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# A Case for Psychoanalytic Visual *Dispositif*? *Birdman* after the “Cinematographic Capture”

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**Abstract:** This paper investigates how the notion of “superhero” in popular imagination, evident in the multiple live-action adaptations of Detective Comic’s and Marvel Cinematic Universe’s comic book heroes for their commercial value, has been debunked by Alejandro Inarritu’s 2014 *Birdman*. While the aforementioned dream factories affirm the fantasmatic “flight” inherent to these cinematic creations, especially symbolised by the aviating capacities of most of their superheroes, it is Inarritu’s *Birdman*, although not commercially comparable, that is theoretically significant here: the “flight” motif paradoxically gestures to the “capture” that is the very cinematic essence. Working with some key psychoanalytic theorists of the apparatus and later the suture, I shall argue that the messianic in this film, embodied by the male lead, whose waning career is resurrected from oblivion given Keaton’s subsequent work acknowledgement despite his Oscar nonsuccess, is revealed by this author to be ultimately the cinematographic apparatus that gives us Baudry’s transcendental subject, a concept arguably bound to his cinematic effect, a term with epistemological import. This paper will also redirect attention to the *interpretative* liberation associated with “flight”, insisting that Baudry’s discussion of the cinematic *dispositif* is among the first to address the real, albeit with an emphasis on intelligibility, so that release from what I call the “cinematic capture”, a term that Todd McGowan defines as “uncritical subjectivity”, can be enacted. This thesis asserts that *Birdman*, proposed here as a case for psychoanalytic film theory, unintentionally exposes the traumatic real within the imaginary because of cinematic capture, thus leading to this discussion of the gaze, identification, narration, control and desire. In addition, it will appraise what Baudry calls the “knowledge effect” by responding to the following inquiries that encapsulate the critical stake here. How can one call this effect “knowledge” when the “subjective” of the transcendental subject becomes more pronounced with the other title of Baudry’s apparatus theory, which is suture theory? What can one say about the “reality effect” of the apparatus theory in an age of digitisation the emphasis of which is virtuality and, last but not least, can one argue that Inarritu’s *Birdman* is an illustrative intervention of the digitised post-cinematic?

**Keywords:** Psychoanalytic Film Theory, the Psychoanalytic Triad of the Imaginary, Symbolic and the Real, the Cinematographic Apparatus, Superhero, *Birdman*, Alejandro Inarritu

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