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## Circularity as Interminable Analysis in Lynch Cinema

*“Endings are heartless.”*

Stephen King, *The Dark Tower*

### 1. What is a circular narrative?

When can we define a narrative as circular? According to the narratologist Brian Richardson, a narrative is circular if it “can circle back on itself, as the last sentence becomes the first sentence”<sup>1</sup>. Some of Lynch movies do have this feature, although the identity between the first scene(s) and the last scene(s) is often imperfect. In *Blue Velvet* (BV), folds of blue velvet are seen undulating in the first frames as well as in the last. In addition, an idyllic sequence of flowers, a fire truck and children crossing the road appear twice, both in the first minutes of the film and in the last. In *Lost Highway* (LH), a dark road lit by a running car appears on the same background, as opening and closing credits, while a night starry sky opens and ends *The Straight Story*.

However, this definition is of little interest, as Richardson adds a condition: the *fabula* should continue for eternity<sup>2</sup>. Therefore, in a cinematic narrative, it is not enough for the first scene to be coincident to the last. Think of a character who comes home, takes off their coat, and turns on the television. If this happened at the beginning and the end of the film in the exact same way, but they were a detective solving a crime, and thus the situation had changed, the narrative would not be considered circular. Of course, if each frame and sound were exactly the same, it could be disturbing to the viewers<sup>3</sup>. However, as Richardson says while referring to the *fabula*, that is, to the chronological order of the events, it can be argued that everything leads the viewer to believe that the two scenes,

<sup>1</sup> B. Richardson, *Unnatural Stories and Sequences*, in *A Poetics of Unnatural Narratives*, a cura di J. Alber et alia, The Ohio State University Press, Columbus 2013, p. 21.

<sup>2</sup> See *Ibidem*.

<sup>3</sup> It may be taken as an implicit suggestion that the crime has not been actually solved.

despite their similarity, are taking place at different times. Since they represent different events, they are different scenes. Therefore, the first and last events must be the same for a narrative to be circular.

This definition implies a sort of time travel scenario, where event A (both the first and the last scene) happens before event D (the penultimate scene), and event D happens before A. However, this suggests sci-fi or magic, but David Lynch movies do not appear to be situated within those genres<sup>4</sup>. Therefore, I suggest to put aside the temporal properties of what is represented in a movie, moving from an *event* to a *situation*, or a “state of affairs”<sup>5</sup>. If we stop thinking of temporal properties of events, we can define a circular narrative – I will return to the question of whether there can be a narrative without time – as a narrative in which the opening and the closing situation are identical, *as if* nothing happened in the middle. Of course, some things have happened in the middle, but, in the end, it is like they have been nullified, as they have not changed the starting situation. This could also be defined as a *Kafkaian* narrative, like the one in *The Castle*<sup>6</sup>; and Kafka is unsurprisingly a major inspiration to Lynch.

To say that the middle of a narrative has “come to nothing” can mean different things. The final situation might be like the starting one because some goals (if there are any) have not been met, something has not been understood, or the characters have not undergone a process of growth. Of course, it is not easy, in movies as in real life, to establish when somebody has grown spiritually, that is, in their inner life<sup>7</sup>. However, Lynch more recent movies – only *The Straight Story* loudly break this rule – often resemble these features, as the initial goals change and are usually not achieved, and the characters do not grow up.

In this paper, I attempt to explain why Lynch movies often present a circular or quasi-circular<sup>8</sup> shape. I posit that some of Sigmund Freud’s insights on the mental realm are valuable in shedding light on this topic. My purpose is not to state that Lynch represents things the way he does mainly due to Freud’s influence; rather, I intend to show that some of

<sup>4</sup> However, I have to admit that here intuitions may diverge.

<sup>5</sup> If we consider atemporal objects as “situations”, as I just explained, the classic distinction between *fabula* and *syuzhet* is inevitably undermined.

<sup>6</sup> It could be noted that *The Castle*, as other Kafka’s novels, is just an unfinished work; however, as Miller pointed out, it is likely that unfinishedness is a distinctive and intrinsic feature of this novel. See J. H. Miller, *The Sense of an Un-ending: The Resistance to Narrative Closure in Kafka’s Das Schloß*, in *Franz Kafka: Narration, Rhetoric, and Reading*, a cura di J. Lothe, B. Sandberg e R. Speirs, Ohio State University Press, Columbus 2011, pp. 108-22.

<sup>7</sup> We cannot refer to age since we chose to not consider strict temporal properties.

<sup>8</sup> See G. Torrenzo, *I viaggi nel tempo. Una guida filosofica*, Editori Laterza, Roma-Bari 2011, p. 112.

Freud's insights can help us to understand conceptual issues mentioned above, clarifying at least one classic feature of Lynch movies.

I am going to consider three movies in this paper: BV, LH, and *Mulholland Drive* (MD). For obvious reasons, it is impossible in one brief article to consider the whole cinematic production of Lynch. Moreover, there are two motivations behind this selection. First, circularity is manifest enough in these cases – although it can be argued that other movies do not represent an objection to my theory<sup>9</sup>. Second, other Lynch works, particularly the Twin Peaks saga and *Inland Empire*, go far beyond my actual comprehension. Anyway, an exhaustive interpretation<sup>10</sup> of the three selected movies cannot be achieved here. I do not seek to explain the “deepest” meaning or *all* the meanings of these movies. Rather, I propose a general framework that can explain why a fair number of Lynch movies seem to be circular, which could help in rejecting *a priori* some existing interpretations. In the following paragraph, I will briefly illustrate what Freud considered an “interminable analysis”. Then, I will explain the sense in which Lynch movies are circular. Finally, I will draw some conclusions, by illustrating the points on which the two authors would likely agree.

## 2. Interminable analysis according to Freud

According to Freud, it is not easy to separate psychoanalysis as a theoretical system from psychoanalysis as a practical therapy. Considering also that Freud cast doubts on the distinction between a healthy (normal) mental system and a sick (abnormal) one<sup>11</sup>, the problem of how to heal *a* mind is inextricably linked to the question of how *the* mind generally works. Therefore, by examining what the analyst tries to do with the patient, we can draw some conclusions about how the human mind works. The practical purpose of psychotherapy has been defined by Freud in different ways. Initially – even though this idea has never really been abandoned<sup>12</sup> – the goal of psychoanalysis was cathar-

<sup>9</sup> *Inland Empire* could be considered both a validation and an overcoming of what it will be discussed in this article, rather than a counterexample.

<sup>10</sup> On the possibility of a fully accomplished interpretation, what has been written by Freud on dreams might be useful. See S. Freud, *Some Additional Notes on Dream-Interpretation as a Whole*, in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud. Volume XIX*, The Hogart Press, Columbus 1961, pp. 127-130.

<sup>11</sup> See S. Freud, *An Outline of Psycho-Analysis*, in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud. Volume XXIII*, The Hogart Press, London 1964, p. 195.

<sup>12</sup> See S. Freud, *Analysis of Phobia in a Five-Year-Old Boy*, in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud. Vol. X*, The Hogart Press, London 1964,

sis, understood as an emotional discharge of an affect that has been encapsulated after a traumatic experience. The patient must remember something that they do not want to recall. To elicit a “passionate memory” through the analysis, the patient must relive, or re-experience, something that has happened in the past. Then, the therapy becomes somewhat paradoxical: while going forward, there is actually a regression, a going back.

However, psychoanalysis has the solution to this paradox. According to Freud, the mental domain is occupied by primitive “objects”, which are *drives* or *desires*<sup>13</sup>. Moreover, the “psychical is unconscious in itself”<sup>14</sup> and the unconscious is atemporal<sup>15</sup>. So, what in philosophy of time is called A-Series (according to which, events are ordered in past, present and future) and B-Series (according to which, events can be ordered as an ‘earlier than’ and a ‘later than’) exist only in the consciousness. The *C* system (consciousness) orders things – events, thoughts, desires, representations – in time, stating that *E* comes before *F* or that *G* is past or present, whereas in the *Unc* system, the temporal dimension is annihilated. To place things in order and differentiate<sup>16</sup> from a temporal point of view is a function of consciousness. The task of psychotherapy is to bring something to consciousness by giving strength to the Ego, allowing it to also make a distinction between what is past and what is present<sup>17</sup>. Therefore, a successful therapy makes something conscious, typically a desire, that has been kept away from consciousness (removal). In doing so, it assigns a time to that desire<sup>18</sup> (or those desires), creating some distance and separating it from the Ego, or from the system of current representations and desires.

The inability to effectively differentiate in time is a sign that the analysis has gone wrong, therefore unfinished. Just as there are many ways to define the task of psychotherapy, there are also different ways to conceptualize its failure and different obstacles on the path that both therapist and the patient must overcome. According to *Remarks on the Theory and*

p. 145, and also see S. Freud, *The Goethe Prize*, in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud. Volume XXI*, The Hogart Press, London 1961, pp. 209-210.

<sup>13</sup> It can be argued that in Freud’s *oeuvre* there is not a dramatic difference between *Triebe* and *Wunsh*.

<sup>14</sup> S. Freud, *An Outline of Psycho-Analysis*, *cit.*, p. 158.

<sup>15</sup> See S. Freud, *Papers on Metapsychology*, in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud. Volume XIV*, The Hogart Press, London 1957.

<sup>16</sup> See M. Stucchi, *Is Freudian Psychotherapy an Example of Scapegoat Mechanism?*, in “Dialegesthai. Rivista telematica di filosofia”, vol. 23, 2021.

<sup>17</sup> See *Ibidem*.

<sup>18</sup> In the double sense of ordering that psychical event in the series of psychical events and stating whether it is past or present, or maybe an expectation about the future.

*Practice of Dream-Interpretation*, the purpose of the analysis is to re-establish the hegemony of the principle of reality<sup>19</sup>. The patient, in fact, is not capable of distinguishing clearly what is real from what is not. I should note here that Freud proposed different solutions to the problem of which psychical instances govern the principle of reality. In *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, he suggested that the Ego performs this function<sup>20</sup>, but in *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego* he wrote that the Ideal of the Ego, that is the Super-Ego, is in charge of the principle of reality. This confusion between what the Ego and the Super-Ego do can be found in different passages. Relatedly, and quite relevant to the present inquiry, there is the question of which mental instance operates the removal: in *Introduction to narcissism*, it is the Super-Ego, while in the first years Freud believed that it is the Ego. This confusion will continue in his last works, particularly in *The Dissolution of the Oedipus Complex*.

An analysis is interminable – that is, it ends with the mental disease, just as it started (therefore, it does not end) – if some of these circumstances occur: the attempt of “temporalization” – that is to assign temporal properties – fails; the relation between the patient and the therapist is characterized by the same problems of the patient’s past “traumatic” relations, such that the translation is not an ally for post-education, but rather it simply repeats past relations, meaning there has been no growth and no re-education<sup>21</sup>; the Ego is not strong enough to distinguish between what is real and what is not; and the deputy instance is not able to replace the unconscious removal (or repression) by a conscious condemnation<sup>22</sup>. It is important to note that all these formulas are highly problematic on a theoretical level. It is not accidental or due to the psychotherapist’s incompetence if or when a patient is not able to put a temporal distance between what they have repressed and their Ego, or cannot distinguish between what is real and unreal, or cannot replace the repression with a condemnation. These major obstacles to a recovery depend on the fact

<sup>19</sup> See S. Freud, *Remarks on the Theory and Practice of Dream-Interpretation*, in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud. Volume XIX*, The Hogart Press, London 1961, p. 118.

<sup>20</sup> See S. Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud. Volume XVIII*, The Hogart Press, London 1955, p. 10.

<sup>21</sup> See S. Freud., *On Psychotherapy*, in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud. Volume VII*, The Hogart Press, London 1953, p. 267, and see Freud S., *An Outline of Psychoanalysis*, in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud. Volume XXIII*, The Hogart Press, London 1964, p. 175.

<sup>22</sup> See S. Freud, *Analysis of a Phobia in a Five-Year-Old Boy*, in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud. Volume X*, The Hogart Press, London 1955, p. 145. But it is not clear whether it is the Ego or the Super-Ego that formulate the condemnation.

that repression and condemnation are actually similar, or that the functioning of the principle of reality is not linear – as demonstrated by the fact that Freud changed his idea multiple times. Moreover, the conscious action of temporalizing is often threatened by the more powerful Es. All these theoretical problems ultimately led Freud<sup>23</sup> to a pessimistic outlook on the efficiency of his psychoanalytical method.

### 3. Interminable movies according to Lynch

In this paragraph, I am going to abandon Freud's technical vocabulary in order to allow Lynch movies to speak for themselves, and I will do so by focusing on the circularity of his narratives. First, it is important to question whether there is catharsis in BV, LH, or MD, which is typically an indicator of an ending, both in psychotherapy and in fictional art, at least according to Aristotle<sup>24</sup>. Of course, if we define catharsis as a subjective feeling of purification, it is not a movie itself that can be defined as cathartic, as two viewers can have different experience of the same ending<sup>25</sup>. It is likely that MD would not be experienced as cathartic by anyone, whereas BV may or may not be. However, if we define the term "catharsis" objectively, the question of whether a movie is cathartic or not is interesting. René Girard defined catharsis as a social reconciliation due to a violent expulsion, typically the reconciliation of the persecutors at the expense of one or of a few ejected individuals<sup>26</sup>. A classic form of expulsion is homicide. In fact, Dick Laurent in LH and Frank in BV are murdered by Fred and Jeffrey, but a rec-

<sup>23</sup> I am referring especially to S. Freud, *Civilization and its Discontents*, in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud. Volume XXI*, The Hogart Press, London 1961; S. Freud, *New Introductory Lectures on Psycho-Analysis*, in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud. Volume XXII*, The Hogart Press, London 1964; S. Freud, *Analysis Terminable and Interminable*, in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud. Volume XXIII*, The Hogart Press, London 1964; S. Freud, *Constructions in Analysis*, in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud. Volume XXIII*, The Hogart Press, London 1964.

<sup>24</sup> According to the Greek philosopher, catharsis is the effect of purification operated by a narrative. In *Poetics*, he writes that "to every tragedy there pertain a Complication and an Unravelling". Aristotle, *On the Art of Poetry*, tr. ing. Lane Cooper Ithaca, Cornell University Press, Ithaca 1947, pp. 58-59. Since the unravelling follows the complication, it is likely that an ending is both a catharsis and an unravelling.

<sup>25</sup> For the sake of simplicity, I will assume that if the main character, or narrator's point of view, experiences catharsis, the viewer will do so as well. However we will see that neither in psychoanalysis nor in Lynch cinema there is a privileged point of view.

<sup>26</sup> See R. Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, tr. ing. di Gregory, P., The Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore 1977.



conciliation seems to follow just the elimination of Frank. Meanwhile, MD is not cathartic, as the main character kills herself, and there is no “community” left that seems to benefit from her death. The missing (or imperfect) catharsis in LH and BV could be due to the unclear relation between the main character, who expels, and the antagonist, who is expelled. They likely share desires, thoughts, or knowledge, and it is not clear whether such psychological elements are expelled. As Frank said to Jeffrey: “You’re like me”.

Therefore, if catharsis, at least according to Aristotle and Freud, is an indicator that something has ended successfully<sup>27</sup> (it could be a narrative or an analysis<sup>28</sup>), and in these three movies there is no catharsis, this means that they have “failed to end”. Moreover, Lynchian characters rarely, if ever, undertake a path of growth, as their opacity and obtuseness – in the words of David Foster Wallace<sup>29</sup> –, endures the whole movie, from start to finish. However, to say that there is no catharsis is not enough to prove that we are seeing a circular narrative. A half-line is not a circle, although they both have no end.

If we want to establish which figure, a half-line or a circle, might be more accurate in representing the narrative structure of these movies, it may be useful to discuss the role of memory in Lynch films. In MD, Rita has forgotten something, and she attempts to remember who she is and what happened in the street called Mulholland Dr. Here, however, forgetting seems to be plainly unintentional. Conversely, Betty pushes something away from her mind. As an old lady, Louise Bonner, tries to help her to bring these things to light, Betty keeps her out of her aunt’s house<sup>30</sup>. LH also deals with remembering. Pete, a sort of “second<sup>31</sup> main character”, cannot remember something of importance, and Fred, who finds out about his murdering of his wife by watching the mysterious videotape, complains that the video camera interferes with memories, and he prefers to remember events in his own way. BV treats this matter in a more symbolic, and less direct, manner. My guess is that the blind people who appear in a few scenes, as well as the famous cut ear (that is an ear separated from the brain, i.e. the mind), alludes to the fact that something, which has been seen or heard, has been removed by the consciousness or by the instance that tells the story.

<sup>27</sup> To end and to end successfully are, in some sense, the same thing.

<sup>28</sup> We should not forget that psychoanalysis, the “talking cure”, consists in letting the patient tell her story. See S. Freud, *Fragment of an Analysis of a Case of Hysteria*, in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud. Volume VII*, The Hogart Press, London 1953, p. 16.

<sup>29</sup> See D.F. Wallace, *A Supposedly Fun Thing I’ll Never Do Again: An Essays and Arguments*, Little, Brown and Co., Boston 1997.

<sup>30</sup> As Freud has stated: the Ego is not master in its own house.

<sup>31</sup> At least in order of appearance.

However, remembering is not just a matter of recalling “memories”, aka mere mental tracks of something happened in the past. Remembering is closely related to re-experiencing and repeating something. Some objects and scenes must be understood keeping this in mind, such as the gramophone in the opening sequence of *Twin Peaks: The Return* or the tape at the beginning of *Inland Empire*. The famous scene at Club Silencio in MD illustrates this concept. The line “No hay banda. There is no band” means that what we see is not really happening because it has already happened: “This is all a tape recording”. The scene in BV where Ben sings *In Dreams* might have a similar function. Above all, *Inland Empire* explicitly illustrates the paradox of going back and forth at the same time. As the film starts, we see a character, maybe the main one, who is watching the movie itself playing backward on a television. Thus, *Inland Empire* goes back and forth simultaneously, just like a Freudian analysis.

Therefore, there is some evidence of recursivity in different Lynch’s narrative structures. Of course, if everything that we are seeing in the movie has already happened, but we do not know when, we cannot localize the beginning. Given this, we should be more inclined to prefer a circle rather than a half-line to represent a “Lynchian” narrative structure<sup>32</sup>. Here, it is important to note the temporal oddities that clearly infest MD and LH, and question whether they are just anti-mimetic elements, typical of postmodern narratives<sup>33</sup>. Temporality appears clearly circular in LH, and it is likely so in MD as well, as we witness the same event from two different perspectives: a person falls on a bed with crimson sheets. Do these oddities simply represent a postmodern mannerism? I believe these temporal paradoxes are only apparent because they pop up as we try to assume temporality. Rather than biting the bullet in assuming the form of temporality, I suggest we should hypothesize *atemporality*. This means that in Lynch movies, what is represented is atemporal *in sé*. Temporality is added *a posteriori* by the narrator(s) and/or the main character(s), in the sense that what we see is the result of an attempt to impose temporal order in atemporal situations. When the attempt fails, as it clearly fails in MD and LH, we witness a paradoxical “temporal collapse”, and what comes before coincides with what comes after.

There are benefits to this hypothesis. First, there would not be room for time travel, in accordance with the intuition that Lynch movies have nothing or very little to do with sci-fi. Additionally, Lynch would not be

<sup>32</sup> Of course, an infinite line made of segments that recur always equal to themselves is, for the purpose of our discussion, the same as a circle. A circle is just a more elegant and intelligible representation.

<sup>33</sup> See B. Richardson, *A Poetic of Plot for the Twenty-First Century. Theorizing Unruly Narratives*, The Ohio State University Press, Columbus 2019.



considered anti-mimetic due to an alleged postmodern style or simply because he wants to mesmerize his audience. But the real benefit is that it helps us understand what these three Lynch movies<sup>34</sup> are about, and that is atemporal unconscious. To fully support this thesis, it would be necessary to thematize what defines repression (or removal) according to Freud and conduct a detailed analysis of some films. However, the reader will have to settle for a clarification on the main topic of this paper, which is the apparent circularity of many Lynch narratives. In sum, Lynch is neither anti-mimetic nor anti-realist; his art is mimetic in relation to a specific object: the unconscious mind.

Another feature of Lynch films supports this interpretation. A single narration seems to require a single narrator. However, if a narrative is an attempt to revisit something that has already happened – in order to change it or understand it –, it seems to imply at least a twofold instance: one who wants to go back, and another one who *is*, or was, back<sup>35</sup>. In other words, there is a force that strives to re-narrate, and there is a resistance. It is important to note that neither of these instances are omniscient, much less omnipotent. There cannot be one impartial and reliable narrator because there cannot be *one* privileged instance. As it is said in Part 14 of *Twin Peaks: The Return*: “We are like the dreamer who dreams, and then lives inside the dream. But who is the dreamer?”. I suggest that this question should not be taken as a riddle that must be solved with a name: Richard, Linda, Cooper, Audrey, Cole or David Lynch. However, this is not to say – as many have – that we should stop analyzing or trying to understand Lynch movies. “*Who is the dreamer?*” is not a question with a definitive answer. It relates to the “eternal” and inescapable doubt, due to the impossibility of finding a steady and sovereign instance in an unconscious mind<sup>36</sup>.

But, if there is not a privileged point of view in the movies I have considered thus far, if the instances that relate to the narration are intertwined, and they change; there cannot be any clear distinction between the pleasure principle and the reality principle. With regard to Lynch movies, this means that it is not possible to state with certainty what has happened and what is just desired<sup>37</sup>. Moreover, what is desired, that

<sup>34</sup> But this hypothesis must be extended also to *Eraserhead*, *Wild at Heart*, *Inland Empire* and the whole *Twin Peaks* saga.

<sup>35</sup> This is what Freud called the strange status of knowing and not knowing at the same time.

<sup>36</sup> Again, Girard's concept of *interdividuality*, conjuncted with the concept of double, could be useful to understand this theoretical point. See R. Girard, *Things Hidden since the Foundation of the World*, tr. ing. di S. Bann e A. Meteer, Stanford University Press, Stanford 1987.

<sup>37</sup> Because of this I disagree with Murat Asker's interpretation of MD. In fact, he claims that “[f]rom a narrative textual reading, the film can be read in two ways: either the naive

is, what is expected to lead to pleasure, is often deeply linked in Lynch films to what is wanted to be pushed away, removed. The desire to have an abortion, the wish of infanticide<sup>38</sup>, as well as any incestuous desire is pushed away, as they are perceived as unpleasant. However, they are still desires.

Thus, there is no easy distinction between reality and dreams (or imagination) according to Lynch<sup>39</sup>. This is a serious critique against different readings of MD or LH, according to which part of the movie represents what really happened – from Fred’s and Diane’s perspective –, and the other part is just a dream or a mental attempt to re-write what happened – from Pete’s and Betty’s points of view. Likewise, the identity of mental instances, reality, and “imagination” are constantly at stake. They are the product of a continuous negotiation between conflicting desires. As Shakespeare, unsurprisingly another source for Lynch (and for Freud) said: “We are such stuff / As dreams are made on”. In other words, there is a common ground between the “real world” and our dreams, and this is what the American filmmaker is interested in.

#### 4. Some conclusions on Lynchian “circular” narratives

According to my thesis, Lynch movies – at least the three I have analyzed here – focus on unconscious *facts*, which have, by definition, no reference to time. Our intuitions, as well as those held by most narratologists, suggest that there is no narrative without time. I propose we can reconcile this antithesis by recognizing that there is temporality in these movies, but it is more like an attempt done by a mental instance towards something that has been removed. The attempt to present situations with temporal properties, such that they become *events*, can be more or less successful, although success can potentially *always* be challenged, as the last scene of *Twin Peaks: The Return* brutally reminds us. BV is quite successful in this sense, even though that writhing bug casts a shadow on

Betty meets a lost Rita and the two enter a miraculous time-space distortion where the past becomes the future, connecting a present in which both Betty and Rita shift identities/positions. Or the second segment could signify the first segment as a “fantasy” in which Diane, feeling desperate after the loss of her lesbian housemate-lover, first fantasizes about the more beautiful and amorous lover Camille Rhodes who betrays her.” M. Akser, *Memory, Identity and Desire: A Psychoanalytic Reading of David Lynch’s Mulholland Drive*, in “Cinej Cinema Journal”, Vol. 2 No 1, 2012, p. 62.

<sup>38</sup> By this I do not mean that abortion and infanticide should be considered as equal. However, it is likely that on an unconscious level such a clear distinction does not exist.

<sup>39</sup> This is why I do not agree with the perspective held in G. Ficca, *Chi dorme indaga. Sonno, sogno, insight e stati di coscienza intermedi in Twin Peaks*, in M. Tirino e A. Fattori (a cura di) *Black Lodge. Fenomenologia di Twin Peaks*, Edizioni Avanguardia, Sermoneta 2021.

any happy ending. Meanwhile, LH and MD leave no doubt that such an attempt has been a failure. Therefore, according to the above-mentioned definition of narrative, the fact that there is an attempt to introduce temporality in what is told is enough. If there was not, then I would agree that there is no narrative. However, neither LH nor MD fall into this category.

Circularity is not an unequivocal and invariant formal structure for Lynch. Rather, it is the apparent outcome of a complex process the mind undergoes in dealing with unconscious facts. Like an analysis – which is also a narrative since a patient *tells* things – may turn out to be interminable, a narrative may be circular in a very close sense. It has been suggested that scenes should be considered as the product of a protean mental instance(s) that desires and wants to know, but wants to forget or to avoid something at the same time. But “who” is this instance? While in Freud’s works there is some conceptual confusion on this crucial point, Lynch takes things a step further, stating that the “who” of such an instance cannot be decided in principle. Thus, Freud’s confusion on this topic is inherent to the problem. The Ego and the Super-Ego are not fixed, established once and for all, the “disciple” (Ego) and the model (Super-Ego) might be overturned, as it clearly happens in MD. Who is searching for something, and who is interfering with the investigations<sup>40</sup>? Is it Jeffrey or Sandy or both? Is it Fred, Pete, Renéé or Alice? Is it Betty, Rita, Diane, “aunt” Ruth or someone else? If we, as viewers but also as psychotherapists, elevate a particular point of view to an objective and superior instance, this likely implies an expulsion (the inferior instance is expelled), therefore a catharsis. This happens because every character, just like every person in the real world, strives to be set free from something unpleasant. If we accept Jeffrey’s point of view as a coherent and unitary whole, then Frank and the yellow man are expelled, and the same is true for Fred and Dick Laurent<sup>41</sup>.

In conclusion, I claim that some Lynch movies seem to be circular because the narration, that is a re-living and a re-arrangement of something that has already happened, is jeopardized. The “nuclear complex”<sup>42</sup> of the repression has not been solved, bypassed, or perfectly hidden, and so it manifests again, making the whole narrative path appear as if it were moving in a circle.

<sup>40</sup> We can accept this classical, and also recurrent in Lynch, metaphor, but we might also sophisticate it, by contemplating more instances/characters: an ally, a traitor, a double-dealer, an authority and so on.

<sup>41</sup> As different characters fight to be in a privileged position, a so-made narrative turns out to be an “Oedipal rumble”, as the Twin Peaks saga seems to be.

<sup>42</sup> S. Freud, *Totem and Taboo*, in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud. Volume XIII*, The Hogart Press, London 1955, p. 17.

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