

Beyond the Myth of Experience, Part 2: Deviant Phenomenal Models in Gaspar Noé's *Enter the Void*

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1. 'The Shimmering Vacuity of the Human Experience'

Enter the Void tells the story of Oscar (Nathaniel Brown), an American who lives in Tokyo with his younger sister Linda (Paz de la Huerta) and supports himself by dealing drugs. One night, following an intense DMT-trip and a discussion with one of his friends about *The Tibetan Book of the Dead* and its depiction of reincarnation following the afterlife of the spirit, Oscar is caught by the police during a job and is shot to death in the bathroom of a bar called 'The Void'. Yet rather than marking the end of a conventional narrative, Oscar's death merely initiates the main scenarios of the film – which depict the disembodied viewpoint of the protagonist as he observes the aftermath of his death from the perspective of a spirit, recalls his traumatic childhood caused by the death of his parents in a car-crash, his strong bond with his sister, their move to Japan and eventual descent into drug-abuse and stripping, and eventually re-experiences his own birth (or, perhaps, reincarnation) at the very end of the film.

Yet contrary to its seemingly spiritualist underpinnings, the film's director Gaspar Noé comes from an atheist background and became interested in *The Tibetan Book of the Dead* not for its spiritualist speculations on afterlife and reincarnation, but because of its vivid depictions of altered states of consciousness (most notably out-of-body experiences and the experience of dying) and their hallucinatory underpinnings – which inspired counterculture icons such as Timothy Leary to use it as a manual for experiments with psychedelics already in the 70s, and also has had notable influence on a number of experimental musicians such as Tool, Surgeon and Eliane Radigue. Hence, what is particularly significant with the film from the perspective of this article, and where it indeed stands out from much of the cultural material inspired by the book – which has tended to retain much of its spiritualist animus – is that it substitutes the latter in favour of a thorough neurobiological account of altered, psychedelic states. Indeed, as Noé has pointed out himself: 'Actually, the movie is not so much about reincarnation. It's more about someone who gets shot while on acid and DMT, and trips out about his own death and dreams about his soul escaping from his flesh, because he wants to keep this promise to his

sister that he'll never leave her, even after death.¹ This consequently provides *Enter the Void* with a distinctively cognitive import – and I think that the major significance of the film indeed lies in its utilisation of the capacity of the cinematic medium to exteriorise altered experiential states through publicly available images (many of the more distinctive psychedelic segments, such as the opening DMT-trip, are based on Noé's own experimentations with psychedelic drugs) in ways that bring to the fore Ray Brassier's critique of the 'myth of experience', or what Noé has referred to as 'the shimmering vacuity of the human experience'.² Here, as one character in the film puts it, dying itself becomes the ultimate trip:

Books tell stories where people have hallucinations at the moment of their death, linked to the secretion of DMT in their brain. This molecule is a substance that is the source of dreams, and, apparently, a massive discharge of DMT can occur in the brain during an accident or when one dies. It's the same molecule that we absorb in our systems when we take ayahuasca, the magic Amazonian drink...³

Hence, what might at a first glance appear to be a mere residue of 70s counterculture – a bland mixture of hippie psychedelia and popular Buddhist thought – instead turns out to be a distinctively modern fusion of cinematic and cognitive resources: an audio-visual interface operating under the aegis of the neurobiological plasticity of phenomenal experience, and which consequently must be analysed accordingly. This is the purpose of this article.

2. Phenomenal Plasticity

If there is one philosopher whose work illuminates the aesthetics of *Enter the Void*, it is that of the German neurophilosopher Thomas Metzinger. Indeed, from my perspective, one of the most significant aspects of Metzinger's work is that it presents a distinctively original account of the illusory immediacy concomitant with phenomenological, first-person experience that resonates strongly with the formal experiments of the film. More specifically, in his magnum opus *Being No One: The Self-Model Theory of Subjectivity* (2004) – and its more accessible follow-up *The Ego Tunnel: The Science of the Mind and the Myth of the Self* (2010) – Metzinger outlines a representationalist and functionalist analysis of how the phenomenological experience of selfhood emerges out of sub-personal, neurobiological processes. In other words, against the widespread idea among philosophers that the experience of being a self is not something that can be reductively explained – because such an explanation would automatically explain away

the very target of its explanation – Metzinger’s project is one of explicating how this basic intuition can itself be explained through a thoroughgoing sub-personal analysis of what it is that makes possible the experience of oneself as a self.

According to Metzinger, humans are complex information-processing systems that misrepresent themselves as selves because evolution has equipped them with a transparent, biological interface that increases practical flexibility (survival) yet decreases epistemic clarity (cognitive self-awareness) because it prevents the systems in question from recognising themselves *as* systems. This interface is lived experience (i.e. the phenomenal first-person perspective), which generates a form of transparent window inwards and outwards – of inner and outer experience, or experience of self and the world – that the system by default fails to recognise as an ongoing representational process because it is unable to experience its underlying neurobiological mechanisms. In other words, through the latter we are phenomenally cut off from the reality of sub-personal, neurobiological kinematics, and are instead forced to operate under the illusory immediacy of phenomenal appearances while failing to recognise them as appearances. For what we experience is not an unmediated contact with the world around us, but rather a low-dimensional projection of an immensely richer physical reality.

Hence, for Metzinger, the notion of an authentic self in immediate contact with itself and the world around is a myth rooted in complex representational processes in the brain – whose central function is to maintain the phenomenal transparency that is necessary for a stable first-person perspective. In technical terms, this means that it is only the ‘content properties’ (phenomenological data) that are accessible to the system, but not the ‘vehicle properties’ (underlying neurodynamics). This is how the system comes to experience itself as a self (rather than as the biological data-system it actually is), by failing to recognise that phenomenal selfhood is the content of a particular form of representational model – what Metzinger refers to as the ‘phenomenal self-model’ (PSM) – that has been generated throughout the courses of evolution in order to maximise cognitive and behavioural flexibility strictly for the purposes of survival. Our brains and sense organs simply evolved in this way, for what the PSM in fact is an example of is an immensely useful medium for a physical system’s flexible interfacing with external and internal reality. But it is precisely because the PSM enables a particular form of navigational efficacy that it also needs to filter out earlier information-processing stages, since the computational load imposed on the system otherwise would become too great. This is consequently why phenomenal appearances are transparent: because it allows the system to successfully integrate myriads of internal and external patterns of information, while preventing it from

undergoing computational overload by constantly having to process the mechanisms of representation themselves.

Phenomenal selves thus operate wholly under the aegis of what Metzinger refers to as 'auto-epistemic closure', or 'naïve realism'. In short, they fail to recognise experience as a highly complex data-format that has evolved to process information in a very specific way. In one of his vivid metaphors, Metzinger therefore invites us to think of the PSM as an advanced virtual reality model. For just as in VR, the major objective of the PSM is to make the user unaware of the fact that he is operating in a medium. Yet with the PSM, we need to go one step further – since unlike in VR there is no user that precedes the interaction with the system, because it is only the system that exists to begin with.⁴ Indeed, it is the system's ability to generate a *world-model* on the one hand and a *self-model* on the other that produces the notion of a strong sense of self in immediate contact with the world:

First, we possess an integrated inner image of ourselves that is firmly anchored in our feelings and bodily sensations; the world-simulation created by our brains includes the experience of *point of view*. Second, we are unable to experience and introspectively recognize our self-models *as* models; much of the self-model is, as philosophers might say, *transparent*. Transparency simply means that we are unaware of the medium through which information reaches us. We do not see the window but only the bird flying by. We do not see neurons firing away in our brain but only what they represent for us. A conscious world-model active in the brain is transparent if the brain has no chance of discovering that it is a model – we look right through it, directly onto the world, as it were. The central claim of this book [*The Ego-Tunnel*] – and the theory behind it, the *self-model theory of subjectivity* – is that the conscious experience of being a self emerges because a large part of the PSM in your brain is transparent.⁵

This is Metzinger's representationalism, but in order to fully understand the philosophical and cultural relevance of the PSM-theory we also need to take a brief look at his functionalism. In contemporary philosophy of mind, functionalism has come to refer to a school of thought that approaches cognition in terms of the functional roles played by its individual components – not the particular medium through which this functional infrastructure is instantiated. In that regard, Metzinger's account of phenomenal first-person experience is functionalist insofar as it

defines the latter according to a number of neurophenomenological constraints that a system (biological or artificial) must instantiate in order to be classifiable as conscious (transparency being one of the most important ones).⁶ And once the full list of functional constraints has been isolated by the scientist and the philosopher, we will have been equipped with an *abstract model* (or metacognitive account) of the cognitive target in question (experience in this case), which then will have been opened up to systematic *explanation* and *manipulation*. Thus, once we have understood how these constraints are instantiated in biological systems, it will become possible for us to technologically alter their underlying neurobiological mechanisms and even to construct artificial systems possessing some or all of these constraints. In this particular case, it means identifying the specific neural correlates for the varieties of phenomenal experience⁷ – which will make it possible for us to reproduce the same experiences via technological means by activating the appropriate neuronal patterns in the brain:

[P]inning down the neural correlates of specific conscious contents will lay the foundation for future neurotechnology. As soon as we know the sufficient physical correlates of apricot-pink or sandalwood-amber, we will in principle be able to activate these states by stimulating the brain in an appropriate manner. We will be able to modulate our sensations of color or smell, and intensify or extinguish them, by stimulating or inhibiting the relevant groups of neurons. This may also be true for emotional states, such as empathy, gratitude, or religious ecstasy.⁸

Hence Metzinger's interest in so-called 'hypertrophies', or 'deviant phenomenal models' – such as dreams, blindsight, hallucinations, out-of-body experiences, phantom limbs, and so on – for what they are examples of are experiential states in which some of the functional constraints necessary for default conscious experience have been tampered with in one way or another, and in that regard point to the vast richness of our neurobiological possibility space: the fact that ordinary conscious experience is just one phenomenal state class among many, and that there are several others that we so far have understood very little of.

From Metzinger's functionalist perspective, phenomenal experience thus comes in many different degrees and varieties depending on the number of constraints satisfied by the system in which it is instantiated. This means that two systems can have vastly different reality models depending on their specific catalogues of constraint-satisfaction. Yet this is a fact that often has been overlooked even by professional theorists, given that non-pathological humans in stand-

ard situations all operate under the same reality model. But hypertrophies point in a different direction. Cotard's syndrome, for instance, is a particular neurological disorder in which a person explicitly claims that she is dead or do not exist. In other words, she has lost the experience of phenomenal certainty concomitant with corporeal self-intimacy and does no longer experience her body as a lived body, but merely as an inanimate object.⁹ Metzinger hypothesises that the instantiation of Cotard's syndrome in the PSM is the result of a global loss of affect following severe accidents and extreme depression. What disappears is the overall emotional profile of the PSM, which means that the so-called 'pre-reflexive self-intimacy' concomitant with embodiment no longer is globally available and the default corporeal experience of infinite closeness to oneself has been substituted by an emotionally disembodied experience of infinite distance. Therefore, even though the processes of elemental corporeality still are fully functional, they are no longer felt by the subject, who thereby draws the conclusion that she is a dead object merely resembling a living body: 'In this type of case the patient conceives of herself as nothing more than a locus, not of experience – because, due to the complete suppression of affect, her perceptions and cognitions are not annexed to her body – but of the registration of the passage of events'.¹⁰ Or, to put it differently, the patient does no longer experience herself as a self, but merely as an object.

Yet deviant phenomenal models are not only realised through neurological disorders, but through altered states of consciousness as well – such as dreams, out-of-body experiences and psychedelic experiences. It is this latter group of hypertrophies that is of particular relevance to the present analysis, and to which I will return shortly. But first a few more words about the overall aesthetics of *Enter the Void*.

As I remarked earlier, I take the main virtue of the film to be its compelling cinematic treatment of cognitively explicated experience – of the phenomenal first-person perspective on the one hand, and various forms of deviant phenomenal models on the other. In other words, the cognitive import of the film operates at a distinctively *formal* register, and thus coincides with the argument that I have made elsewhere about the link between formal alienation and cognitive subversion. This is partly manifested in the film's unusual and uncompromising take on the phenomenal first-person perspective, which operates on the basis of the extensive use of subjective point-of-view-shots across a number of phenomenal state classes. Of course, the use of first-person-shots is nothing new in the language of cinema – yet the extent to which these are taken up in *Enter the Void* certainly is, since the entire film in fact is made up exclusively of shots from Oscar's subjective point-of-view (including personal inner thoughts, blinks

of the eyes, etc.). Normally, point-of-view-shots are used selectively in narrative films – for instance in order to invoke individual cognitive states (e.g. the image sometimes loses focus or becomes unstable when a character is drunk or hallucinating) – yet *Enter the Void* significantly reverses this relation and makes the point-of-view-shot the basis of the entire film. This makes sense, of course, given that point-of-view shots may be characterised as distinctively cognitive shots – which thereby reinforces the impetus of cognitive exploration under which the film operates. From the first to the last sequence, the camera always depicts Oscar’s subjective, first-person perspective – even when it is seen observing him from the outside, which I will come back to in a moment – and thus is in tandem with Metzinger’s claim that phenomenal first-person experience first and foremost involves individual point-of-view: a subjective perspective of oneself and the world that is immediately recognized as *one’s own*.¹¹ However, as I remarked earlier, the seeming stability of the default first-person perspective may easily be shattered through various methods of cognitive disruption that manifest themselves in the mental production of different types of deviant phenomenal models. This constitutes the other side of the film’s formal aesthetics, and its full-blown cognitive import can therefore only be understood once we have had a look at how it explores these atypical phenomenal state classes. More specifically, there are two kinds of deviant phenomenal models that both play significant roles in the film’s overarching cinematic and cognitive architecture: hallucinations and out-of-body experiences.

Hallucinations

One of the most compelling sequences of the entire film is the opening DMT-trip, which consists of roughly five minutes of abstract, coloured patterns following Oscar’s inhalation of the drug in his apartment. The patterns bring to mind the Jupiter-sequence in Stanley Kubrick’s *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968) – as well as the experimental shorts of filmmakers such as Jordan Belson and Kenneth Anger (both mentioned explicitly by Noé) – but are also based on hallucinations experienced by Noé himself under the influence of the drug. In order to communicate these kinds of mental images to the digital graphics team (whose staff had not necessarily experimented with the drug personally), Noé put together a portfolio of images from films, books and paintings, which then were handed to the graphics team who turned them into digital images for the film. This procedure brings to mind what Metzinger refers to as ‘a new and important scientific discipline’ called ‘phenomathematics’,¹² which concerns itself with outlining abstract geometric patterns supposedly experienced by all human beings under the influence

of psychedelic drugs. More specifically, the discipline of phenomathematics has so far isolated four kinds of context-free, geometric patterns – gratings, cobwebs, tunnels and spirals (all of which appear in the sequence in question) – which, because they seem to point to invariant phenomenal properties shared by all cultures, supposedly contain information about the underlying functional infrastructure of the PSM.¹³ For instance, the emergence of abstract geometric patterns during psychedelic experiences – and the accompanying phenomenal intensification of qualitative content, such as colours (which also play a significant role in the DMT-sequence and in the film as such)¹⁴ – may be traced back to a neurological disinhibition of dynamical activity that results in the intensification of internal stimulus-correlation (i.e. internally generated phenomenal content), and subsequently to the onset of colour-intense states of abstract hallucinations.¹⁵ In that regard, hallucinations may be understood as a specific form of extrasensory phenomenal content generated by the internal simulation of perceptual experiences – presumably as an attempt by the system to maximise global coherence during states of cognitive overload.

Strictly speaking, psychedelic hallucinations of the kind experienced by Oscar in the DMT-trip sequence are examples of what Metzinger refers to as ‘pseudohallucinations’ in that they are explicitly recognised *as* hallucinations. This is highly significant from a theoretical perspective, since, as I remarked earlier, first-person experience in its default state is characterised by phenomenal transparency and thus a lack of cognitive self-awareness. The system is unable to recognise phenomenal content as part of an ongoing representational process because of the global activation of the transparency-constraint. However, precisely insofar as pseudohallucinations are explicitly recognised as hallucinations by the system, they no longer operate under the aegis of transparency but are instead indexed according to degrees of phenomenal *opacity*: they are appearances that the system automatically identifies as appearances. Accordingly, pseudo-hallucinations may be understood as a particular form of phenomenal content in which the transparency-constraint is lost to a greater or lesser degree – thereby making it possible for the system to experience various processing-stages within its phenomenal reality-model. Naturally, this has important experimental implications:

A controlled experience of pseudohallucinations in a scientific setting may offer a chance to introspectively observe the process of construction, activation, and dynamical self-organization of phenomenal representata as they change along a gradient from transparency to opacity. [...] Transitions from transparency to opacity

could become an object of rigorous investigation, not in terms of theoretical or empirical strategies, but by utilizing the phenomenal variant of representation itself as a starting point. Attentional availability of earlier processing stages, in a second step, could become a *variable* in controlled experiments, which finally might lead to new insights concerning the notion of phenomenal transparency itself.¹⁶

However, there is no reason for why these experiments have to take an exclusively scientific form – they could also be performed utilising aesthetic resources (or, rather, a combination between the two). Indeed, it is precisely at this particular juncture between the scientific and the aesthetic where the cognitive import of *Enter the Void* becomes most immediately culturally relevant. Yet before elaborating further on the wider cultural import of this particular form of cognitive cinema, we first need to have a look at the other type of deviant phenomenal model that occurs frequently throughout the film.

Out-of-Body-Experiences (OBE's)

Even though the entire film is depicted from Oscar's first-person perspective, it is only during the first 20-25 minutes that the latter actually is tied to his body; because for the rest of the time, it floats around incorporeally through flashbacks and across the streets of Tokyo in the form of a variety of a so-called 'out-of-body-experience'. Naturally inspired by the accounts of OBE's in the *Tibetan Book of the Dead*, the film depicts this disembodied, floating first-person perspective through the use of a large amount of complex crane-shots where the camera often hovers above the characters, flies through walls, and circles around in the sky. It is a very impressive technical and cinematic achievement that was made possible by recent developments in production techniques and a talented key grip. However, it also adds additional weight to the film's cognitive import insofar as OBE's is an example of another phenomenal state class with a lot of theoretical relevance. In its most basic form, an OBE may be defined as a phenomenally transparent and thus highly realistic experience of leaving one's own body and observing it from an external, third-person perspective (often in the form of some kind of floating 'presence'). This is interesting from a neurophenomenological perspective insofar as it is an example of a representational configuration that involves two self-models: one (passive) that is tied to the physical body, and another (active) that has departed from the first in the form of a kind of 'etheric double' (Metzinger). Another way to put this is that OBE's are characterised by a peculiar form of intentionality-relation wherein not only the subject-component but also the

object-component consists of a self-model. However, in all cases it is only the second, non-corporeal self-model that is mentally and intentionally active: it is the new locus of cognition, attention and sometimes even agency.¹⁷

Naturally, many intricate questions arise in any discussion about OBE's (it has not until recently been considered a serious field of study, so the amount of research is still relatively poor) – such as why do they occur in the first place? Metzinger – drawing upon other prominent consciousness-theorists, such as Susan Blackmore – notes that OBE's (like hallucinations) usually occur in situations when somatosensory input generally is very low, such as before or after sleep or during severe accidents (like in the film), and suggests that it is a method of functional modularisation performed by the PSM in order to preserve overall coherence during stressful or unusual situations by redistributing the locus of higher cognitive functions across a new functional module.¹⁸ Furthermore, as I briefly mentioned, OBE's are also characterised by a high level of phenomenal transparency in that they feel extremely realistic through and through. Indeed, the transparency associated with OBE's seem to be the underlying neuropsychological explanation as to why OBE-experiences frequently have been associated with various forms of mind-body dualism in several different cultures, such as in the form of the existence of a soul or spirit that departs from the body after death (as in *The Tibetan Book of the Dead*). However, as Metzinger suggests, the culturally widespread ideas of a soul or spirit may in fact turn out to be proto-conceptual theories of the functional core of consciousness – which in this case is instantiated in the form of a culturally invariant, functional modularisation with distinct neural correlates common to all human beings (i.e. the OBE-experience):¹⁹

Under certain conditions, the brains of all human beings, through specific properties of their functional and representational architecture which have yet to be empirically investigated, allow for this set of phenomenal models of reality. Probably this set of models of reality is a discrete set, forming an individual, clearly circumscribed goal for empirical research. A minimally sufficient neural correlate for the OBE state in humans is likely to exist, and, in principle, a functionalist analysis of the phenomenon can be developed from a more fine-grained representationalist analysis.²⁰

It is in this sense that there is an intimate link between Noé's account of 'the shimmering vacuity of the human experience', Metzinger's PSM-theory and Brassier's 'myth of experience' – which is manifested in the synthesis between cinematic formalism and cognitive exploration

that in my view constitutes the defining characteristic of the film. As Noé has pointed out, the purpose of the film was to cinematically (re)produce altered states of consciousness – which have had the effect of people in the audience feeling stoned and sometimes even perceptually uncomfortable.²¹ Yet this is not a shortcoming of the film; quite the opposite, since it points to the fact that *Enter the Void* is not just an example of a particular kind of cinematic experience (whether characterised as ‘genuine’, ‘productive’, ‘disturbing’, etc.), but rather a kind of formal aesthetics that forces us to question our basic conception of experience as such. In that regard, it uses the cinematic medium in order to progressively deconstruct our notions of ‘self’ and ‘experience’ in a way similar to Metzinger’s theoretical work – by drawing attention to and creatively utilising the culturally invariant, neurobiological underpinnings of phenomenal experience through techno-cultural exteriorisation and manipulation. It is therefore an example of what we may think of as a genuinely *cognitive cinema* that compels us to rethink not only what cognition and cinema can be, but aesthetics and culture as well.

3. ‘A New Cultural Context’

As I alluded to earlier, the future of cognitive neurobiology on the one hand lies in systematically investigating the vast functional complexity that underlies phenomenal experience as such, and on the other hand in making use of the findings in concrete, sociocultural situations. According to Metzinger, what is necessary for addressing these issues in a non-conservative manner is the creation of ‘a new cultural context’²² organised around the cultural implementation of the naturalist image of man in the form of a theoretical and practical extension of the scientific disenchantment of the world to the more recent neuroscientific disenchantment of the self. For Metzinger, this new cultural context requires the creation of neuroanthropology as a new form of intellectual discipline – whose purpose would be to create the rational foundation for normative issues concerning what we *ought* and *ought not* to become, by drawing attention to and systematically navigating the complexity of what he refers to as the extraordinary depth of our phenomenal state-space:

The mathematical theory of neural networks has revealed the enormous number of possible neuronal configurations in our brains and the vastness of different types of subjective experience. Most of us are completely unaware of the potential and depth of our experiential space. The amount of possible neurophenomenological configurations of an individual human brain, the variety of possible tunnels, is so large that

you can explore only a tiny fraction of them in your lifetime. [But] a naturalistic, neuroscientific image of humanity suddenly makes it obvious not only that we have a huge number of phenomenal states at our disposal but also that explicit awareness of this fact and the ability to make use of it systematically could now become common to all human beings.²³

If successful, rational neuroanthropology will lead to the emergence of a genuine ‘consciousness culture’ operating under the aegis of the cognitive exploration of deviant phenomenal models through resources such as digital technology, psychoactive substances, scientific-philosophical data and nascent neurotechnologies: ‘The interplay of virtual-reality technology, new psychoactive substances, ancient psychological techniques such as mediation, and future neurotechnology will introduce us to a universe of self-exploration barely imaginable today.’²⁴ Needless to say, I believe that modernist aesthetics of formal alienation would be very much a part of this new cultural context – particularly if distributed through genuinely large-scale cultural channels easily available to everyone. This is another important aspect of *Enter the Void*, which – at least to a certain extent – compellingly has taken up various experimental aesthetic tropes and repositioned them beyond their confinement within their usual high cultural habitats in a way that has given them renewed cultural and aesthetic potency. One can only image a popular culture where similar aesthetics of cognitive exploration circulate freely on television, online, at the cinema and in whatever other technological devices available – which means that *Enter the Void* is not simply an example of a compelling present aesthetic, but more importantly also a fragment of a possible future cultural landscape oriented towards large-scale cognitive and cultural subversion. Indeed, from this perspective, the trip has just begun...

Notes

1. Noé, G. and Lambie, R. (2010) ‘Gaspar Noé Interview: *Enter the Void*, Illegal Substances, and Life after Death’.
<http://www.denofgeek.com/movies/16358/gaspar-no%C3%A9-interview-enter-the-void-illegal-substances-and-life-after-death>
2. Noé, G. and Schmerkin, N. (2010) ‘Interview Gaspar Noé’, in *Enter the Void* Press Kit. <http://www.festival-cannes.com/assets/Image/Direct/029848.pdf>
3. Ibid.
4. See Metzinger, T. (2004) *Being No One: The Self-Model Theory of Subjectivity* (Cambridge: MIT Press), p 553-558.

5. Metzinger, T. (2010) *The Ego Tunnel* (New York: Basic Books), p. 7. Hence, the upshot of Metzinger's analysis is in my view a compelling demystification of the concept of lived experience through its appropriate integration into a conceptual framework compatible with the natural sciences. For whereas critics generally have tended to focus on whether he really has eliminated the self or not (which is the central claim of his books), it seems to me that the most decisive contribution of his work rather should be understood in terms of a distinctively original explanation of what the experience of selfhood actually is: a function of auto-epistemic closure engendered by subconscious, neurobiological mechanisms. As Ray Brassier puts it: 'Metzinger need not even deny the reality of the self (we might say that self-models are 'real' in some suitably qualified sense – though justifying this would require working out a full blown metaphysics), only the phenomenological postulate of its absolute explanatory priority. He draws a metaphysical conclusion where a methodological one would be more apt: the self-model theory of subjectivity describes and explains the phenomenon of selfhood in a way that allows it to be reintegrated into the domain investigated by the natural sciences. It forces us to revise our concept of what a self is.' See Brassier, R. (2011) 'The View From Nowhere: Sellars, Habermas, Metzinger', in *Identities: Journal for Politics, Gender, and Culture*, Vol. 8, No.2.
6. A thorough analysis of all of Metzinger's constraints fall outside the scope of this essay, but for his own comprehensive account of them, see Metzinger, *Being No One*, p. 107-212 and p. 299-428.
7. More specifically, the thesis behind the concept of so-called 'neural correlates of consciousness' (NCC's) is that for every sensation and experience that we are able to undergo, there are specific sets of activation-patterns among neurons that correspond to this particular phenomenal state. For instance, when I experience the sensation of warmth, this will activate certain neurofunctional regions in my brain, whose *objective properties* correlate with my *subjective experience* of warmth. The search for local and global NCC's (i.e. NCC's for specific kinds of experiences and for consciousness as a whole) therefore not only provides us with an important method for the crucial task of integrating third-person objective data with first-person subjective experience, but also for understanding how first-person phenomena may be manipulated via third-person means – since once the sufficient sets of NCC's for a particular kind of phenomenal experience have been isolated, it will have made that particular cognitive state open to public manipulation. Needless to say, this is already an area of massive interest to various big businesses – who are attempting to tap into the novel commercial opportunities provided by fields such as neuromarketing and neuropharmacology (what Metzinger calls 'commercialised consciousness technology').
8. Metzinger, *The Ego Tunnel*, p. 19-20.
9. See Metzinger, *Being No One*, p. 457.
10. Ibid. p. 460.
11. Noé himself mentions Robert Montgomery's *Lady in the Lake* (1947) – a film shot almost entirely from the point-of-view of the protagonist – and the opening sequence of Kathryn Bigelow's *Strange Days* (1995) as crucial cinematic influences for this stylistic choice, and also recalls that having watched *Lady in the Lake* under the influence of mushrooms, and being transported into the head of the protagonist, was a significant reason behind why *Enter the Void* was made. See Noé and Schmerkin, 'Interview Gaspar Noé'.
12. Metzinger, *Being No One*, p. 243.
13. Ibid.

14. For instance, this is reason why Tokyo finally was chosen as the city the film would take place in (earlier locations included New York and the Andes): 'For this specific project, with its hallucinatory sequences, all requiring very vibrant colors, Tokyo (which, as far as I know is one of the most colorful cities with the most flashing lights on the planet) was the ideal setting'. See Noé and Schmerkin, 'Interview Gaspar Noé'.
15. See Metzinger, *Being No One*, p. 242-243.
16. Ibid. p. 249-250. However, in this case (as in most cases of hypertrophies), there is still a PSM that experiences opacity against a backdrop of phenomenal transparency; or, to put it differently, pseudo-hallucinations are a form of opaque content that nevertheless is indexed according to a predominantly transparent reality model. This naturally begs the question of whether it is possible to conceive of experiential states that are *fully* opaque – that is, not just in terms of certain kinds of phenomenal content, but in terms of the PSM as a whole. Metzinger refers to this hypothetical form of subjective configuration as 'nemocentric subjectivity'. A nemocentric subject is a subject who still operates under an egocentric frame of reference and a centred model of reality, but at the same time is phenomenally selfless because its PSM is opaque through and through. It is a subject for whom all earlier processing-stages of the PSM are attentionally available, which means that it no longer operates under the aegis of naïve realism and therefore is unable to instantiate a phenomenal self. A nemocentric subject is therefore a subject without a self, because it lacks a phenomenal centre of experience. It would still be capable of referring to itself as 'I' – although it would do so not from a phenomenal first-person perspective, but from a non-phenomenal *first-object perspective*, because it would experience itself as a system and not as a self (see Metzinger, *Being No One*, p. 581). In that regard, it would be the perhaps most compelling literal instantiation of the so-called 'view from nowhere' (i.e. a cognitive metasubject), which the meaning of the term 'nemocentric' alludes to: a representation centred on nobody. Nemocentrism would thus provide a rational subject with a more fine-grained perspective of its own representational deep-structure. However, this would also involve new forms of biological issues, since a system operating under a nemocentric reality model would need to make up for the additional computational load concomitant with the global processing of opaque phenomenal content. Yet it would most certainly also offer it novel cognitive opportunities, which already is exhibited to a certain degree by humans, since – as Metzinger points out – parts of our cognitive infrastructure already operate under an opaque model in that its content is explicitly recognised as internal representations. This is the case with higher cognitive functions such as rational thoughts, which means that a cognitive system of the model sapience operates across a spectrum covering both degrees of opacity (rational thoughts) and transparency (phenomenal experience). However, a nemocentric subject would be fully opaque in that even its first-person experience would be recognised as a dynamic, representational structure.
17. See *ibid.* p. 489-490.
18. See *ibid.* p. 498-499.
19. See *ibid.* p. 504-505.
20. Ibid. p. 503. Naturally, this would also allow us to trigger OBE-states with the help of various neurotechnologies. This has in fact already happened in 2002 at the Laboratory of Presurgical Epilepsy Evaluation of the University Hospital of Geneva, where Olaf Blanke and his team repeatedly induced OBE-like experiences using electrical stimulation while treating a woman for drug-resistant epilepsy (see Metzinger, *The*

Ego Tunnel, p. 95). Also, strictly speaking, the OBE's experienced by Oscar in the film are for the most part not OBE's in the traditional sense, since they generally only involve a disembodied first-person perspective without the object-component (i.e. without the observed physical body itself). Notable exceptions are at the beginning of the DMT-sequence and just after Oscar has been shot, when the camera slowly detaches itself from his body and briefly observes him from a bird's eye view (which is a brilliant cinematic visualisation of an OBE-experience, given the film's rigorous commitment to the first-person perspective). There are also a large amount of flashback-sequences (both to Oscar's childhood and to recent events in Tokyo) that also involves a subject-component observing an object-component (usually from behind) – although these are also not OBE's per se, since they lack the latter's ultra-realistic *nowness*, but are rather examples of internal reconstructions of past events (e.g. memories, which, as Metzinger and Blackmore point out, often operate from an external, third-person perspective). Thus, the many sequences involving Oscar's incorporeal first-person perspective rather seems to be something like a dreamt or hallucinated out-of-body experience. This is perfectly consistent with the present analysis, however, insofar as dreams, like hallucinations and OBE's, occur in situations when somatosensory input is very low and when the system instead has to manufacture complex *internal* phenomenal models – presumably as a way of stabilising overall coherence during states of cognitive deviation (during accidents, when drifting in and out of consciousness, etc.).

21. See Noé, G. and Stephenson, H. (2010) 'Gaspar Noé's Big Trip'.
<http://www.interviewmagazine.com/film/gaspar-noe-enter-the-void>
22. See Metzinger, *The Ego Tunnel*, p. 237-240.
23. Ibid. p. 217.
24. Ibid. p. 239.