

Athanasios Alexandridis

Genealogy of Evil in David Lynch's Films¹

1. Methodology of the psychoanalytic approach of an artwork

Should the title have been “Evil in David Lynch's Films” the answer would be easy and decisive: in Lynch's films “evil”² is everywhere. If the viewer can withstand evil's seduction and the perverse deconstruction that one experiences when facing it, let them enjoy the films! The rest can stay out. As I myself have been a cinephile since I was young, I watched Lynch's films when they “came out” of the warm bosom of cult cinematographers, and surrendered to the seductive charm of the director's aesthetics, without being particularly concerned with the conceptualization of the work. It was a time of big debates around structuralism, deconstruction, the need for coherence in narration or the creativity of discontinuities' in literature and cinema. In short, debates regarding the morphology that, as a young aspiring intellectual, I passionately followed. Debates that took place on a backdrop of hope for social change and art's and avant-garde's role in that change.

Today, three decades later, as a psychoanalyst in profession and psychoanalytically formed as a subject, having been asked to write this article, comfortably seated on my sofa, I watch the films on my HD screen looking for meaning. Is this maturity or professional perversion? Is it a conversation with myself, against the backdrop of pessimism about society and the question of what art and the avant-garde are today?

This question is a good starting point for reflection. It triggers a feeling of distress, which demands a certain way of thinking in order for the distress to diminish and, if possible, be eliminated. The psychoanalytic method could offer some solutions: it can transpose the artwork into “text” and interpret certain fragments that the psychoanalyst considers capable of presenting unconscious movements, traumas and deficits.

¹ Translation from Greek: Orestis Stylianidis. Editing: Eleni Makka.

² Paul Ricœur gives an extremely concise but substantial presentation of evil in theology and philosophy in P. Ricœur, D. Pellauer, *Evil, a Challenge to Philosophy and Theology*, in “Journal of the Academy of Religion”, 53, n. 4, 1985, pp. 635-648.

The title of this article is both a gimmick and part of this particular methodology: the concept of *evil* – impossible to be defined in its totality – is cut into “*forms of evil within its genealogy*”³. Thus, certain fundamental unconscious “episodes” are generated, that are reiterated throughout the artwork, either identical or symbolically modified. This is what the psychoanalyst must organize in order to reconstruct the latent narration that lies beneath the artwork’s manifest narration, in line with Freud in the interpretation of the dream⁴. In particular, Freud reconstructs the unconscious ways that evil is intertwined with the subject’s story. I insist that in a psychoanalytical context, the subject is the film itself – not its creator. There have been repeated attempts to psychoanalyze the creator through their work – but I am personally completely opposed to this approach, both scientifically and ethically. I maintain that the original creator as an “Other” – according to Arthur Rimbaud’s maxim, “*Je suis un Autre*” (“I is Another”) – creates works of art to expand their Consciousness into the spaces of the unconscious, according Freud’s dictum, “where it was, ego shall be”⁵. And I contend, to state it from the outset, that through his films Lynch certainly challenges the viewers’ capacity to look beyond themselves and their fixed assumptions, and one could argue that he exposes himself to this challenge too.

Freud engaged with works of art (poetry, literature, theater, painting, sculpture)⁶ for two reasons: a) to become inspired, and b) to find cultural evidence that supports the theories he derived from clinical material. He looked for the big topics, such as the *oedipus* complex, the castration complex, the murder of the father, sadomasochism, the primary mother-infant relationship. This course of searching for meaning from the artworks’ content was appropriated by his followers, becoming a seemingly one-way street approach for psychoanalysts. Not, however, for myself who considers it necessary but insufficient if art analysis is not combined with the analysis of the artwork’s form. This approach is obligatory when one tries to discover and follow the variations of evil in its early manifestations. I will attempt to demonstrate this in the chronological analysis of

³ Nietzsche examined the genealogy of concepts and showed that their content is modified by the evolution of systems of power. By analogy, I study the forms and meanings that evil takes as Lynch’s work evolves.

⁴ S. Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams*, in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, tr. by J. Strachey, 4, Hogarth Press, London 1953.

⁵ S. Freud, *The Ego and The Id*, in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, tr. by J. Strachey, 19, Hogarth Press, London 1961.

⁶ A comprehensive list of the individual works, articles or quotations where Freud refers to Art would heavily burden the bibliography. The works and numerous articles commenting on them are now available online, and most of them, free of charge.

Lynch's works in order to reveal, if any, a genealogy of evil, and to reveal its "uncanny" aspects, as I will later explain.

In reading the artwork psychoanalytically, it is as if the relationship between psychoanalyst and analysand is maintained, with the artwork holding the latter position. However, we know that in a psychoanalytic process that is carried out according to all the rules, the free associations of the analysand play a huge role in the understanding of the material and the formulation of interpretations. This is of course missing in the "psychoanalysis of the artwork" and in its place comes the psychoanalyst's free associations and thoughts. This led André Green⁷ to argue that in this case the artwork holds the position of the psychoanalyst and the psychoanalyst the position of the analysand⁸. Which means that the psychoanalyst, in discussing an artwork listens to his theories, that is, the product of his resistances and, possibly, some darker parts of himself that will appear mainly through bizarre images and sensations. That's always the case, but it is maximized when the psychoanalyst-viewer is confronted with abstract art, a category under which David Lynch's works fall, in my view –in the sense that his movies' are consisted of fragments of stories that are arranged on an abstract canvas. Besides, one should not forget that the filmmaker studied painting at a School of Fine Arts.

2. Radical Evil and its variations

It is at this point, perhaps, that I should present my thesis about evil on the psychic level. I find that "radical evil" for a person consists of his own death and the knowledge of his "mortality". Through this knowledge does not arise that early, since the beginning of life one experiences somatic and psychic states of acute bewilderment and angst where the feeling of precipitation and annihilation of the world and, within it, the elemental self, is very intense. As one grows, the psyche attempts to repress this knowledge of radical loss, displacing it with specific individual losses, such as the loss of significant persons, states, psychic and somatic qualities, that are experienced as mutilation or castration. Mutilation refers to complete loss without the possibility of symbolic substitution, as is the case with castration. The establishment of *oedipus* and castration complex play the most important role in the psychic organization of evil that institutes the prohibition of incest, as a model of prohibited desire, as well as the prohibition of murder on the level of the real, while

⁷ A. Green, *La Lettre et la Mort*, Denoël, Paris 2004.

⁸ A. Alexandridis, *André Green and the Applied Psychoanalysis*, in *A tribute to André Green*, ed. by O. Maratou, D. Panitz, Nissos, Athens 2016.

leaving the imaginary and symbolic fields free for the development of incestuous and murderous scenarios. Those are the fields wherein art has operated throughout time, imaginatively proliferating their variations from the crudest forms to the most sophisticated. Yet, however much the images have been altered and the stories have been displaced to different places and other times, the viewer, as Aristotle⁹ has posited is faced with the “mimesis of praxis” (representation of an action) through “pity and fear”, experiencing the passions of the heroes as their own and as alien at the same time. The intensity of this split of emotion and identity grew as Lynch’s work progressed. But let us examine the works in more detail.

3. Paths of evil in Lynch’s filmography

In Lynch’s first feature films, *Eraserhead* (1977) and *Elephant Man* (1980) the *radical evil* underlying the films comes from Nature and is inconceivable! In the first film it’s a monstrous baby and in the second it’s a horribly deformed adult who was born as a monster. Their presence is so disruptive that the behavior of all the characters is organized around them, demonstrating a direct consequence of evil: that it divides people into *good* and *evil* according to their attitude towards it. Thus, the concept of good is created reflectively, namely through empathy for the sufferer. This “division” of people, groups and society in the face of evil is what Lynch will deliver in all his films, which is also dictated by their structure as “crime films”. In his first two films the consistency of *good* and “evil’s contents” as well as the attitudes of the “good characters and the ‘villains’” is delivered with a kind of narrational naivety. Contrastingly, in his following films the dividing lines start to blur, making the viewer wonder about the underlying intentions of the good characters and the “villains” as well as the “contents of good and evil itself”.

Elephant Man, provides an explanation for teratogenesis: while pregnant, the mother of the main character is assaulted by a huge elephant and this gives birth to an elephant-like deformed person, as if the infant assumed the features of the assaulting rapist, reflecting the mother’s horror and disgust. It seems like the director is introducing a psychosomatic theory about the effect of real events on the biology of an individual. However, if we choose to read the assault symbolically, we could assume that it refers to a *rape* and that the mother, as is often the case, has projected both her love and repulsion for the rapist onto her child, thus turning the child into a *psychic monster*. Nevertheless, the mother-infant

⁹ Aristotle, *Poetics*, tr. by A. Kenny, Oxford University Press, 2013.

primary relationship emerges as yet another variation of evil, especially in *Eraserhead*, where the mother abandons the infant-monster she gave birth to. On the contrary, in *Elephant Man*, as the film progresses we find out that the mother initially did take care of her child but for some unknown reason she was later separated from it. This fact has left a seed of good in the child's psyche, that was dormant due to the impact of evil upon it, until it was brought back to surface through external care, acceptance and love.

Certainly in the first two films, but to a great extent in the ones that came after, Lynch follows a *traditional typology*, typical of fairy tails: *good characters are beautiful, "villains" are ugly*. This typology is abandoned in the films that follow, and a typology of *bizarre* is introduced, based on characters of undefined origin and intention. Their presence renders both the aesthetics and the narration more enigmatic yet more intriguing. I will discuss this further below.

Let us return to his first film, *Eraserhead*, which I suggest represents the DNA of all of Lynch's films in terms of theme, morphology and narrative. *Eraserhead* is classified as a horror film, the genre primarily associated with evil, as in my view are all of his films along with the last film, *Inland Empire*, with *Elephant Man* being an exception as it is classified as drama. Continuing with the identification of the forms of evil in *Eraserhead*, we can distinguish the following:

- *The industrial space*. It is portrayed either as active, but of dated technology, or as abandoned, with huge machines that spit out fire, smoke and noise, it produces an environment of angst and hazard, where intriguing, yet often enigmatic, actions take place. This is a constant element in all Lynch's films mentioned.

- *The house*. On the primary level it is portrayed as a "good", protective environment, and suddenly turns bad, for mainly two reasons. Firstly, due to the house's fluidity and the removal of its spatio-temporal status. This is typically exemplified by the "melting" of Henry's bed and its transformation into a lake when he makes love. And while we initially think that this transformation illustrates the lovers' sensual immersion, it then turns into a vortex that sucks them in. Secondly, due to the house's liquidation with corridors that lead to an absolute formless blackness – or, in the other films, some other dark color – a "gate to the transcendental".

- *The objects*. Often depicted in whole or in part in long shots, they are animistic and constitute elements that reinforce the hero's and the viewer's anguish about whatever demonic may arise from them. The curtains and floors are particularly animistic elements.

- *The dream process*. The dream begins as a "therapy" of the dreamer's psyche but more than often ends up a nightmare. A blonde woman, with

a large bosom and cheeks puffed out like mumps, dances while worms drop from the ceiling, which she crushes with her foot.

- *The day dreams.*

- *The hallucination.* Henry's head comes off and falls on the floor. Out of his neck the head of the infant-monster emerges. Henry's head falls into the street, gets smashed in by a drill etc.

- *The sexual impulse.* It is introduced as an "urgent passion" that often breaks the rules. In *Eraserhead* it takes on an incestuous dimension with Mary's mother assaulting her daughter's lover. This theme of the *sexual seduction* of a younger man by an older woman, is also found in *Blue Velvet* (1986) and *Wild at Heart* (1990), while in the following films the theme of *father-daughter incest* appears, as is the case in *Twin Peaks: Fire Walk with Me* (1992).

- *Sexual intercourse.* While it is desirable, it often becomes unsettling because it is disrupted by images of people that intrude into the hero's mind other than the sexual partner and drive them to confusion and terror.

- *The murder.* In *Eraserhead* it is Henry's desperate murder of the infant-monster, an act of euthanasia that takes on the character of an assassination. It comes as a redemption for the viewer, as they had this idea in their mind since the beginning of the film.

- *The transcendental.* In the beginning and the end of the film a man appears rather obscurely as a figure from some other world (god, demon, time) who operates some objects that seem like levers.

- *Madness.* A state into which Harry enters, and is suggested by the nightmarish and puzzling title of the film. "Eraserhead" – a head that erases. Does it erase memory or the present? And if so, what is left of the person?

Eraserhead was panned by critics, but captivated cinephiles around the world as a horror film. Lynch received some funding from within the studio system to create a more conventional but impeccable film, *Elephant Man* (1980). The film was a universal success. Such an achievement requires a great theme that could undoubtedly touch the whole world. The battle between good and evil *is* such a theme. The film revolves around morphological and mental disability and the reactions to it. The whole atmosphere evokes Dickens novels, with its division between London's high society and the lumpen underworld. The former, carrying humanitarian and scientific values, will embrace the "disabled monster" to integrate it into society, while the vulgarian, cruel underworld will exploit it as a "spectacle". The main theme that arises is the *seduction of observation* that is associated with "good" when related to scientific progress and the disabled person's development, and on the other hand, with evil, when it aims to satisfy the voyeuristic and scopophilic drives. Whereas the "romantic" aura of

the film encourages the first tendency, I feel that Lynch is “winking” at the audience as if to say “you are here because you wish to see the evil at work while naively believing that you are observers on the side of good”. It is a stance that will carry on in all his following films, though it will become increasingly ambiguous as “good, evil, and what is beyond” will intertwine, pulling the viewer out of the convenient position of *innocence*. Even in *Elephant Man* the dividing line's clarity is lost when the doctor wonders about the selflessness of his intentions. In a sense, I think Lynch from this film onwards essentially declares “no one is innocent!”

The film brings out various ways of reversing evil. Love, care, education, socialization, and acceptance of diversity are widely accepted as good practices. But Lynch emphasizes some others in this film, such as:

- *Language*. Evil is either silent or speaks an “elementary language” that is a bearer of raw instincts.

- *Art*. Art as observation (in the film the theater and by extension cinema) because of the catharsis it brings and art as sublimation through the creation of works of art (the hero builds maquettes).

- *Naming as condensation of the subject*. The hero, being a monster, has no name. He is the Elephant Man. While his subjectification progresses, addressing the mob he states “I am a human being”, and before he dies the process is completed through signing the maquette with his name: John Merrick.

- *Solidarity of the weaker*. It is possibly the most moving part of the film, when the outcasts, the monsters that are put on display, prove able to stand up to their oppressor and rescue Elephant Man from the criminal violence of his “master”.

- *Mother's Love*. Elephant Man dies. The last shots show the sky, the mother, eternity in her arms. The film closes with the phrase “Nothing dies”.

In *Blue Velvet* (1986) the previous movies' typology of evil and its “counterbalance” are widely used, while new aspects of evil are added.

- *The seductive woman*. Dorothy Vallens, the Blue Lady that sings at Show Club who captivates and seduces everyone. Her thrilling presence is reinforced by her actual situation as a captive, raped, abused woman-mother, elements that make her irresistible. She stimulates the desire of young and sexually inexperienced student Jeffrey Beaumont by stating “I have my disease”, counting on the seduction of illness. She commits him to the role of her savior by offering him a love that he had never known before since he is united “incestuously” (on an unconscious level) with the mother-woman. Thanks to her inexpressive face that allows others to project their perversions onto her, she becomes the “universal and ideal object of desire”.

- *Perversion*¹⁰. Perversion is the central axis of the film and will be the central axis of all films onward. It culminates with the rape scene of Dorothy Vallens by mobster Frank, a shocking scene that Jeffrey watches through the closet blinds. At a first level it seems to be a scene of voyeurism where the little boy peeps at his parents making love. This is what we psychoanalytically call the primal scene and it is a scene that charges the watching young child with physical and mental arousal, awe, conscious desire for the desired parent, unconscious desire for the other parent whose position it wishes to take, along with envy and murderous desire towards the parent. At the same time, the child is overwhelmed by fear due to the aggression of the “rapist” parent and the secret-observer-child is driven into a position of powerlessness-idleness. Once again, Lynch is winking at the viewer. This particular scene begins depicting the *standard oedipal complex* with a violent, rapist, father. However it goes beyond that, as Frank starts calling the woman “Mummy” and asks her to show him her genitals while demanding not to look at him. Thus, the scene shifts to a relationship between a boy and his pre-oedipal mother where the little boy is anxiously asking to see what he does not know, the other sex, a condition that will lead him to a basic gender classification. However, the scene opens up to a third level as Frank asks to caress a piece of blue velvet fabric, which he sucks on. We are now in a state of regression to primary childhood and sexuality which is dominated by the needs of erotogenic zones such as breastfeeding and skin contact. Frank has gone back to the state of what Freud calls the “pervert polymorph child” and, at least, in my opinion as a child psychoanalyst and a person that has memories of childhood angst over sexuality, I view Frank’s suffering with compassion and I tend to sanctify him. This is yet another moment where Lynch ingeniously abolishes the dividing line between good and evil, defining a new zone “beyond good and evil”, which, according to developmental psychology, is located prior to the development of the concepts of good and evil within the psyche.

- *Addiction to perversion*. A situation that sharp-witted Sandy sums up for amateur investigator Jeffrey with the question “Detective or pervert?” A question that could also be read as “viewer or pervert?”

- *The malevolence of American small towns*. Beneath the surface of the joyful, peaceful and normal life of suburbia there is much evil that we shall see unfold even more in the subsequent films. I think Lynch is sardonic toward American suburbia. Indicative of this is the plot’s happy ending where Jeffrey returns to the normality of suburban life with a relationship with the glamorous college girl, as if the experiences he went

¹⁰ An excellent presentation on the subject of perversions is given in S. Benvenuto, *What are perversions?*, Karnac Books, London 2016.

through, such as his passion for the Blue Lady and the murder of Jack have not affected or altered him.

- *The insufficiency of the agents of good.* Both in this and in all the following films, the director is particularly sarcastic and critical of police authorities by the way he portrays them.

- *The sufficiency of the agents of evil.* I am under the impression that Lynch admires them in their resourcefulness and effectiveness as villains. He somehow treats them as “fallen angels”. At any rate I don't think that he has had any kind of moralistic perspective about them in his work's entirety. He just documents and lets the viewer judge.

4. The emergence of the ambiguity of evil

Moving on to *Wild at heart* (1990) we once again face the whole repertoire of lynchean patterns of evil, with the addition of certain new ones. Some are ambiguous, “beyond good and evil”. I wonder whether the introduction of such elements is somehow connected to the director's increasing engagement with eastern philosophies, where there is no clear distinction between good and evil, but one is placed within the other, like in yin and yang. The main new elements are:

- *Fire.* The film begins with a match that sets a fire that fills the whole frame in a long shot. From now on, fire will be an ambiguous element that is able to produce both “disaster” and “rebirth”.

- *Circular time.* Destruction and rebirth are main characteristics of cyclical time. While in *Wild at Heart* the narration is still linear, including flashbacks that are completely intelligible in terms of the chronological development of the events, a certain discontinuity already exists”. In the subsequent films the discontinuity will grow and the linear narrative becomes fragmented, as we will demonstrate later.

- *The road.* The film introduces its own purely lynchian genre, a combination of noir and road movie, which will be used for all the films that will follow. I am not sure about the extent to which Lynch has been influenced by Taoism¹¹ (Tao = road) in taking his heroes on the road as a process of discovering (or even losing?) the self.

-*Hallucination, memory, day-dreaming.* They appear as nightmarish, persecutory and unintelligible elements. However some turn out to be good, especially during Sailor's last hallucination where he sees the good witch.

¹¹ Lao Zu, *Tao Te Ching*, tr. by J. Minford, Penguin, London 2021.

- *The transcendental*. Mainly under the form of witches. The “evil witch” is represented by the bad mother, while the “good witch” is Sailor’s protector.

Apart from these, the appearance of manifestations of “pure” evil continues:

- Teenage Lula’s *rape* and subsequent abortion.

- *Murder*. It occurs as paid murder (like the murders arranged by Lula’s mother), as murder due to overwhelming aggression (like the murder Sailor commits in the beginning of the film and the murders during the robbery), and as murder to settle a score (murders between criminals).

- *The possessive mother* as Lula’s mother who wants to eliminate anything that will take her daughter away from her.

- *The femme fatale*. She is portrayed by Lula’s mother who manages to manipulate men with her seductive sexual charms. Her failure with Sailor leads her to develop a “murderous hatred” towards him.

- Perhaps the most ambiguous element of all, is the “transformation” of the word “wild” from something “evil” to something good. At first “the world is wild at heart and weird on the top” but in the end the good witch’s advice to Sailor is “not to turn away from Love and to use his wild heart in order to fight for his dreams”. And the film gradually turns from a noir-road movie into a *Love story and Fairytale* incorporating the director’s sarcasm regarding the good outcome of things that the aesthetically hypnotized adult-part of the viewer will allow the childish-part to believe!

5. Lynch’s method

I propose that the common theme of all the following films is the viewer’s “hypnosis” by the film’s aesthetics. This is probably the only way one could watch these films with “pleasure”. Hypnosis will allow them to set aside their logic, otherwise they will suffer by seeking the linearity of time and narrative, which now is definitely fragmented. Of course, Lynch will not stop to “play hide and seek” with the viewer, by giving them a hint to understand “where the message lies” and then immediately negate it. By adding to his existing repertoire of evil new manifestations such as incest, possession, temptation, malice and a few manifestations of ineffective good, such as police investigation, Lynch puts the viewer in the position already articulated in *Blue Velvet*: “pervert or detective?” By doing so, he doesn’t allow the viewer the kind of relief that would occur if they were dealing with a surrealist film like *Un Chien Andalou* (1929) or a *Dada* film of the interwar period, from which I think he is heavily influenced.

Overall, I believe that Interwar period is one of Lynch's persistent aesthetic references with the recurring image of cabaret and the splitting of the hero into several characters in a Brechtian way, such as the actor playing the hero or the detective changing during the film or conversely the same actress playing two roles. I find that this kind of "split" is complemented by another one of his cinematic references, the films of Jean-Luc Godard. Godard's characters are not split, yet they are not "characters" in the proper sense, but "discourses" expressing the different, if you like, dialectical aspects of a "situation". As a "European" American, Lynch joins the lineage of the aforementioned and provides us with "images of the world" or a "discourse on the world".

In the manner of the visual arts I believe that he encourages us to perceive the film as paintings of a polyptych whose composition has been rearranged. We know that viewing a painting is not done in a certain sequence e.g. from left to right as in Western books. It is assumed that one views a painting as a whole, although this is also an illusion because we know that some elements attract conscious attention and some affect the viewer's psyche unconsciously¹². One can consider that every Lynch film is made up of polyptychs, each of which is a stand-alone story, and yet, altogether form a "complete" story. Let us bring to mind a Catholic Church triptych: when open, the central part and the inner part of the two panels show the story of Christ or of a saint. When the panels are closed the exterior is sometimes directly, other times rather indirectly, connected to the inner history. But other times the connection may seem totally unclear. How one reads the triptych depends on the "inter-painting", analogous to the "inter-textual", mental ability, their ability to phantasize and their availability. I use this metaphor of a triptych to claim that Lynch's films, especially from *Lost Highway* (1997) onwards, can be approached through this model. For example, in *Inland Empire* (2006) there are at least four stories that develop the "theme": the actor's private life, the polish story, the film the actor is shooting, the play with the rabbit-headed actors.

If we consider the lynchean cinema as a "discourse on the world", then we find accordingly – returning again to European culture – a way of writing that resembles the elliptical writing of *nouveau roman*, the plays of Marguerite Duras, or the texts of the avant-garde literary group *Oulipo*. And if I allow myself the arbitrary association, Lynch's films strongly remind me of Italo Calvino's novel *If on a Winter's Night a Traveler* (1979), which belongs to postmodernism. Calvino's "story" unravels while characters and setting change in each chapter. From this

¹² See D. Arasse, *On n'y voit rien: Descriptions*, Folio, Paris 2003 and G. Didi-Huberman, *Ce que nous voyons, ce qui nous regarde*, Les Éditions de Minuit, Paris 1992.

perspective and through this example I would like to argue that Lynch is part of the postmodern movement and that his films consist of text and metatext.

The “deconstruction” of the film, both on the level of the image and the text, is an expression of “the forces of evil” or, more psychoanalytically, of the death drive, though I will develop this a little further on. Up to this point I think I have provided enough detail of both the clear manifestations of evil as well as its ambiguous forms. I would only add that all the above run through these films and culminate in *Inland Empire* (2006) which can be considered a major *Opus* in honor of cinema!

6. Evil at the service of good

To analyze Lynch’s films, and films in general in terms of distinctions between true and false or good and evil that might seem “self-evident” is in fact reductive and far from the gist. Not to say that Lynch doesn’t set up this “rat trap”, to bring to mind Hamlet/Shakespeare. However his work’s main theme is the “uncanny”. This is the common thread of all his films since *Wild at Heart*, and it reaches its peak with *Inland Empire*. The term *Unheimlich*¹³ – *l’inquiétante étrangeté* in French, *uncanny* or *unfamiliar* in English – was elaborated by Freud as the essential factor for the creation of interesting artworks as well as the mobilization of the psychoanalyst’s and the analysand’s unconscious during the psychoanalytic process. Lynch highlights the familiar alienness of the world and the capacity to be experienced as self-exploration. It is at this particular point that evil is put at the service of good.

In order to comprehend the phrase above, let us proceed into a brief theoretical overview that brings us back to the beginning of this article. Let us accept that death is the radical evil and the fact that there is an energy of destruction of the life structures that realizes the individual’s decomposition. Freud called this energy death drive and placed it as a counterpart of the life drive, which aims to create biological and psychic forms. The former deconstructs, the latter constructs. In contemporary psychoanalytic theory, we maintain that the death drive attacks the links and the life drive binds them. Therefore, we could argue that all the work of deconstruction and delinking is carried out by the “agent of Death”. While this seems exclusively destructive on a first level, on a secondary one it seems to provide us with two possibilities. The first, involves the deconstruction of the psyche, when faced with situations that are ex-

¹³ S. Freud, *The Uncanny*, in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, tr. by J. Strachey, 17, Hogarth Press, London 1955.

tremely distressful, unintelligible and uncanny. Deconstruction, mainly related to consciousness and logic, allows the individual to alienate themselves to a certain degree, and hence to not experience events in their full intensity. This is evidenced by the testimonies of individuals who found themselves in extreme situations of danger and survival and who describe themselves as experiencing them as being “outside of themselves”. The second, positive possibility, is a consequence of the former. When consciousness pulls back, its control over imagination and dream is loosened, freeing up space for the production of psychic “illusions” that fill the “void” left by the retreat of consciousness. These *illusions* create a peculiar space, a transitional space, an uncanny world filled by “me and not-me” objects, a bearable dystopian environment where the astonished individual can barely continue to exist and move. Such are the worlds of Lynch’s movies: liminal, but eventually enabling survival. It is clear in all the vicissitudes of his heroes, especially in Nikki Grace, the main character in *Inland Empire*, that despite the feeling of estrangement with the world and herself, she finally survives. Indeed, she may even emerge enriched, just like Lynch’s viewer, if the hallucinatory elements that arose from the experience are recognized as products of the unconscious that can now be integrated into the self and into the knowledge of the self regarding its being. It is in this sense that watching Lynch’s films is a psychoanalytic process with the film holding the position of the psychoanalyst. And it is through this approach that one could probably justify my claim that in Lynch’s films a genealogy of evil unfolds that ultimately serves good!

Bibliography

- Alexandridis A., *André Green and the Applied Psychoanalysis*, in *A tribute to André Green*, ed. by O. Maratou, D. Panitz, Nissos, Athens 2016.
- Arasse D., *On n’ y voit rien: Descriptions*, Folio, Paris 2003.
- Aristotle, *Poetics*, tr. by A. Kenny, Oxford University Press, 2013.
- Benvenuto S., *What are Perversions?*, Karnac Books, London 2016.
- Didi-Huberman G., *Ce que nous voyons, ce qui nous regarde*, Les Éditions de Minuit, Paris 1992.
- Freud S., *The Interpretation of Dreams*, in “The Standard edition of the complete psychological works of Sigmund Freud”, tr. by J. Strachey, 4, Hogarth Press, London 1953.
- Id., *The Uncanny*, in *The Standard edition of the complete psychological works of Sigmund Freud*, tr. by J. Strachey, 17, Hogarth Press, London 1955.
- Id., *The Ego and The Id*, in *The Standard edition of the complete psychological works of Sigmund Freud*, tr. by J. Strachey, 19, Hogarth Press, London 1961.
- Green A., *La Lettre et la Mort*, Denoël, Paris 2004.

Lao Zu, *Tao Te Ching*, tr. by J. Minford, Penguin, London 2021.

Ricœur P., D. Pellauer D., *Evil, a Challenge to Philosophy and Theology*, in
“Journal of the Academy of Religion”, 53, 4, 1985, pp. 635-648.