

**John Cassavetes' *Shadows*.
The Destruction of the Imago in Cinematic Identification**

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Hollywood narrative cinema tends to create meaning through a careful organization of central signs that projects a unified but imaginary reality. This article focuses on John Cassavetes' challenge and deconstruction of such conventionalism. Using Lacan's "Mirror Stage" along with Heath, Mulvey, and Metz psychoanalytic analysis of the cinematic code, the author examines how Cassavetes destroys the process of cinematic identification in his first feature film, "Shadows." Arguing for liberation from coherent reflections of reality, Cassavetes encourages both his characters and viewers to identify with multiples images that defile the structuring totality of the Imago.

We have only to understand the mirror stage as an identification, in the full sense that analysis gives to the term: namely, the transformation that takes place in the subject when he assumes an image—whose predestination to this phase-effect is sufficiently indicated by the use, in analytic theory, of the ancient term imago.¹

Until 1959, John Cassavetes had been better known for his work as an actor than as a director. Due to his apparent "angry-young man" image, he was most often cast in juvenile roles full of anger and intensity such as the psychotic criminal in Andrew L. Stone's *The Night Holds Terror*, or a punk in *Crime in the Streets*, as well as a troubled youngster in a T.V. series *Winter Dreams*. *Crime and Punishment* and *Edge of the City* brought Cassavetes his best recognition as an actor. However, despite his success as a performer, Cassavetes considered himself a director. Among his twelve feature films, *Shadows* (1959), his first release, followed by *Faces* (1968), gained for Cassavetes the reputation of one of the first American independent film-makers, a title that was consolidated with his later movies *Husbands* (1970), *Minnie and Moskowitz* (1971) and *A Woman under the Influence* (1974).

The project of *Shadows* started at the acting workshop Cassavetes formed with Burt Lane in 1956. They rented a studio with a stage at the Variety Arts Building on 46th Street in New York City. The atmosphere of improvisation and experimentation that permeated the workshops inspired Cassavetes to direct his own work and to find an outlet to deal with his frustration as an actor. He explains,

I had worked in a lot of films and I couldn't adjust to the medium, I found that I wasn't as free as I could be on the stage or in a live television show. So for me it was mainly to find out why I didn't particularly like to work on film. In Hollywood ... everyone is frightened to do anything that's not traditional... The actor is expected to go through a dramatic scene, staying within a certain region where the lights are. If he gets out of the light just half an inch, then they'll cut the take and do it over again ... with *Shadows* we tried something different in that we not only improvised in terms of words, but we improvised in terms of motions. So the cameraman also

improvised, he had to follow the actors and light generally, so the actor could move when and wherever he pleased.ⁱⁱ

Nevertheless, Cassavetes was not content with the result of his first version of *Shadows*. He rejected it for being too “arty.” He described it as “cinematic virtuosity. With angles and fancy cutting.”ⁱⁱⁱ Indeed, only Jonas Mekas and *Film Culture* acclaimed the first version of *Shadows*, which showed three times at the Paris Theatre in New York in 1958. For that reason, the movie became the recipient in January 1959 of the “*Film Culture* First Independent Film Award.” Despite this prize, Cassavetes decided to act upon the rest of the criticism and spent another ten shooting days in which new scenes were included to infuse coherence into the story line in detriment of the original improvisation, spontaneity, and experimentation.

The second version of *Shadows* was shown for the first time in July 1959 at the *National Film Theatre’s Beat, Square and Cool Festival*. Later, in August, it competed in the *Venice Film Festival*. From Italy, it traveled to be screened in Paris and London at the *London Film Festival*. Finally, *Shadows’* official opening took place at London’s Academy Cinema where, according to Ray Carey, it played to crowds and took more money than any film in the theatre’s twenty-five year history.^{iv} Despite the arrangement of the second version, *Shadows* retained a high level of originality and freshness that accounted for the critics’ good reviews. In fact, Cassavetes chose to keep the statement, “The film you have just seen was an improvisation,” in the last version despite the fact that it took three years to make, at least two-thirds of the films was scripted by Cassavetes and a professional Hollywood screenwriter, and most of *Shadows* was not shot on location but on a stage. Nevertheless, *Shadows* was different and original, and as some scholars of John Cassavetes have argued, that originality condemned him to marginality despite his initial success. “It didn’t make sense, it wasn’t straightforward like Hollywood movies and it confused me,” says Christos Tsiolkas, one of the most prolific scholars on John Cassavetes.^v

Resisting Conventions

Certainly, *Shadows* does not follow and, in some cases, alters many of the conventional rules that create meaning in the mainstream cinematic code. Heath explains in “Narrative Space” that the “reality” presented in a film “is a matter of representation, and representation in turn a matter of discourse, of the organization of the images, the definition of the ‘views’, their construction.” Such a construction strives for “coherent action,” which is achieved by emphasizing “narratively important settings, characters traits, or other casual agents. Specific spatial cues ... will be established and used accordingly, centering the flow of the images, taking place.”^{vi} Thereby, meaning derives from the careful organization and direction of the viewer’s attention towards central and meaning making signifiers that disclaim everything irrelevant to the narrative. Hence, this cinematic convention positions the viewer in a privileged location that allows him to equate “watching” with “knowing.” Heath concludes, “he becomes, as it were, a ubiquitous observer ... [with] the best possible viewpoint.”^{vii} The viewer’s desire to “know” is therefore readily satisfied and facilitated by his identification with a camera that “hints” at meaning as it constructs the narrative discourse. As a result, cinematic

reality loses the unpredictability, multiplicity, and chaos that characterize world “reality”; the experience of “meaning” making is detached from the effort and timely process that it conveys outside the realm of cinema.

In contrast, *Shadows* rejects such conventions and strives to present “meaning” in alternative ways. Rather, it deconstructs the cohesive and unifying codes of cinematic “meaning” by creating a process that resembles the more active, affective, and yet chaotic and frustrating experience of “knowing” in the real world. In psychoanalytic terms, *Shadows* seeks to destroy the identification with the imaginary—the image reflected on the mirror/screen—at two different levels. On one hand, *Shadows* exposes the artificiality of the conventional cinematic code that projects a unified and coherent image of “reality” that is in every sense imaginary. Instead, it creates a more realistic way to look at the world in which the viewer is actively involved in a timely process of arriving to “knowledge,” which is in any case unstable and multiple. On the other hand, *Shadows* also denounces the “drama” of the mirror stage through its fictional characters. They all adopt images/masks too “rigid” to be sustained. By interaction and conflict with other characters, this imaginary totality of their images collapses, yielding to more fluid identities that finally accept their vulnerability in their fragmentation.^{viii}

Shadows starts at a Rock and Roll party. Ben (Benito Carruthers) enters into a crammed room of people dancing, shouting and cheering to the loud music. As he makes his way through the crowd, middle and close-up shots of both blacks and whites dancing, drinking, and laughing give the viewer a sense of mirth and geniality that contrasts with Ben’s aloofness. He does not interact with anyone. He barely sorts out his way to a corner from where he observes the action with a “cool” and yet yearning detachment. This first scene of *Shadows* does not contain an establishing shot, nor does it provide background information on the who, where, and when the action “is” taking place. As we move into the second scene, the viewer once again encounters Ben walking through the busy streets of a city in which he seems to be at ease. He bumps into two “buddies” Dennis (Dennis Sallas) and Tom (Tom Allen) with whom he heads off to spend \$20 dollars in a bar. There, they find three girls and the scene divides rapidly into alternating shots that line up the three pairs who get framed close to each other in an angle. If the pairs are positioned exactly in the same way, the interaction between the couples is strikingly different. The flirtations present a romantic and adolescent interaction, a sexually overt exchange, and an Oedipal liaison. Up to this point, *Shadows* has not offered a point of reference or a hint to a possible plot. So far, disorientation, a variety of different perspective, and crowded shots frustrate the viewer’s desire for unified understanding and totality of meaning.

It is not until the third and fourth scene, almost 15 minutes into the movie, that part of the narrative begins to be revealed. Ben enters a dance rehearsal studio where Hugh (Hugh Hurd), a dark skinned African American, and his manager Rupert (Rupert Crosse), also African American, negotiate Hugh’s next show in which he has to introduce a chorus line of white girls singing “A Real Mad Chick.” Hugh’s opposition to introducing the girls, demanding dignity as an artist, is subdued when Ben asks him for another \$20. To add confusion, Rupert explains to the club owner (Jack Ackermann) that his client would make a decision as soon as he finishes talking to “his kid bother.” Hugh, torn between his pride as an artist and the apparent financial support that he provides for Ben, takes the job for \$35. But, beyond Hugh’s introduction as a frustrated and

underestimated artist, one cannot avoid noticing the striking difference of skin color between the brothers, and for the first time we realize that the narrative concentrates on other issues than merely Ben's parties and flirtations with girls.

However, that is not all. Scene four finally discloses all the characters involved in the plot: Hugh is at the bus station with his sister Lelia whose skin is as light as Ben's, and it definitely stands out against Hugh's blackness. Lelia (Lelia Goldoni) is young and full of energy. Hugh tries to persuade her to take a taxi instead of walking home alone. However, Lelia confidently dismisses his concern, "nothing will happen to me, nothing ever does." Later, in her way home Lelia passes by cinemas, show rooms, and billboards that expose female sexuality, when she gets especially attracted by a poster of Brigitte Bardot. She seems to stare at Bardot in a mix of amusement, curiosity, and desire.

After this succession of scenes, and approximately 20 minutes into the movie, one realizes at last that *Shadows* is telling the stories of three mix-raced siblings with independent and yet intertwined identities. That is, the initial scenes have presented the characters separately and have characterized them individually. The viewer has no previous history of their past; a lack of history that emphasizes their independence. However, we know of a reliance on one another whether it is financial, emotional, or patriarchal. Such a multiple narrative—three stories in one—challenges Heath's, and in general Hollywood's endeavor for organization in the narrative pattern to achieve cohesion and unification. Instead, *Shadows* distorts the linear plot, introduces multiple points of view—sometimes irrelevant to the main story—and frustrates the viewer-camera identification strategy. In fact, although the viewer is a "ubiquitous" observer, as Heath suggests, he is not in a privileged position. The viewer is disoriented and confused due to an intentional denial of a fast and single understanding of the narrative. As Ray Carney notes, "the viewer is put in a position of not knowing quite who the characters are, why they are behaving in the way they are, or exactly how to interpret their specific expressions."^x The viewer needs to actively observe and put together the different pieces of the puzzle without being able to predict where the narrative would take him/her. Then, the movie as an image of "reality," as Metz says, is projected into the spectator; however, it does not readily "form up into an organized sequence" by which the viewer accesses to the symbolic. Instead, the viewer experiments a gradual process of discovering the characters and their narrative in time and space.^x

This experience of "knowing" in real time by observing and actively decoding their stories denounces the artificiality of organization and totality in Hollywood cinematic technique. *Shadows* attempts a more 'realistic' approach to access 'knowledge.' Cassavetes himself called it 'impressionistic.'^{xi} The story is a succession of feelings, attitudes, and points of views that get in contact as the characters interact. The camera exposes the spectator to a multiplicity of points of views not only in the overall story but also in every scene. To illustrate this point, in Hugh's first scene, at the dance rehearsal studio, one realizes that Hugh is the main focus of attention and with whom the viewer should identify. However, the camera keeps moving from close-up of Ben, Rupert, Ackerman and the girls, reminding the spectator of the many different perspectives and possible identifications. Moreover, the climatic moment does not concentrate on a close-up of Hugh and his frustration. Rather, Hugh is framed in an angle along with Rupert's face in the background and a girl in the left side of the shot who directly looks at Hugh and at the camera. Seconds later, the camera focuses on the piano

player at the moment he flirts with one of the girls in the chorus. Thus, Hugh's story is clearly not the only one, and certainly his viewpoint is not emphasized as the more relevant to the narrative. Thereby, Cassavetes creates an image of reality that is multiple.

He does not let the spectator concentrate on the exclusivity of a single identification. On the contrary, minor characters or entirely unknown ones force the viewer to consider their perspective, expanding the image of reality from the illusion of totality to a more 'realistic' or at least non-imaginary body of multiple, unpredictable, and even, overlooked parts. While the careful organization of meaning in a Hollywood movie renders a total and unified image ready to be processed into the symbolic, *Shadows* offers an unanalyzed succession of data that is more complex to decode than the fixity of a coherent cinematic product. Thus, *Shadows* destroys the ideal image of reality presented by the asceticism of the cinematic technique. It charges its alternative with the complexity, multiplicity, and fragmentation that the original world has outside of the realm of the imaginary reflected on the screen.

Nevertheless, Cassavetes seems not to be content with merely destroying the identification with an ideal image of reality at the level of the cinematic construction of discourses. Indeed, overlapping as well as illustrating his position against the artificiality of the image reflected on the classic screen, *Shadows* presents to the viewer a trio of characters that simultaneously assumes fixed and completed images of themselves in an attempt to avoid change and to hide their human vulnerability. As a metaphor that unites technique with content in *Shadows*, an explicit visual image of a mask appears twice in the course of the movie: first, when Ben stares at a massive sculpture of an expressionless face at the Metropolitan Art Museum; and second, at the initial shot of the scene in which Lelia and Tony have sex. The motif of the mask acts as a representation of the desire to become the image in order to have ontological access to the world from a unified and stable position that, albeit imaginary, "facilitates" social interactions. Hence, the viewer does not fail to notice Ben's taking on an exclusively white image of himself masqueraded with poses and aloofness. His "passing" requires from him an inflexible pattern of interactions with white people only and a detachment from any emotional closeness with blacks or whites alike. That is why he only hangs out with two white "buddies" and spends his time going from girl to girl. Yet, the viewer still gets a feeling of utter isolation and vulnerability behind his role as a tough and impassive Casanova. Thus, the image that he chooses to adopt is, as Lacan described it, "orthopaedic." Although, it seeks to reflect an ontological totality, it is nonetheless defective since it only accounts for one part, if any, of his identity—his white side—but it alienates the rest.^{xiii} Thus, the strict demands of the adopted image create a tension between his public "mask" and his internal reality.

The tension bursts into frustration and ultimately into physical confrontations that serve as outlets to release the repression. If we consider the scene at Hugh's party, the viewer finds Ben alone, sitting in a corner while a group of young African Americans seem to be having fun. The close-ups of Ben's disgust alternate with close-ups of black male faces "indulging" in an excess of laughter. Finally, a black woman approaches Ben and flirtatiously invites him to join the party. Another close-up of Ben shows his awkwardness, which definitely contrasts with the ease in which he picks up white girls. The woman says to Ben: "I know you want to join the party, but maybe you don't know how, ... you maybe want to be coaxed a little bit." To which Ben responds: "I prefer to

be coaxed, but don't you coax me." Despite Ben's obvious rejection, the woman keeps insisting. Close-ups of black men once again disrupt the conversation, followed by Ben's profile showing signs of annoyance. "Put yourself together, you are not kidding anybody about yourself, ... you have your values all mixed-up," says the woman, overtly confronting Ben and revealing the artificiality of his image. As she proceeds to put her arm around Ben's neck, he utters, "don't touch me," and, losing self-control, slaps her. A fight between Hugh and Ben takes place, and finally Ben leaves the apartment. Unmasking the identity suppressed by the "rigid structure" of the image results in a violent outburst of emotions that disrupts the role-play and denounces its artificiality.

Likewise, Hugh takes on the image of the father figure in relation to his two younger siblings, Ben and Lelia. He is not only their protector but he willingly supports them economically and gives them shelter. Yet, his career as a jazz singer is deteriorating. He is forced to compromise his talent to get jobs at second-rate nightclubs in order to maintain his patriarchal status within the family. But ultimately, his proud and self-assured fatherly image feels threatened when he is required to introduce a chorus line of white girls after his show. Reluctantly, he accedes to do it because he needs the money for his family; however, the outcome of the scene shows the vulnerability of Hugh's mask at its peak. In a dressing room, Hugh argues with Rupert and the pianist about being forced to introduce the girls. "All right" Hugh says, "I am a singer, and I sing a song, now ... What am I going to say about a bunch of dumb broads, with white ribbons, going around singing 'I am a pretty girl'. Does that make sense? ... It is a matter of principles."

Nonetheless, right before getting on stage, he is convinced by Rupert to rehearse the introduction. The nightclub scene opens showing a room crowded and noisy. People laugh in the background as the camera follows a couple of comedians going around the room telling jokes that seem to successfully entertain the audience. When their time is up, Ackerman, the club owner, introduces Hugh to the audience. As he comes out, Hugh walks by a mirror that shows his image side by side his "real" body. The mirror shows the split between the person and the image, his self and his imaginary other, foretelling the imminent fall of the phantom that constitutes his reflection. Hugh starts singing a mellow song. Rapidly, the camera focuses its attention on the audience. A man is framed nodding at Hugh in disappointment and later, a successive number of shots concentrate on different couples who are drinking, talking, and staring at Hugh. In sum, the jovial atmosphere to which we were presented at the beginning of the scene has changed with Hugh's tedious song, which is still playing in the background. At that point, Ackerman instructs the pianist to "put him [Hugh] off," and to bring the girls on stage. Despite Rupert's objections, followed by a close-up of Hugh completely confused, the music for a "Real Mad Chick" silences Hugh who is soon overpowered by a line of girls that surrounds him, completing his denigration.

The Female Question

"The presence of a woman," says Mulvey, "is an indispensable element of spectacle ... yet her visual presence tends to work against the development of the story line ... women in representation can signify castration."^{xiii} That is what happens in Hugh's case. The patriarchal, assertive, and proud image that he has chosen to identify with becomes alienated. He has been "castrated." Hugh can no longer sustain his patriarchal mask.

Hence, a sense of humiliation and vulnerability imbues his character, once again reveling the artificiality of his role in the first place. Indeed, women images in *Shadows* oscillate from an erotically coded portrayal to a menacing and castrating representation. The highly erotic chorus of women dancing with minimal clothes adopts, as Mulvey has noted, a “traditional exhibitionistic role, women are simultaneously looked at and displayed.” However, for Hugh, they evoke the “sexual difference,” that once it is made an “icon” of pleasure, ousts his show for being dull and boring.^{xiv} Yet, if the viewer is inclined to think that these two images of women stand still and unquestioned in *Shadows*, he/she is wrong. In Hugh’s case, they serve to dismantle his self-imposed patriarchal demeanor. However, women representations are also sharply criticized for their artificiality through Lelia’s character.

Lelia is introduced in the film as young, beautiful, and naïve. After taking her brother Hugh to the bus station, we see Lelia walking down the streets at night, as she passes by a movie theatre she becomes fascinated by an image of Bardot in *The Night Heaven Fell*. In intimate clothes, and extremely sexualized, Bardot is the object of male desire. Yet, the image also becomes the reflection that Lelia imposes on herself. She seeks for identification and consequently she adopts a sexualized representation of herself. Ironically, in the background of the shot framing Lelia with her mouth open in front of the Bardot’s picture, a billboard reads “liberty.” Scenes later, we find Lelia at a literary party where she is discussing coquettishly her first short story with David, a writer and one of her admirers. The story focuses on a woman who, walking down Fifth Ave., sees a stranger, walks up to him and gives him a kiss. The content of Lelia’s story, the “liberty” inscription in the background of the previous shot, as well as her identification with Bardot’s image emphasize Lelia’s illusions of female emancipation through the adoption of a sexualized image capable of being emotionally detached from the male gaze. However, her encounter with Tony teaches her otherwise.

Acting upon the same impulse of her fictional character, Lelia kisses Tony in order to retaliate against David’s criticism of the story. Lelia’s flirting and careless behavior prompts her first sexual encounter, and the outcome is disastrous. The conversation that follows, shot while they are still in bed, reveals the consequences of Lelia’s adoption of a sexually charged image tailored to satisfy male desire:

Tony: Lelia—Really, if I’d known this was the first time for you, I wouldn’t have touched you.

Lelia: I didn’t know it could be so awful.

Tony: Don’t be so upset, sweetheart, baby. It will be much easier next time.

Lelia: There isn’t going to be next time

...

Tony: I’m sorry if I disappointed you, I guess I did.

Lelia: I was so frightened. I kept saying to myself you mustn’t cry. If you love a man, you shouldn’t be frightened.

Tony: It’s only natural. There isn’t a girl in the world that wouldn’t feel the same way. She’s got to.

After the encounter, Lelia's sexually receptive and seemingly careless behavior needs to be radically changed, since it no longer fits her deeply wounded feelings. Hence, she rapidly improvises the role of the sensitive, hurt, and victimized woman. The shots that immediately follow the exchange above show Lelia striking the most hackneyed and melodramatic postures. However, her drama does not end in that scene. Later on, back in Lelia's apartment, Hugh arrives. Lelia hurries to kiss her brother and to hug Rupert. Immediately, an extreme and long close-up of Tony reveals his disgust at realizing that Lelia's brother is black, so she must be black as well. His face gradually acquires a nauseous grimace. Seconds later, he says, "I have an appointment, I have to go." From now on, Lelia goes to the other extreme: from the excessive flirtatiousness of the object of desire to the threatening image capable of emasculation.

After being deeply hurt, Lelia arms herself with an alternative mask that serves to cover up the frailty of her previous sexualized image and the open wound caused by the overt rejection of her race. This newly adopted external representation of herself—extremely resistant to male entreaties—is tried with Davey Jones an African American who comes to her apartment to take her out to a dance. When he arrives, she is not ready to leave immediately. Davey asks, "will you be long?" Lelia responds, "I'll be as long as I am." Despite the sexual overtones of her line, she in fact makes Davey wait for two and a half hours, time during which she finds ways to humiliate, smart, and belittle him in front of Rupert, Ben, and Hugh. This is a scene with an extreme theatrical exaggeration. Layers of artificial images are obviously imposed on Lelia's character, yet they are doomed to break down for being too fixed and ultimately inoperative in front of her repression and vulnerability. Lelia's final scene represents her failure to sustain her identification with the castrating woman, the moment in which she finally surrenders and admits the falsity of her performance:

Davey: ... Do you always go around embarrassing people in front of strangers? I mean laughing at them in front of your family? Keep them waiting for hours just to show off how masculine you are?

Lelia: Darling, I'm not masculine [sarcastically]

Davey: Well, it would seem that way to me.

Lelia: Well, how do you want me to behave? [taunting]

Davey: Look. Just dance and be as lovely as you look.

Lelia: Look, Davey, I am what I am, and nobody tells me what to do.

Davey: Look, I don't know who you think you're fighting ... You know, I saw the way he [Tony] looked at you back there, and I also saw the way he looked at me.

Lelia starts crying and, unable to speak, being confronted with her reality, drops the mask and finally rests on Davey's arms. He realizes her vulnerability and concludes, "You know, despite your horrible exterior, it's you I like."

Final Remarks

Shadows systematically destroys any external, fixed, imaginary, and self-imposed identity. Whether racial, patriarchal, or sexual, they are all dismissed as "horrible" fronts

that do not account for psychological fluidity and changeability of the human being. The image in the mirror is exceedingly fixed and repressive to be sustained as a permanent representation of the “self.” Its artificiality has been condemned and destroyed. Davey’s final remarks—“...despite your horrible exterior, it’s you I like”—precipitates the end of the film. Not only Lelia, but also Hugh and Ben admit the alienation of their emotional needs in their desire to adopt a perfect ideal, a totalizing image with which they can confront the world.

At the bus station, Hugh opens up and calms down Rupert’s frustration as a manager unable to find decent jobs for Hugh. At last, Hugh drops the external front and exclaims, “do you believe in me? I don’t mean what those other people think of me, but what we give each other, what comes out of both of us, your talent, my voice ... Rup, I believe you are the greatest manager in the world.” The camera, shifting back and forth from Rupert to Hugh’s close-ups, reveals a moment of closure, where finally Hugh’s interiority triumphs over his façade. Ben, at the same time, and after having been beaten up for picking up on a group of girls tells his friends: “No more of this jazz for me baby ... I don’t know why we do this, going around trying to pick up on girls ... here we are, the know-it-all type guy, ... this has taught me a lesson.” Next time we see Ben, he is alone, no music, and the camera, shooting him from overhead standing on street, indicates Ben’s private moment of self-recognition. Seconds later, he proceeds to cross the street. The camera follows him from the distance until he disappears in the night.

In these three moments of *anagnorisis*—a fundamental recognition about one’s nature or need—*Shadows* destroys the character’s identification and adoption of the imaginary.^{xv} Its structure melts, liberating the characters from their alienation. A new “self” is allowed to rise, open-ended and fluid, “not only unformulated, but unformulatable.”^{xvi} Thereby, *Shadows* advocates a continuous renegotiation of one’s identity based, not on illusionary images, but on interactions with others. The characters in *Shadows* are forced to drop their masks when they come in contact and conflict with other people. In fact, the almost claustrophobic shots of Cassavetes, jammed with people extremely close to each other, press them to touch, talk, fight, and reconcile with one another. By disposing of the comprehensive and complete image, the “selves” become receptive to the influence of others. Then, they are forever in flux and saved from “the armour of an alienating identity.”

Moreover, in the realm of cinematography, *Shadows* offers a parallel message. It denounces the unified, all too cohesive image constructed in the conventional cinematic forms of representation. *Shadows* does not tell a story in a predictable way. Rather, the lack of a “proper” beginning, no background information of events, or characters, impossibility of a single identification, and multiplicity of points of view, among other deviations, force the viewer to endure the same ontological process experienced by the characters. In sum, *Shadows* rejects any readily available identification and recognition of one’s self with false images whether reflected on the mirror or on the screen in order to advocate a more ‘realistic’ experience of the world where unpredictability, multiplicity, and chaos reign against the fantasy of the *Imago*.

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ⁱ Jacques Lacan. *Écrits: A Selection*. Trans. Alan Sheridan. (New York: W.W. Norton and Co., 1977) 2.

ⁱⁱ John Cassavetes. “And the Pursuit of Happiness,” *Films and Filming* (February 1961)

ⁱⁱⁱ Quoted in Tom Charity, *John Cassavetes: Lifeworks* (London: Omnibus Press, 2001) 22.

^{iv} Ray Carey, *Shadows* (London: BFI Film Classics, 2001) 7.

^v Christos Tsiolkas, “Meet John Cassavetes” *Senses of Cinema: an Online Film Journal Devoted to the Serious & Eclectic Discussion of Cinema* 16 (Sept-Oct 2001) 2

^{vi} Stephen Heath, “Narrative Space” *Questions of Cinema* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1981) 26-39.

^{vii} *Ibid* 32.

^{viii} My interpretation of the mirror stage is informed by Lacan’s explanation in “The Mirror Stage”: “The mirror stage is a drama whose internal thrust is precipitated from insufficiency to anticipation –and which manufactures for the subject, caught up in the lure of spatial identification, the succession of phantasies that extends from a fragmented body-image to a form of its totality that I shall call orthopaedic—and, lastly to the assumption of the armour of an alienating identity, which will mark with its rigid structure the subject’s entire mental development.” Lacan,4.

^{ix} Ray Carey, *The Films of John Cassavetes*. (New York: Cambridge UP, 1994) 10.

^x See Christian Metz. *The Imaginary Signifier. Psychoanalysis and the Cinema*. (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1982) 48-49.

^{xi} See Ray Carey, *Shadows*, 48.

^{xii} See Lacan 4.

^{xiii} Laura Mulvey, *Visual and Other Pleasures* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana UP, 1989) 19-25.

^{xiv} *Ibid* 21.

^{xv} Anagnorisis, Greek: “recognition,” in a literary work, the startling discovery that produces a change from ignorance to knowledge. It is discussed by Aristotle in the *Poetics*.

^{xvi} Ray Carey, *The Films*, 47.

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