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## Desktop Lynch: Archiving the Ghosts in the Machine

### An introduction through the filmmaker's desk

In the summer of 2024, popular media channels dispersed the news that filmmaker David Lynch was planning to quit cinema for health reasons, as he has been suffering from emphysema for several years. This piece of information proved to be a rumor shortly after, when the director himself used his personal social media account to confirm that he might be “homebound” but “[he] will never retire!”, suggesting that as long as there is a camera, he’s happy to shoot<sup>1</sup>. Despite its sensational tone, the story around Lynch’s withdrawal simultaneously usefully condenses key aspects of the critical perception of his body of work and mobilizes this discourse toward new directions. On the one hand, it presents a number of the filmmaker’s methodological traits: his affinity with social media and the attention of their pop appeal and role in the public sphere; his impulse to address his acknowledged fan community directly, and the latter’s constant preoccupation with the verification of the formulations of the filmmaker that toys with expectations of Reality; his capacity to prepare compelling moving-image works from a confined environment, even before the Covid-19 pandemic; and the filmmaker’s impulse to keep a public record of his creative gestures – expressions of understanding the “promise of liberation of the image into gesture”<sup>2</sup> so processes of “making a means visible as such”<sup>3</sup> and exhibiting cinema’s own visuality, without the pressure of ‘creating content’. On the other hand, certain questions are triggered: What kinds of binaries are constantly mobilized by the investigation of David Lynch’s oeuvre, oscillating between virtu-

<sup>1</sup> E. Shanfeld, *David Lynch Reveals Emphysema Diagnosis, Can't 'Leave the House' or Direct in Person: 'I Would Do It Remotely if It Comes to It'*, in “Variety”, 5 August 2024, <https://variety.com/2024/film/news/david-lynch-emphysema-cant-leave-house-direct-1236095608/>. Accessed: 6 August 2024.

<sup>2</sup> G. Agamben, *Notes on Gesture*, in S. Buckley, M. Hardt, B. Massumi (a cura di), *Agamben, Means Without End. Notes on Politics*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis 2000, p. 56.

<sup>3</sup> Ivi, p. 58.

al worlds (that is, fictional, imaginary, volatile, im/possible, unfathomed environments of potentiality) and real worlds (elliptical, faulty, palpable, disparate environments where possibilities are necessarily discarded or canceled)? In the same vein, how can a self-reflexive archive of a maker's creative unconscious converse with bodily performances and embodied experiences? How can this conversation (and the assertion that film art can be produced with minimum means) reveal the divisive standardizing processes that are fostered in the canonical cinematic apparatus – described by Jean Louis Comolli as a “ceaseless split” between two poles:

[T]he visible part of the technology of cinema (camera, shooting, crew, lighting, screen) and its “invisible” part (black between frames, chemical processing, baths and laboratory work, negative film, cuts and joins of editing, soundtrack, projector, etc.), the latter repressed by the former, generally relegated to the realm of the unthought, the “unconscious” of cinema.<sup>4</sup>

Lastly, what kind of interfaces are developed between seemingly contrasting worlds in an expansive network of human and non-human agents, and how do these interfaces encourage “generative friction between different formats”<sup>5</sup>.

The exploration of this set of inquiries can be further inspired by the last appearance of David Lynch on screen two years earlier and draws its conceptual tools from the (classical) narrative environment of a film with an emphatically different caliber when compared to his own body of work. The final scene of Steven Spielberg's *The Fabelmans* (2022), the dramatized quasi-memoir of Hollywood's most prolific filmmaker, features an unexpected reenactment of Spielberg's early years: Sammy, an intimidated young man, aspiring to follow his dream of making movies following his graduation from high school, tries to pursue an internship at CBS studios and during his interview for a TV show, he gets the offer to meet the “greatest film director who ever lived – and is right across the hall”, as mentioned in the film. He broodily enters their office, sitting by the secretary's desk, only to realize through the poster gallery hanging from the walls that he is waiting at the anteroom of John Ford's sanctuary. Sammy's daydream amazement is interrupted by Ford himself, who makes an entrance in his typical garb, albeit with lipstick traces on his face. Despite the imposing attire, the viewers recognize that this iconic figure is played by another legend of cinema, who is no other than David Lynch. In the minutes that will follow, Lynch entertains the stereotypes

<sup>4</sup> J.-L. Comolli, *Machines of the Visible*, in T. de Lauretis, S. Heath (a cura di), *The Cinematic Apparatus*, St. Martin's Press, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee 1980, p. 125.

<sup>5</sup> A. R. Galloway, *The Interface Effect*, Polity, New York 2012, p. 44.

that are part and parcel of a “meeting-the-master” scene and therefore emulates the body movement, motor tics, and posture, or even the tone of voice and caliber of this pioneer of the Western genre. In other words, his performance doesn’t interpret and appropriate a role, but predominantly mimes and duplicates, delivering an imitation of life and a simulation of Spielberg’s original memory.

In this process, in his only work as an actor to date (with the exception of his participation in his *Twin Peaks* series), Lynch appears willing to leave his own recognizable identity aside and abide by the need to adhere to a reality of sorts, as a loyal apprentice would. As the brief encounter between these characters slowly evolves, the camera breaks the 180-degree rule, moving from one side of the axis to the other when the character of the veteran filmmaker starts advising the novice. Contrary to the waiting room, whose walls are exclusively adorned with movie posters – an archive of a triumphant trajectory in cinema – John Ford’s office is mostly decorated with paintings: images of cowboys, portraits of Native Americans, a landscape in the desert, and a view of a populated battle scene, seem to be there not due to their aesthetic merit, but for reasons of indexicality, as they exemplify different treatments of the horizon line. “When the horizon’s at the bottom, it’s interesting; when the horizon’s at the top, it’s interesting; when the horizon’s in the middle, it’s boring”: These are the words that serve as a takeaway from this interaction, also informing the last shot of *The Fabelmans*, which seems to be executed in an instructive fashion (as the horizon line moves in real-time from the middle of the frame downwards).

Casting an acclaimed filmmaker in his major blockbusters is a tried and tested practice for Steven Spielberg, who in the past has recruited the Nouvelle Vague stylist François Truffaut to impersonate the role of a US-based French scientist, a government agent specializing in alien activity, in *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* (1977). Notably, Spielberg also wrote the role of the CEO of *Jurassic Park* (1992) with Richard Attenborough in mind, arguably not only because of the latter’s rampant career in acting, directing, and producing for Hollywood but also because of his kinship to the biologist and broadcaster Sir David Attenborough (who at the time was more devoted to living than to extinct species, and was later inspired by the film to expand his research to dinosaurs). Thus, as opposed to his peers, who willingly played a part that was completely irrelevant and disconnected from their art and vocation, no matter the associations and allusions at play, David Lynch agreed to participate in a reflexive acting practice, portraying another auteur – even if this term is considered *avant la lettre* in Ford’s case, whose career spans from the silent era to the early 1970s. Equally dedicated to recreating, establishing, and subverting the popular iconography of Americana, the films of these

two directors have more differences than common traits, as they follow different methodologies and visual languages, or stem from and build different social contexts and, possibly political imperatives.

Nonetheless, there is an instance of David Lynch's filmography that contains a reference to John Ford that remains understated: *The Straight Story* (1999), a film that was launched as an 'exception' to the 'Lynchian' signature style for many reasons, including the tangible facts that "it is his only film that he did not write or co-write, as well as the only one to have garnered a G rating, for general audiences"<sup>6</sup>, was based on 'real events' and follows the linear (i.e. straight) narrative trope of a classical road movie. Even though the title of the film introduces the key character Alvin Straight, who is the main agent of action, it also embeds an allusion to John Ford's first feature-length work, *Straight Shooting* (1917), as well as casts Richard William Farnsworth as the protagonist – an actor who also worked extensively as a stuntman in popular Westerns such as Ford's *Fort Apache* (1948), where he doubled John Wayne. Sitting on a desktop, i.e. the office of the studio set, David Lynch seems to appear as a mediator of an astounding set of on- and off-screen narratives, while archiving in his performance the processes of his own creative unconscious – divided in four distinct categorical stages:

Preparation, a time when the basic information or skills are assembled [...] incubation, a relaxed time during which [...] connections are unconsciously being made [...] inspiration, the eureka experience when the person suddenly sees the solution [...] and production, a time when the insights are put into a useful form.<sup>7</sup>

Encouraged by the mise-en-scene to break the linear axis of the narrative; to experience the last scene of the film in an archival register; and to unpack the affect produced by the presence of the recognizable figure of David Lynch in a production of this caliber through a four-step creative interpretation process, the viewers no longer approach the physical desktop as part of the set design. They are rather prompted to visualize it as an interface: "a two-dimensional plane with meaning embedded in it or delivered through it"<sup>8</sup>. The meaning of this desktop, I argue, transcends the boundaries of *The Fabelmans'* diagetical norms, as it presents a prototype for the filmmaker's self-reflexive account of his own cinema. In the pages that will follow, I will use the notion of the desktop to discuss

<sup>6</sup> D. Lim, *David Lynch: The Man From Another Place*, Amazon Publishing, New York 2015, p. 148.

<sup>7</sup> N. C. Andreasen, *A Journey into Chaos: Creativity and the unconscious*, in "Mens Sana Monographs.", n. s., a. IX, n. 1, 2011, pp. 42-53, doi: 10.4103/0973-1229.77424.

<sup>8</sup> A. Galloway, *op. cit.*, p. 43.

David Lynch's screened experience of mediation, one that stems from his own affinity with the web, embodies and performs technologies, and micro-archiving practices, and manifests as a need to visualize altered states of visibility and invisibility. The function of the desktop as an interface becomes all the more complex and generative in the case of two works by David Lynch with a different episodic format, developed in two distant installments spanning a period of several decades. Whereas the *Weather Reports* (2005–2021) exemplify the modality in which the filmmaker makes use of non-cinematic (or at times non-visual) platforms to create a psychoanalytical archive and explore the embodied, potentials of mediality as a self-reflexive structure, the third season of the TV-series *Twin Peaks* (2017) takes this investigation one step further: The storyline that unravels around a surprising visual-archival apparatus (“The Glass Box”) in the first three episodes of the season renders the filmmaker's creative unconscious as a medium in itself, one that, due to its archival agency, can help us acquaint with the “ghost in the machine,” and therefore the critique against mind-body dualism.

### **Weather Reports: Observing the mind**

“Good morning Davidlynch.com members. Today is [exact date], 2005, and it's here in Los Angeles, it's another beautiful sunny day, temperature, light wind, blue skies, not a cloud in the sky, puffy white clouds, 63 degrees. Have a great day.” Articulated with anticipated variations but uttered in a similar, celebratory tone, this introduction was the constant opener of David Lynch's *Weather Reports* project, a series that provided a daily update on Southern California's climate. Even though the *Weather Reports* shorts uploaded by David Lynch during the Covid-19 quarantine<sup>9</sup> were vastly hailed as an instantiation of the videos he uploaded in 2005 through his personal website, his first attempts in this elliptical storytelling format were launched through a different medium: Parallel to his online activity, Lynch would broadcast prerecorded audio files (of similar tone and content), on the LA-based station Indie 103.1 FM, after an invitation of the host Joe Escalante and using his landline for the emission. The presence of a black telephone behind his shoulder in the early videos suggests that this could have been the same device since this is only one of the props that appear repeatedly – in slightly varying placement – and seem to hold both an indexical and a diegetic function:

<sup>9</sup> C. Schafer, “The Unique Beauty Behind David Lynch's Daily Weather Report,” in “Film Obsessive”, 2020, <https://filmobsessive.com/film/film-analysis/filmmakers/david-lynch/the-unique-beauty-behind-david-lynchs-daily-weather-report>. Accessed: 1 July 2024.

a rough, quasi-naïf painting of the sun against a blue background appears whenever Lynch announces “it’s a bright sunny day”; another painting, this time with rough black-and-white brushstrokes, appears when the sky is full of white, puffy clouds” or “partly cloudy”, an inverted bucket with a question mark drawn on the side and a paper arrow glued on its top is featured in several reports, before its content gets revealed half-way through the series, only to present another riddle (this time numerological); the large mug shifting places on the desktop is a well-expected prop in a morning show, yet at the same time, it can be seen as a reference to one of the most recognisable leitmotifs in the first two seasons of *Twin Peaks* (1990–1991), where Agent Cooper often expresses his satisfaction over a “damn fine cup of coffee”; as for the portable radio/cd player (by now an obsolete medium) which looms over Lynch’s chair, not only it serves as a reference to the origins of these reports, but its idle state as an inactive sound source reminds us that we are experiencing a media environment of disjointedness where the tension that lies within different binaries is heightened: The material is constantly confronting the immaterial, the voice often appears disembodied, and the distinction between what is present and what is absent is up for grabs. The loss of the medium’s operability, Lynch seems to say, allows for its indexicality to appear more clearly, and through an inherent spectral agency, it prompts us to look at what the mind imagines as an intermediary process, and what sort of mental performances this process entails.

In the case of the medium of the radio, the performative agency is further highlighted by the emergence of a specific terminology: In the history of media, the term “Theater of the Mind” was established as a popular metaphor for radio broadcasting, pointing to the medium’s inherent incapacity to generate, reproduce, and diffuse visual representations, as well as the systematic effort of its practitioners to invent prompts and techniques that helped audiences build speculative environments, a process possibly moving them from mental to bodily stimulation. In his comprehensive study of the term, Neil Verma traces the genealogy of this jargon back to the first post-war years and a 1949 *New York Times* article, but insists on the observation made by the prolific radio actor Joseph Julian in his autobiography, that the theater of the mind is actually a theater *in the mind* (emphasis mine). In the writer’s view, this is “a superior way to describe what the phrase is after, since internalization is the principle that governs the saying, which names one medium (radio) by its capacity to nest a second medium (theater or pictures) in a third (mind or imagination)”<sup>10</sup>. Offering a theory of remediation *avant la lettre*, decades

<sup>10</sup> N. Verma, *Theater of the Mind: Imagination, Aesthetics, and American Radio Drama*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago 2012.

before Bolter and Grusin established that “[w]henver our identity is mediated in this way, it is also remediated, because we always understand a particular medium in relation to other past and present media”<sup>11</sup> the writer moves a step further, as he frames the mind as a necessarily archival medium with significant storage and abysmal retrieval capacities, as one medium is reflected and performed into another.

This observation about the mise-en-abyme performance of the radio in the human mind is meticulously visualized through the mise-en-scene of the weather report referring to 1 February 2005 – “a beautiful sunny day, not a cloud in the sky.” Setting his camera higher than usual, shooting from a 45-degree angle down, David Lynch appears behind his desk together with actress Laura Dern, one of his most frequent collaborators. The physical desktop of his studio seems relatively empty, with a set of props lying on its surface: a wired mic, whose one end permeates the lower edge of the frame; one of the artist’s seemingly naïve paintings, featuring a bright sun; a small white bucket turned upside-down, with a paper arrow attached on its top (or its actual bottom) and a black question mark painted on the side facing the camera. In the background, we recognize the black phone and a yellow filing cabinet (the piece of furniture where the radio is usually placed). In the middle of the screen, the only two humans in this environment perform some minor actions: Lynch announces the weather and extends his congratulations to a newlywed friend, whereas Dern holds a piece of paper with the date on it, but from the reverse side, creating the impression that we are facing a mirror.

Seen through this prism of duplicity, this scenography renders the performance of an archival gesture a mirror image *par excellence*: The filmmaker opens a possibility for a “coalescence” between an actual image (one of a real object) and a “virtual object which, from its side and simultaneously, envelops or reflects the real”<sup>12</sup>. Using the weather report format, a type of narrative that aims by definition at crystallizing a sense of momentum with specific coordinates, the filmmaker attempts to adopt a point of view from the other side of the mirror; however, what makes this experiment particular – and distinct from the use of the mirror as a trope in Lacanian psychoanalysis, where the reflection is a formative step in the creation of subjectivity – is that this leap is not a shift in positionality and perspective, but a change in temporality, as the presence of the date (i.e. a time marker) reminds us: If in the cinematic mirror “the present is the actual image, and its contemporaneous past is the virtual image”<sup>13</sup>,

<sup>11</sup> J. D. Bolter, R. Grusin, *Remediation. Understanding New Media*, MIT Press, Cambridge 2000.

<sup>12</sup> G. Deleuze, *Cinema 2: The time-image*, Continuum, London 2005, p. 68.

<sup>13</sup> Ivi, p. 79.

David Lynch acknowledges and explores this distance as an opportunity to reflect on the process of his own filmmaking durational process, and therefore invites one of his most frequent and recognizable collaborators to share the same desk – a place of potentiality, where the viewer is called to participate with active speculation. Rather than consuming oneself in the act of making meaning, the viewer is called to join this coalescence by following a series of free associations drawn from research on the filmmaker's full body of work – including, for instance, the observation that in the cinematic time of the first series of *Twin Peaks* (1990), the first of February refers to the diary page where the key character, Laura Palmer, listed the initials of every person she ever had intercourse with, thus keeping an archive that relates to the evolution of the narrative (as it possibly contains the key to the murder mystery that triggers the plot). Pointing, even inadvertently, to an archival gesture that explores the boundaries of the cognitive interpretation of the moving image, this *Weather Report* manifests eloquently how the setting of the desktop becomes an interface for negotiating whose mind is performing (and in which 'theater') and through which steps of mediation.

The aforementioned video might serve as an example of the "coalescence" proposed by David Lynch, yet it cannot be considered *representative*: as parts of an archive that taxonomizes equal artifacts on the basis of seriality (suggested by the date), the videos produced in the mid-2000s share common features and aesthetic traits in terms of mise-en-scene and scenography, color palette, spoken text, rhythm and duration, while their differentiation develops as a set of variations on the same theme. But furthermore, and all the more importantly, the archival agency that is repeatedly expressed through the accumulation of human and non-human actors on and around the desk in different constellations, tackles the problem of representation – and its dual meaning. Except for the question framed by John Law and Ruth Benschop as a "performance of division"<sup>14</sup> (an inherently archival function), representation entails two functions at the same time: On the one hand, the constant re-appearance in the 'here-and-now' of an image, whose emergence risks to lose its referent as the digital mass media establish a greater distance between the image reality of the referential world (a critique that was crystallized as the crisis of representation in cultural theory<sup>15</sup>). On the other hand, it includes the often arbitrary act of sorting out according to properties shaped through standardized worl-

<sup>14</sup> J. Law, R. Benschop, *Resisting Pictures: Representation, Distribution and Ontological Politics*, in K. Hetherington, R. Munro (a cura di), *Ideas of Difference. Social Spaces and the Labour of Division. Sociological Review Monograph*, Blackwell, Oxford 1997, p. 158.

<sup>15</sup> For a comprehensive overview of the term, see: W. Nöth, *Crisis of Representation?*, in "Semiotica", n. s., n. 143, 2003, pp. 9-15, <https://doi.org/10.1515/semi.2003.019>.



dvies and appointing delegates of different ontologies. Regarding the latter, in Geoffrey C. Bowker and Susan Leigh Star's view, the most important problem is that "[however imbricated in our lives], These standards and classifications are ordinarily invisible" although they "inform the social and moral order via the new technological and electronic infrastructures"<sup>16</sup>. This is exactly the point where Lynch's *Reports* wish to draw a distinction: Conversing with Robert Gerrard Pietrusko's media-archaeological account of weather report practices in meteorology, the filmmaker agrees that the foundation of a standard weather report is *visibility* – "a quantity used by meteorologists to measure the relationship between sight and distance"<sup>17</sup> and whose ontology is rooted in *contrast* (emphasis mine), not in similarity. "To describe visibility one does not measure an amount – how *much* one can see – but instead, a distance – how *far* one can see"<sup>18</sup>. Allowing the viewer to experience the distance as a temporal quantity, Lynch acknowledges contrast and duality (the maker and the viewer, the subject and the object, the real and the virtual, the off-frame and the on-frame, the audio and the video, the mind and the body), not as mutually exclusive categories (another problem of "sorting things out," according to Bowker and Star), but proposes a model of co-existence. In this sense, the elements he puts on the table are not mere nods of intertextuality, but a personal, self-reflexive archive. The mediation of technology is no longer invisible but neither quite visible. It is rather spectral: it performs the "entangled state of agencies"<sup>19</sup> that can embody and perform seemingly contradicting ontologies – both absence/dispossession and presence/empowerment – emitting the aura of the eerie.

This aspect becomes more palpable in the second installment of the *Weather Reports*, unraveled during the Covid-19 pandemic, when Lynch uploaded 950 daily videos on his YouTube channel (aptly named "David Lynch Theater") from 11 May 2020 to 16 December 2022. This exclusively online archive, partly complemented by another treat entitled *Today's Number Is...*, with the filmmaker performing a makeshift lottery on a daily basis, sets off with significant commonalities with the first collection of reports, as each video starts with the usual greeting, is set against the familiar background of the wall corner in his studio (with the yellow file cabinet and the black phone), and features himself staring at the camera while sitting on a busy desktop with several props – mundane, overexposed objects

<sup>16</sup> G. C. Bowker, S. L. Star, *Sorting Things Out: Classification and Its Consequences*, MIT Press, Cambridge 1999, p. 3.

<sup>17</sup> R. G. Pietrusko, *Contrast*, in J. Parikka, D. Dragona (a cura di), *Words of Weather. A Glossary*, Onassis Foundation, Athens 2022, p. 72.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>19</sup> K. Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning*, Duke University Press, Durham 2007, p. 23.

such as a cup of coffee, a drill, a notebook, or a cream tube. But from the outset, the difference in his approach is reflected in two features that mark the evolution of his spectral presence. Firstly, in terms of framing, the position of the camera remains exactly the same in 179 videos: Opting for an immutable point of view to an act of self-reflexive mediation and building an archive, the filmmaker contextualizes his work in time and space, by conveying a sense of stasis, i.e., the generalized rapture of temporality in an era of global confinement. Through the persistent eye level shot, mediation establishes an alignment between the maker and the viewer, thus pointing at the condition of evenness and equation in what concerns the use of visual technology: at a time of global crisis and on a societal level, human interaction in a new, necessarily mediated configuration constantly oscillating between presence and absence, grows universally dependent on the use of the camera and the screen and the participation in a global network. Secondly, and consequently, 180 videos into the project, David Lynch changes the setting – for reasons he attributes to the weather itself, as “it’s very chilly outside” – and readjusts his camera to a medium close-up shot. For the next 770 videos, David Lynch will wear dark sunglasses that hold a double function: they break the eyeline match that was established over time (a technique that seems to undermine the human-to-human relationship) and in the vast majority of videos, they mirror the screen, inviting the viewer in a regulated *mise-en-abyme* iterated over time, a trope that draws their attention away from the field of vision and closer to the possibilities opened by the condition of archival mediation. In this sense, the interface for communication moves from the physical desktop to the human face, rendering its neutral expressions the surface on which we reflect our interpretations of external reality<sup>20</sup>. In this archive of self-reflections, the face becomes the medium that leads us through different constructions of visibility. In the following section, a scene sequence analysis of a central storyline in the third series of *Twin Peaks: The Return* will attempt to manifest a reverse process: the representation of the experience of the human

<sup>20</sup> Contesting Hugo Münsterberg’s argument that the close up, a technical feature that is only specific to cinematic language, can be only be considered part of an artistic endeavor when deviated from the real, from the everyday forms of space, time, and causality (see: H. Münsterberg, *The Photoplay: A Psychological Study*, in A. Langdale (a cura di), *Hugo Münsterberg on Film. The Photoplay: A Psychological Study and Other Writings*, Routledge, New York 2002, pp. 45-151), Mary Ann Doane’s links the face to the question of representation – and therefore: “What we call representation is nothing other than the more or less complicated history of that resemblance, of its hesitation between two poles, that of appearances, of the visible, of the phenomenon, of representative analogy, and that of interiority, of the invisible or of the beyond-the-visible, of the being, of expressive analogy. The face is the point of departure and the point of anchorage of this entire history”. See: M. A. Doane, *Bigger Than Life. The Close-Up and Scale in the Cinema*, Duke University Press, Durham 2021, p. 40, <https://muse.jhu.edu/book/97749>.

and non-human (inter)faces in archival media informs a self-reflexive gaze on the archaeology of visual apparatuses and their cinematic potentialities.

### Twin Peaks – The Return: Revisiting Binaries

Whereas the series of *Weather Reports* concludes with a game with the eyelid match rendering the human face an *interface* for archival mediation – a condition that understands reality as an ontology beyond representation in a non-exclusive realm of visibility (i.e. virtuality) – the third season of David Lynch’s TV show *Twin Peaks* sets off with an oppositional choice of shot – a truck and roll move that does more than demonstrate the potentiality of contemporary mobile cameras: As it navigates the most recognizable patterns of the Red Room (the zigzagged floor and the pulled crimson curtains), the lens arguably attempts a POV shot, identifying our gaze with that of a wandering ghost. We are instantly reminded that the last character we met in the closure of the series’s second season (1991) was no other than the inhibiting spirit of BOB, who turned to possess Agent Cooper to commit voracious crimes, and thus we are invited to explore the alternate living environment of the main character through the eyes of this spectral entity. Often cited as *Twin Peaks: The Return* and *Twin Peaks: A Limited Event Series*, the third season of the work that helped establish the renown of the filmmaker on a global scale, premiered on Showtime network in 2017; this means that the making of the series was indeed programmed a couple of years before its release date, and therefore accurately performed character Laura Palmer’s much-quoted line “I will see you in 25 years” – as we are reminded by the original scene that is embedded intact in the opening of the first episode.

Commencing with an explicitly self-reflexive, archival register that soon lands on a mirroring narrative trope (as we follow the trapped “real” Agent Cooper vis-a-vis the “non-real” one in parallel threads), the plot unravels in a highly complex structure comprising eighteen one-hour episodes and multiple, seemingly unrelated storylines and a large constellation of older and new characters. Echoing the critical reception around the series, which by and large was concentrated on the reluctance of its maker to facilitate interpretative ‘meaning-making’ as defined by David Bordwell<sup>21</sup>, Dennis Lim highlights the archival agency of the se-

<sup>21</sup> David Bordwell draws a distinction between comprehension and interpretation in the meaning-making process: Whereas comprehension is concerned with apparent, manifest, or direct meanings, “interpretation is concerned with revealing hidden, nonobvious messages”. See: D. Bordwell, *Making Meaning. Inference and Rhetoric in the Interpretation of Cinema*. Harvard University Press, Cambridge 1989, p. 2.

ries, observing that *Twin Peaks: The Return* resembles “a house built in a single late burst of inspiration, big enough to hold a life’s work. [...] All of Lynch is here”<sup>22</sup>.

The viewer’s urge to revisit *Twin Peaks* as a storage medium of representations that potentially holds the key to a deeper understanding (and therefore knowledge) of David Lynch’s body of work, will be constantly undermined through the viewing experience, as the unfolding of the series will devotedly resist not only narrative, but also thematic or tellability closure (the realization “of what the narrative is about in the sense of [identifying] its central theme or themes”<sup>23</sup> or the positive assessment of the “features that make a story worth telling,” drawing on “the observation that telling stories is subject to certain pragmatic constraints”<sup>24</sup>. At the same time emerged a counter-force: the instant proliferation of online forums during the airing of the show (often in real-time, hosted by platforms such as Twitter or Reddit), which gave ground to networks of aficionados born of the necessity to organize and demystify what was introduced on screen, approaching representations as a signification code that had to be cracked open. In this vein, the anonymous expanded community that engages in archival activities of classification from their desktops is sustained through the investigation of the “hidden” (and essentially not visible) meaning, propagating a discourse on duality and contrast that lies inherently in representation. Less of an attempt to forge a stronghold of sociability in what Geert Lovink defines as a “network without a cause” (a controlled web environment where centralized networks of social media create a bubble “in the form of the collapsing libertarian consensus model”<sup>25</sup>, and more of an extension of the quest for an active intellect – the cornerstone of Neoplatonic traditions in Muslim, Jew, and Christian philosophies geared towards “[this] interface of the transcendent and the immanent”<sup>26</sup> – this collective endeavor is consumed by binary, exclusive take on the tropes that “mirror” reality but take their distance from it. Inadvertently responding to this tendency, the series introduces in the plot a piece of archival visual technology where a pe-

<sup>22</sup> D. Lim, *Memento Mori*, in “Artforum”, n. s., a. LVI, n. 143, 2017.

<sup>23</sup> T. Klauk, T. Köppe, E. Onea, *More on Narrative Closure*, in “Journal of Literary Semantics”, n. s., a. XLV, n. 1, 2016, pp. 21-48, <https://doi.org/10.1515/jls-2016-0003>.

<sup>24</sup> R. Baroni, *Tellability*, in P. Hühn, J. C. Meister, J. Pier, W. Schmid (a cura di), *Handbook of Narratology*, De Gruyter, Berlin-München-Boston 2014, p. 836, <https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110316469.836>.

<sup>25</sup> G. Lovink, *Networks Without a Cause: A Critique of Social Media*, Polity, Cambridge 2011, p. 2.

<sup>26</sup> M. A. Peters, *Interview with Pierre A. Lévy, French Philosopher of Collective Intelligence*, in “Open Review of Educational Research”, n. s., a. II, n. 1, 2015, pp. 259–266, doi:10.1080/23265507.2015.1084477.

cular interface is staged (in what appears as a ‘theater in the mind’); in so doing, it endorses self-reflexivity not as a “thought thinking itself” (a process that Pierre A. Lévy identifies as the Aristotelian definition of divinity<sup>27</sup>, but as a feature of mediation that invites us to break binaries, dissolve standards, and endorse coalescence.

More specifically, the visual technology of interest is introduced halfway through the first episode of the third season (“My Log Has a Message for You”), in the shape of a room-sized glass box in the size of a Renaissance cabinet, located on the top floor of a skyscraper in downtown New York – property of “some anonymous billionaire.” Empty on the inside, this hefty display case is put on a low stage pedestal, is surrounded from three sides by spotlights and cameras recording its content 24/7, and has its fourth side attached to a wall where a bullseye window opens to the skyline of the metropolis. The box and its complementary equipment are safeguarded by human presence: For reasons that are never explained, a security professional is hired to keep an eye on the space, whereas a young man desperate for a salary is hired to watch and maintain the installation that functions in full disclosure. His daily ordinary tasks are summarized in the loading and reloading of SD cards in the cameras, and storing them in the local server.

The guard he replaced asserted he had seen something in the box, but never told him what it was, therefore contesting the tellability of his own observation. One evening, the security guard leaves his post without notice. The young man’s love interest, who works in the same building, visits the studio to spend time with him. Soon after she is allowed to the main space, the two of them engage in sexual intercourse, which in turn is interrupted by the spectral presence that appears in the box. A pan shot over this apparatus’s cable system heralds the ghostly apparition of an androgynous faceless creature, which seems to be projected two-dimensionally on a pop-up black surface – on an interface that opens out *ad hoc*. The creature’s wrath is triggered by the eyeline match between the two characters and the creature, but, similarly to the *Weather Reports*, David Lynch opts for breaking the axis that aligns the gazes: Shortly before the ghost transcends the interface to attack and murder its witnesses, the camera focuses on a close up of their face, which allows us to see that their eyes are missing.

Whereas on the level of action, the ghost arguably accurately personifies and literally performs Emmanuel Levinas’s theory of the face as a secret language of transcendence, cutting across the nothingness of the sensual world, the setting of the scene and the presence of the appa-

<sup>27</sup> Ivi, p. 261.

ratus shifts our attention to the mechanisms that confect and channel the agency of the gaze (which is “precisely the epiphany of the face as a face”)<sup>28</sup>. After all, the box’s architecture alludes to an inverted, transparent variation of the camera obscura, the closed chamber where the view from outside permeates the space through a (smaller) hole and strikes the surface facing this aperture, whereas the texture of the figure directly alludes to the technique of Pepper’s ghost, the optical illusion that was developed in early phantasmagorias as theater attractions and tested in magic lantern shows, through a nexus of mirror-images, multiple and mobile projectors, and smoke. Alluding to the legacy of obsolete pre-cinematic devices as a powerful agent in this uncanny viewing dispositif that functions with a database logic<sup>29</sup>, feeding a classified and taxonomized storage of standardized memory cards, the filmmaker elicits an archaeological, and therefore layered approach to the question of what is it that we see in reality and the origins of its perception.

If the black surface with the projected ghost is an interface that doesn’t “appear before you but rather is a gateway that opens up and allows passage to some place beyond”<sup>30</sup>, the desktop for its activation is not conceived as a physically flat area, but as a significant space where different agents with iconic qualities/settings are gathered, claiming a certain place or function. The Red Room, the setting that opens this work, can be conceived as a working space: a prototype environment from which different narratives will stem and to which they will return for comparisons. Demarcated by the theatrical curtains, it seemingly contains a small pool of symbolic representations and a limited network of humans and non-humans. But if in the first two seasons the Black Lodge – the larger periphery where the Red Room is hidden – was perceived by audiences as a boundary space separating the physical from the metaphysical, as the third season progresses, the filmmaker opts for a plot twist that relocates our attention to the importance of a boundary surface as a (inherently cinematic) medium of encounter. On the one hand, in the penultimate scene of the second episode (“Zen, or the Skill to Catch a Killer”) Agent Cooper escapes the Red Room when the latter collapses in its entirety, under the cry of Mike (the one-armed man) that “this is non-exist-ent”. His trajectory leads him through a sea of fragments to the bullseye window – the opening from which the image of the external physical would enter a camera lucida, hence the viewers’ expectations of reality are already subverted. Once he crosses this threshold, cross-cutting editing

<sup>28</sup> E. Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, Duquesne University Press, Pittsburgh 1961.

<sup>29</sup> L. Manovich, *Database as a Symbolic Form*, in “Millennium Film Journal”, n. s., a. V., n. 34 (“The Digital”), 1999.

<sup>30</sup> A. Galloway, *op. cit.*, p. 43.

bridges Cooper's experience in the display with a flashback from the previous episode, where the couple realizes they are alone on the floor (after double-checking the bathroom and its mirror). The switch between POVs demonstrates that Cooper (whose figure changes multiple sizes in perspective, as if it was captured by lenses with different apertures) is identified as the killing ghost.

What can be perceived as another expression of obfuscating heuristic processes and a constant redistribution of signification, opens up new possibilities for understanding the role of the filmmaker in fostering a non-binary frame of thought that draws on and subverts archival-categorical thinking. Technologies of mediation, deployed in self-reflexive creative gestures, create interfaces of coalescence and co-existence. As seen in the last sequence episode of the series ("Call for Help"), the spectral image of the killer was only captured in a single frame by this apparatus of surveillance and documentation (like a momentary lapsus), whereas the image of Agent Cooper escaped this archival representation – it seems not to fit in the archive. It is for this reason that it exemplifies Gilbert Ryle's notion of "ghost in the machine"<sup>31</sup>, critiquing the Cartesian division of mind and body that would become the cornerstone of the Enlightenment. Working with different surfaces, interfaces, and archival processes as themes within the narrative, David Lynch provides the theoretical toolkit for both the examination of the cinematic medium in the past and the speculation of its virtual life in the future. In this self-reflexive take, his focus is far from the observation of the thought process in the act of making meaning, or from the distinction between mental/intellectual and bodily/sensual registers – often translated as a psychoanalytical inquiry on the approach of the Real. Expanding his investigation of standards, taxonomies, and modes of visibilities he attempted in his experimental meteorology, the series he completed between the two installments of his *Weather Reports*, he returns to an observation of his own work, proposing an interface of co-existence.

## Conclusion

The conceptualization of two non-cinematic, episodic artworks by David Lynch as gestures of self-reflexive archiving, their approach through theories of mediation, using the desktop interface as an analytical tool, and the close reading that focuses more on the entanglement of visual technologies and bodily performances in the narrative world,

<sup>31</sup> G. Ryle, *The Concept of Mind*, Routledge, London 2009.

and less on the quest for interpretative schemes and aspects of closure, wishes to contribute a different strand in research on the prolific filmmaker's work: A framework in which the comprehension and perception of his film legacy transcend binary thinking and other processes of classification that proliferated from the post-Enlightenment era to this day – including divisions like conscious and unconscious, visible and invisible, mind and body, real and unreal. An investigation of Lynch's *Weather Reports* through the prism of an archival gesture has helped establish the divisive power of representation, while investigating different interfaces as spaces of encounter, against the standardization of vision and observation. In extension, the centralization of a visual archival apparatus that elicits an archaeological methodology in the research of visual technologies, fosters a gaze that understands media interfaces as modes of co-existence that dismantle biases that associate reality with either the tactile world or, in Lacanian terms, with the register where everything is devoid of meaning. Returning to the scene of Spielberg's *The Fabelmans*, this study eventually considers that the shift in the axis and the perspective can make an image interesting, but what might prove more generative for the past, present, and future of cinema is the interest in the techniques and technologies that change the way we experience vision in the horizon of time.

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