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## ***The Hysteric's Guide to Pixar: On Voice and Gaze in Toy Story 1-2***

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### **Introduction**

This article presents a Lacanian analysis of two animated films from Pixar Studio: *Toy Story 1 & 2*. It has the double aim of exemplifying important psychoanalytic concepts (the voice, the gaze, partial object, the Other, the primal father, the name-of-the-father, symbolic castration) and analyzing two films of a new and influential genre: Computer animated film. The analysis is founded on the observation that the genre of computer animated film seems to carry within it, as a kind of meta-reflection, the very philosophical problem of “animation” – what does it take to “animate” a thing or an animal? That is, what is “a soul” (Latin: “animus”)? How is something “humanized?” Or, psychoanalytically speaking, how is the subject constituted? Pixar’s animated universe seems to me not only to present its creators with this problem, but also to thematize it. Or, put in another way: the problem of “animation” seems to expand from being a problem of production to defining to a large degree the themes and stories of the films. In the very first “birth scene” of an animated Pixar character that you could watch on screen, the cowboy doll Woody becoming alive in *Toy Story 1*, “animation” is staged as voice and gaze: Woody is changed from a toy to a live character the moment he speaks, and his painted empty eyes become the site of a gaze. Now, as voice and gaze may seem the trademarks of “humanity” and “subjectivity”, Lacan nevertheless puts them on the side of the object, regarding them as potential partial objects,

objects to be desired, and to be feared. In this article I shall inquire into the “animation” of Woody as well as his seemingly psychotic pal, the space toy Buzz Lightyear through analyzing *Toy Story 1* and *2*. My analysis of *Toy Story 1* will take its point of departure in the dimension of the voice, where as the dimension of the gaze will be central for my analysis of *Toy Story 2*.

## **The Voice, the Alien**

In Sophie Fiennes’ documentary film *The Pervert’s Guide to Cinema*, Slavoj Žižek claims that cartoons, as well as silent movies, present us with a universe without guilt, sexuality and death, as those themes enter in human life only with the voice. In a lucid analysis of Chaplin’s *The Great Dictator*, which has of silent as well as talking movie elements, he claims that this film is all about the problem of “domesticating the terrifying dimension of the voice”. As long as Chaplin is the Jewish barber living in the peaceful ghetto, he is in the infantile universe of the silent movie, with all its primitive laughs and aggressions and gags – as soon as he gets into the role of his double, the German Dictator Hynkel, he is inhabited by a voice threatening to demonize him. In the final scene, when the Jewish barber dressed up as dictator gives his heroic speech promoting Democratic values, Žižek remarks that his appearance and the enthusiastic reaction of the crowd do not differ very much from the situation of the totalitarian dictator. Even if Chaplin here preaches nice, democratic values, the very demon of the voice has entered his body, threatening to transform him into just a copy of the dictator he is verbally attacking. Thus the voice becomes an instance of that “alien” which, according to Žižek (and psychoanalysis in general) is at the core of humanity: “Humanity means: the alien is controlling our animal bodies”. (Žižek in Fiennes 2006)

When we look at the history of animated film, it begins as silent movie, in that “anal-oral-egoistic” universe which Žižek finds ruling those innumerable cartoons where animated animals are chasing and mutilating each other – and which might actually seem a perfect illustration of the paranoid-schizoid universe of the infant as Melanie Klein describes it: the universe where there is nothing between one being and another but revengeful aggression and attacks. Actually, animated film is still often silent movie, and the truth about the voice even in live action (that it is not emitted from the body images on the screen, but from another source) is more evident in animated talkies. In the animated universe of Pixar the voice is certainly one of the constitutive features of “animation” in the sense of bringing human life into the representations of things and animals. Thus, in *Toy Story 1*, the cowboy doll Woody is given a voice the moment he is born as an animated character. Interestingly, though, he actually has two “birth scenes” in the film, two crucial moments of becoming alive, of going from being inanimate to animate through having a voice. In the first “birth scene” (at the beginning of the film) voice humanizes him, in the second (near the end) it rather demonizes him. Before pointing this out, I will have to give a short summary of the film.

The basic scene of the *Toy Story* films is a boy's, Andy's, room, and the characters are his toys, coming alive whenever they are left on their own. The main characters are the cowboy doll Woody and the space toy Buzz Lightyear. In *Toy Story 1* Buzz Lightyear arrives as Andy's birthday present and right away becomes his favorite toy, thus dethroning Woody. In a series of events initiated by Woody's jealousy, and by a detour to the fast food restaurant "Pizza Planet", they both end up with the neighbor's boy Sid who is a really bad kid, treating his toys sadistically, blowing them up or tearing them apart, putting them together again in surrealist constellations (like a doll's head with spider legs). In Sid's home, in a strangely touching scene, through a TV commercial Buzz gets to realize that he is not really a space ranger, but a mass produced toy - thus he is not unique, and he can't fly. Through cunning planning and by the help of Sid's surrealist creations, his kind of mutant toys, Woody and Buzz manage to scare Sid and escape from him, just as he is about to fire off Buzz, bound to a big rocket, which becomes instead a means for Buzz and Woody to fire themselves into Andy's car, as he is moving with his mother to a new house. The moral seems quite clear: by overcoming your jealous rivalry, realizing your own limitations, and working together, you can make it. In its pedagogical address to children the film definitely deals with the problem of sibling rivalry. (As my younger son said, when he was seven years old: it is about being the super-coolest, and then somebody else arrives and becomes the super-coolest instead.)

Now let us direct our attention towards Woody's two "birth scenes". The first one is in the film's first scene when Woody is left on the bed by Andy, having until then been the one to "animate" him as the child animates his toy. The second one is towards the end of the film, scene 26, when Woody is placed on the barbecue by the sadist neighbor kid Sid, but starts pronouncing threats with his mechanical voice and finally "comes alive" in Sid's hand, talking to him, and staring directly at him. Where as the gaze and the voice in the first scene humanize Woody, in the scene at Sid's they rather demonize him. When the traumatized Sid tells his sister: "the toy is alive", this is (at it would be in reality) really, really scary.

So what animates us, what inhabits us? Is it a soul, or is it a demon? Do the voice and the gaze stem from some kind of inner source of humanity - or are they rather transplanted into our bodies? In the case of animation movies, the voice is clearly something that is put into the figure (and sometimes actually changes the character, as becomes clear from the commentary track to *Toy Story 1*, where the animators tell us that Tim Allen's voice made them change Buzz from a super hero to a space cop). In *Toy Story*, furthermore, both Buzz and Woody have both a mechanical and a human voice, and what happens in Woody's "second" animation at Sid's is a kind of fusion of those two: Woody is talking with his mechanical voice, but he is free to say what he wants, not just replaying the same mechanical and rather idiotic sentence ("there is a snake in my boot"). Departing from Žižek's point: "Humanity means: the alien is controlling our human bodies", Woody's second animation scene is perhaps not contradictory to his first, but rather it's truth: humanization is just as much a demonization, a being invaded by the alien, the voice. Thus

the “animation” of the animated film might be seen as a familiarization of something which is actually deeply unfamiliar and scary.

If Woody is animated (humanized as well as demonized) by voice, the story of Buzz Lightyear depicts the process of becoming a subject as a process of symbolic castration and subjective destitution. The story of Buzz Lightyear’s fall is central to the film and brings us into its fundamental dealing with the distinctions between the neurotic and the psychotic, the name-of-the-father and the father-of-enjoyment, the symbolic castration and the sadist mutilation. Departing from the scene of Buzz Lightyear’s fall and the Lacanian concept of the big Other I shall now argue that those distinctions are fundamental structures in the film.

### **Falling with Style**

Buzz Lightyear’s fall may be seen as constituting him as a neurotic. Till then his character matches Lacan’s definition of the psychotic: the one who firmly believes in the big Other. The big Other (French: “L’Autre”) is Lacan’s concept for that place - be it a person, an ideology, God, common sense – where I believe the truth about my existence, the meaning of my life, the guarantee of my identity, to be located. One of Lacan’s definition of this Big O is “the subject supposed to know” – which might incarnate itself to me in the figure of my shrink, my teacher, my beloved, my favorite theorist (in this case: Lacan), a political party. For Buzz Lightyear, the big O is the outer space control from which he (thoroughly psychotically) believes to be sent on a mission. In *Toy Story 1*, in the scenes taking place in the fast food restaurant “Pizza Planet”, one may observe yet another allegory for big O: “The claw”. The claw is placed in an automat where children can catch small green plastic Martians. As Woody and Buzz fall into the automat, we experience “the Claw” from the small Martians’ perspective – and here it certainly functions as “the big O”: the God-like instance “choosing” certain of its creatures to be lifted. In the DVD version of *Toy Story*, the menu is designed as a TV-screen being watched by the small green Martians, waiting excitedly for the choice of the remote control. Thus the position of the spectator is given as the position of a small plastic Martian, and the TV screen becomes the place from which the big Other emanates. This is something recurrent in Pixar: it is by watching a screen that the characters come to know their desire. (Like when in *Ratatouille* Remy the rat watches the chief Gusteau on TV and finds support for his desire to cook, or when in *Up* the characters as kids watch the explorer’s mountain which is to become the goal of their dreams for a life time.) This may be both the wish of a movie company, and a truth of our time: The screen is what animates us.

Back to Buzz: his confrontation with the screen is actually something else than the affirmation of imaginary identity, on the contrary it is the deconstruction of imaginary identity – the moment when he is forced to give up his firm belief in the big O. It is spelled on the screen that he is just one in a series, “not a flying toy”, and that he is “made in Taiwan”, which is confirmed when

Buzz horrified observes that writing on his wing. Thus Buzz could be said to be awakening from his psychotic delusion: the subject discovers that he is not an instrument of some all-knowing big Other, he is just a product in a multiple series of similar products, and he does not have any supernatural powers. It is the moment when he realizes what Woody has been screaming to him earlier in the film: "YOU ARE A TOY". To put it in another way Buzz realizes that he is not THE Buzz Lightyear, he is just a Buzz Lightyear. This is how Woody puts it: there is a scene before the fall when he says reproachfully: "You really think you are THE Buzz Lightyear?", and then there is a scene after the fall when he says approvingly and encouragingly: "You're a Buzz Lightyear" (which is a very fine thing to be). One might say that here Woody behaves as a really bad shrink, telling Buzz a truth he is not yet ready to face. Furthermore, in his remark "You are not the real Buzz Lightyear" Woody seems himself to be deluded, as if "the real Buzz Lightyear" (and not just copies) existed. Altogether one cannot blame Buzz for answering, when Woody screams into his head: "YOU-ARE-A-TOY": "You are a little sad man, and you have my pity."

Now, Buzz' condition is not just some "toyish" condition, but rather an allegory of the human condition: The big Other and our imaginary identity are illusions, and somehow we have to realize that, how painful it may be. The moment when Buzz gives up the idea of some unique essential identity is the moment when he becomes the subject of his own desire, his own mission (instead of this mission of the big O from outer space). Even if one must of course be strictly aware that he is on a mission for Pixar, whatever kind of big O that might be... Buzz' fall is clearly staged as castration, a feminization: he loses his arm, and after the fall Sid's sister dresses him up as "Mrs Nesbit" in apron and hat, places him at a doll's tea table where he gets drunk on Darjeeling: "The one minute I am defending the whole galaxy, the next minute I am sucking down Darjeeling." Furthermore the fall is staged as a crucifixion (after the fall Buzz forms a cross on the floor), which makes of Woody a Judas, who is according to Žižek the greatest ethical hero of the Bible, being the traitor whose act is necessary for Jesus/ Buzz to fulfill his mission. What Buzz is going through is what Lacanian psychoanalysis calls a subjective destitution: the subject realizing, as Žižek puts it in his colloquial way, that it is just a piece of shit, thereby actually and paradoxically gaining its subjectivity. When you give up the illusion of your subjectivity as a unique kernel, you gain your subjectivity as that which it really is: a knot in a network, the crossing of several inscriptions: "Made in Taiwan", "Walt Disney Productions" (stamped in Buzz' behind, shown in a very quick glimpse when he is falling), "Andy" (Andy writes his name on his toys' soles, including Buzz'). When you realize that you can't fly, you are able to fall with style (which is Woody's wording, finally taken over by Buzz: "I am not flying, I am falling with style").

## Beyond the Name-of-the-Father

*Toy Story* seems at first sight to represent a universe where fathers are absent. It is as if Andy only has a mother, even if there is no allusion to divorce or father's death. Sid's father is only represented by an arm, sticking out from the back of an armchair in front of the TV, whereas his mother, if not visually appearing is at least represented by an articulated voice. But actually Andy and Sid could be seen themselves as father figures, as they are kind of fathers to their toys. From a Lacanian perspective, Andy represents the symbolic father, also known as the-name-of-the-father. This is the father as the function of inscribing the child into social order. Andy's name very explicitly has this function of giving social identity to his toys: he marks them by writing his name on their soles. What saves Buzz from insanity is actually this very name-of-the-father written on his sole - when he sees it he gets out of his post-castration depression and takes to action. So when it comes to the question of what makes a subject a subject, the film also points to this social inscription, the name-of-the-father. Buzz has more than one name-of-the-father, more than one social inscription: "Andy" is supplemented by "Made in Taiwan" and "Walt Disney Productions" (which may be seen also as Pixar's ironic tribute to their name-of-the-father). The subject is a product, humanity is a trade mark. Thus the film points to the fact that we are socially always products of more than one "father"; the inscriptions quilting us to the social world are not only our family name, but also names of other social forces than that of the family.

The series of such "brands" or "inscriptions" or "castration marks" in the film is extensive: besides the literal inscriptions you have Buzz losing his arm, and Woody having a mark burned into his front like a kind of Cain's mark (one may observe how this mark is prefigured by Buzz directing his impotent laser ray against Woody, and then inscribed for real when Sid burns a mark in Woody's front by capturing rays of sun in a looking glass). The Cain's mark may allude to the theme of sibling rivalry, which is certainly an important theme in the Buzz/Woody relation, but at the same time it marks that symbolic castration which has to happen to Woody as well, in order for the two of them to be able to "share the fall" - which might be one way of defining love, and which is very literally what happens in the final scene when together they are "falling with style" into Andy's car. Compared to Andy as the symbolic father, Sid could be said to represent the primal father, the one that tends to take over in the symbolic father's absence, as Paul Verhaeghe makes it clear in his article "The Collapse of the Function of the Father and its Effects on Gender Roles": "Instead of the real primal father, it is the symbolic function which is destroyed, thereby setting loose what Lacan calls the primal anal father, a figure who is only on the lookout for his own *jouissance*." (Verhaeghe 2000: 138) Sid bears the marks of this "Father-of-Enjoyment" (Lacan: "père-jouisseur"): his sadistic behaviour, his satanic laughter, his passion for the fantasmatic phallus (The rocket called "the big One" to which he attaches Buzz), his bad teeth that tend to be a characteristic of the visualizing of this fantasmatic figure (think of Bobby Peru/ Willem Dafoe in

David Lynch's *Wild at Heart*). In this seemingly fatherless universe, Andy and Sid thus may be seen as allegories of the symbolic versus the primal father. The film shows us how the name of the father can save us from psychosis (as it saves Buzz), and how its disappearance gives way to the sadistic primal father of enjoyment.

One interesting aspect of the character of Sid, though, is the creativeness of his sadist operations. When you listen to the commentary track you will hear the animators saying that they identify with Sid, and not with Andy. Andy is the strange guy, treating his toys neatly and nicely, whereas blowing up G.I. Joes and tearing apart mechanical toys is what the animators remember themselves doing as kids. And Sid's creations surely look like surrealist pieces of art. In their final coming together against Sid his mutant creations become a kind of zombies, turning themselves against the force that have distorted their very being, thus representing a kind of rebellious potentiality in the very products of the destructive force (something like the replicants in Scott Ridley's *Blade Runner*).

### **Kiss my Butt**

Mutilation could be said to be played through in three different versions in *Toy Story 1*. First we have that anal-oral mutilation that Žižek rightly sees as characteristic of cartoons, in the figure of "Mister Potato", whose partial objects (eyes, mouth, feet, arms, ears) are all de- and re-attachable, as they would be in a universe before symbolic castration, before finitude and mortality. In the beginning, the figure is used very literally in an anal-oral joke, taking off his mouth and holding it to his behind, thus incarnating the verbal expression: "kiss my butt" – a joke that the film makers really enjoyed as is clear from their commentary track. The orality is furthermore stressed as Andy's little sister takes Mr. Potato in her mouth, biting off several parts that he will afterwards have to recollect while complaining about "Princess Drewl". Secondly we have the phallic mutilation, the castration represented by Buzz' loss of his arm. A loss that might be seen as compensated through the big fantasmatic phallus that is tied to his back in the form of Sid's rocket – a phallus that it takes some cunning, though, for Buzz not to become its victim, but its master. Besides this anal-oral and phallic mutilation we thirdly have Sid's mutilation of his toys, which may on the one hand be seen as the cruel (sadist) version of anal-orality ("Princess Drewl" being the innocent version), on the other hand as a creative process in which dismembered entities are put together in new constellations. Sid's creations might be seen as a result of that switching between the paranoid-schizoid (mutilating) and the depressive (recreating) positions that is to Melanie Klein a condition of the subject in general – and of creativity in specific. The difference between anal-oral and phallic mutilation is correlative to the difference between different kinds of partial objects, or perhaps rather between partial objects and the phallus, between Mr. Potato's parts and Sid's rocket "the big One". In between we would have Buzz' arm, lingering between being (as a metaphor) the sign of

symbolic castration and (as metonymy) the sign of sadistic mutilation.

The fall of Buzz is one in a series of falls throughout the film. First we have Woody falling down on the floor (as an expression of his being dethroned by Buzz). Then we have Buzz' "flying" in Andy's room in a scene in which the surroundings provide him with what Lacan would call an "answer of the real" (Žižek 1991: 29-30): the things by accident catching and throwing him, thus supporting his imaginary belief, making of his fall what looks like flying. After Buzz's big fall we then finally have the common fall of Buzz and Woody into the car. Here our heroes succeed in not just being victims of the unavoidable "fall", but sharing it and directing it to match their desire (returning to Andy). This may be what "falling with style" is about. The motto of Buzz Lightyear: "To Infinity and Beyond" (meant by the film makers to be a ridiculous hyperbole) is repeated by the two friends in the final fall, but the meaning seems transformed: "beyond infinity" is no longer the fantasmatic superlative of a megalomaniac, but could rather be read as the expression that we are now beyond the illusion of the infinity of the subject; we are able to deal with mortality and fall as parts of the human condition.

As suggested answers to the question "What animates us?" *Toy Story 1* has given us the voice, the gaze, the big O, the name-of-the-father, the sadist drive of mutilation. The moral of the story seems to be that you should subject yourself to symbolic castration and the name-of-the-father. But the film is not blind to the demonic and destructive forces at the core of subjectivity (animation as demonization, mutilation as creativity), and it may even seem to transcend symbolic Law in the image of Love as "sharing the fall". In the analysis of *Toy Story 2* we shall get more into the function of the gaze which, from the Lacanian point of view, shares with the voice the ambiguity of being both subject and object.

### **Big O is watching you**

For psychoanalysis, the subject is constituted by a lack, a split, a fissure. We may have dreams of being complete, and perhaps at a very early (infantile or even embryonic) stage of our lives we felt no lack, no split, no separation, being just one with whatever surrounded us. But as far as we are creatures of language and desire (and to Lacan language and desire are what separates the human from the animal being), we are split beings: split between the thing and the word for it, between what we want and what we get, between what we feel like and what we look like, between present and past, between what we think we say or want and what we actually say or want (that is between conscious and unconscious). Being split from temporality (the impossibility of a complete present moment, uncontaminated by past or future), from desire (the impossibility of complete and permanent satisfaction), from mortality (the horizon of "nothingness" surrounding our existence). In seminar 11, the lecture called "Le schisme de l'oeuil et du regard", Lacan stages the fissure of the subject as the fissure of the eye, being both the site of looking and a thing, an object, a partial



object. Like when you think of your own eyes as on one hand the hole, the nothing in your face from where you see the world (but not your own face) - and on the other hand as material eye balls. Lacan puts the gaze on the side of the object, stating it as the object of the scopic drive:

“The *object a* in the field of the visible is the gaze” (Lacan 1978: 105).

What on earth does that mean? On the one hand it means that our eyeballs desire to be filled with the gaze, to become the site of looking in stead of just empty globes. On the other hand it means that what we really desire to see (for instance when at the cinema) is the gaze of the Other. Now, the Other, or big O (as defined earlier in the analysis of Buzz Lightyear’s fall) is this fantasmatic instance (“the subject-supposed-to-know”) to whom and for whose approval we are, consciously or not, performing the comedy of our lives – be it our mother, our God, life style magazines or something more abstract. We desire this gaze to rest upon us, and we desire to meet it. But when this seems to actually happen, it can be a most creepy experience. As Žižek argues in *Everything You Always Wanted to Know about Hitchcock, but Were Afraid to Ask Lacan*, finally looking into the gaze of big O would be something like looking into the gaze of Norman Bates in the final scene of *Psycho* (a scene in which both voice and gaze surely seem as “aliens” animating a human body). (Žižek 1992: 245)

### **The Gaze of the Skull**

Lacan’s most famous example to explain the turning point where the desired and idealized gaze of the big O turns out to be a scary, annihilating gaze of the big Zero, is Hans Holbein’s painting from 1533, “The Ambassadors” (now in the National Gallery, London: <http://www.nationalgallery.org.uk/paintings/hans-holbein-the-younger-the-ambassadors>). In this painting you see two richly dressed ambassadors posing, leaning on a table where their books and instruments, seemingly signs of their mastering the world, are exposed. In the foreground some strange amorphous white-grayish spot is lingering.

Now, those two men could be said to be posing as imaginary personae for the gaze of the big O – which is what we always do when we are being painted, or (today, more likely and much more common) photographed. The gaze here being the public gaze, to which they are showing themselves off – at that time represented by the artist’s gaze, as it would be today by the camera. But there is another, creepy gaze present in the painting: If you get to look at the spot in the foreground from the right (oblique) angle, you will see that it is actually – a skull. The spectator’s desire for the gaze (reflecting the ambassadors’ desire for the gaze of the imaginary big O) will be mockingly satisfied by the anamorphically distorted skull, the very symbol of vanity. If we really get to see the gaze, it will be the gaze of the real, looking back at us with no other message than the

message of the mortality of the subject. (It should be noticed that the subject, the artist, has inscribed his mortal name in the skull, which could thus be seen as a kind of signature: “Holbein” meaning “hollow bone”.)

Thus the painting makes us experience the difference between the gaze in “the imaginary” and the gaze in “the real”, those concepts being understood as two of the three Lacanian orders, the third being “the symbolic”. The symbolic order is in Lacan’s definition the social and verbal world into which we are born; in the symbolic the subject is the subject of language, desire, and social order, being marked by that split or lack or fissure (called “the symbolic castration”) implied in speaking, desiring and being a social creature. In the imaginary the subject is without this fissure: complete (as we can dream to be “hole” and “perfect” figures, be it in a new age dream of self presence, or in a teenage dream of becoming a star). In the real the subject is that which escapes symbolic (verbal, social) definition as well as imaginary ideals: mortal body and ungraspable spectrality. So in the imaginary, the subject is “something”, in the real he is “nothing” – and in the symbolic, if he subjects himself to it without making of his symbolic position (be it “man” or “professor” or “space ranger”) an imaginary identification, he is “not nothing”. As in the example of Buzz Lightyear: believing he is really “something” (THE Buzz Lightyear on a mission from big O aka outer space), coming through his fall to find himself as “nothing”, and finally realizing that he is “not nothing” (a Buzz Lightyear).

The two dimensions of the gaze of the Other have been termed by Todd McGowan “the imaginary look” (the camera before which you are posing) and “the real gaze” (the skull suddenly staring back at you). (McGowan 2007: 1) McGowan renews Lacanian film theory by turning the focus from “the imaginary look” (film as ideal images dictated by the dominating ideology, including ideal images of women dictated by patriarchy) to “the real gaze” (cinema as the place where you can actually meet Norman Bates staring back at you).

### **Woody Caught by his Image**

There is a scene in *Toy Story 2* in which the dialectics of the gaze is performed in an aesthetic and philosophical parallel with Hans Holbein: the scene where “the cleaner” comes to repair Woody. Before turning to this scene, though, a short summary of the film’s plot is needed. In *Toy Story 2* Woody learns about vanity. Both in the sense of being obsessed with one’s own image, and in the sense of mortality. In the beginning of the film, while Andy is playing with him, his arm loosens. As a result he is not coming with Andy to “cowboy camp”, but put on the shelf (the toys have a word for this: “being shelved”) where he finds “Squeeze”, an old dust-covered plastic penguin whose “squeeze” doesn’t work any more, and has a psychedelic night mare (not unlike the night mare sequel from Hitchcock’s *Vertigo*) about Andy throwing him into the dust bin in a whirling fall among loose parts of broken toys. Next day, Squeeze is collected by Andy’s mother for a yard sale; in

saving him Woody ends up as an item in the sale himself. He is spotted by the fat and greedy toy collector Al who finally steals him as Andy's mother does not want to sell him. In the collector's home Woody finds out that he is part of a toy "set" (including a cowboy girl, a prospector, and a horse), and star of a former TV-show for kids. He meets the other figures from his set and falls completely in love with his own appearance on the TV screen. Trying to escape, though, his loose arm falls completely off, but in the most fascinating scene in the film he is repaired by an old toy specialist called "the cleaner", and finally ready to be sent by air plane to the museum in Tokyo that has bought the whole set of cowboy toys expensively. Andy's other toys, though, have set out to rescue him, finding their way to "Al's Toy Barn", where a hilarious comedic exchange is played out between Buzz and his (still deluded) double: one of the numerous other "Buzzes" on the shelf getting out of his box, for a time replacing the "real" Buzz, but finally being discovered and left behind in happy harmony with his former enemy and most Darth Vaderish father, Zurg (having declared himself with the *Star Wars* line: "I am your father"). After a thrilling hunt at the airport, where Woody's arm falls off again, the toys, including the rest of Woody's set, are all back in Andy's home – and Andy sews Woody's arm back on in clumsy boy's stitches, as a counterpoint to the perfect reparation by "the cleaner".

There are several similarities between the plots and themes of *Toy Story 1* and *2*: a toy is taken away from home by some evil force, be it the neighbor's kid or the toy collector, experiencing some kind of symbolic castration or even crucifixion. (Buzz and Woody both loose one arm, Buzz as he tries to fly, and Woody as he tries to escape - and after their dismembering they are both staged in a kind of "imitatio Christi": Buzz lying as a cross on the floor, Woody hanging on his metal cross in the collector's glass box.) But where as Buzz' symbolic castration takes him out of his psychotic delusion that he is on a mission from outer space (an instrument of some big Other), Woody's castration (which has to happen twice) finally takes him out of his narcissist infatuation with his own appearance (his imaginary posing before the big Other).

### **The Eye as a Stain**

Addressing the theme of vanity and the gaze, let us start with the scene where "the cleaner" comes to fix Woody's arm – to me one of the best scenes in Pixar. Through the technique of montage the scene subtly stages the play between the eye as the site of gaze and as an object, "le schism de l'oeuil et du regard", as Lacan calls it. The music for the scene is reminiscent of Tchaikovsky's *The Nut Cracker*, or Offenbach's *The Tales of Hoffmann*, and thus suggests the theme of toys becoming alive, like the toys in E. T. A. Hoffmann's tales, not at least the doll Olympia in "Der Sandmann" in which the gaze and the loose eye ball play an important part.

As the old "cleaner", with his big nose and his white hairy eye brows, is approaching Woody, the point of view is switching between the cleaner and Woody, whose eyes in the

“objective” shot of his face are just painted surfaces, no site of the look. Well seated vis-à-vis Woody, placing his tool box on the table and Woody in a metal clamp like in a barber’s or dentist’s chair, the old man takes out an optic glass to have a closer look at his “specimen”. This glass becomes to the spectator a screen through which the cleaner’s eye is looking, as well as the screen through which we are looking at the cleaner’s eye. Thus we are switching between the eye as the site of the gaze, and the eye as the object to be gazed upon. Furthermore, the eye as an object is represented in this scene by the loose eyeballs in the cleaner’s toolbox. Another tool besides the looking glass functions as an axis between the old man and Woody, between eye-as-subject and eye-as-object, and that is the cotton pin with which the old man cleans Woody’s eye. We see the pin approaching from Woody’s point of view – and then we actually share his experience of getting it into the eye: the cotton of the pin fills out the whole screen which then for a moment goes completely white, cutting to the scene in the toy store which breaks up the cleaner scene as an intermezzo. This “white out” is later repeated in a “black out” when we, for a moment, in a really crazy shot, seem to experience the situation from the gap in Woody’s body, closing as the old man is sewing the arm back on.

The scene’s switching between subjective and objective shot may remind us of that which Žižek calls the Hitchcockian montage (for instance the switch in *Psycho* between Janet Leigh looking at Norman’s gothic house, and some indiscernible point in the house looking back at her). (Žižek 1991: 117) This kind of montage implies the experience of the object looking back, which might be said to be the general idea of the *Toy Story* films: the toy is looking back; the world is seen from the toy’s perspective. The cleaner scene in *Toy Story 2* actually is montage to a higher degree than any other Pixar scene – it is more cut than any other scene (that is what we are told in the commentary track). At the same time one must notice that the camera in this scene is moving in a smooth and sliding, almost caressing way, in this way kind of harmonizing the cut, the fissure, the schism between the eye and the gaze, just as the cleaner is actually repairing Woody. Despite the smoothing, harmonizing camera, one might argue, though, that in this scene we get close to the real gaze – which appears as a stain in our visual field. The stain representing the real of the gaze is for instance the skull in Holbein’s painting, or the birds in Hitchcock’s *The Birds*. In the cleaner scene the stain might be said to be represented by Woody’s blind painted wooden eyes, or by that black out which appears when in a split second the point of view moves to this really crazy, impossible place: the fibers of the cloth of Woody’s shirt, closing as the old man is sewing.

## **Nostalgia and Montage**

The main theme of *Toy Story 2* may be seen as Woody’s lingering between being exposed to “the real gaze”, and to “the imaginary look.” Exposed to the real gaze he becomes the object of mortality, exposed to the imaginary look, watching himself as a TV star, he becomes the object of

the big Other as in the mirror stage. The scene when he is watching himself starring in the TV show “Woody’s Round up” is wonderful: his face and his whole body irradiates infatuation – this is how a man looks when he falls completely in love with his own image. The play between real gaze and imaginary look in the film stages the story of Woody’s objectification, showing itself both in the real (as Woody becoming a dead or mortal body), in the symbolic (Woody becoming a commodity, an object of exchange), and in the imaginary (the fantasmatic side of the commodity; Woody as a precious collector’s item).

*Toy Story 2* even seems to play out an allusion to that Hitchcock film in which the gaze is the most predominant theme: *Vertigo*. The psychedelic style of Woody’s dream in the beginning of the film is reminiscent of James Stewart’s nightmare in *Vertigo*, and his whirling and seemingly endless fall into the abyss of the dust bin is a version of that fall into the swirl of the abyss that *Vertigo* is all about, and that might convincingly be interpreted as the fall into the abyss of the human eye. (Žižek 1991: 87) With Woody also a set of playing cards fall to the floor, uncannily revealing themselves to be all aces of spades, looking all like black pupils on the white background of the playing cards. (According to the commentary track ace of spade was chosen because in Tarot it is the card of death, but this extra-filmic allegorical meaning does not annul the intra-filmic visual suggestion of pupils, contributing to the theme of the gaze.) Thus, Woody’s anxious experience of mortality is coupled to images that might be interpreted as the experience of the eye as rather a flat surface or an abyss than a site of the look and a mirror of the soul.

According to Žižek in *Looking Awry*, there are three filmic ways to cope with “the gaze”, or with the antimony between the eye and the gaze: pornography, nostalgia, and montage. (Žižek 1991: 107) In pornography the spectator is paralyzed by being reduced to the object-gaze, which is thus absent from the picture. (Please notice that this is quite another way of understanding pornography than the way of Laura Mulvey in her famous essay “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema”, 1975. Mulvey regards the position of the spectator as that of the subject-master – with Žižek he is rather the object-victim.) In nostalgia the gaze of the Other is included as the innocent and naive gaze that supports the gaze of the spectator: we imagine a gaze to which the world portrayed is completely natural and familiar. Montage, finally, is the most faithful to the antimony between eye and gaze. In *Toy Story*, and in Pixar’s animation films in general, nostalgia may seem the most adequate description. The films depend on what Žižek calls “the subject supposed to believe” (Žižek 2006: 29), in this case the child, the fantasy of whom is actually what animates the animators. The “subject supposed to believe” is a variation of “the subject supposed to know”. We depose the innocent, naive, believing gaze in the eye balls of the child, thus supporting our own enjoyment. Nevertheless I have tried through the cleaner scene to show also an element of montage and of exposing the stain, the real gaze.

## **The Virtual, the Real**

Turning to computer animated films as a Lacanian cultural analyst one must consider the question whether virtual reality in itself somehow excludes the real. "Virtual reality [...] provides reality itself divested of its substance, of the resisting hard kernel of the real" (Žižek 2006: 38) Thereby joining the phenomena that Žižek has cleverly seen as characteristic of our late capitalist culture: matters being deprived of their dangerous substance: coffee without caffeine, beer without alcohol, sweets without sugar, vampires without (human) blood (as in *True Blood* and *Twilight*). So, when film is deprived of human bodies, is it deprived of the hard kernel of the real? Here perhaps, the one human presence of Pixar's animation films, the voice, being actually performed by live actors, comes to play a role. Even in other dimensions the computer animated construction of reality (as opposed to "the real") is actually not completely controlled: the medium will react in unforeseen ways, and the crossing of story, animation, music, lines, characters in combination with the amount of people working to create the film will make the result never predictable.

Žižek relates virtual reality to what he calls interpassivity (as opposed to interactivity), and of which he sees Hollywood as an agent: Hollywood takes care of our feelings, so that we can just sit down in the cinema and relax. Žižek sees this as a modern, sentimental version of the chorus in Greek tragedies. (Žižek 2006: 22) If one wants a Greek chorus in *Toy Story*, one should just turn on the commentary track. In one scene in *Toy Story 2*, when the cow girl Jessie, one of the other figures in Woody's "set", sings her very sad song about being abandoned by the child who once loved her, the commentary goes: "It's so emotional, there is so much emotion in this scene – oh, the amount of emotion that she puts into this song."

## **Woman between Maniac and Zombie**

The cow girl Jessie was, according to the commentary track, created as an answer to the demand for "a strong female character". This seems quite comic, or perhaps quite symptomatic of our time, as Jessie's "strength", if she has any, is a kind of boyish wildness. When Jessie first appears, she actually seems to be a complete maniac: attacking Woody with her uninhibited enthusiasm, screaming: "it's you it's you it's you". Later on we learn that besides this maniac mood, Jessie can get really blue; she is provided with a "traumatic" psycho-biography, told in her sad song, "When somebody loves you", about being a girl's greatest love, until that girl grew into a giggling teenager painting her nails and not playing with toys anymore. The "flash back" scene in which Jessie for a moment believes that the grown up Emily has finally taken her back - only to find that she is taking her to the dump – is highly sentimental.

Actually, with her switching between mania and the blues, Jessie inaugurates what seems to be a persistent type in Pixar: the manic-depressive female character, later to be found for

instance in *Wall-E* and *Up*. In *Wall-E* we have the character of “Eve”, the Mac-like, white and aerodynamically shaped robot who either freaks out completely in Wall-E’s garage, threatening to smash up everything in her wild dance, or, after having been fertilized, falls into a death-like slumber, closing upon herself. In *Up* we have Fredericksen’s wife, being both the little completely uninhibited girl kind of invading Fredericksen as a boy, and the grown up woman folding herself together in her grief for the child she cannot have. This is clearly one picture of “femininity” in Pixar: women are either uninhibited maniacs or depressive zombies. It corresponds to two typical “feminine” positions in our culture: Woman as the one who cannot contain herself, who is somehow flowing over her borders, and Woman as the mystery closing upon herself in some kind of secret communion (Freud’s “dark continent”, Lacan’s feminine position).

### **Gaining from Loss**

When Woody chooses to stay with his “set” and be sent to the museum in Tokyo, he chooses to stay in the projector of the imaginary look, being its precious object. The smoothing, healing “camera” movement of the cleaner scene wins over its dimension of exposing us to the real gaze. Woody is restored to the point where his symbolic inscription, his name-of-the-father, disappears: the letters “ANDY” on his sole are painted over, marking his exit from the symbolic order and complete entry into the imaginary one. One might say that he chooses the museum life out of compassion for the rest of his set (Jessie being traumatized from her life locked away in the stock), but the images of the film, showing his overwhelming enjoyment with his own image, tell another story: a subject being driven by the imaginary look, being caught in the lime light of the big Other.

If *Toy Story 1* can be said to tell the story of Woody symbolically “castrating” Buzz, *Toy Story 2* could be said to tell the story of Buzz “castrating” Woody. As I have already pointed out, though, they are castrated “from” two different states: Buzz from the psychotic state of being the instrument of the big Other (the space control), Woody from the narcissist state of being the idol of big O (the public). When Woody in *Toy Story 1* tells Buzz: “YOU ARE A TOY”, it means: “you are not a space ranger”. When in *Toy Story 2* Buzz addresses exactly the same line at Woody, it means: “you are not a collector’s item”. Whereas Buzz’ castration throws him into femininity (as Sid’s sister dresses him up as “Mrs. Nesbit”), Woody’s castration throws him into mortality. Woody’s choice between the glass coffin for exposition and the shaft through which his friends have come to save him, seems to be a choice between immortality and finitude.

In both the case of Woody and of Buzz, the “castration” is symbolized by the loss of an arm. But they get their arms back on in different ways: In Buzz’ case in a kind of magical operation performed by Sid’s surrealistic constellations, gathering around him in a way that hides to the spectator what is happening, symbolizing perhaps that reparative phase of artistic creation à la Melanie Klein to which they seem in their very constitution to bear witness. In Woody’s case the

arm is sewn back on twice: the first time in the cleaner's perfect and invisible stitches, making it as good (or even better) as new. The second time in Andy's clumsy sewing, stuffing the arm's filling unevenly, so the upper arm becomes much too thick. The point is that Woody finally likes Andy's clumsy repair better than the cleaner's perfect one, and the "mistake", the deformity of the upper arm, seems actually to be able to take on new values as a signifier: Woody poses as a body builder, showing off his swelling "biceps". So, actually his signifier of "castration", the deformed arm, becomes a sign of potency. Which may be what "castration" is all about: gaining from your loss. Gaining access to language and symbolization, to that play of signifiers in which every phenomenon, even a deformed arm, is ready to be filled with new and never absolute meaning. If *Toy Story 1* tells us the story of the psychotic subject becoming a split subject (a normal-neurotic toy ...) through his fall, *Toy Story 2* tells us the story of the subject being tempted to congeal in imaginary perfection, but finally coming to terms with his imperfection, his fissure, being staged as the fissure between the imaginary look and the real gaze.

## **Conclusion**

I have tried in this article to point out how Pixar's computer animated films pose the question of "animation" as not only a technical, but also a philosophical problem, and how the Lacanian understanding of the crucial devices of animation, voice and gaze, might help us analyzing the films. On the other hand I hope that the analysis of the films may contribute to a further understanding of the Lacanian concepts of "voice" and "gaze", or more precisely: that the images of the films may function as the temporary and illuminating flesh, the Lacanian concepts being the bones that are invisible without such flesh, but cannot be reduced to it either. In the analysis of *Toy Story 1* "voice" was central to the animation of the character Woody, whereas the-name-of-the-father (as distinct from the-father-of-enjoyment) and the symbolic castration (as distinct from sadistic mutilation) were suggested as ways to conceptualize the subjectivization of Buzz Lightyear. In the analysis of *Toy Story 2* "gaze" was the prism that made it possible to formulate the central theme as the subject's lingering between being the object of the real gaze and the object of the imaginary look, leading into the discussion of the difference between nostalgia and montage, and the question whether virtual reality (such as computer animated film) can be said to have a "real" dimension at all. On the most basic level my analysis of *Toy Story 1 - 2* rests upon the psychoanalytic understanding of the subject as constituted by a lack, a split, a fissure – and claims that both films tell us the story of this constitution.



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