POLANSKI AND PERCEPTION

Submitted by Davide Caputo, to the University of Exeter as a thesis for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Film Studies, 15 November 2010.

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Abstract

Filmmaker Roman Polanski declares in his autobiography that he was greatly influenced by renowned neuropsychologist Richard L. Gregory (1923-2010), whose work, Polanski claims, gave scientific confirmation to many of his own beliefs regarding the nature of perception. Gregory was a strong advocate for what is referred to as the 'indirect' theory of perception, a theoretical model that stresses the agency of cognition, specifically hypothesisation, in the act of perceiving.

This analysis of Polanski's cinema is guided by an exploration of perceptual psychology, with special attention paid to how the theory of indirect perception differs from competing, and often more intuitive, models of perception. The two main focuses of this thesis are: a) to identify the ways in which Polanski's cinematography is actively informed by neuropsychological research on perception, and b) to discuss the various ways in which the key philosophical implications of the theory of indirect perception find expression in his cinema.

My analysis will focus primarily on two (unofficial) 'trilogies', what I refer to as the 'Apartment Trilogy' of Repulsion *(1965),* Rosemary's Baby *(1968), and* The Tenant *(1976), and the 'Investigation Trilogy' of* Chinatown *(1974),* Frantic *(1988) and* The Ninth Gate *(1999). Also included are minor case studies of* Knife in the Water *(1962),* Death and the Maiden *(1994), and* The Ghost *(2010). This thesis hopes to demonstrate the manner in which Polanski's cinematic engagement with perceptual psychology evolves over his career, from more psychologically intimate explorations*

of the perceptual mechanism via portrayals of schizophrenia in his earlier films, to more distant studies of highly proficient perceiving bodies who are nevertheless confronted with serious challenges to their perceptual (and epistemological) frameworks.

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Table of Contents