

ERASERFEAR

SCIENCE FICTION MONSTERS IN THE CITY OF THE SOUL

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SUMMARY

Based on the concepts of simile and metaphor in Homeric epic and Aristotelian aesthetics, this article studies in depth the relations between the film *Cloverfield* and the imagery of the invasive monster as a threat to city's security, regarding the symbolic background of September 11 attacks. The author insists in the presence of an audiovisual style which privileges the emotion and the sentimental register –through the platonic theory of soul- as intimate vehicles of fiction, confronting at the same time this emotional trace against the shadows of fear and its erasing capacity as the greatest metaphors of contemporary monstrosity.

KEY WORDS

Aesthetics, Philosophy, Film, Science Fiction, Simile, Metaphor, Monster, Alien, Fear, City, Soul, J. J. Abrams, *Cloverfield*, September 11 attacks, Terrorism, United States, New York, Pop music, Memory, Video camera, Recording, Erase

ARTICLE

Cloverfield is fantasy. The movie is meant to be entertainment — to give people the sort of thrill I had as a kid watching monster movies. I hadn't seen anything that felt that way for many years. I felt like there had to be a way to do a monster movie that's updated and fresh. So we came up with the YouTube-ification of things, the ubiquity of video cameras, cell phones with cameras. The age of self-documentation felt like a wonderful prism through which to look at the monster movie. Our take is what if the absolutely preposterous would happen? How terrifying would that be? The video camera, we all have access to; there's a certain odd and eerie intimacy that goes along with those videos. Our take is a classic B monster movie done in a way that makes it feel very real and relevant, allowing it to be simultaneously spectacular and incredibly intimate.

JJ. Abrams (Statements made to Rebecca Winters Keegan "Cloverfield: Godzilla goes 9/11", *Time*, Jan, 16, 2008)

1. SIMILE AND METAPHOR

Agamemnon, by his sword, has just sent Iphidamas to Hades. Coon, brother of the latter, attacks Agamemnon, and runs a spear through his arm. Moments later, Coon's head is separated from his body on Iphidamas's corpse. Agamemnon's wound allows him to continue his terrible task. But when the blood ceases to gush, he is overcome by such sharp pain he is forced to leave the field of battle for that day. How can we know what pain was felt by Agamemnon? How intense is a wound that passes right through the forearm? Homer compares it with the terrible pain produced by the pointed darts that the Eileithyia, the divinities of childbirth, throw at women when they give birth. With this simile, anybody, man or woman, can accurately imagine how intense was the pain of the wound suffered by Agamemnon.

Homer, in the *Iliad* above all, makes reiterated use of the stylistic resource of the simile, and he does so with a cognitive, not merely aesthetic function. Indeed, the simile helps to find out about the unknown, either because it is far from the day to day environment and activities of the listener, or because it is something intangible, like willingness or courage. And we travel from the known to the

unknown along the path of similarity. In summary, the simile is a mechanism of the production of knowledge through the comparison of two heterogeneous things, one which is easy and immediately cognoscible and the other which is not, based on the perception of a certain similarity between the two in some way.

The ability to perceive similarities between heterogeneous things is the basis of good metaphors since, as Aristotle established in his *Poetics*, "to make good metaphors (*metapherein*) implies an eye for resemblances" (*Poe.* 7-8). And Aristotle adds that the skill in making good metaphors cannot be borrowed from anyone, but depends on one's own talent.

The metaphor, in Aristotle's classical doctrine, therefore, presupposes the simile, that is to say, needs the capturing of a resemblance between two heterogeneous things. And the production of the metaphor is a peculiar way of naming. Indeed, Aristotle defines the metaphor as "the application of an alien name by transference" (*Poe.* 1457 b 6). That is to say, via the metaphor we name a thing with the name of another. Such transfer of names is also a mechanism of knowledge production of the thing named with the name that does not belong to it. Aristotle distinguishes four kinds of metaphor. Here I am only interested in the "analogical" kind of metaphor.

In *Nicomachean Ethics* (*EN.* 1131 to 31-32), Aristotle defines analogy as an "equality of ratios", and specifies that it requires at least four terms. In his *Poética -Poetics* he specifies that he calls analogy provided there is a resemblance (of relation) between the second and the first term and the fourth and the third. Let us consider these four terms: "evening", "day", "old age" and "life". It is obvious that there is a resemblance in the relation that exists between the "evening" and the "day" on the one hand and the one that exists between "old age" and "life" on the other, in the sense that both "evening" and "old age" express the future expiry of two heterogeneous courses of time, that of the day and that of life, respectively. This resemblance of relations ("imminent expiry") between heterogeneous things, this analogy between the parts of the day and of life, justify speaking of the "evening of life" or of the "old age of the day". Obviously, the specific terms used to speak of these phenomena of life and of the day are not being used, but we perceive new meanings of both which are not brought about by the appropriate or expected uses of "evening" and "old age". To this end, naming something with a different name, that is to say, using a metaphor, constitutes a mechanism of knowledge production.

2. CATAclysms OF THE CITY OF THE SOUL

Plato, in the *Republic*, assimilated his utopian city (*Kalípolis*) to the soul (*psyché*) of the human being, as he conceived it, comprising three different parts. The Greek philosopher took his simile to the extreme of establishing a radical isomorphism between the soul and the city as regard the number of their parts and relative functions. Since Plato, in western tradition, it is permissible to speak of the city of soul (and of the soul of the city).

The comparison between the soul and the city is not gratuitous or dispensable since there is nothing so intangible in the human being, and therefore, requiring similes so that we can get to know and understand it, as the soul, the place where betrayal and deceit "hurt", which is "wounded" by insidious or mean words, and which can be "destroyed" or "ruined" by coldness, indifference or contempt for the loved one.

The simile between the soul and the city has often been resorted to by the cinema in order to show states of the soul by means of the description of cities visited, lived in and inhabited (and vice-versa). Hence we can understand immediately how lost in translation are two souls simply casting them into the streets of a far off Tokyo which is hermetic and incomprehensible for them. Or to understand the eclipse of the soul through the contemplation of an expanding part of Rome which slowly, masterfully fades before our eyes until blinded by the darkness of the night that surrounds them.

The comparison of the soul with the city is, in any case, a simile that allows us to imagine the "collapse" of the soul of somebody gazing at the demolition, the destruction and the collapse of the city through which he wanders or flees aimlessly.

On the other hand, no emotion is so capable of collapsing the harmony of the soul as fear, "the oldest and strongest emotion of mankind", as H.P. Lovecraft writes in *Supernatural horror in Literature*.

Aristotle defined fear (*phóbos*) in his *Rhetoric* as a "pain or agitation derived from the imagination of a future destructive or painful evil" (*Ret.* a 21-22). Of course, fear for the Greek

philosopher is one of the emotions produced in the soul, and like all destructive emotion is accompanied by "pain" (*EN* 1105 b 21-23).

But "fear" is as intangible and invisible as the place it inhabits, the soul. Therefore, in order to know what it is, and which are its works, we need to imagine it to ourselves, give it a face. And that is what that brilliant "maker of images", in the words of Plato (*eidóλου demiourgós*, *Rep.* 599 d 3), who was Homer, did too.

In Homer, *Phóbos*, who is still just the personification of the flight, outlines Athena's shield, in her facet as predatory goddess of war. Within the "*phobic*" outline, the head of Gorgon was etched. For the Greeks, the Gorgons, one of which is Medusa, represent, as Jean-Pierre Vernant puts it, "the extreme of horror". But Vernant is even more explicit: 'Whatever kinds of distortion used, the figure [of the Gorgons] systematically plays on the confusion of human and bestial elements, juxtaposed and mingled in a variety of ways. The enlarged rounded head recalls the face of a lion, the eyes are staring; the gaze is fixed and piercing, the hair resembles an animal's mane or bristles with snakes, the ears are overly large, deformed –at times like those of a cow–, horns sometimes grow from the skull, the gaping, grinning mouth extends so far that it cuts across the breadth of the face revealing rows of teeth, fangs, or wild boar tusks, the tongue thrusts forward and protrudes outside the mouth, the chin is hairy or bearded, and the skin is sometimes furrowed with deep wrinkles' (Jean-Pierre Vernant, *La muerte en los ojos. Figuras del Otro en la antigua Grecia - Death in the eyes. Figures of the Other in ancient Greece*, Barcelona, Gedisa, 1996: 44). It is hardly surprising, therefore, that Homer, in the *Odyssey*, says that the head of Gorgon produces a "monstrous terror" (*Od.* XI 634). And, as Ovid tells us (*Metamorphosis*, IV 779-785), whomever shall look at the face of the Medusa head on, with her snakes for hair, shall turn into a stone statue, shall remain stone, paralysed. If Medusa is for the body of man what fear is to his soul, it can be understood why sudden, intense, unbearable fear should petrify the soul.

"Soul" and "city", and "fear" and "monster", two similes, and four terms. Fear undoubtedly belongs to the soul, and the cinematographic monsters of science fiction always head for the cities. If there is a "resemblance" of the relationship that exists between fear and the soul, on the one hand, and the monsters of science fiction cinema on the other, then we now have four terms that, at least, are required in order to build "analogical" metaphors, as Aristotle demands. Without a doubt, such a "resemblance" of relationship exists and is obvious: destructive capacity. Fear destroys the soul. And

the monsters of science fiction destroy cities. We therefore express ourselves metaphorically when we speak of the terrified city, but also of the monsters that threaten our souls. Intense, uncontrollable fear destroys the soul just as the monsters of cinematographic science fiction raze the cities.

Therefore, nothing as suitable to tell of the collapse of the soul triggered by fear, both intangible, as resorting to the collective cinematographic imagery of the destruction of cities devastated by prehistoric, radioactive, mutant monsters and other giant living creatures. And that is what *Cloverfield* does; tell the story of the emotional catastrophe that devastates its main character, Rob, and “display” the state of destruction of his soul as a result of fear. But as fear cannot be seen, it is intangible, there is nothing left to do, if we wish to get a rough idea of how intense and destructive it is, than to do so by analogy, with an “analogical” metaphor. And the metaphor, which has been rigorously constructed in accordance with the strict terms established by Aristotle, is this one: *Cloverfield* shows us “the monsters of Rob’s soul”.

3. THE COLLAPSE OF AN INTERNAL CITY: THE MONSTROUS CREATURES OF ROB’S SOUL.

In his critique, in *Time*, of 16 January 2008, Richard Corliss wrote as follows:

“An explosion shakes the earth. Flames spark through the night sky like fireworks. It’s either July 4th or Sept. 11th. More like the latter, because devastation and hysteria have engulfed lower Manhattan. Then, in flash glimpses, we see the cause of the carnage. A scaly tail, long as a city block and wide as a boulevard. A furtive figure 25 stories big. Whatever the thing is, it’s alien, it’s odd-looking and it’s royally pissed.

Most horror and monster stories follow a simple format: “What if [insert worst thing you can imagine]...?” In the junky, fitfully frightening, virally marketed new movie ..., the “if” is the worst thing you can remember. To wit: What if a previously unknown agent of evil were to destroy a world-famous New York City edifice? Not the World Trade Center, this time, but the Statue of Liberty — the Lady’s head is tossed like a used beer can onto a lower Manhattan street. And the Statue decapitator is not a team of al-Qaeda operatives but a scaly, 300-ft. monster, an American Godzilla.

Cloverfield, without a doubt, is a science fiction film with prehistoric or extraterrestrial creatures. As Hud says, “Ocean is big. Dude. All I’m saying is a couple of years ago, they found a fish in

Madagascar that they thought had been extinct for centuries (...) Maybe it erupted from an ocean trench, you know? Or a crevasse. Crevice. It's just a theory (cited from *Godzilla*, "Gojira", Ishiro Honda, 1954). I mean, for all we know, it's from another planet and it flew here." Hud is referring to the gigantic creature whose destructive, demolishing movements are causing such havoc in New York as caused by the prehistoric monster awakened by a nuclear explosion in the Arctic of *The Beast from 20000 Fathoms* ("Le monstre des temps perdus", Eugène Lourié, 1953). But the city also suffers the plague of thousands of repulsive animals which look like hymenopterics insects measuring a metre or a metre and a half, armed with poisonous claws, bugs that are slightly smaller than the mutant ants in *Them!* (Gordon Douglas, 1954). *Cloverfield* conceals photographs of the radioactive monsters of these two films, as well as one from *King Kong* (Merian C. Cooper and Ernest B. Schoedsack, 1933).



The Beast from de 20000 Fathoms (Eugène Lourié, 1953)



Them! (Gordon Douglas, 1954)



King Kong (Merian C. Cooper and Ernest B. Schoedsack, 1933)

But *Cloverfield*, as a science fiction monster film, it is, at least, atypical, because the main plot has absolutely nothing to do, not even tangentially, with the paradigmatic plot of the genre's archetypal films such as those cited: *Godzilla*, *The Beast from 20000 Fathoms* and *Them!* Indeed, in the films of monsters that threaten a city or the entire human race, the whole plot revolves around the efforts and means deployed by the governments, aided by scientists (there is always an eminent scientist who advises the authorities), in order to defeat the monster. In *Cloverfield* there are no politicians or authorities or scientists to be seen. Just the army. In fact, the plot of *Cloverfield* neither proposes nor

develops in orthodox fashion the appearance of the threat of a radioactive, prehistoric or extraterrestrial monster and the means that are provided to defeat or annihilate it. Nevertheless, *Cloverfield* is shaped with the imagery of the classic cinema of radioactive, science fiction monsters, plus the imagery coming from the reality of cities devastated by terrorist attacks shaped by television. That is how it is, the image of the behaviour of the bewildered masses fleeing like disoriented pilgrimages of zombies advancing through clouds of dust and bits of paper raining down slowly towards the ground that we seen in *Cloverfield*, as anyone will realise instantly, comes from the collective imagery that arose as a result of the New York terrorist attacks of the 11-S, an imagery that has been created and nurtured at the same time by images recorded spontaneously by thousands of people who were engulfed in the heart of the catastrophe, that have been shown on television repeatedly throughout the world.

Cloverfield, as I have already said, is the story of the emotional catastrophe that is destroying Rob, and it "displays" the state of destruction in which his soul is left due to fear.

Rob is a young winner, about to set off for Japan to take over the vice-presidency of a Japanese multinational. Rob pines for Beth McIntyre, a beautiful, delightful young lady, and he has a brother, Jason, whose girlfriend is Lily.

Almost at the start of the film we attend the party that Lily, Jason and Hud, a friend of Rob's, have secretly organised at his flat to see him off. It is a multitudinous party with lots of young friends, a good atmosphere and music. Rob arrives, and after his initial surprise at the party, asks Jason whether Beth is going to be there, to which his brother replies that she is. They talk, and soon after Beth turns up. But she is accompanied by another young man, Travis, which would certainly vex Rob. However, Rob goes to the door to greet Beth, and after a civilised exchange of words, each goes their separate way. The party continues. Then we see Beth talking excitedly to Travis and other guests. Conversely, Rob remains seated alone on a sofa, drinking sake, and in sadness, observing Beth among the people. Then, determinedly, he goes up to her and asks if they can speak. We then witness an exchange of reproaches between the two. First an angry Beth says to Rob: "You never even called me, Rob!". And Rob replies: "You go and bring some guy to my party?" To which Beth answers: "Hold on! You haven't talked to me in weeks!" Just then, Hud appears and we stop hearing the conversation. Later, when Hud comments to Jason that he has found Rob and Beth arguing, they

decide to go in search of Lily because they suspect she might know something. After slight resistance, Lily lets out the big secret: "Rob and Beth slept together".

After the argument, Beth returns to the party and looks for Travis in order to leave. Upon leaving, she crosses paths with Rob. Then she says to him, quite warmly, "Good luck in Japan, Rob", to which he replies, looking down to the floor, "Good luck tonight, Travis". Beth gesticulates in response to this reply in surprise and incredulity.

Lily, Hud and Jason have realised the whole thing. Then Lily persuades her friends to go and talk to Rob. He tries to convince them that there is nothing the matter, although his face shows patent emotional anguish. The following conversation then takes place:

Hud: She was heartbroken

Rob: Look, there's no "together". It's just her and me, two separate things. It's better if we just stay friends.

Jason: ... not that I feel like I'm not good enough for her! No, stop, stop! I didn't say "feel", Rob. You're not good enough for her. That's it. That's fact. That's science. Beth McIntyre is, like, from a whole 'nother planet, man. She's beautiful. She's charming. And you... I love you, but let's face it, you're kind of a douchebag. And going to Japan is not gonna fix that. She's crazy about you, bro. Like, right now, as you are.

Hud: And you're in love with her.

Jason: But you got to go after her.

Rob: It's not that simple.

Jason: No, it is that simple, Rob.

Hud: Come on, man. Don't be scared.

Jason: It's about moments, man. That's all that... You got to learn to say, "Forget the world", and hang on to the people that you care about the most.

Just when Jason says this, the first explosion is heard and everything shakes. Now let us analyse the music that is heard at Rob's party.

Barring the music for the end credits, "Roar!", a composition by Michael Giacchino that pays homage to Akira Ifukube's overture accompanying the initial credits of *Godzilla*, the only music we hear throughout *Cloverfield* is the music heard at the party. In other words, all of the music of the film is *diegetic*. And here are some of the songs with some of their lyrics:

West Coast, by Coconut Records:

For a second there I thought you disappeared
It rains a lot this time of year
And we both go together if one falls down
I talk out loud like you're still around
And I miss you I'm going back home to the west coast
I wish you woulda put yourself in my suitcase
I love you
Standin' all alone in a black coat
I miss you
I'm goin' back home to the west coast
And if you shake her heart enough she will appear

Beautiful girl, by Sean Kingston:

You're way too beautiful girl
That's why it'll never work
You'll have me suicidal, suicidal
When you say its over
(...)
Oh when you took my heart
That's when we fell apart

Coz we both thought
That love lasts forever (lasts forever)
(...)
Now were fussin'
And now were fightin'
Please tell me why define
I'm feelin' slightin'
And I don't know
How to make it better (make it better)
You're datin' other guys
You're tellin' me lies
Oh I can't believe
What I'm seein' with my eyes
I'm losin' my mind
And I don't think its clever (think its clever)

Do I have your attention, by The Blood Arm.

I can't control all of this for long.
You can't keep changing the words to my songs.
'Cause when you shake, I shake and when you dance, I break
and then I brace myself to sing it again.

Come on girl, one last time
let me know you're still alive
Let me know that it's not all in vain.

Do I have your attention,

Do I have your attention,

Did I fail to mention this situation is a mess?

Conversations never end, but maybe I'm deluded.

Do I have you attention right now?

We also hear *Taper Jean Girl* and *Pistol of Fire* by Kings of Leon, *Give up the Funk*, by Parliament, *Seventeen years*, by Ratatat, *Wraith pinned to the mist and other games*, by Of Montreal and *Policewoman*, by The Ride. There is no doubt. The vast majority of the songs heard at the party, deal with the same issue: Rob and Beth's situation or, more precisely, how Rob sees his situation with regard to Beth. But, which are Rob's musical themes?

A short while before Rob arrives at the party, *Got your moments* by Scissors for Lefty is playing, in anticipation of what his brother Jason tells him later on the balcony: "It's about moments, man. That's all that... You got to learn to say, "Forget the world", and hang on to the people that you care about the most"

Got your moments, Scissors for Lefty:

I'll never ever get you

mrs. complete enigma

but you seem to have your moments

that really matters

hey!

chorus:

I don't love you but I love, love, love you

and I don't miss you but I miss, miss, miss you

inconsistent, rollercoaster this is

no expectations

I love your moments, moments anymore.

When we see Rob again *My kind of lover* is playing, by Locksley:

Though you left me behind, you're still on my mind.

Yeah!

Well you've been gone for so long, girl.

Yeah!

But I keep hanging on, girl.

Yeah!

Until you tell me I'm wrong, oh girl.

If you'd only be, lying here with me.

Then I'm sure you'd know, then I'm sure you'd see.

There's a place for us, at least I think there was.

(...)

You're just my kind of lover (time to love her)

You're just my kind of lover, my kind of lover.

My kind of lover

The party continues and suddenly we begin to hear *19-2000*, by Gorillaz. Who is about to appear? The beauty (the beast and the beauty), Beth.

When, after Rob's disappointment at seeing Beth turn up in company, we see him sitting observing Beth to the tune of *The underdog*, by Spoon. And that is because right then Rob feels like a loser (*underdog*: a loser or predicted loser in a struggle or contest):

I know you think that it ain't too far

But I hear the call of a lifetime ring

felt the need to get up for it
oh you cut out the middleman
get free from the middleman
You got no time for the messenger,
got no regard for the thing that you don't understand,
you got no fear of the underdog,
that's why you will not survive!
(...)
but can I get out from under it?
Can I gut it out of me?
It can't all be wedding cake
It can't all be boiled away
I try but I can't let go of it
Can't let go of it

Later on, when Rob goes to look for Beth and tries in vain to clear things up, *Disco Lies*, by Moby is playing:

You said you want me that was just a lie
You said you love me that was just a lie
All I needed was someone who could keep me warm at night
You tried it baby but didn't work and now I know that this is gonna be
the end
How could you lie

You said you need me that was just a lie
You said the truth once that was just a lie
All I needed was someone who could keep me warm at night

You tried it baby but didn't work and now i know that this is gonna be

the end

How could you lie

All I needed was someone who could keep me warm at night

You tried it baby but didn't work and now i know that this is gonna be

the end

How could you lie

Of course, it is very difficult for anyone seeing the film for the first time to be able to recognise all of these songs. And of course, what would be a real chimera is a kind of "ideal spectator" who not only recognises them but automatically remembers their lyrics. But it is no less true to say that anyone can become an "ideal spectator" the second or third time he or she decides to attend Rob's party, if they have the slightest desire to understand, broadband internet connection, and the elementary conviction that a book is only read once it has been re-read two three or four times, and a film only just begins to be seen after the second, third or enth time.

In any case, the moment the party is abruptly interrupted, just when Hud has just told Rob not to be afraid, and Jason that it is the time to take a risk and start a relationship with the woman of his dreams, two things will have been hinted at: Rob's afflicted soul, and his fear.

After the explosion that shakes the whole city, everyone evacuates the building. Henceforth we witness the fear tormenting Rob's soul through a city plunged into chaos crumbling under the attacks of a monstrous creature, and whose inhabitants are lethally attacked by huge, revolting insects.

Rob, Hud, Lily, Marlene and Jason are in the middle of Brooklyn bridge in full flight. It is then that the event occurs which brings into the action what Aristotle, in his *Poética* technically calls *peripéteia*, "a change by which the action veers round to its opposite". A phone call from Beth to Rob marks the radical change in the real direction Rob is heading in, the direction of a dual (*phóbos*), both physical and emotional flight. In any case, it is not at the exact moment that he receives Beth's call

that Rob begins to walk in the opposite direction to which he was going in at that time, a tremor causes Brooklyn bridge to collapse triggering a terrified flight again towards Manhattan amidst the multitude present on the platform. As the bridge subsides, Jason, Rob's brother let us not forget, loses his life. When, finally, those who have saved their lives stop running, still breathless, Hud keeps telling Rob that he's sorry for what has happened to Jason. Rob is stunned, after all he has just lost his brother. But... who is Rob thinking about, there, in the middle of the street, staring into nothing, standing just beneath the clearly visible sign bearing SEPHORA, the multinational French cosmetics shops whose biblical name is explained as follows on their website: "Symbol of elegance, joy and freedom, it is the name, in the biblical tradition, of Moses' most beautiful wife. She is young, intelligent, bold, free and generous..."

You might well imagine, and you would probably be right, that the name SEPHORA appears there due to the simple reason of *product placement* or *embedded marketing*, especially if we take into account the fact that *Cloverfield* is a film that will be watched by millions of people. But the "poetic effect", which Umberto Eco defines as "the capacity that a text displays for continuing to generate different readings, without ever being completely consumed", is absolutely legitimate: Rob, who has just lost his brother, cannot stop thinking about Beth, the elegant, joyful, pretty, young, intelligent, free, generous...girl, with whom he is madly in love. The name SEPHORA placed slightly above Rob's head is a double brand, a commercial trademark, and the brand that unequivocally tells us who Rob is thinking about. Not his brother, surprisingly. His only concern, as we ascertain immediately, is to get hold of a battery for his mobile phone in order to be able to speak to Beth again. He manages to get one by pillaging an electronics shop opposite SEPHORA, in a scene which is now also familiar to us in our imagery created by television when it broadcasts images of looting as a result of lengthy power cuts that disarm security alarms and cameras and riots.

Inside the shop, Rob finally hears the message Beth has left him on his voice mail. She is in grave danger. And she faces danger in the most perilous place of all, the place from which everyone is fleeing. Then, upon completion of the suspended action on the bridge, Beth's call for help, the "peripeteia" is committed, the change of the action in the opposite direction: from the flight from danger there is a one hundred and eighty degree turn, and they set off in the direction of the danger. Otherwise, as Aristotle says, all peripeteia occurs credibly or necessarily. In this case, it may be argued that the twist in the action is not very credible in so far as reality is concerned. But if the

distance Rob is covering is emotional space, peripeteia occurs according to the inescapable and authoritarian necessity dictated by Eros.

Rob, beneath several television sets tuned in to the different channels covering the events live, decides to go and rescue Beth. Despite the huge risk, Lily, Hud and Marlene go with him. Here starts, in the most classical sense, the task of the hero heading to rescue the loved one in danger. And the thing is that Rob cannot bear the thought that Beth is unaware that he loves her profusely. As Rob and Lily make headway along a dark underground tunnel they have the following conversation:

Rob: I just can't stop thinking about how the last thing I said to her was "Good luck tonight, Travis"

Lily: She knows you didn't mean that. When I think of some the things I said to Jason... (it is impossible for us to know this, and hence this declaration of Lily's is surprising)

Rob: No, that's different

Lily: Why?

Rob: Jason knew you loved him.

Having battled through great danger, Rob finds Beth unconscious, with an iron rod through her chest. She finally opens her eyes, and in a sweet tone, whispering, they exchange the following dialogue:

Beth: - Are you really here?

Rob: Yeah, I'm really here

Beth: Rob? You came back for me

Rob: Of course, I came back for you.

In any case, all Rob's effort will have been in vain because having rescued Beth, they fail to escape. Too late to find a way out. The time has come. The two of them, alone (Hud has been killed by the creature, and Lily has managed to escape in another helicopter), they end up buried under the

rubble of the bridge beneath which they had taken refuge. Following a nightmarish flight (*phóbos*), in which Rob has dreamed his worst dreams, (rats around his feet, telling his mother that his brother has died), in the end, the insects with the deadly claws and the monstrous creature have buried Rob's soul beneath tonnes of rubble. These monsters are the face of the fear that inhabits the city of Rob's soul.

But if fear and the soul are intangible (a scientist reduction of the fear of adrenocorticotropin), so necessarily is the means of fear acting on the soul. Therefore, again only via similes and metaphors can we get an idea of how fear operates.

4. FEAR, THE ERASER TAPE. THE HAPPINESS OF THE SOUL

Socrates, in the introductory passage of the metaphor of the soul (or the mind for Locke in his work *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* of 1690) as a *tabula rasa* (according to Saint Thomas of Aquino, human intellect, in the beginning is "sicut tabula rasa in qua nihil est scriptum", *Summa theologiae* I, q. 79, a 2), he asks Teeteto to accept the image that in our souls there is a wax tablet. This wax tablet, says Socrates, is a gift of Mnemosyne, the goddess of Greek mythology personifying the memory. And he adds that if we wish to remember something we have seen or heard or our thoughts, we apply these sensations or thoughts to the tablet, and "we imprint them on it, as we might stamp the impression of a signet-ring". Then, what we have etched, we remember and know as long as the image remains etched. But all that which is erased or has not actually been etched we forget and do not know (Plato, *Teeteto* 191 c8 – e1).

Plato, therefore, establishes with the utmost precision a simile between the memory of the soul and a wooden tablet covered in wax on one side, and, on the other, between the sensations we perceive and our thoughts and the images or material signals that can imprint their mark on wax tablets. Moreover, for Plato there exists a "resemblance in relation" between the visual and audible sensations and our thoughts, and the seals of signet-rings and wax tablets. This resemblance of different, irreducible relations that are maintained by heterogeneous things can be expressed as the "recording capacity", that of feelings and thoughts on the memory of the soul, and that of the signet-

rings on wax tablets. Naturally, if what we see and hear and think has the monstrous face of fear, then the memory of our soul is imprinted, etched with the effigy of a monstrous creature; in the memory of our soul, each time we get access to it, we will only be able to recall what was imprinted there as a *bas relief*, and it is ominously inhabited by the image of a monstrous creature.

Plato was a visionary in many ways. But the simile between the memory of the soul and an imprintable wax tablet takes us back to a vision of the future, our most recent present, simply fascinating. Currently, our life is being recorded, increasingly, on tablets, not made of wax, but digital ones, on memory sticks or memory cards. Marshall McLuhan, another visionary, wrote in *Understanding media* (1964) that "Our new electric technology is not an extension of our bodies but of our central nervous systems". The conclusion is immediate: digital memory supports are, in a real sense, electric extensions of the memory of our soul. And things that are capacitated to record or imprint these unexpected electric extensions of the memory of our soul are that other electric extension again of our soul, the digital video camera. So, digital video cameras, after harnessing through their eye (Vertov was another visionary) images of the outside, take and process them on electric circuits, recording them finally on digital memory cards, a perfect simile of the process through which our organic lenses harness images and take them to the optic nerve through which they are transported in electrical form to the memory of our soul. The digital video camera replaces the signet-ring. But there is one fundamental difference. The video camera is not an object capable of recording more than one image, like the signet-ring, but is just the object capable of recording. That is to say, the possible recordable images are potentially infinite, and therefore, the recorded images will also be infinite. And if what one records is fear, it will be stored in the electric extension of the memory of our soul with the face of the monster of the personal imagery of whoever makes the recording, which in the case of the digital video camera recording called *Cloverfield*, is that of the imaginative Hud (the only one on the group that the monster gives the honour of killing directly, not collaterally).

The narrative device of *Cloverfield* can be described as follows: a video recording erases a previous recording as it proceeds. At the beginning we are not quite sure whether the images of heterogeneous situations we watch in the first few minutes of the film are simple flashbacks. But at one given moment of the party, Hud comes up to Rob, while recording, and asks him what the matter is. Rob says nothing's the matter, but he suddenly looks into the lens and asks Hud: "Is that my

camera?" Hud replies that he does not know, that Jason handed it to him. Then Rob insists: "Did you switch the tape? Because I had a tape in there". So Hud stops recording to check the camera and we see a few seconds of the recording that is being erased. Then Hud says to Rob: "Tape was in here when I got it. Why? Rob, why?" Rob moves his head with a slight gesture of a mixture of frustration, melancholy and annoyance, and replies: "No, it doesn't matter... it doesn't... It's stupid". Now we can understand that the scene with which *Cloverfield* begins belongs to a recording of Rob's. At the end we will know that all of the tiny cuts in the recording of the night of terror, *Cloverfield*, all belong to the day of the first recording. Hence, what we see throughout the film corresponds to two different days. Although when looking carefully at the recording time codes, which are clearly seen, we will be immediately able to see that in total, the two recordings make up an exact full day, 24 hours.

Cloverfield starts with a sequence in which Rob is recording the inside of a luxurious apartment high up in a skyscraper in Central Park, where we soon find out he has spent the night with Beth. Rob tells us it's 6:42 a.m. And the superimposed time code (the signal that we are watching a recording), although it begins at 6:41, seconds later it displays "APR 27 6:42" (anecdotally the birth date of Matt Reeves, director of *Cloverfield*). The video camera time code remains on the screen throughout the sequence. They are radiant and calm. Rob himself has already made us aware of this after he tells us the time: "it's already a good day". It is happiness. They make silly remarks as they pass the camera to each other, they frolic, and they make plans as to how to spend the day. At the end of that scene we know they will go to the Coney Island amusement park. And from then on, little by little, we will realise that Rob's dawn is a dream come reality. It is the beginning of a unique day, the first, unrepeatably, always the best and most special.

Cloverfield ends with another brief fragment of the recording of that day. We hear the signal that the tape is about to finish, and Rob, who is embracing Beth, while they both look into the camera, warns: "All right, we're almost out of tape. We got, like, three seconds left. What do you wanna say? What do you wanna say? They are still happy and radiant. They exchange glances and ecstatic smiles. Beth thinks for a moment. She focuses on the camera and says "I had a good day". Then she looks at Rob, and rests her head on his shoulder. Again the recording time has appeared. It is 6:17 p.m. End.

When Jason borrows his brother's camera to record Rob's going away party Rob, on 23 May, almost a month after that day at Coney Island, it's 6:43 p.m. That is to say, the second recording,

almost entirely done by Hud, coinciding all but a few minutes with the footage of *Cloverfield*, begins almost at the same time as the recording which will be erased as Hud progresses ended. The last shot of the second recording takes place beneath a bridge in Central Park. Rob and Beth are alone again. But they are not now in a luxury room high up with impressive views, closer to heaven, but they are hidden in the "room" of the poor, under a bridge, at ground level, without any views, without any dressers, without silk sheets and halogen lights, no strawberries to play with. Then Rob takes the camera again to record himself as he had done the whole of 27 April, and he says these words just when he hears the siren, the signal that there are only two minutes left before the whole area is to be bombarded, and before the end of the recording: "My name is Robert Hawkins. It's 6:42 a.m. on Saturday, May 23". After a few minutes charged with fear, the tunnel collapses around them, and they will only have had a second to say to one another "I love you". So, there is a beginning and an end that are symmetrical, two same spaces –a bedroom- and two same people just manifesting in the first person their emotions on camera; but those two spaces, those two people and the emotions they express are radically opposed, the obverse and the reverse, the front side and the rear side, light and darkness of the 24 hours that make up a day. A beginning and an end, therefore, that are symmetrical, but radically opposed at the same time, opposition which is founded and resorts to the single hand of fear.

The two recordings make up a whole 24 hours, with its day and night, with its light and its darkness, with its space of the vigil and its space of the dream, the natural space of nightmares. Rob says this clearly at one moment of his journey through his night of monsters, "this is like a nightmare, you know?". The two recordings are opposed, therefore, in accordance with clear polar opposites: day/night and light/darkness; The day is the space and time of light, of conscience, and night the space of darkness, of fear and of course, of dreams, right where the most sinister dreams lurk, after all, dreams are the domain of fear. In any case, there are not two recordings. In the end there is just the one recording, the one we see, erasing happiness from Rob's soul, that is, the digital and metaphorical images of his fear. And the recording of fear advances erasing a previous recording, pressing *record* after starting at the beginning of what has previously been recorded, taping erasermonsters on top of images of happiness, imprinted in the memory of our soul.

First Recording: From 6:42 to a 6:17 p.m
(April 27th)

First take



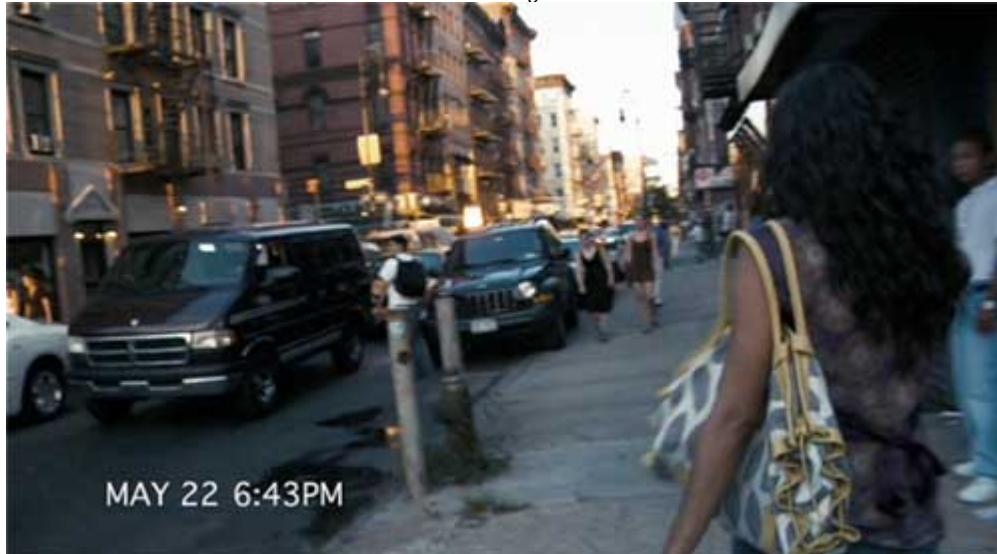
Rob starts shooting with his camera, and says: *"It's six forty two am... it's already a good day"*

Last take



Second Recording (eraser tape): From 6:43 p.m to 6:42 a.m
(From the afternoon of May 22nd until the sunrise of May 23rd)

First erasing take



Last erasing take



Rob takes his camera to state the last words before the ending of the tape: *It's 6:42 a.m on saturday, May 23. Approximately seven hours ago, something ateacked the city. I don 't know what it is. If you found this tape... I mean, ifyou're watching this right now, then you probably know more about it than I do"*

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