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"Playing with People": Male Fetishization, Feminist Resistance, and New Realities in *Being John Malkovich*

"Have you ever wanted to be inside someone else's skin? Think what they think? Feel what they feel? It's good, better than your wildest dreams" (*Being John Malkovich*, 1999).

"How do you come to feel you have as much right as anyone else to be on this planet, when you have a barrage of information telling you that you don't have a right to be here, or that you have to change yourself to be allowed to be here? I took each character and on an instinctive level explored how they would react to that anxiety." Charlie Kaufman, screenwriter

When Adam Spiegel, alias Spike Jonze, decided to direct *Being John Malkovich* in the late 1990s, the screenplay had already drifted around Hollywood for several years. Producer Michael Stipe (of R.E.M.) said that "a lot of people had read it and thought it was very funny and audacious," but none of them had the nerve to actually make it into a feature film (NYFF). After John Malkovich read the script and found it funny, screenwriter Charlie Kaufman was shocked. No one quite believed that the actor would ever be willing to star as himself in a movie in which he plays a mere pawn. "I don't think anyone reading [the script] who's ever lived or worked in Hollywood for more than a second would ever expect this film to get made," Malkovich told reporters at the 1999 New York Film Festival, "[b]ecause it's good. It's daring. And of course, naturally, they probably never thought I'd make it" (NYFF).

Being John Malkovich dares to tackle the long-standing mind-body issue, delving into questions of human relationships and the universal struggle for power. Selling trips into Malkovich's brain at $200 a pop, Craig Schwartz (John Cusack) and Maxine (Catherine Keener) profit off of a human weakness: voyeurism. Even more bizarre is the strange web of tensions that forms between the movie's main characters, centering around Malkovich and his brain, through which they attempt to secure their own identities by physically and mentally conquering each

other. In this paper, I explore the surrealist structure of *Being John Malkovich* against the reality of human beings' need to define themselves within society. French literary theorist Michel Foucault's concepts of discipline and docility work as a backdrop for the power struggles emerging in the movie. Closely examining the film, I point out where docility exists and where Foucault's theories become problematic both on screen and in real life. An understanding of the means of production of the film -- directorial intent and critical response -- proves that the outcome of *Being John Malkovich* resists, in Foucauldian terms, the patriarchal system of mainstream Hollywood. Critic Laura Mulvey's position that female movie stars have been traditionally fetishized by the gaze of male actors and viewers works in reverse here, demonstrating that the film is specifically a *feminist* resistance, since the female characters ultimately hold the gaze and exert discipline over the men.

From the start of the film, you can tell that the characters of *Being John Malkovich* depend hopelessly on the world for their self-fulfillment. Craig wants nothing more than an audience for his puppet shows, but his wife Lotte (Cameron Diaz) wants to have a baby, so he finds a real job. Maxine thrives on others' admiration, and of course, dangling in the center of the story is John, who for most of the film remains unaware that his brain is a tourist attraction and that others control his sanity. Michel Foucault realized the interconnectedness of people and their relationships. His study of the structure of cultures and the distribution of power within a group of people provides a useful basis for a better understanding of John's predicament.

In Discipline and Punish, Foucault utilizes the evolution of the penitentiary system as a microcosm of the power strategies present in western culture since the nineteenth century. The prison, Foucault says, was one of the first instances of organized discipline. The emergence of the prison as a solution to crime illustrates the concept that control of the body results in domination of the mind. Foucault's theory holds that discipline, along with its various strategies

and technologies, has come to affect much more of the world than penal practices.

The nineteenth century marked a change in criminal punishment methods from public torture to private discipline, where retribution was carried out behind the walls of the prison. Prior to that time, western cultures relied on torture to produce pain, mark the criminal, and make a public spectacle of the crime (Shumway 117). Since crime was an offense against the ruling figure, the law itself became an extension of the sovereign's political power, and public execution symbolized the reestablishment of his or her power. As Foucault explains it, "[t]orture was so strongly embedded in legal practice . . . because it revealed truth and showed the operation of power" (DP 55).

Discipline, like torture, establishes power but on a more individual level. The act of discipline has similarities to slavery, servitude, and monasticism, in that it forces a certain structure of time and space on the victim. Discipline differs from torture, however, because it both requires and generates aptitude; it carries with it the expectation for production (Shumway 124-5). Foucault uses an example of a juvenile detention center to illustrate this disciplinary structure. Inmates are expected to wake on cue, dress, straighten up, eat, and even pray according to a carefully organized schedule. More importantly, subjects must work and study as required. Assumably, supervisors watch the prisoners during every waking moment, and at no time during the day do they receive free time. Disciplinary devices also exist in military training, in the way that soldiers are taught exactly what to do with their bodies. Essentially, the military treats soldiers' bodies as machines to be trained for specific purposes (Shumway 124). Thus, discipline produces what Foucault calls "docile bodies," bodies which may be "subjected, used, transformed, and improved" (D&P 136). Although the prototypes of the prisoner and soldier show the extreme effects of constant discipline, the techniques can be found anywhere, in offices, in schools, even in homes. As Susan Bordo explains, "[b]anally, through table manners

and toilet habits, through seemingly trivial routines, rules, and practices culture is . . . converted into automatic, habitual activity" (165). Foucault aimed to show the world that docile bodies, in fact, comprise modern cultures.

Ultimately, Foucault held that the object of disciplinary techniques was the soul. Formed by supervision, training, constraint, and punishment, the soul is in reality, a historical construct (Shumway 123). The soul, or mind, is the tool by which an individual navigates the realm of politics; indeed, as Foucault says, "the soul is the prison of the body" (D&P 30). Discipline controls the body, making it more efficient, and thereby dominates the mind by refusing to permit an individual the chance to stray from a given schedule or to think independently. Discipline affects the way that a person interacts within a culture and to an extent determines his or her place within the world.

The necessity for discipline arises as a result of human beings' idiosyncrasies. Foucault considered bodies to be organisms with changing behavior patterns and requirements, and discipline a method of dissecting each person's individuality. "Discipline 'makes' individuals; it is the specific technique of a power that regards individuals both as objects and as instruments of its exercise" (D&P 170). Foucault defines discipline as a suspicious power that depends on three components: hierarchical observation, normalized judgment, and examination.

The first component, observation, requires that the subject be watched, constantly aware that his or her actions may be seen. Either figuratively or literally hierarchical, the observer views the objects from a single point. This surveillance does more than prevent crime or rule-breaking, it also creates a distinctive ranking, and thus individualizes those under observation (Shumway 128). Specifically, subjects are held up to standards of behavior. In order to fit in and avoid humiliation, those under observation will generally conform to the standards and strive to fit the norm, a concept that Foucault calls normalized judgment. Examination, then, is the

observer's act of comparing each subject to the standard. Examination lies "at the root of the gaze of the one in power upon one who is less powerful, the subject of the gaze" (Shumway 129).

Through the careful examination of docile subjects, Foucault hypothesizes, a new type of knowledge emerges. He writes:

> The examination is the technique by which power, instead of emitting the signs of its potency, instead of imposing its mark on its subjects, holds them in a mechanism of objectification. In this space of domination, disciplinary power manifests its potency, essentially, by arranging objects. The examination is, as it were, the ceremony of this objectification (D&P 187).

The knowledge obtained through the gaze differs from authoritative education, since it relates directly to the bodies of those being observed and enables the routine documentation of individuals. For Foucault, this knowledge is synonymous with power. The most documented subjects are the most individualized and the least powerful. Foucault's power creates individuals, but the individuals have no advantages since they are the strange ones who, for whatever reason, cannot fit into the societal norm.

Power, to Foucault, cannot be possessed, but is exercised. A complicated web encompassing all human relationships, power acts as a dynamic relation. According to David Halperin in his book, Saint Foucault, "power is what characterizes the complex relations among the parts of a particular society -- and the interactions among the individuals in that society -- as relations of ongoing struggle" (16-17). No longer the negative cause of repression, power can be positive and productive, while discipline becomes a tool for the powerful to create "new mechanisms of normalization," i.e., new realities (Shumway 139).

Foucault further complicates his theory by asserting that resistance and power are not opposites; instead, resistance originates within power. In The History of Sexuality, Volume I, he explains that "the points, knots, or focuses of resistance are spread over time and space" (96). He does acknowledge that occasionally there can be binaries between power and resistance, "[b]ut

more often one is dealing with mobile and transitory points of resistance, producing cleavages in a society that shift about, fracturing unities and affecting regroupings, furrowing across individuals themselves, cutting them up and remolding them" (HS 96). Since power and resistance are not dichotomous, resistance does not often produce change, but instead repetition (Shumway 140). Resistance may cause people to change places, in effect reorganize the web to give power to some and take it from others, but the presence of power itself remains immutable.

Within the web of power that organizes culture, Foucault views sexuality as more than a natural drive and form of reproduction. "Sexuality connects knowledge and power; it is a great surface network in which the stimulation of bodies, the intensification of pleasures, the incitement of discourse, the formation of special knowledges, the strengthening of controls and resistances, are linked to one another" (HS 105-6). Foucault contrasts Western sexual discourse, *scientia sexualis*, with the *ars erotica* of Eastern cultures, a set of methods from which "truth is drawn from pleasure itself" (HS 57). Instead of labeling and cataloging sexual acts as Western discourse does, *ars erotica* evaluates pleasure by its intensity, duration, and qualities (Shumway 145). *Scientia sexualis* and *ars erotica* both involve relations of power; in the first power is passed from the confessor or patient to the examiner, but in the second, power travels from the master to the novice. Foucault encourages this second method, since "[i]ts effect is not to reproduce existing relationships, but to proliferate power by expanding the areas and forms of control" (Shumway 147-8). Arguing that Western discourse on sexuality is a cultural construct that removes power from the individual and places it in the hands of an uninvolved authority figure, Foucault calls for people to utilize their own capacities for pleasure as tools of resistance. Hence, by de-sexualizing pleasure, individuals will find a multiplicity of new types of pleasure, and in turn, a multiplicity of new *powers.*

Pleasure, I would argue, rules the lives of the characters in *Being John Malkovich.* Most

obviously, voyeurism creates tension that moves the plot along, but each character also has his or her own underlying drive to feel good. Most of their drives are selfish: Craig litters his puppet shows with his sexual fantasies, Maxine lives and breathes for people to desire her, and John's blind lust drives him into the bizarre love triangle at the heart of the movie and eventually causes his downfall. Lotte alone finds pleasure in constant catering to her menagerie of pets (read: substitute children). Perhaps the character most motivated by pleasure, Dr. Lester (Orson Bean) plays the stereotypical dirty old man, trying without success to get into his young secretary's pants. A closer look at the characters and their relationships illustrates how they use Foucault's pleasures of the body to try to resist docility, exercise power, and introduce new realities.

At the start of the film, Craig seems to have escaped docility as far as he refuses to succumb to the full-time-job, wife-and-two-kids life that is typical of his society. He is married, yet his marriage lacks any involvement on his part. Although he clearly loves his work as a puppeteer, Craig is a bum by contemporary New York City standards. Unshaven, with long and unkempt hair, his slovenly appearance and lack of a steady nine-to-five job combine to form an individual outside of the norm. He laments his very consciousness (quoting Abelard?): "I think, I feel, I suffer. All I ask in return is the opportunity to do my work." Craig *does* his work -- street performances of an NC-17 nature -- despite routinely being beaten up by angry parents, until Lotte demands that he find a real job. Thus, Craig, enters the realm of discipline and becomes yet another of Foucault's docile bodies.

He takes a job as a file clerk at LesterCorp, a company that fills the role of Foucault's prison. Located on the seven-*and-a-halfth* floor of a downtown skyscraper, LesterCorp's offices are only four feet tall. Employees must stoop, hunched over at the waist, or else sit while working. Less blatantly, LesterCorp imposes discipline over employees' time, forcing them to work eight hours a day, over their appearance -- Craig wears a sport jacket and a ponytail -- and

over their minds, as we see through Craig's mind-numbing filing work.

Craig's wife, Lotte, on the other hand, seems to be the only character who cares about anyone else. Her overgrown, frizzy hair and sallow skin make her look as unbecoming as Craig, but unlike him, Lotte's unattractiveness symbolizes her docility. Her discipline comes from her marriage and is partly self-imposed, since we assume she chose to marry Craig. Lotte seems to truly love Craig and embraces her responsibilities as caregiver to her pets, yet her passionless life has left her restless. At one point, she lies awake alone in bed while Craig stays up all night building Craig and Maxine puppets, which he uses to act out his fantasies. From the start Lotte makes it clear that she is ready to have a child, yet Craig refuses, holding her hostage in a relationship from which he has removed himself.

While Lotte pines away at home with her assorted animals, Craig pursues his sexy co-worker, Maxine. Maxine dresses to attract attention. Her obvious care over her appearance could allude to her position as a docile body, as corporate culture certainly doesn't frown upon women dressing like Maxine does. But the fact that she knows exactly what she does and why gives an inkling that she has seen beyond the system of the business world. We never find out Maxine's job title -- she later becomes the mastermind behind JM Inc., the storefront for John Malkovich's portal -- but her office job threatens to make her docile. Yet she resists the discipline of her job. After viewing a training tape that reveals the history of their floor, Maxine tells Craig that "unfortunately, the story's bullshit." Craig never questions her statement, and she volunteers no more information, so the viewers are left guessing how she knows the story is untrue. However, Maxine's rejection of the midget story demonstrates her resistance to docility and her doubt of the system of normalcy within LesterCorp.

John, the crutch of the struggle between Craig, Lotte, and Maxine, at first glance seems to play a minor role in his own movie. John Malkovich, while not completely unknown to the

general public, is not a huge movie star. Throughout the film, John repeatedly has to put up with so-called fans who cannot even recall his movies. Any other semi-famous actor could easily have played John's role.[1] Weak-minded and motivated by physical desires, John literally seems incapable of directing his own life. His acting profession symbolizes his malleable personality -- the opposite of Craig's -- he has a talent for adopting the minds of others. He accepts a blind date with Maxine (regardless of the influence of Lotte in his brain) which leads him straight to the bedroom and eventually powerless. According to Foucault's theory, John gains no power since others do the examining for him. His nice apartment, doorman, and Chinese takeout leftovers all point to the fact that he fits comfortably into accepted society. John's docility, however, leaves him vulnerable to the exploitation of the other characters and to members of the general public who have paid the two hundred dollars for the chance to see life through his eyes. John, however, cannot see that he has lost control of his sanity until it is too late.

One more seemingly minor character, Dr. Lester, plays an important role in the outcome of the characters' struggle and in the unraveling of the twisted plot. Despite his high position within the corporation, Craig's 105-year-old boss turns out to be less than docile. Soon after starting his job, Craig becomes a confidant for Lester, who dreams of seducing his secretary, Floris (Mary Kay Place). Even stranger, Floris has some sort of a hearing impediment -- for example, when Craig introduces himself to her, she mistakes his last name, *Schwartz,* for *Wartz,* and attempts to throw him out of the office. Dr. Lester, on the other hand, blames himself. "Damn fine woman, Floris," he comments to Craig, "I don't know how she puts up with this speech impediment of mine. I've been very lonely in my indecipherable tower of incomprehensible speech." Lester could be humoring Floris to flatter her and get her into bed, or his response could be taken as a sign that he knows his own faults. Despite holding the

[1] Screenwriter Charlie Kaufman reportedly chose John Malkovich because his name was so fun to say.**

disciplinary power as president of the company, Lester does care about each of his employees. He doesn't hesitate to invite Craig, the new *file clerk*, and Lotte to his home for dinner, another sign that he appreciates the people who work for him. Interestingly, Lester also takes extremely good care of his body, crediting carrot juice with his good health. "Nobody wants to die," he tells Craig.

Strands of power connect all the characters in *Being John Malkovich*. The ensuing tug-of-war begins within the constraints of LesterCorp with its normalized standard of power. Later, after Craig discovers a small door in his office that leads to a darkened portal, the struggle moves to the strange realm of John's brain, where discipline is lax but exists nonetheless. At first, Craig operates at the center of the circle, dominating in his relationship with Lotte but at the command of Maxine. He withholds sex and motherhood from Lotte while attempting to break the monotony of his newly docile work life by flirting with Maxine. Demonstrating the mental control that makes him such a good puppetmaster, Craig guesses Maxine's name and earns himself a date with her. "Nobody told me, it just came out," he assures her. They meet for drinks at a bar where she immediately attempts to ascertain Craig's affection. He tells Maxine that he is married, but that he likes her for some unknown reason. "Is it my tits?" she asks, and when Craig denies it, she accuses him of being gay, so of course he admits to wanting to sleep with her. That accomplished, Maxine tells Craig to forget it -- she will never want him because *she* is not attracted to *him*. In this scene and the next few office scenes, Craig repeatedly calls Maxine by her name, almost as if it were a chant, showing his mental prowess and attempting to dominate her. She, on the other hand, taunts him with her body, telling him that if he ever got her he would have no idea what to do with her. So, Craig wants Maxine, and even though Maxine thinks Craig is ugly she still needs him to want her. Lotte, who doesn't yet know Maxine, acts as a prop in her husband's life. In their quest for power, the three have reached a temporary standstill.

Craig's discovery of the portal shatters his emerging docility and jars the characters' stuggle back into action. Inside, Craig's epiphanous experiences of John eating toast, reading the newspaper, checking himself in the mirror, and taking a taxi ride awaken him to new pleasures. Even though he is tossed from the sky onto the side of the New Jersey Turnpike after fifteen minutes inside the portal, Craig tries to use the portal to impress Maxine. She at first dismisses him as a freak. However, she soon devises her $200-per-ticket plan to profit from the portal, turning the tables yet again, and illustrating a key trait of her character. Maxine knows instinctively that people will pay the extravagant price, after all, she strives to be an object of voyeurism herself, so she understands that the chance to see inside someone else will motivate people. Apart from all of the other characters who fall prey to the temptation of John's brain, Maxine never expresses the slightest interest in trying out the portal. She, instead, takes pleasure in being looked *at*, in being objectified, a fact which according to Foucault, should remove her power. Because Maxine recognizes the normalcy imposed on her life by LesterCorp and sees past it, choosing to use her body as a tool for her own benefit, her actions ironically disprove Foucault's theory of examination while upholding his pleasure theory.

After normal business hours -- between nine p.m. and four a.m. -- Maxine and Craig set up their makeshift business, JM Inc. The portal quickly attracts streams of ordinary people looking for fifteen minutes of fame. Concurrently, Lotte tries the portal and finds John showering, and the experience awakens her so abruptly that she becomes convinced that she is a transsexual. Exerting newfound power, she demands Craig to take her back for another trip into the portal: "It's like everything made sense. I knew who I was -- I was John Malkovich." No longer content to sit idly by while Craig attempts to cheat on her, Lotte develops her own crush on Maxine. Like Maxine and Craig, Lotte gains a foothold in the fight against the discipline and docility imposed by her everyday life.

By now, Maxine has developed a torrid love affair with John. Within John's brain, Lotte finds sex as a man more fulfilling than her thankless marriage, and actually falls in love with Maxine. She enjoys being inside John so much that she begins to identify her own body as male. She tells Craig that she has begun to consider sexual reassignment surgery, but he discourages her, dismissing it as a phase. "Don't stand in the way of my actualization as a man," Lotte retorts. Lotte's metaphorical awakening inside the portal has empowered and permitted her to mentally throw off her old, docile, female body. Later, when Craig discovers Lotte's feelings for Maxine he attacks her in a jealous rage. Lotte, in the process of assimilating to masculinity, tells him to "suck [her] dick." Craig uses force to subvert her by holding a gun to her head and locking her inside the cage of her pet chimpanzee. These drastic measures clarify the threat posed to Craig by Lotte's power, and although he manages to control Lotte's physical body, she now fully realizes her situation and so is no longer unknowingly docile.

Maxine, on the receiving end of Lotte's affections, *says* she loves Lotte, but seems more taken with the idea of being looked at: "Can you imagine two people looking at you with total lust and devotion through one pair of eyes? It's quite a thrill," she blabs to a friend on the phone. Since Maxine insists that she is only attracted to Lotte on a spiritual level, they continue their tryst through John, with Lotte entering the portal at the same time that Maxine and John meet. Here, the distribution of power gets complicated. Foucault's theory would place the most power with John, whose body plays the role of the examiner. Yet it is Lotte, inside the portal, who does the real looking; John's presence is a mere bonus for Maxine. She obviously cares more about Lotte looking at her since she waits for Lotte to arrive in the portal before making love to John. John has become fully docile as each woman uses his body purely for her own pleasure. He even loses his name when Maxine calls out Lotte's name in a moment of passion. "Did you just call me Lotte?" John asks Maxine. "Yeah, do you mind?" she asks. "No, not really," he responds.

From then on, Maxine calls John "Lotte" during sex, and the real battle for power exists between her and Lotte.

Once Craig locks Lotte in the cage, he sneaks into the portal and attempts to take over John's brain. While John has sex with Maxine, Craig uses his puppetry skills to touch Maxine's breast with John's hand, and soon figures out how to make John talk. "It's all a matter of making friends with the Malkovich body," Craig tells Maxine. "Rather than thinking of it as an enemy that has to be pounded into submission, I began imagining it as a really expensive suit that I enjoy wearing." By now, Lotte has escaped from the cage and called Maxine to warn her about Craig. Fickle Maxine, however, is happy with having a new onlooker inside of John and leaves Lotte to her own devices. Soon after, Maxine encourages Craig to permanently invade John's brain, taking over his body and name, as well as his bank account. The two marry and eight-and-a-half months later are expecting a child. Meanwhile, Craig has helped John make a massive and successful career change, from actor to puppeteer. Craig seems to have won the battle for power -- he has John's body and Maxine -- but he has fallen into a familiar trap. His marriage to Maxine quickly turns sour during her pregnancy. He is now trapped in another loveless marriage which unbeknownst to him, puts discipline back into his life.

Lotte, devastated and still crazed with wanting to be John, has befriended Craig's boss, Dr. Lester. Her interest in Lester arose after she and Craig dined at his home and she discovered a room full of John Malkovich pictures in his house. From Lester, Lotte finds out that John Malkovich is actually what he calls a vessel body, and that Lester survives by jumping from one host body to another, through portals like the one Craig found. When the vessel matures, Lester enters the portal, along with several dozen of his closest friends, and takes over the body. He explains that his group must invade the host at just the right moment, or else they will be diverted into the newest-forming host body. There, they will become trapped and have to live out

the rest of their lives without any control over their host body. Lester invites Lotte to join him inside of John when the vessel ripens, on John's forty-fourth birthday. Thus, Lester has both normalized the portal and established himself as the most powerful since he understands the significance of the vessel bodies: eternal life. While Craig, Maxine, and Lotte used John's brain as a means of escape from their dull lives, Lester uses the host body as a tool for immortality.

On the evening of John's forty-fourth birthday, Craig goes out to a performance. "Why did I have to move into such an old body?" Craig asks before leaving. "I might die of a heart attack or something," he scoffs. Obviously, he has no real respect for his host vessel. Upon returning, Craig finds the house empty. He receives a call from Lester, demanding that he leave Malkovich at once or else Maxine will be killed. Craig tells him that he cannot leave because without Malkovich, he is nothing. "Maxine will have nothing to do with me. She already has nothing to do with me," he confesses to Lester. Finally, out of concern for his wife and baby, Craig does leave John. When Craig approaches Maxine in his own body, she ignores him, which drives him back into the portal to fight with Lester, who along with his entourage has taken over their ripe vessel. Of course, Craig does not understand that he has been diverted into the next vessel body, Maxine's baby, and has become utterly powerless.

What no one else knows is that Maxine conceived her baby while Lotte was inside the portal. "I only kept the baby because you were the father," Maxine tells Lotte. "You mean we are going to be parents -- together?" Lotte asks. This bizarre twist brings the women together in the end to raise their daughter, Emily, through whose eyes Craig is doomed to forever watch both of his wives. The power that the outcome lends Maxine and Lotte represents a Foucauldian resistance to both the methods of typical Hollywood films and to the patriarchal system of normalcy that is considered to dominate contemporary society. An examination of the means of production of the film show that Being John Malkovich was never intended as a run-of-the-mill

romantic comedy. Charlie Kaufman explained to reporter Michael Sragow of salon.com that he wanted to "create situations that give people something to think about. I hate a movie that will end by telling you that the first thing you should do is learn to love yourself. That is so insulting and condescending, and so meaningless. My characters don't learn to love each other or themselves." Kaufman told Sragow that he wrote the screenplay partly to amuse himself, but that in the process of developing the plot he had to create a world that made sense in and of itself. The world he created in the film, has its own system of normalcy, separate from that of the real world.

Michael Stipe, who produced Being John Malkovich along with Sandy Stern and Steve Golin, recruited then twenty-something director, Spike Jonze. Jonze has a habit of adopting pseudonyms -- his real name is Adam Spiegel -- and is known in the field for his eccentricity. Since the early 1990s, Jonze has taken images from America's visual vernacular -- TV shows, ad campaigns, B-movies -- and turning them inside out, upside down, and into vehicles for his ironic sense of humor (Smith "Spike Jonze Unmasked"). In 1994, he directed the video for the Beastie Boys' *Sabotage*, an homage to seventies cop dramas like Starsky and Hutch, and his 1995 video for Björk's *It's Oh So Quiet* plays with the choreography of Busby Berkley. Jonze also won an MTV Music Award in 1999 for *Praise You* with the invented "Torrance Community Dance Group," which reimagines the amateurism of America's Funniest Home Videos as Broadway spectacle. Jonze has repeatedly used his photography and filmography skills to bring little-known subcultures into the limelight. For example, he wrote and did photography for *Freestylin'*, a magazine on freestyle biking, (skateboard-style tricks performed on dirt bikes) and his talent for snapping pictures while skateboarding led him to great success. Even within his short films on freestyle biking, Jonze dared to go against the subculture's style by playing pop music in the background instead of the typical punk or heavy metal.

In his first full-length film, *Being John Malkovich*, Jonze made the much commented-on choice to play the characters straight and thereby let the plot become the focus. Reviewer Andrew O'Hehir said that the movie "sticks to a grimy, present-tense mode you might call kitchen-sink surrealism" (salon.com). A closer look shows that Jonze does with *Being John Malkovich* exactly what he did in his earlier work: he combines discordant elements. In Foucauldian terms, he promotes a new type of normalcy (freestyle biking, alternative music, independent film, brain portals) by applying to it qualities that have already been normalized (pop music, B-rate movies, New York City). In doing so, Jonze creates an association between the two elements which indirectly unites disparate systems. Vital to a Foucauldian resistance, Jonze uses the technique in the film to accentuate the strangeness of the situation. These characters exist in an irregular society, yet they are blatantly stuck in the middle of New York City, in a typical, everyday, overly realistic setting. Perhaps they could never exist, but perhaps they *do* exist.

According to Michael Stipe, it took five years to make *Being John Malkovich*. First, Kaufman had to sell his script to Malkovich or some other actor willing to risk his reputation. By playing himself in this film, John Malkovich undertook a personal resistance to the discipline imparted through cinematic fame. Although he has not appeared in another film since 1999 when *Being John Malkovich* came out, one could speculate that his resistance has actually increased his fame, as a result of the movie's widespread popularity. In addition to the Malkovich casting problem, the movie lost funding several times, probably because it "adamantly refuses to observe the conventions of cinematic storytelling" (O'Hehir). Admittedly, Hollywood does not typically make films like this one. Many of the usually good-looking cast members are dressed and made-up to look unattractive, actually ugly in some cases. The movie deals with large philosophical issues, requiring the audience to become at least somewhat intellectually involved in order to

make anything out of the plot. Finally, the "happy" ending in *Being John Malkovich* -- two women raising their daughter together -- might pose a threat to some viewers. Jonze's directorial choices combined with Kaufman's wacky script constitute a film that goes against the grain of normalized America, as embodied by the mythical Hollywood.

By and large, modern Hollywood cinema caters to the heterosexual socially established interpretation of the differences between men and women. Feminist film theorist Laura Mulvey argues that this tendency controls onscreen images, as well as viewers' erotic pleasure in looking (14). She applies psychoanalytic theory (which she qualifies as a political weapon, but uses it only to demonstrate how the patriarchal hierarchy has structured film form-14) to demonstrate the paradox of phallocentrism, since the "woman stands as the linchpin to the system: her lack produces the phallus as a symbolic presence" (14). Thus, within a patriarchal culture, the woman signifies the male Other, onto whose image a man places his fantasies. Donna Haraway explains that, "[in] the realm of knowledge, sexual objectification is illusion and abstraction. . . a woman . . . in a deep sense does not exist as a subject or even potential subject, since she owes her existence as a woman to sexual appropriation" (159). Women, in *Being John Malkovich*, however, eventually come to exist on their own, not merely as a counterpoint to the male characters. While at the start Lotte is contently faithful to Craig, she uses her experiences in the portal to gain autonomy and in the end, has her much-wanted child without Craig's help. Maxine, on the other hand, seems objectified, yet the plot reveals her self-awareness. Her role is two-fold: Jonze positions her as a decoy through whom male viewers can find the fulfillment described by Mulvey, and at the same time she revolutionizes the power hierarchies of both Mulvey and Foucault. She uses her appearance as a tool for her own pleasure and thus gains power while creating new expectations for women's movie roles.

Mulvey states that two types of pleasure occur within the theater. The first, *scopophilia*,

or pleasure in looking, controls and objectifies the subjects of the gaze. Extreme examples include Peeping Toms and voyeurs, but less overtly, movie audiences also experience this type of pleasure. Mulvey also argues that male viewers experience a narcissistic pleasure by identifying with the male actor who gazes at the actress onscreen. The male viewer thinks that if the actor can get her, then he can, too. Assuming the masculinity of the viewers, an actress' role in a film positions her as an erotic object for the male characters and for the spectators in the theater (Mulvey 19). In the patriarchal culture fostered by Hollywood, men control film fantasies, and so represent the power forces within the culture. "As bearer of the look, [the male viewer] neutralizes the power that the onscreen woman has as spectacle," Mulvey asserts (20). *Being John Malkovich*, then, is a diversion from the usual cinematic structure of Hollywood, because the object of everyone's gaze is John Malkovich. Each character objectifies John by looking *at* him or *through* him, hordes of strangers flock to his portal to get a look at his fascinating interior, and the audience concentrates on John in an attempt to discover the meaning of the characters' dilemma. Even John obsesses over his appearance, noticeably checking himself in the mirror whenever an opportunity arises. John's body remains a constant object of interest throughout the film, and applying Mulvey's theory, this is another cause of his powerlessness.

Through mainstream film, men can overcome their Freudian castration anxiety either by investigating the actress, thereby demystifying her through devaluation, or completely disavowing the fear by turning the woman into a fetish object which becomes reassuring instead of dangerous. This fetishistic scopophilia, as Mulvey terms it, builds up the physical beauty of the object, turning it into something satisfying in itself (21). With John as the subject of the gaze, his presence does not seek to quench fears of penis castration, but instead brain castration, a non-gendered fear. Returning to Foucault's soul-body relationship, Judith Butler says that "the soul is precisely what the body lacks; hence, the body presents itself as a sugnifying lack. That lack

which *is* the body signifies the soul as that which cannot show" (2496). Thus, the "menage-a-quatre" between John, Maxine, Craig, and Lotte turns John's body into a fetish object. Lotte or Craig ventures into John's brain for a tryst with Maxine, all the time using his body as nothing less than a sex toy. Maxine at one point even exclaims to Craig, "It's not playing with dolls, it's playing with people!" If the portal into John's brain is meant for nothing more than the pleasure of those who enter it, then it ceases to be a realistic threat to the characters.

While psychoanalytic theory has men trying to overcome their castration anxieties, women, too, must fight the "threat posed by her real lack of a penis" (Mulvey 14). As a result, the woman tends to turn her child into a symbol of her desire to attain a penis, Mulvey explains. "Either she must gracefully give way to the word, the name of the father and the law, or else struggle to keep her child down with her in the half-light of the imaginary" (Mulvey 14-15). Through her baby, a woman shows the world that she has attracted a man, and no longer poses a threat. Once the child becomes the symbolic link, patriarchy removes all meaning from the mother (Mulvey 14). In *Being John Malkovich*, Maxine places none of that significance on her baby. In fact, pregnancy makes her miserable since it puts her out of control of her body. Maxine admits that the only reason she keeps the baby is because Lotte is the father. Far from rending her parents meaningless, Emily cements them as powerful and as bearers of the gaze. Emily's existence, however, does remove power from the men - John's role is reduced to that of a sperm donor, while Craig becomes literally trapped inside the mind of his daughter.

According to Mulvey, alternative cinema challenges the assumptions of mainstream film, thereby providing a space for films that are radical in a political or aesthetic sense (15). Politically radical in nature, *Being John Malkovich* is a unique Hollywood creation that defies patriarchal assumptions. Women derive pleasure from their own bodies without consideration of anything else, leaving men brainless, bodiless, and powerless. Moreover, the women in this film

are intelligent - even the pretty ones - and self-aware. They use their knowledge to overcome the threat posed to them by men and to create new realities. In their new world, two women can have a child together and happily raise her without the slightest need for a man. As such, the film portrays a successful feminist Foucauldian resistance.

Discordantly, at the end of the movie, Lester has control of John. Seven years has passed, and John has married Floris, Lester's lusted-after secretary. A room in John's home is set up as a shrine to Emily, the ripening host vessel, and John prepares to take his friends and loved ones inside her when the time is right. The fact that Lester ultimately gets John's body might seem to undermine the claim that *Being John Malkovich* is a feminist resistance. Lester's success may be another tool used by Jonze to make the movie more palatable to male viewers. Foucault, however, theorized that a successful resistance should not simply reverse a system of normalcy; i.e., trade patriarchy for matriarchy, but instead should create an all-new reality. Lester's willingness to eventually adopt a female body illustrates this new reality. As a man, Lester views women as sex partners, possible sources of new vessels through whom he can prolong his life. Yet his friendship with Lotte shows that he also sees people as they want to be seen. (When Lotte goes to Lester's house to ask him about his Malkovich museum, Lester lends her his robe since her clothes are rain-soaked. He compliments her: "You look so lovely . . . in my oversized man's robe," hinting that he recognizes her emerging masculine identity.) All along, Lester has treated people with respect and kindness, regardless of their genders or abilities, which plays a large role in his later position of power. The prospect of becoming a female at some future point obviously poses no threat to him, and along with Lotte's "actualization as a man," promises a new sort of androgynous society.

In an interview on *Being John Malkovich*, Charlie Kaufman admitted the film has no single explanation - instead, people should seek to define it for themselves. Inarguably, *Being*

John Malkovich strays from the typical, easy-to-swallow premise of American cinema. Even though body colonization is not a real threat to audiences, it does raise questions about the level of control people have over their own bodies and lives. As viewers, Foucault's theories of discipline and docility provide a system of normalcy through which we can view the movie's plot, called "meaningless" by one reviewer (O'Hehir). In Discipline and Punish, Foucault begins with the example of the prison to help people objectively accept ideas that could be threatening if presented on a personal level (Shumway 115). Once people find out that power struggles exist in the home, in the *bedroom*, it is too late. They have already seen the logic of Foucault's argument. Applying his theories to *Being John Malkovich* has the same effect. His web structure links the movie to the real world by tracing the power connections between the characters and pinpointing their motivations. Viewers might dismiss the characters as New Yorkers, overgrown children, actors, or lesbians, but an understanding of the discipline ruling the characters' lives reveals their universality. Craig, Lotte, Maxine, and John live in homes, work in offices, frequent bars and restaurants, fall in love and marry like the majority of people do. More importantly, they have bodies. Viewers must resolve this commonality and closely examine their accepted norms or else risk permanent docility.

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