, or even that they completely forget that they are at the cinema. Spectators can, on the other hand, choose to set aside this knowledge and to adopt a high degree of belief in the projected events and characters. Ordinarily, this belief fluctuates in intensity. The conception of a passive spectator who is at the mercy of the filmic discourse is not only outdated, but also false from a psychoanalytic perspective, since even the Freudian dreamer, from whom this conception of spectatorship derives, is not passive and at the mercy of his or her unconscious mind. In an often forgotten passage of *The Interpretation of Dreams*, Freud wrote that 'throughout our whole sleeping state we know just as certainly that we are dreaming as we know that we are sleeping' (Freud 1953: 571).

As is the case for a Freudian dreamer, the spectator never completely forgets that he or she is at the cinema, and fluctuates between credence and mistrust, without necessarily having perfect control of this mechanism -- the border between belief and disbelief, as well as between perception and illusion, is precarious and often crossed. This back and forth movement also concerns our metaphorical spectators. Cole and Lenny like their trips and clips so much that they prefer them to real life; and because of this inclination they often cross the above described border between perception and illusion. *Twelve Monkeys* suggests that Cole may even be mad; at one point he begins to hear a voice speaking to him, and his confidence in his own sanity vacillates during the film. Lenny, on the other hand, is so addicted to his Faith-clips that he far prefers them to real life, despite his friend Mace's attempts to anchor him in the present.

*Strange Days* clearly shows the dangers of this perceptive addiction; those who are exposed to a boosted SQID-signal do not die, but enter a state of sensorial overload, which seems to be experienced as both pleasure and suffering - an extreme, annihilating enjoyment from which there is no return. We are beginning to glimpse the death drive that, as Lacan has taught us, lies behind the scopical drive and, in fact, behind any drive, since each drive tends to its own annihilation, implies repetition, and tries to go beyond the pleasure principle. The excess of SQID-perception generates an experience of the *jouissance* that underlies any attempt to enter the realm where enjoyment is experienced as suffering.

In our films, the idea of time travel - and that of spectatorship with it -- is linked to a vertigo of displacement between past, present and future, between memory and perception, the real and the imaginary. It is no accident that *Strange Days* and *Twelve Monkeys* both re-enact Hitchcock's *Vertigo* (USA, 1958), a true archetype of the cinematic reflection on the spiral of time, on subjectivity and on spectatorship.

*Vertigo*'s intertextual presence in *Strange Days* emerges immediately, with the very first scene, a rooftop escape ending with a fatal slip. In *Vertigo* Scottie (James Stewart) is a cop taking part in the rooftop chase of a robber in San Francisco. Scottie slips from the roof but grabs hold of the ledge; one of his colleagues bends forward to help him but falls, and Scottie can only watch as the man plunges to his death into the void. Lenny in *Strange Days* is an ex-cop who is playing back a clip of a similar chase and, through the SQUID, experiences in first person the death of a robber falling from a roof. Thus, both Scottie and Lenny witness in a subjective manner, by means of point-of-view shots, a death that is also a fall, a vertiginous plunge into the void. Both are driven to look, but are also nauseated by their vision. Both identify with the person who falls, but continue to be spectators at the same time. These sequences talk about the scopic drive and its death token, and replicate the mythical scene of Narcissus falling into the abyss - where the mythical character is both the spectator of his fall, reflected by the water, and he who falls.

The analogies between the two films are not limited to their opening sequences. Scottie also becomes an ex-cop, as is Lenny. Both men are blinded by their infatuation with an unobtainable *femme fatale*, and are unaware of being loved by an intelligent and entrepreneurial female friend. Both were with the object of their love for only a short time, and show for the rest of the narrative a dangerous obsession with the past and a strong wish to relive it. Both opt for a visual re-enactment of the past: Scottie transforms the appearance of Judy to make her look more and more like Madeleine, until the two women's images coincide. Lenny, who has ultramodern media at his disposal, just keeps playing back his Faith-clips so that he can look at her over and over again.

*Twelve Monkeys*' re-presentation of *Vertigo* is even more explicit. The sequence of Hitchcock's film set in the sequoia grove is projected in a cinema. Cole and Kathryn are hiding in the almost empty theatre and put on disguises while distractedly looking at the screen, their plan being to leave Philadelphia unnoticed by the police who are looking for them. Immediately after, in the entrance hall of the same cinema, Cole and Kathryn re-play the famous scene of the return of Madeleine. Kathryn, who has dyed her hair blond, plausibly in the cinema's washroom, walks towards Cole like Judy/Madeleine in *Vertigo* came out of her hotel bathroom, returning from the dead to a Scottie who is moved to tears. After all Cole, like Scottie, is obsessed with the memory of a woman from his past, who, like Madeleine, has lived at least twice.

'I think I have seen this movie before', Cole humorously says while watching the projection of the sequoia grove sequence, in which Madeleine points to the tree rings and whispers: 'Here I was born, and there I died'. We the spectators also feel that we have seen this film before - and in fact *Twelve Monkeys* quotes not only from *Vertigo*, but also from *Brazil*, *Monkey Business*, *Terminator*, and Jean Vigo's *Zéro de conduite*. The intertextual game reinforces in the spectator the impression of being in a spiral of time; and *Twelve Monkeys* being a remake (of Chris Marker's *La Jetée*, 1962) further emphasises the idea of return and recurrence. Despite the patent difference in style (*Twelve Monkeys* is a traditional film whereas *La Jetée* is a photomontage almost totally composed of individual stills), the two films present a very similar plot, including the fundamental scene of the airport killing.

The theme of the spiral of time is very significant and is made manifest by the graphics in the opening titles of *Twelve Monkeys*, evoking the famous spiral in *Vertigo*'s titles. A set of concentric rings, formed by a series of monkeys, rotate in the same direction at different speeds, creating the effect both of a spiral and of an iris with a hole in the middle. In Hitchcock's film, the spiral emerges from an eye, that of Madeleine. It could be argued that *Strange Days* and *Twelve Monkeys* similarly emerge from eyes, namely those in the opening detail shots of Lenny and Cole's perceptive organs. These shots are followed by the two point-of-view sequences described above, and which I now wish to analyse further.

That in *Twelve Monkeys* talks about the simultaneity and reversibility of seeing and being seen. As mentioned earlier, Cole's dream of the airport killing is recurrent. This enigmatic, repeated oneiric scene finds an explanation at the end, or perhaps we should call it the beginning of the film, when the spectators realise that Cole is not only the child, but also the man who is killed before the child's eyes -- or better, his own

eyes. Thus, in his dream Cole is an actor and a spectator at the same time: he watches himself as the child watching himself as the adult who is shot dead. Furthermore, thanks to the subjective camera, we the spectators see through the child's eyes and, as a result, we tend to momentarily identify with him; thus, the man whom we see being killed is also partly ourselves. In short, we see through the eyes of a character who is simultaneously passive and active, child and adult, watching and acting, present and past, alive and dead. Cole's momentous gaze reminds us once again of Narcissus looking into his own eyes while falling into the abyss.

At the beginning of *Strange Days*, the conventions of the point-of-view structure suggest that the spectator shares the perspective of two different characters at the same time: that of the still unknown proprietor of the eye in the first shot, who, in his turn, sees through the eyes of a nervous robber. It is only at the end of the clip, after the fatal jump from the roof, that the camera pans backward, and discovers for the first time Lenny's body. During the whole sequence, the spectators are not sure of who is looking, where and when: there is not, in fact, a character with whom they can identify, since Lenny has not been shown to them as yet, and also the robber's body is almost completely invisible. At the end of the clip, the spectators realise that they have looked simultaneously through the eyes of a dead person and through the cells of Lenny's brain. Also in *Strange Days*' case, this gaze is that of an actor and a spectator at the same time, and it is a gaze that implies both a fall and a death.

What we are told by these sequences is that perception not only locates us, but can also displace us. Lenny and Cole live a spectatorial vertigo, one that is transferred to the spectators in the auditorium and amplified for them by the *mise-en-abîme* of the point-of-view structure. Through these subjective sequences, we the spectators live more than a perceptive and more or less intense emotional identification with the characters; we live almost a vertigo, we take part in Lenny and Cole's trips in time.

These trips are destabilising, because they cause a time paradox, which is exemplified by a scene at the end of *Twelve Monkeys*, set in the same airport of the oneiric sequences. Everything happens just as in Cole's dream, but with more details and a coherence that retroactively illuminates the meaning of this recurrent scene. Cole and Kathryn have finally understood that the virus is not being spread by the Army of the Twelve Monkeys, an innocuous group of animal rights activists lead by Jeffrey Goines, but by a microbiologist assistant to Jeffrey's father. Chased by Cole, he runs along the airport corridor, carrying with him the deadly virus, but it is Cole who is shot by the police. All this happens under the gaze of a child, who has just been called 'James' by his parents, and who has been warned by the fleeing scientist with the double-meaning phrase: 'Watch it!'. James the child watches James the adult being shot before his eyes; his gaze and Cole's do not meet, but Cole -- who in the previous sequences has put together all the pieces of the puzzle -- is now aware of the meaning and implications of his dream. Kathryn also knows and, after Cole's death, anxiously searches the airport corridor for the child, and meets his gaze. In this exchange lies the vertiginous confirmation of a guessed identity, immediately nullified by death. Once again, the scopic drive has taken its death toll. The child, who has a tear in his eye, possibly realises that he and the adult are the same person, that the spectator and the actor are one and the same. Too late. The gazes did not meet, the moment has passed, and the chance to see himself seeing himself has vanished.

The possibility of meeting ourselves, of gazing on ourselves from the outside is the paradoxical event that perhaps fascinates us most in all the narratives on time travel, both in literature and in cinema. A distinction between literature and film in this respect is that, thanks to the point-of-view, we the spectators can be perceptively, almost physically part of this unattainable gaze, by which we look at ourselves while we see and we make ourselves seen at the same time. Nevertheless, as Lacan argues in 'The Split Between The Eye and The Gaze', this attempt by the subject to grasp itself '*as seeing oneself seeing oneself*' represents mere sleight of hand. An avoidance of the function of the gaze is at work here' -- the function of the gaze being 'both that which governs the gaze most secretly and that which always escapes from the grasp of that form of vision that is satisfied with itself in imagining itself as a consciousness' (Lacan 1977: 74). The subject itself is, therefore, the object of this vision but, as Žižek put it, 'I am aware of myself, I am compelled to turn reflexively onto myself, only insofar as I can never "encounter myself" in my noumenal dimension, as the Thing I actually am' (Žižek 1999: 304). *Twelve Monkeys* confirms this impossibility; Cole and the child's gazes do not meet, and the two have not being able to see themselves seeing themselves. After all, as Lacan has written, 'In the scopic field, the gaze is outside, I am looked at, that is to say, I am a picture', or even,

in an often quoted axiom, 'You never look at me from the place from which I see you'. (Lacan 1977: 103). Cole and the child can only look at the other as pictures -- as spectators watch a film, or dreamers watch their dream.

In *The Ticklish Subject*, Slavoj Žižek has discussed the time loop in science fiction as an example of the drive's paradox, and has associated the 'vertigo' in the title of Hitchcock's film with 'the way Scottie is caught up in drive's endless loop'. (Žižek 1999: 300). Similarly, I wish to suggest that *Twelve Monkeys*' circular narrative strategy, as much as that in *Vertigo*, mimics the loop or closed circuit that is at the heart of the scopic drive. As Lacan argues in *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, the goal of each partial drive is to follow its aim, its way, that is to circle around the object. 'What is fundamental at the level of each drive is the movement outwards and back in which it is structured.' (Lacan, 1977: 177) *Vertigo*, *Twelve Monkeys* and *Strange Days* tell us that spectatorship is motivated by the scopic drive; but this drive can never be satisfied, and its purpose is in fact to circle around its object, to repeat the circular act of seeing -- seeing oneself -- making oneself seen. The aim, as Lacan put it, is 'the way taken', the 'return into circuit'. As much as spectators keep returning to the cinema to see and make themselves seen, they will never be able to see themselves as consciousness on the screen.

Scottie, Lenny and Cole, therefore, are not truly animated by desire -- the desire to go back to a mythical and lost time of full satisfaction, as their nostalgia seemed at first to indicate. The back and forth movement underlying their quests is not that of desire, but that of drive. The three characters - three metaphorical spectators -- want to see, see themselves and make themselves seen, over and over again. It is in the scandalous excess of the drive's repetitiveness that the destructiveness of their passions lies. In *Vertigo*, Scottie's need to look at Madeleine and to make himself seen by her forces him to bring her back from the dead, and to kill her a second time. Her death is, of course, a plunge into the void, only one of the many falls in Hitchcock's film: the cop falls from a roof in the opening sequence; Scottie falls from a chair; Madeleine falls in the bay, and later from the bell tower; Scottie dreams of falling into a spiral, and then into an open grave.

In *Twelve Monkeys*, Cole is trapped in his circular path back and forth in time; his every attempt to escape the loop brings him straight back to his orbit. His purpose is not to go back to the past, but to meet himself (to see and make himself seen) in the airport, over and over again. At the end of the film, the film begins again, with the child who leaves the airport and is going to grow up into an adult Cole, who will go back again to see himself looking at himself.

Lenny is addicted to images, and ultimately to his own image. This same addiction is shared by all the characters in *Strange Days*. In a topical line of Cameron's screenplay Faith says, referring to the use that her manager and lover Philo makes of the SQUID: 'For him it's about seeing himself through other people's eyes. He is fascinated by his own image' (Cameron 1996: 143). All the characters in *Strange Days* are fascinated by their images, and continually seek their own reflections in mirrors. In this sense, *Strange Days* openly shows the narcissistic element of the scopic drive. The film brims over with looking glasses, rear-view mirrors and other reflecting surfaces. In the concluding part of *Strange Days*, during the final confrontation between Lenny and the villain Max (Tom Sizemore), a vast number of mirrors, lamps, windows and glass tables are smashed either by bullets or by the bodies of the fighting characters. This emblematic scene tells us that the mirror (the illusion) has been smashed, leaving Lenny able to detach himself from the narcissistic contemplation of his own image. He does not fall into the void - Max does, and flies down from a balcony into the night. Lenny, instead, is now free to love Mace, who is not a Madeleine-like image, but a real woman.

The looking glass, the glass that looks at us, is what in everyday life offers us a glimpse of the experience of gazing at ourselves from the outside; and it is also the mythical place in which we first encountered our own gaze. I refer to the mirror phase, with its miracle of the sudden recognition of something that was always already there, an experience that once again takes us back to time loops and, therefore, to time travels. As Mladen Dolar wrote in relation to the mirror phase, 'There is a strange time loop when one becomes what one recognizes oneself always to have been' (Dolar 1996: 135).

*Twelve Monkeys* reflects this strange time loop in the already quoted scene set in the cinema hall, after the viewing of *Vertigo*, with Cole-Scottie who can finally set eyes on his Kathryn-Madeleine, blonde at last. Now that their transformation is complete, the characters can recognise each other, but also themselves -- they

become what they have always been, and from that moment onward they can only carry out what has already happened to them. Here the circular structure of the drive is clearly revealed for what it is -- as Žižek has written, 'the Freudian "drive" is ultimately another name for "Destiny", for the reversal through which the circle of Destiny accomplishes/closes itself' (Žižek 1999: 303). Cole and Kathryn hesitantly embrace, testing the solidity of their discovered/recovered identities, with the camera circling around them, accompanied by Bernard Herrmann's dizzy musical theme from *Vertigo*. The vertiginous time loop is now complete -- Cole/Scottie has returned to his past, and Hitchcock's masterpiece has come back to the present, once again.

## References

### Works cited

Baudry, Jean-Louis (1975) 'Le dispositif', *Communications*, n. 23.

Cameron, James (1996) *Strange Days*. London: Penguin Books.

Dolar, Mladen (1996) 'At First Sight', in Salecl R. and Žižek, S., *Gaze and Voice As Love Objects*. Durham-London: Duke University Press.

Freud, Sigmund (1953) *The Interpretation of Dreams*, in *The standard edition of the complete psychological works of Sigmund Freud*. London: Hogarth, vol. 5.

Lacan, Jacques (1977) *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*. London: Hogarth.

Žižek, Slavoj (1999) *The Ticklish Subject. The Absent Centre of Political Ontology*. London-New York: Verso

## Author Information

Laura RASCAROLI is Toyota Lecturer in Film and Media Studies at the National University of Ireland, Cork. Her principal research interest lies in Film Theory. She is currently co-writing a book on Postmodern Cities in European Cinema with Dr Ewa Mazierska of Manchester Metropolitan University (UK). She has published on *Screen* and *Enculturation*.