Giornale di Filosofia

JOUVENCE

Indice

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Introduction

Just when the issue was sent out for publishing, we were saddened by the news of David Lynch's passing away. With profound sorrow and admiration for his unique perspective on art and life, we would like to dedicate this issue of Giornale di Filosofia to his memory.

David Lynch is not just one of the most distinctive contemporary film-makers, he is above all an all-rounded artist who has always strived to investigate the expressive limits of representation and narrative, especially with regards to how the world is shaped by unconscious desires. This volume collects papers addressing – with cutting-edge perspective and theoretical accuracy – Lynch's enigmatic innovations in respect to this issue, that brings together the (media-)philosophical, psychoanalytical, and narratological traditions.

Psychoanalysis has often crossed paths with narrative; since Paul Ricœur's innovative narrative interpretation of Freudian psychoanalysis[1], a number of important contributions have developed and strengthened the bond between the two, in theory as well as in therapeutic practice[2]. The "restriction to language" inherent in the "talking cure" of the psychoanalytic practice may be highlighting desire's "semantic dimension"[3], as Ricœur notes, but also its intersubjective and communicative nature. Speaking particularly about the decisive role of transference in psychoanalysis (involving the relationship between analyst

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[1] See P. Ricœur, *De l'Interpretation: Essai sur Freud*. Fayard, Paris 1965; P. Ricœur, *The Question of Proof in Freud's Psychoanalytic Writings*, in "Journal of the American Psychoanalytic Association" Vol. 25, No. 4, 1977, pp. 835-872; and also P. Ricœur, *On Psychoanalysis: Writings and Lectures Vol. 1*. Polity press, Cambridge 2012.
[2] See among others: A. Ferro, *Psychoanalysis as Therapy and Storytelling*. Routledge, London and New York 2012; J. László, *The Science of Stories: An Introduction to Narrative Psychology*. Routledge, London and New York 2008; P. L. Rudnytsky, Peter L., and R. Charon (Eds.), *Psychoanalysis and Narrative Medicine*. State University of New York Press, New York 2008.; R. Schafer, *Narration in the Psychoanalytic Dialogue*, in "Critical Inquiry", Vol. 7, No. 1, 1980, pp. 29-53; D. P. Spence, *Narrative Truth and Historical Truth: Meaning and Interpretation in Psychoanalysis*. WW Norton & Company, New York 1984.
[3] Ricœur, *On Psychoanalysis*, cit., p. 13.

and analysand), Ricœur notes how it forms a "playground", in Freud's terms, which acts as an "intermediate region"[4] where desire can be expressed; "not only is it able to be spoken, to be brought to language, but it is also addressed to another".

Arts and media narratives can also be thought in these terms; as constituting playgrounds and spaces in-between reality and inner mental life, expressing desires that are always addressed to another (and thus introducing a communicative interplay with each member of the audience and the audience as a collective). In this expressive and communicative act lies narrative's "therapeutic" potential.

Narrative as a process of "telling", in the sense of making something narratable, corresponds to a process of temporalizing, making meaning and being able to communicate something that has so far been ineffable, undisclosed, sometimes not even accessible to consciousness and realized by the person. Siri Hustvedt argues that "involuntary and traumatic memories that are sensorimotor, affective replays of an event, are not codified in language, and cannot be located in a subjective time or space"[5], but fiction and narrative creativity, which she deems equivalent to dreaming and remembering, is a process of "dreamlike reconfigurations of emotional meanings that take place unconsciously"[6].

This observation offers a refreshingly direct association of narrative not necessarily with a symbolic (and language-based) quest of the mind for meaning-making, a "mode of reasoning" as Jerome Bruner called it, even if this mode contrasts and complements the "paradigmatic", "logico-scientific mode"[7], but with a more direct expression of the unconscious, akin to dreaming. There could hardly be a more accurate description of Lynch's narratives than that of a "dreamlike reconfiguration" of unconscious emotions and desires.

The peculiarity in Lynch is that this reconfiguration retains in its form and aesthetics, but also in its affect, the dreamlike character which other products of imagination in their artistic incarnations do not necessarily have. Here we could think of the immense interest that the Lynchian universe, unique and distinguishable in its bizarre character, and for that reason, attractive, has inspired in academic and popular discourse, and the special place it occupies in the landscape of contemporary filmmaking.

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[4] S. Freud, quoted in Ricœur, Ivi, p. 15.
[5] S. Hustvedt, *Three Emotional Stories: Reflections on Memory, the Imagination, Narrative, and the Self*, in "Neuropsychoanalysis", Vol. 13, No. 2, 2011, pp. 187-196, p. 187.
[6] Ivi.
[7] J. Bruner, *Actual Minds, Possible Worlds*. Harvard University Press, Cambridge MA 1986, pp. 12-13.

It should be pointed out that for psychoanalysis all sorts of artistic creativity can be thought to some extent as dreamlike. Freud considered creativity to be equivalent to dreaming, to the extent that it constitutes an expression of unconscious desires of the creator(s). In the case of Lynch, a special characteristic of his "ars poetica"[8] is making dreams – and, more often, nightmares – enjoyable instead of repulsive for viewers. Freud suggested that art can have a healing effect, as a form of tension-release. As he writes for poetry in particular: "our actual enjoyment of an imaginative work proceeds from a liberation of tensions in our minds. It may even be that not a little of this effect is due to the writer's enabling us thenceforward to enjoy our own day-dreams without self-reproach or shame"[9]. Ricœur's re-interpretation of the therapeutic potential of narrative, as already broached, is that this potential does not just lie with "tension release", but with intersubjective communication with someone – who becomes, at least temporarily, a substitute object of desire (taking the place of the "lost object")[10].

The therapeutic potentialities of Lynch's narratives, through their intersubjective and dreamlike qualities, will be put under scrutiny in this issue. Lynchian stories have often been discussed as non-linear, fragmented, and dreamlike, following the dreams' "royal road to the unconscious"[11] rather than the beaten path of classical Aristotelean drama; but they are still communicating, affectively, preconsciously, and through atmosphere, meanings lying beneath the surface of conscious awareness. They are playgrounds, or "miniature artificial stages"[12], where audiences connect in collective dreaming. This is something that, to some extent self-reflexively, Lynch himself acknowledges by naming his multimedia platform and YouTube channel "David Lynch Theater" – an intermediate playground or stage where he does not lose chance to communicate with fans through a playful use of the screen (see the "interface" metaphor through which Geli Mademli addresses his work in this issue). The screen of David Lynch's theater might be seen as an interface ultimately abolishing the division between outside and inside, as well as a meeting place, permeable and playful.

As for the therapeutic potential of David Lynch's theater (which might be thought as encompassing all his multifaceted work with various media and different art forms), this can be assumed from his cult following and from various comments on his work in the popular press, academic

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[8] S. Freud, *Creative Writers and Day-dreaming*, in *Collected Papers Vol. 4*, Basic Books, London 1908, pp. 419-428.
[9] Ivi.
[10] Ricœur, *On Psychoanalysis*, cit., p. 15.
[11] In Freud's famous expression from *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1900).
[12] Ricœur, *On Psychoanalysis*, cit., p. 16.

scholarship as well as coming from his anonymous fanbase. For example, it becomes apparent from users' comments under the videos he regularly posts on his platform, that his audience is deliberately watching Lynch's films, videos, as well as listening to his music, in order to address their psychic desire (as indicated by the frequent use of terms such as "love") and take part in a potentially therapeutic dreamlike experience. As a commenter recently posted under the promo video "David Lynch Theater presents: The Moon's Glow" (part of a series of humorous amateur-like videos Lynch makes dubbing old Hollywood movies with new and mostly nonsensical dialogues) "[…] something so deeply unsettling about how that whole exchange feels. Love that I can't even put the feeling into words, it's like some confused, troubling dream you had but can't put into words."[13] And another comment reads: "I don't always understand what I see with David Lynch, but I strangely always love it"[14].

What "cannot be put in words" becomes a special kind of feeling, distinct and recognizable in its affect, and being communicated and shared in the playground that the director himself has set up on his virtual "stage".

The term "theater" in Lynch's use but also in its appropriation in the present issue is not coincidental. As Bernard Baars observes in his book *In the Theater of Consciousness: The Workspace of the Mind*, the term has been used in various occasions and contexts as a metaphor for the mind and conscious experience, from ancient Vedantic philosophy to Plato's allegory of the cave[15], until contemporary brain science: "all unified theories of cognition today are theater models"[16]. On the other hand, the cinematic theater and its set up, central for what has been theorised as the "cinematic apparatus" in the 1970s through the so-called "Apparatus theory" by the likes of Jean-Louis Baudry and Christian Metz, has also embodied a metaphor for subjective consciousness and its distortions. Drawing as well on Plato's allegory of the cave and its alignment with the cinematic theater[17] – setting up a play of light and shadow, hiding

[13] Comment by an anonymous user under video *David Lynch Theater presents: The Moon's Glow*. In *David Lynch Theater*, YouTube, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=y1sg_fCi_wc, August 2024 (access 10 September 2024).
[14] Comment by another anonymous user under the same video, August 2024 (access 10 September 2024).
[15] B. J. Baars, *In the Theater of Consciousness: The Workspace of the Mind*. Oxford University Press, New York 1997, pp. 5-6.
[16] Ivi, p. ix. Baars also defends the theater model as a "productive metaphor for thinking about the brain" despite the erroneous "Cartesian theater fallacy" as criticized by Daniel Dennett (*Ivi*).
[17] See J-L Baudry, *The Apparatus: Metapsychological Approaches to the Impression of Reality in Cinema*, in P. Rosen (Ed.) *Narrative, Apparatus, Ideology: A Film Theory Reader*, New York, Columbia University Press 1986, pp. 299-318.

and revealing – apparatus theory focused on the way film experience is shaped by unconscious processes of projection and identification. It also applied psychoanalysis to cinematic spectatorship, considering film viewing a state of consciousness akin to dreaming. As a "screen" between the unconscious and the conscious, the dream speaks the language of the primary process, translating unconscious desires into forms that, distorted and unrecognizable, reach conscious awareness as memories of things that used to make perfect sense in the dream, but are now, in the conscious realm, seeming incomprehensible. They do however carry with them the sense of meaning they once had in another realm of experience – a meaning inaccessible and, if not narratively reworked and reimagined, forever forgotten. David Lynch's work consists in a theater, different from Plato's cave – in that it stages and "reconfigures" these incomprehensible memories, rather than trying to conceal them. And the aim of this volume is to shed light (or cast, indeed, a spotlight), on Lynch's unique talent and remarkable ability to do so, that is to "stage" and "tell" what remains unseen, unattended, and ineffable.

Telling the untold certainly recalls the Lacanian concept of the "Real" as that which is unspeakable but produces effects, a concept that has become a fundamental tool of Lacanian-inspired cinematographic criticism such as that of Joan Copjec[18]. For example, Slavoj Žižek used the Lacanian concepts of "Real" and "fundamental fantasy" to interpret Lynch's cinema in *The Art of the Ridiculous Sublime. On David Lynch's Lost Highway*[19]. But not only (Lacanian or Freudian) psychoanalysis can offer approaches to the "ineffable" in Lynch, or the link between his work and what can be largely called "unconscious". For example, the phenomenological tradition has cultivated a concept of the unconscious as "background" or indeed "atmosphere" (see Hven's paper in this issue) colouring every perception. In *The Visible and the Invisible*, Maurice Merleau-Ponty writes that "This unconscious is to be sought not at the bottom of ourselves, behind the back of our 'consciousness', but in front of us, as articulations of our field. It is 'unconscious' by the fact that it is not an *object*, but it that through which objects are possible"[20]. This phenomenological conception of the unconscious is compatible with its theatrical metaphor popular in the neuroscience of consciousness (as previously seen through Baars), as encompassing all that stays in the

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[18] See J. Copjec, *The Orthopsychic Subject: Film theory and the Reception of Lacan*, in "October", Vol. 49, 1989, pp. 53-71.
[19] S. Žižek, *The Art of the Ridiculous Sublime: On David Lynch's Lost Highway*. Walter Chapin Simpson Center for the Humanities, University of Washington, Seattle 2000.
[20] M. Merlau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*. Northwestern University Press, Evanston IL 1968, p. 180.

periphery rather than the "spotlight" of attention, but still influencing everything that is attended to and thus rising to conscious awareness. In this vein, telling the untold for Lynch, is, for example, to show what Mark Fisher calls *weird* and *eerie*, situations expressing "a preoccupation with the strange"[21], which Lynch evokes with showing nothing where it should be something, or, in reverse, something where it should be nothing. In both cases what is perceived is perceived as such because of what is not perceived, through a contrast created between what is in the "spotlight" and what in the periphery of consciousness.

The use of the term "telling" in this issue does not mean to reinstate a dualistic relationship between verbal and nonverbal, cognition and emotion, mind and body. Telling here rather extends beyond language alone, to involve "showing" as well[22], addressing the whole of artistic creation that renders it an embodied experience – as well as narrative as an embodied experiential process[23]. Hence the "theater" as a non-linguistic, embodied metaphor for Lynch's art as a whole.

The articles contained in the present issue highlight Lynch's "telling the untold" in different ways.

The issues starts from a paradoxically, perhaps, optimistic perspective on Lynch's darkest stories and their therapeutic power. In his article "Genealogy of Evil in David Lynch's Films", psychoanalyst Athanasios Alexandridis suggests a longitudinal analysis of (or rather, approach to) the work of Lynch, through the evolvement of the concept of Evil in it – defined as the forces of life's disintegration and the subject's traumatic knowledge of death. He observes that Evil takes different forms and progresses in Lynch's work, from a radical, fairytale-like evil projected onto evil characters, to one that is less one-dimensional and more complex. Pointing out various salient "evil" narrative elements across Lynch's filmography and ascribing them psychoanalytical meaning, Alexandridis ultimately finds in *Inland Empire* the culmination of Lynch's uncanny stories and the paradoxically therapeutic power of their evil elements. He particularly argues that they create "liminal" illusory worlds filled in with the contents of the unconscious where the Self experiences a state of not being, which however happens in a "safe" environment, ultimately alleviating one's traumatic encounter with death.

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[21] M. Fisher, *The Weird and the Eerie*. Repeater, London 2016.
[22] See R. Schafer, *Narration in the Psychoanalytic Dialogue*, in "Critical inquiry", Vol. 7, No. 1, 1980, pp. 29-53, p. 38
[23] As explored for example, by Aaron Mishara (A. L. Mishara, *Narrative and Psychotherapy – The Phenomenology of Healing*, in "American Journal of Psychotherapy", Vol. 49, No. 2, 1995, pp. 180-195.

Continuing with another broad consideration of Lynch's filmography and its potential for catharsis, the article "Circularity as Interminable Analysis in Lynch's Cinema" by Marco Stucchi focuses on a peculiar characteristic of Lynch's narrative structures, and argues that the circularity in them can be understood through a Freudian lens, as mimicking the unresolved, repetitive nature of the unconscious. Freud's idea of "interminable analysis" is used as a framework to understand the lack of resolution or growth in Lynch's characters. In psychoanalysis, the failure to bring unconscious desires to consciousness in a timely manner can result in a perpetual state of analysis, much like the circular or stagnant narratives in Lynch's films. Freud posits that the unconscious mind is atemporal, and this atemporality leads to difficulties in distinguishing past from present, reality from fantasy – issues that are central to narratives in Lynch's work. In Aristotle's terms, catharsis involves emotional purification, often through the resolution of a narrative. According to Stucchi, Lynch's films frequently lack such resolution, leaving characters and viewers in a state of ambiguity or unresolved tension. This is evident in films like *Mulholland Drive* and *Lost Highway*, where attempts at resolution fail, reflecting the interminable nature of the narrative.

The next article particularly focuses on *Lost Highway,* one of the most discussed but still enigmatic narratives told by Lynch. While much of the scholarly focus has been on the male protagonists Fred and Pete, in "'You'll never have me'. Re-framing *Lost Highway* from a Renee/Alice's Perspective" Diego Chece offers an original interpretation, proposing that the film can be reinterpreted through the lens of the female characters, Renee and Alice. In this reading, the two characters are not merely archetypal femme fatales but central figures in a narrative exploring the fluid nature of desire and identity. Renee/Alice embodies desire not as a lack but as a dynamic force. Her statement, "You'll never have me," when understood as a collective assertion, shifts the narrative focus to the broader exploration of desire as an ongoing process rather than a quest for a missing object. Reinterpreting *Lost Highway* through Renee/Alice allows us to view the film not as a puzzle to be solved but as a "producer of sense." Drawing on the philosophical ideas of Deleuze and Guattari, particularly their concepts from *Anti-Oedipus*, Chece shows how the film's narrative, with its fragmented identities and non-linear structure, generates sense immanently, through the film's ongoing process, rather than by concealing a deeper, hidden meaning awaiting to be discovered.

Also drawing on Gilles Deleuze (*The Logic of Sensation*) to find an interpretative key for approaching Lynch's work, Antonio Ricciardi in his article "Il trittico Lynchiano e l'arte della frantumazione: una ontoritmologia della visione" explores an essential aspect of Lynch's poetics, the link between his visions and the work of the painter Francis Bacon. Ric-

ciardi focuses particularly on three films by the director (in the writer's opinion his masterpieces), *Lost Highway*, *Mulholland Drive* and *Inland Empire*. Ricciardi argues that, just like with Bacon, what seems to interest Lynch the most is "to present the actions of invisible forces upon bodies, rendered in a preintellectual sensation of intensities", as the director declares, and as can already be deduced from his pictorial work.

Expanding on the affective potential of Lynch's work, in the following article "David Lynch. L'arte tra paticità e metafisica" Marco Palladino addresses the director's propensity to stage in his cinema feelings and emotions such as anguish, amazement, horror, essential engines for performing the power of the unconscious and its primacy over *Ego*. The theoretical starting points necessary for the understanding and analysis of Lynch's work are for Palladino the psychoanalysis of Sigmund Freud, of course, but also the phenomenology of Henri Bergson, Martin Heidegger, Max Scheler, Luigi Pareyson, as well as American pragmatism by William James and Charles Sanders Peirce. This network of references therefore places the director's work within a nexus that includes the most significant theoretical approaches of a good half of the twentieth century – through the expressionist aesthetics Lynch is inspired by since the beginning of his career.

The next paper also draws less obvious connections between Lynch's work and the legacies of Freud as well as of American psychologist (as well as pragmatist philosopher as mentioned in the previous article) William James. In "Diving in the Ocean of Consciousness: Altered states, Psychoanalysis and Transcendental Aesthetics in David Lynch", Maria Poulaki focuses on the director's preoccupation with the practice of meditation, through his own accounts of his meditative experience as a feeling of "diving in the ocean of consciousness". Poulaki traces the psychoanalytical lineage of this concept in Freud's accounts of transcendental experience, as well as in the American psychologists's – almost contemporary to Freud's – theorization of altered states of consciousness. She then approaches the aesthetics of such "oceanic" feeling in two titles of Lynch's filmography, *Eraserhead* (also discussed by Alexandridis) and *Straight Story*, claiming that they represent the opposite ends of a spectrum of profound challenges to "Ego-based identity". Through techniques of "emptying and voiding attention", Lynch's work is thus portrayed as a creative quest to arrive at a blissful (rather than frightening) feeling of self-dispersion.

Setting off from a childhood memory of NYC subway Lynch has narrated in an interview, in "Lynchian Atmospheres and the Optical Unconscious" Steffen Hven investigates Lynch's particular method of creating atmospheres and thus transmitting to viewers his peculiar and eerie worlds. Hven goes back to Benjamin's concept of the optical unconscious to demonstrate how "more than representing the themes of psychoanalysis in cinematic form, [Lynch] locates the uncanniness, the repressed,

and the unconscious in the operations of the medium itself" – and thus externalizes the unconscious "onto the material world and the sensorial environment". Hven's article, returning to the theorist who approached the therapeutic value of cinema, poses a challenge, (in a way echoing Alexandridis), to think in what ways Lynch's cinema can be conceived as both a warning as well as a protective shield for human subjectivity to endure the trauma and terror of being lost in an endless loop of technological communication.

In the same vein with Hven's investigation of the mediality of the unconscious in Lynch, Geli Mademli in her article "Desktop Lynch: Archiving the Ghosts in the Machine" suggests a refreshing analysis of the director's work, shifting focus to his performative "desktop" practices. Against Lacanian readings of unconscious aspects in Lynchian narratives, Mademli brings to the fore, drawing on Jean Louis Comolli among others, the "technological" unconscious in them. She also sees the semi-visible network of technologies and the media archive they form as a lingering spectral presence in Lynch's performative videos (his "Weather Reports" series uploaded on "David Lynch Theater"), as well as his serial narratives (*Twin Peaks*), which blurs the boundaries between presence and absence, actual and virtual. Mademli also interestingly brings up the notion of the "theater of the mind" referring not to the brain, as mentioned previously from the perspective of neuroscience, but to media technologies (its use traditionally referring to the radio), as ultimately addressing one's capacities for imagination, which has been inextricably entangled with the theater metaphor and its multiple remediations (from radio to online performances). Although Mademli does not focus on Lynch's filmography, her analysis provokes new "desktop" readings of Lynch's films as well, and an investigation of their performative (and) archival practices and aesthetics.

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Athanasios Alexandridis
Genealogy of Evil in David Lynch's Films[1]

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.

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[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 e*vil* – 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 dream[4]. 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

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[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 Green[7] to argue that in this case the artwork holds the position of the psychoanalyst and the psychoanalyst the position of the analysand[8]. 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 pschoanalyst-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

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[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 Aristotle[9] 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

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[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 *traditiona*l *typology,* typical of fairy tail*s: 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 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 town*s. 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

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[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 Taoism[11] (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.

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[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 unconsciously[12]. 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-

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[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!

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Marco Stucchi
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"[1]. 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[2]. 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[3]. 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,

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[1] 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.
[2] See *Ibidem*.
[3] 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 scifi or magic, but David Lynch movies do not appear to be situated within those genres[4]. 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"[5]. 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 *Kafkian* narrative, like the one in *The Castle*[6] ; 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[7]. 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[8] 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

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[4] However, I have to admit that here intuitions may diverge.
[5] If we consider atemporal objects as "situations", as I just explained, the classic distinction between *fabula* and *syuzhet* is inevitably undermined.
[6] 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
[7] We cannot refer to age since we chose to not consider strict temporal properties.
[8] See G. Torrengo, *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[9]. Second, other Lynch works, particularly the Twin Peaks saga and *Inland Empire*, go far beyond my actual comprehension. Anyway, an exhaustive interpretation[10] 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[11], 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[12] – the goal of psychoanalysis was cathar-

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

[10] 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.

[11] 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.

[12] 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*[13]. Moreover, the "psychical is unconscious in itself"[14] and the unconscious is atemporal[15]. 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[16] 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[17]. 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[18] (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*

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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.

[13] It can be argued that in Freud's ouvre there is not a dramatic difference between *Triebe* and *Wunsh*.

[14] S. Freud, *An Outline of Psycho-Analysis*, *cit.*, p. 158.

[15] 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.

[16] See M. Stucchi, *Is Freudian Psychotherapy an Example of Scapegoat Mechanism?*, in "Dialegesthai. Rivista telematica di filosofia", vol. 23, 2021.

[17] See *Ibidem.*

[18] 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[19]. 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[20], 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[21]; 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[22]. 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

[19] 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.
[20] 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.
[21] See S. Freud., *On Psychoterapy*, 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.
[22] 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[23] 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[24]. 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[25]. 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[26]. 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-

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[23] 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.

[24] 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 CooperIthaca, 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.

[25] 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.

[26] See R. Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, tr. ing. di Gregory, P., The Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore 1977.

onciliation 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[27] (it could be a narrative or an analysis[28]), 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[29] –, 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[30]. LH also deals with remembering. Pete, a sort of "second[31] 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.

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[27] To end and to end successfully are, in some sense, the same thing.

[28] 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.

[29] See D.F. Wallace, *A Supposedly Fun Thing I'll Never Do Again: An Essays and Arguments*, Little, Brown and Co., Boston 1997.

[30] As Freud has stated: the Ego is not master in its own house.

[31] 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[32]. 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[33]. 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

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[32] 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.

[33] 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[34] 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[35]. 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[36].

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[37]. Moreover, what is desired, that

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

[35] This is what Freud called the strange status of knowing and not knowing at the same time.

[36] 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.

[37] 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[38], 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[39]. 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

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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.

[38] 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.

[39] 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[40]? Is it Jeffrey or Sandy or both? Is it Fred, Pete, Reneé 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 word, 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[41].

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"[42] 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.

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[40] 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.

[41] 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.

[42] 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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Diego Chece
"You'll never have me"
Re-framing *Lost Highway* from a Renee/Alice's Perspective

In David Lynch's 1997 film, *Lost Highway*, the narrative bookends itself with the enigmatic phrase "Dick Laurent is dead". This framing might initially suggest a circular plot, where unresolved premises introduced at the start are neatly resolved as the story unfolds, only to return to its starting point with newfound clarity. However, *Lost Highway* defies such expectations. Throughout the film, logical coherence eludes grasp, as the plot resists conventional interpretation at every turn. Attempts to dissect the storyline, even through psychological readings of the characters, disrupt any linear progression, as the characters themselves seem to reject traditional logic of "common sense"[1]. Instead, they navigate through shifting identities and temporalities, challenging the very notion of a fixed narrative structure. The logical sequencing of life and death itself evades traditional chronology. To distil the essence of the film, one might turn to the director's own description, wherein he frames it as "a 21st Century noir horror film. A graphic investigation into parallel identity crises. A world where time is dangerously out of control. A terrifying ride down the lost highway"[2]. It serves as a potent visual exploration of parallel identity crises set in a world where time spirals perilously out of grasp, propelling characters into a harrowing journey along forgotten pathways. Except to later describe such statements as "rubbish", stating instead that the film consists mainly of a mystery[3].

Let's proceed systematically. While many analyses of *Lost Highway* concentrate on its male protagonist(s), Fred/Peter, I propose a different perspective centred on the female character(s), Renee/Alice. Instead of categorizing her solely as archetypal "*femme fatales*", I contend that she represents the true focal points of the narrative. In fact, by reinterpreting Renee/Alice's statement, "You'll never have me", as a collective asser-

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[1] Cfr. T. Jousse, *David Lynch. Masters of Cinema (Cahiers du Cinema)*, Phaidon Press, London 2010.

[2] D. Hughes, *The Complete Lynch*, Virgin Publishing Ltd., London 2001, p. 224.

[3] Cfr. D. Lynch and C. Rodley, *Lynch on Lynch,* Faber and Faber, London 1997, pp. 214-243.

tion, the narrative shifts towards a broader exploration of desire, drawing inspiration from Deleuze and Guattari's *Anti-Oedipus*[4]. Within this framework, Renee/Alice embodies desire not merely as an object but as a dynamic force propelling the storyline. Examining the film through this lens unveils a deeper understanding of the nature of desire as an ongoing, fluid journey for connections. Renee/Alice emerges as a pivotal desiring character, reshaping our interpretation of Lynch's cinematic masterpiece.

These reshaping emerges because main interpreters focus their readings on psychoanalytical interpretations of Lynch's cinema, exploring the intricate layers of desire, fantasy, and the unconscious, utilizing theories mainly from Freud and Lacan, among others. For example, McGowan's analysis focuses on Lynch's use of dream logic and the disintegration of the symbolic order, emphasizing how his films portray the failure of desire and the persistence of lack[5]. I believe that these types of interpretations, while extremely valid, support the idea of desire as lack and reduce the film's interpretation to a hierarchical vision focused exclusively on man's hero. Žižek's reading can be closely aligned to the perspective that I'm proposing, especially in the way he explores *Lost Highway* as a cinematic exploration of the "Lacanian Real", where the film's non-linear narrative illustrates the breakdown of the symbolic order and the intrusion of the Real into the characters' lives. And I agree with him also in thinking at Renee/Alice as a character shifting the *cliché* of the *femme fatales*[6]. But, according to Žižek, the transformation of Fred into Pete represents a desperate attempt to escape the traumatic kernel of his existence, thus this metamorphosis is seen as an effort to reconstitute a coherent identity amidst the disintegration of symbolic structures. In this light, the key of the interpretation returns to Fred/Pete as the main character, driving the film's interpretation in strictly Freudian rails, in a binary alternative between "reality" and "phantasmatic fugue". Pisters' thought sets the stage for the "desiring" reading that I'm proposing. In fact, her theory incorporates Deleuzian concepts, suggesting Lynch's films create a "cinematic unconscious" that engages viewers on an affective, rather than purely

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[4] G. Deleuze and F. Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus. Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis 1983.
[5] Cfr. T. McGowan, *The impossible David Lynch*, Columbia University Press, New York 2007; J. Ruers and S. Marianski, *Freud/Lynch. Behind the Curtain*, Phoenix Publishing House Ltd, Bicester 2023.
[6] Cfr. S. Žižek, *The Art of the Ridicoulous Sublime. On David Lynch's Lost Highway*, University of Washington, Seattle 2000. Regarding the possible proximity between Deleuzoguattarian "desire" and Lacanian "real", cfr. B. Massumi, *A User's Guide to Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, MIT Press, Cambridge 1992; S. Žižek, *Organs Without Bodies. On Deleuze and consequences*, Routledge, New York, London 2003; F. Cimatti, *Il taglio. Linguaggio e pulsione di morte*, Quodlibet, Macerata 2015.

cognitive, level: "Lynch's cinema functions as a 'rhizomatic' structure, creating a multitude of connections that challenge linear, logical narratives and open up spaces for a 'cinematic unconscious'"[7].

All these readings collectively illuminate how Lynch's surreal and often disorienting storytelling techniques provide a cinematic space that foregrounds the deepest and most repressed aspects of the human psyche, thereby challenging conventional perceptions of identity, reality, and desire. My attempt in reading *Lost Highway* consists in trying to produce a desiring *enchaînement* between the film's fragmented, fluid, identities and the Deleuze and Guattari's ideas about desire, multiplicity, and sense. So, my aim, rather than interpreting the film in search of hidden meanings, is to show how it is a "producer of sense", in a Deleuzian sense. In fact, a more effective approach to engaging with the film seems to be actively generate sense from it, rather than passively searching for pre-existing significance within the plot. To do this, I believe it is necessary to focus on the female character, because she *embodies* desire and, in doing so, shows us this dynamic that works both for desire and sense[8].

In the initial section, I provide an annotated overview of the film, primarily highlighting the challenge of analysing the storyline and characters' behaviour through a logic interpretative framework. Subsequently, I aim to demonstrate how the varied interpretation of the phrase "You'll never have me" spoken by Alice suggests a fluidity in the dynamics of desire within the film, thereby rejecting the notion of the latter part of the film solely as Fred's imaginative escape. In summary, by embracing this dynamic of desire, *Lost Highway* presents itself as a creator of sense rather than merely a subject for a "psychoanalytical" interpretation.

A surreal journey on the lost highway

As mentioned, the film begins with a sentence that sounds like a condemnation: "Dick Laurent is dead". Listening to it, we find Fred (Bill Pullman) answering the intercom of his aseptic house in a metropolitan suburb. But he has no idea who is uttering these words, let alone who this Dick Laurent is. Drawing from sparse interactions between Fred and his wife Renee (Patricia Arquette), it emerges that their marital bond is

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[7] P. Pisters, *The Matrix of Visual Culture: Working with Deleuze in Film Theory*, Stanford University Press, Stanford 2003, p. 218.

[8] From this perspective, there might be a proximity between my idea and Lacan's theory of feminine desire as expressed in *On Feminine Sexuality: the limits of love and knowledge. The Seminar, Book XX: Encore*, Norton & co., New York 2000. However, albeit nuanced, I believe that Lacanian theory contains implicitly a sexual binary which, conversely, Deleuze and Guattari's theory of desire aims to dismantle.

fraught with tension, prompting Fred to question Renee's loyalty. Fred's conjecture implies that Renee's hesitance to accompany him to his jazz saxophone performance at the club may be due to her engagement with another man. This sense of doubt permeates the audience via Fred's hallucinatory visions, depicting Renee with another man at the club. Moreover, we are equally involved in Fred's spasmodic waiting for her answer on the phone, which punctually does not come. The prevailing motif in the initial segment is Fred's pervasive sense of doubt and suspicion, amplified by his saxophone solo performance at the club and further exacerbated by the subdued and seemingly inconsequential nature of the dialogue between him and Renee[9]. The love scene is perfectly in line with the atmosphere experienced so far: antiseptic and unresolved. One morning, Renee finds a videotape on the outside stairs of their house that shows the exterior of the mansion and does not contain any messages, as well as other scenes. The couple, especially Fred, does not seem to pay too much regard to it.

The next day, a new videotape: this time the recording includes scenes from inside the house and of the couple asleep in their bed. In a crescendo of anxiety, they calls the police, who are unable to draw any conclusions. Interestingly, the couple has no security cameras and, in general, no filming equipment: in fact, Fred prefers to remember events "in his own way". This is an important aspect of the entire film. We are indeed surrounded by the vagueness and the lack of objectivity of what we see. Like our own memories, the scenes live in a pasture that is not only that of recorded images: Lynch attempts to show us something that cannot simply be shown, to tell us something that cannot simply be said. The scenes of the film, like the memories, are imperfect because they are shot through with sensations (both those of the moment in which the event happens and those in which the memory resurfaces)[10]. Similarly, the opening scenes of the film attempt to restore and immerse us in the suspicious, equivocal, and affectionless world in which Fred and Renee live.

The following evening, the couple goes to a party at Andy's house. Andy (Michael Massee) is an old friend of Renee, and the same man whom Fred suspects his wife of having an affair with. During the party, Fred meets a mysterious and unsettling character, who tells him that he is at his house at that exact moment. Incredulous and sceptical about this claim, Fred finds himself talking on his mobile phone to a man who

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[9] Žižek interprets this flat dialogues as reminiscent of Beckett's and Iounesco's theatre. Cfr., *The Art of the Ridicoulous Sublime. On David Lynch's Lost Highway*, cit., p. 29.
[10] To give a banal example, a fall from a bicycle and the resulting skinned knee at the age of six will be remembered painfully the following month, with affection and nostalgia seventy years later.

seems to be both in front of him and in his house, in what is undoubtedly the film's most famous and unsettling scene. Furthermore, Mystery Man (Robert Blake) claims in Kafkaesque fashion that he is present at Fred's house because he was invited by the latter. Distraught, Fred quickly returns home with Renee, finding no sign of any strangers in the house.

Third shot: in a brief frame, we see Renee's body horribly mutilated and Fred despairing. We do not directly see Fred killing her, but we "feel" it with some certainty. Likewise, both the police who arrest him and the court that sentences him to the electric chair seem to confirm this impression. But photography, settings, and sounds seem to communicate to us above all the senselessness into which Fred is thrown. As in a Greek tragedy, we do not see the violent act consummated on stage, but we experience it in the narrative: our messenger is a very brief frame that directly recalls videotape recordings. However, we cannot be absolutely sure about Fred's guilt, precisely in light of the previous considerations about memory and the lack of video-recording equipment in the house. What we are sure of is that, even in the cell and while awaiting the death sentence, Fred has not been able to unravel the riddle determined by Renee and remains in the same, apathetic and unnerving, doubtful disquiet.

Subsequent events within the narrative of the film exhibit an absurd and surreal quality. Instead of Fred, another individual named Peter (Balthazar Getty) occupies the cell. Peter finds himself devoid of any recollection regarding the circumstances leading to his confinement. Fred, conversely, has inexplicably vanished. Peter, younger than Fred, resumes his life after his release from prison, returning to familial surroundings, socializing with friends and a girlfriend, and pursuing employment as a mechanic in a garage. Yet, alongside the bizarre experience of awakening in a maximum-security cell without explanation, another enigmatic aspect pervades Peter's existence: a pivotal yet undisclosed event, alluded to throughout the film but only hinted at, which his parents and girlfriend avoid discussing, and of which Peter retains no memory. Lynch introduces yet another layer of ambiguity, this time without resorting to physical transformation but through subtle narrative cues, instilling in the protagonist (and the audience) an irresolvable uncertainty.

The primary client of Peter's garage is Mr. Eddy (Robert Loggia), a gangster who admires his mechanical prowess. In a subsequent scene, Mr. Eddy – referred to by the agents tailing Peter as Dick Laurent – returns to the garage and invites the guy for a drive in his car, purportedly to address an engine noise. In this absurdly comedic sequence, the gangster pursues and violently assaults a driver who had overtaken him, all while delivering diatribes on car safety statistics and imperiously commanding obedience to traffic regulations. The next day, Mr Eddy returns to the garage, this time accompanied by a stunning blonde identical in every

way to Renee, except for her hair colour (Renee was a brunette), whose name is Alice. It is love at first sight between Peter and Alice (highlighted by Lou Reed singing "This Magic Moment" by the Drifters), despite the risk posed by Mr Eddy.

The one pulling the strings of the relationship is evidently Alice. It is she who decides that the passionate clandestine affair can begin, and it is always she who manages how and when to see each other. The new elements in the couple's dynamic are Peter's passion and amateur skills, which are better than Fred's. What remains is the enigma represented by Renee/Alice. If with Fred her enigmatic being is expressed through an icy apathy and an ill-concealed coldness towards her husband, in the case of Peter the enigma presents itself in the guise of a strong and passionate woman, who lets herself go with sexual desire but at the same time lucidly and rationally manages the relationship. It is in fact she who plans the escape with Peter, when Mr Eddy starts to become suspicious and threatens Peter by telephone (memorable is Mystery Man's monologue).

Following Alice's disclosure of her coerced involvement in a pornography enterprise controlled by Mr. Eddy, she proposes a scheme to rob Andy, the individual who initially introduced her to the gangster. Peter, deeply unsettled by the screening of a sexually explicit scene featuring Alice herself at Andy's residence – coincidentally, the same individual who was acquainted with Renee – becomes emotionally perturbed. This disturbance ultimately leads to a botched robbery, wherein Peter inadvertently commits murder instead of merely incapacitating Andy. At this critical juncture, Alice's manipulative nature becomes starkly apparent as she callously points out Peter's responsibility for the death. Peter's subsequent quest for solace in a restroom serves as a poignant reflection of his psychological turmoil: the overpowering resonance of Rammstein's industrial metal anthem further disrupts any semblance of coherent thought, rendering the scene a cacophony of disorientation and distress: "*Ramm-Stein, ein Mensch brennt*". The man who burns is indeed Peter: he burns with irrational passion towards Alice; he burns because he was involved in a murder and a robbery; he burns above all because during the unfolding of events the predominant feeling was jealousy towards Alice and that sex scene in which she was the protagonist. This is a strong parallel with Fred: the latter too, despite his death sentence, seemed to remain totally absorbed in the same state of mind of apathetic and jealous indecision that pervaded his relationship with Renee.

Shortly thereafter, Peter and Alice's bodies are still burning, this time in the open Californian desert, under the headlights of the stolen car. At this juncture, a polished depiction of romantic affection unfolds, suggesting an eventual progression towards a serene and gratifying future. This feeling is short-lived: to Peter's words of love, Alice replies: "You'll

never have me", abandoning him and walking towards the house where they was waiting for the fence who will supply them with counterfeit passports. At this point, Peter turns back to Fred. It is also here that Alice disappears and Mystery Man re-emerges shouting that there is no Alice, only Renee. In the following scenes, we witness Fred's revenge on Mr Eddy. The latter is in a room at the Lost Highway motel with Renee/Alice (this time a brunette) and is surprised by Fred, who kidnaps him and cuts his throat in the middle of the desert with the help of Mystery Man, who will give Mr Eddy/Dick Laurent the *coup de grace*. After the deed is done, Mystery Man whispers something (which the audience cannot hear) in Fred's ear, who immediately takes the car and runs to intercom to his own house (talking to himself?) the phrase: "Dick Laurent is dead". The film closes with Fred – whose expressiveness remembers us the first meta-morphosis into Pete – being chased by police cars on the *Lost Highway*[11].

Trying to understand *Lost Highway*

The film therefore does not present a linear narrative, it is imbued with surreal and unspoken elements. Think, for instance, of the meta-morphoses of the characters, the double names, the frequent references that Peter receives to "that night" of which he remembers nothing and of which Lynch shows us nothing, or the phrase that Mystery Man whispers to Fred after the murder of Dick Laurent. The two narrative planes, which we could summarily describe as consisting of the Fred-Renee and Peter-Alice series respectively, are continuously mixed and intertwined, especially by the presence of Mystery Man acting in both planes. At the same time, the presence of the police – mostly in comic form – who witness the metamorphosis in the cell and subsequently tail Peter, gives a sense of attachment to the first part of the film, to the Fred-Renee plan. Again, Andy himself is active in both plans: indeed, his proxy activity seems to make explicit Fred's doubts about his wife Renee.

One might think that the narrative is circular; after all, the first and last sentences are the same. But it is a circle whose contours tend to be opaque, porous, certainly not well delineated. At the end of the film, we have absolutely no feeling of a "closing the loop", quite the contrary. Instead, we feel that the narrative thread itself is as surreal and logically impossible as the scenes we have seen. The non-sense is mixed with the sense of the plot at multiple points and, at the same time, hints at multiple meanings. A more effective approach to engaging with the film is

[11] About vehicles and roads in Lynch's films, cfr. A. Mactaggart, *The Film Paintings of David Lynch: Challenging Film Theory*, Intellect Books, Bristol 2010.

to actively generate meaning from it, rather than passively searching for pre-existing significance within the plot: the figure of the Möbius tape – suggested by Lynch himself and co-writer Gifford – seems much more apt to exemplify this infinite possibility of cross-references, especially if we consider such cross-references as production of meaning and not as mere referents of something deeper. And, therefore, something that goes far beyond a simple closing of the circle or a "reassuring" return to the starting point, but "rather a 'coming back to oneself' that leaves the field open to transformations and new spatio-temporal dimensions"[12].

A potential and insightful line of interpretation can be termed as "phantasmatic dialectics", because interprets the film as a psychological dialectic concerning Fred[13]: the initial segment representing reality, wherein Fred commits the act of killing Renee; the subsequent metamorphosis depicting his hallucinatory reverie, wherein he assumes a younger persona and is pursued by the woman; however, the tragic culmination constitutes a synthesis in which the torments of the former inexorably encroach upon the aspirations of the latter, escalating into a crescendo of violence and despair. Žižek accurately notes this aspect, emphasising that neither plane is actually idyllic. Indeed, both show tragic and despairing characters, in which the hallucinatory fantasy is nonetheless absorbed by the crudeness and senselessness of reality: "It is as if the unity of our experience of reality sustained by fantasy disintegrates and decomposes into its two components: on the one side, the 'desublimated' aseptic drabness of daily reality; on the other side, its fantasmatic support, not in its sublime version, but staged directly and brutally, in all its obscene cruelty"[14].

The kind of reading that we might call "phantasmatic dialectic" seems to lean towards the idea that, in order to satisfy his desire for Renee, or even better, to attract Renee's desire, Fred is forced to flee from the harsh and desolate reality into the realm of imagination, the phantasmatic horizon of the Peter-Alice plan. It is precisely here that is produced the short circuit, or rather the continuous deadlock of his desire, its definitive and irresolvable condemnation: "The subject turns to fantasy to escape the deadlock of desire but inevitably encounters the deadlock in a new

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[12] R. Caccia, *David Lynch*, Il Castoro, Milano 2000, p.118 (my translation). About Möbius tape, cfr., M. Henry, *Le Ruban de Moebius. Entretien avec David Lynch*, in "Positif", 431, 1997, pp. 8-13.

[13] A similar viewpoint has been expressed by Arquette in various interviews. Cfr., P. Hoad, *"I visited a dominatrix club where customers were used as tables". Patricia Arquette on making Lost Highway*, The Guardian, 24 October 2022, https://www.theguardian.com/culture/2022/oct/24/david-lynch-bill-pullman-patricia-arquette-dominatrix-lost-highway (accessed 1 March 2024).

[14] S. Žižek, *The Art of the Ridiculous Sublime. On David Lynch's Lost Highway*, cit., p. 22.

form"[15]. This is evident if the film is read from the perspective of Fred/Peter: the unattainable object of desire is Renee/Alice, invariably elusive and evasive. Trying to grasp her desire is what continually frustrates Fred/Peter's desire, in very different but equally tragic ways. It is thus the eluding of the object that produces the desperation of the male protagonists. This could be an interesting point: it is not the so-called law of the father and the consequent sublimation (Mr Eddy, who serves as the ideal character of the Father is easily evaded and eventually killed; moreover, his killing does not take on any totemic significance[16] but seems to be restored to the meaninglessness that envelops Fred's actions) that clips Fred/Peter's wings, but it is the object of desire itself that escapes from all sides, that is unattainable in its paradoxical proximity. Therefore, in my opinion, the character who could help us most in producing meaning is none other than the elusive and equivocal Renee/Alice, because she is the embodiment not of the object, but of desire itself. Let us thus reverse the perspective: instead of the loop closing proposed by the phrase "Dick Laurent is dead", let us disarticulate the circle by referring to a production of meaning starting from Alice's statement "You'll never have me". If we decline it in the plural, it becomes a sort of mantra with regard to the male figures in the film: none among you will ever have me, you will not be able to channel my desire into your lacks. So, it is not the object that flows, but the desire itself.

A "schizo's stroll" with Renee/Alice

To substantiate the last statement, which form the cornerstone of my overarching interpretation, it becomes imperative to introduce certain tenets of the concept of desire that I aim to employ, particularly as elucidated by Deleuze and Guattari in *Anti-Oedipus*. In this seminal work, the authors articulate a conception of desire that diverges markedly from conventional wisdom and contemporary theoretical paradigms. Rather than construing desire as a deficiency seeking fulfilment, or as an impulse directed toward perpetually elusive objects, Deleuze and Guattari conceive it as a generative force, an ongoing impulse towards production. They posit it as inherently productive, continually engendering realities, thereby eschewing fixed objectives and emphasizing its fundamentally social dimension. In my interpretation, such a formulation does not celebrate disorganization or unrestrained revelry, but rather represents a forward impetus towards novelty, facilitating an elucidation of the in-

[15] T. McGowan, *op. cit.*, p. 155.
[16] Cfr. S. Freud, *Totem and Taboo*, Routledge & Sons Ltd., London 1919.

trinsic relationship between power dynamics and the nature of desire and its repression within societal organization[17]. This is because the lack of an object towards which to strive is not what gives rise to desire, but rather what represses it but at the same time organizes it in the plane of immanence of societal organization: "Production is never organized on the basis of a pre-existing need or lack (*manque*). It is lack that infiltrates itself, creates empty spaces or vacuoles, and propagates itself in accordance with the organization of an already existing organization of production"[18].

We might use the analogy of a river encountering a dam to illustrate how social structures organize and regulate the flow of desire. Just as a dam controls the movement of a river and its resources, the social organization of desire establishes objects or "territories" of desire. This analogy helps us understand two main points: firstly, the primacy of desiring production over lack, similar to the relationship between the river's origin and the dam; secondly, the river's natural resistance to imposed organization. Just as a river continues to flow according to its natural course, shaped by its surroundings, desire thrives on its fluid and ever-changing nature, resisting societal attempts to impose limitations and restrictions.

This aspect of the societal organization of desire, while it may initially appear somewhat incongruous with the context of *Lost Highway*, is indeed of significant import. When viewed through the lens of Fred/Peter, the film aligns with a paradigm of objectlessness (Renee/Alice) and the paternal law (Mr. Eddy/Dick Laurent), encapsulating the castration of desire through societal norms and the consequent frustration stemming from the unattainability and elusive nature of desired objects, as epitomized by mechanisms of sublimation. However, when analysed from the perspective of Renee/Alice, this interpretative framework appears notably diminished. The female character escapes this dynamic because she shuns the territorialization that the male characters attempt to impose on her: Renee/Alice is the embodiment of desire for this very reason. And not simply because she could cheat on her husband, or because she is an extremely free woman, but because she does not direct herself towards a missing object. She constitutes her own precarious and changing organisation, her precarious and fluid micro-territories, because, unlike all the other characters but like desire, "she lacks nothing": "Desire does not lack anything; it does not lack its object"[19]. All the men

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[17] Naturally, my interpretation is anything but serene. For contrasting viewpoints, cfr. S. Žižek, *Organs without bodies. On Deleuze and consequences*, cit., or M. Recalcati, *L'uomo senza inconscio*, Cortina, Milano 2010.
[18] G. Deleuze and F. Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*, cit., p. 28.
[19] Ivi, p. 26.

seek to assert control over her, to establish territorial dominion: but the jealous spouse, the aggressive mobster, the youthful paramour, and the procurer of pornographic actresses merely constitute marginal annotations within her stream, transient instances of intersecting desiring flows (*enchaînement*, to borrow the terminology of Deleuze and Guattari). In this light, all the men in the film look like grotesque manifestations of the "Body-without-Organs"[20]: non-production stasis that tries to attract the desiring-machine Renee/Alice, but at the same time repulse her. Within this framework, *Lost Highway* is the exemplification of the desiring flow: Renee/Alice runs through all these non-production stations, but none of them stops her, because her path is, definitely, a "line of escape". While Renee/Alice acknowledges the inherent precariousness of the trajectory of escape and its ensuing organization, the male characters become ensnared within it, succumbing to their paranoia, neuroses, and illusions of control. Consequently, she embodies a "schizo" character wherein the apprehension of novelty and the threat of dissolution coexist – a character who offers a glimpse into an alternative horizon yet simultaneously risks, due to repression, plummeting into the abyss of despair and psychic affliction:

> Van Gogh, Nerval – and how many others could be cited! – have broken through the wall of the signifier, the wall of "mum-dad", they are far beyond it, and speak to us with a voice that is that of our future. But the second element still remains in this process, and that is the danger of collapse. That the "*percée*", the rift, may coincide or slip into a kind of collapse is something that no one has the right to treat lightly. One must consider this danger as fundamental. The two things are linked.[21]

Exemplifying this notion is the scene wherein Alice, confronted with a firearm, is compelled to disrobe in the presence of Mr. Eddy. Arquette's facial expressions vividly convey a composed demeanour, save for a subtle

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[20] Due to spatial constraints, further elaboration on the concept of the Body-without-Organs (BwO) is not feasible. For the current discourse, it suffices to note that within the BwO, it manifests as an instance of anti-production essential to the dynamics of desire – an entity that resists any form of organization yet simultaneously posits itself as a surface enabling the dynamics of desire. It represents a necessary yet unattainable limit: "The BwO is desire; it is that which one desires and by which one desires". G. Deleuze and F. Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus. Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis 1987, p. 165. Cfr., the entire chapter VI, titled *November 28, 1947: How Do You Make Yourself a Body Without Organs?* (pp. 149-166). Reference is deferred also to *Anti-Oedipus*, cit., especially pp. 9-16.
[21] U. Fadini (a cura di), *Gilles Deleuze e Félix Guattari. Macchine desideranti. Su capitalismo e schizofrenia,* Ombre corte, Verona 2004, p. 56. My translation.

shift indicative of an acknowledgement of this coerced interaction, albeit with an underlying intent to subvert it. This momentary acquiescence to territorial imposition is swiftly followed by a subsequent deterritorialization – a movement seldom enacted by the male characters. While they may exhibit traits of paranoia, perversion, mania, obsession, and repression, none embody the "schizo" disposition as Renee/Alice does. They all remain attached to their dualistic patterns, their sclerotized territories, their shortcomings: "People trapped in a dualistic world are 'lost' because they believe unity can only be attained through the pursuit and acquisition of a fundamental yet missing element"[22].

If we reverse the perspective focusing on the desiring flow embodied by Renee/Alice, it seems possible to go even further in reading the film. Indeed, it becomes apparent how fluid and mutable identities and subjectivities are within a universe where boundaries and spatio-temporal norms, akin to those of the unconscious, are fractured. She epitomizes this dynamic of desire, transcending the constraints imposed by her impotent, paranoid husband, the young car mechanic, the deceitful Andy, or the Oedipal figure of Mr. Eddy. She navigates deftly beyond the confines of identity, temporality, and the dichotomy of life and death. In embodying the film's temporality, Renee/Alice subverts linear narrative conventions, offering instead an intricate interplay of desire and the unconscious – a rupture in the fabric of time, albeit symbolized by an unconventional circularity. She appears to traverse a temporal realm distinct from conventional experience, reminiscent of Billy Pilgrim, the protagonist of Vonnegut's *Slaughterhouse-Five*[23]: in this book, linear time becomes just a human convention and, just like Billy, she only dies for a while, just "to go out for a walk". From this perspective, the disjointed, non-linear structure of the film reflects the fractured nature of the unconscious, making it a canvas for exploring the paradox of temporality and, in backlight, of identities:

> The paradox of […] pure becoming, with its capacity to elude the present, is the paradox of infinite identity (the infinite identity of both directions or senses at the same time – of future and past, of the day before and the day after, of more and less, of two much and not enough, of active and passive, and of cause and effect).[24]

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[22] M. Walling, *All Roads Lead to the Self. Zen Buddhism and David Lynch's Lost Highway*, in W. Devlin and S. Biderman, *The Philosophy of David Lynch*, Kentucky UP, Lexington 2011, p. 96.

[23] K. Vonnegut, *Slaughterhouse-Five, or The Children's Crusade: A Duty-Dance with Death*, Dial Press, New York 1999.

[24] G. Deleuze, *The Logic of Sense*, Continuum, New York 2004, p. 4.

Renee/Alice's journey is literally a "schizo's stroll" as her identity shifts and fragments the conventional chains of symbolisation. Her statement, "You'll never have me", is a rebellious assertion of autonomy and a rejection of the conventional structure of desire, placing her in stark contrast to the archetypal female roles often represented in cinema, in a very counter-intuitive way. She moves as the productive and connective synthesis of desire: she is not Renee "or" Alice, but she is Renee "and" Alice, "and", in my misguided interpretation, Mystery Man as well. After the glossy sex scene in the desert sand, in fact, who remains is neither Alice nor Renee, but only Mystery Man. The same face exactly that, projected onto Renee's body, terrorizes Fred during a nightmare in the first part of the film. However, it would be better to say that there is Mystery Man, "and" Alice, "and" Renee. He/she, Mystery Man, shoots Mr Eddy and conveys a mysterious message to Fred, moving like a "demiurge". Just like Alice with Pete.

If we assume the second half of the film as a mere imaginative and desperate escape of Fred, we lose the fluid identity of all the other characters[25] and, consequently, of desire itself: "Fluidity is one of the most important features of [Lynch's] cinematic world"[26]. Above all, we lose the desiring nature of the film, its being a producer of deterritorialized meanings, which elude symbolization and conventional sense-making, yet they are not thereby absence of sense:

> Nonsense does not have any particular sense, but is opposed to the absence of sense rather than to the sense that it produces in excess – without ever maintaining with its product the simple relation of exclusion to which some people would like to reduce them. Nonsense is that which has no sense, and that which, as such and as it enacts the donation of sense, is opposed to the absence of sense. This is what we must understand by "*nonsense*".[27]

All characters must be regarded as genuinely real, existing within the same realm of desire, epitomized by Renee/Alice. There is no hierarchy or depth, just interlocking planes where Renee and Alice, Fred and Pete, coexist without fully merging: "The existence of all the characters in the Lynchian sphere is beyond doubt: ontologically, they are all on the same level"[28]. By embracing the radical reality of all characters, we further affirm the Deleuzoguattarian dynamics of desire embodied primarily by

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[25] It is in this sense that Brenna defines Lost Highway as a "Bonfire of the identities". Cfr., S. Brenna, *A letto con David. Sogni e incubi nel cinema di Lynch*, BookTime: Milano 2012.
[26] R. Parciak, *The World as Illusion. Rediscovering Mulholland Dr. and Lost Highway through Indian philosophy*, in W. Devlin and S. Biderman, cit., p. 78.
[27] G. Deleuze, *The Logic of Sense*, cit., p. 83.
[28] R. Parciak, *op.cit.*, p. 82.

Renee/Alice. She is the character who accepts to operate within a plane of immanence, where desire generates nothing but the real, while all male characters instead appear to exemplify mechanisms of transcending desire that produce frustration, both in their attempts to confine Renee/Alice and in their various neuroses: "Every time desire is betrayed, cursed, uprooted from its field of immanence, a priest is behind it. The priest cast the triple curse on desire: the negative law, the extrinsic rule, and the transcendent ideal"[29].

The possibilities of making sense are therefore all there in immanence plain sight, all on the surface, whether they are images, dialogues, unspoken words, or the music of a splendid and heterogeneous soundtrack. This is because, in Deleuze, the dynamic of making sense is strictly related to the dynamics of desire, both expressing an immanent, horizontal, rhizomatic becoming rather than a transcendental, hierarchical, binary form[30]. In this light, sense "is produced. It is not something to discover, to restore, and to re-employ; it is something to produce by a new machinery. It belongs to no height or depth, but rather to a surface effect, being inseparable from the surface which is its proper dimension"[31]. On the basis of these considerations, the film is a production of sense in the immanence plain, rather than an object concealing a mysterious, transcendent, meaning that produces frustration and neurosis. It is a *producing-machine* rather than a *object-of-analysis*, because it presupposes a generative idea of sense, rather than a definite one, in a perspective that conceives of sense as the element of the *genesis* of propositions and no longer simply the *effect* of propositions[32]. If, as I assume, the film acts "in order to liberate a living and expressive material that speaks for itself and has no need of being put into a form"[33], it means that the Lynchian language – through the surreal and the non-sense – does not work in revealing something, but works in producing connection between "elements which are not themselves signifying"[34]. So, we have to explore this paradoxical movement in which the sense is generated: sense is production because it is a pure becoming rather than a static being, and it moves within the interstices, within the empty spaces of the signifying chain. It

[29] G. Deleuze and F. Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, cit., p. 154.
[30] And this is also the reason why I chose this kind of theory rather than other hermeneutical theories (such as Gadamer's, Ricœur's or Eco's theories) that conceive interpretation as a productive and dynamic movement.
[31] G. Deleuze, *The Logic of Sense,* cit., p. 83.
[32] Cfr., D. W. Smith, *The Concept of Sense in Gilles Deleuze's Logic of Sense*, in "Deleuze and Guattari Studies", 16, 1, 2022, pp. 3-23.
[33] G. Deleuze and F. Guattari, *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis 1986, p. 21.
[34] G. Deleuze, *The Logic of Sense,* cit., p. 175.

is within these spaces that the unconscious finds its place, as a paradoxical force that disrupts linear logic: "There is nothing astonishing in the fact that the paradox is the force of unconscious: it occurs always in the space between (*l'entre-deux*) consciousnesses, contrary to good sense or, behind the back of consciousness, contrary to common sense"[35].

In accordance with Deleuze and Guattari's framework, desire engenders the immanence of reality through incisions, connections, and conjunctions that constitute the *agencement* of desiring flux. In its surreal essence, *Lost Highway* exemplifies a deterritorialisation in every sense. However, a crucial aspect, integral for a comprehensive understanding of Deleuze and Guattari's conception of desire, is that this deterritorialization engenders new, albeit inherently precarious, territoriality. This new territoriality is nothing but the productive assertion of new horizons of sense, especially when it succeeds in generating a sense of unfamiliarity while employing the familiar language of cinematic narrative. In order to understand this strictly intertwining between desire and sense, I think that the clearest approach in reading the film involves leaving behind the jealous neuroses of Fred/Peter and focusing on the "schizo's stroll" of Renee/Alice, who embodies desire and shows the fluid, precarious, becoming in which consists the sense.

Conclusion

The decision to uniquely analyse *Lost Highway* should not be misconstrued as implying that the film is an isolated work within Lynch's career. In fact, similar dynamics can be observed in various other works. Especially if we look at films as machines that produce sense, one can consider, for instance, *Blue Velvet*, *Inland Empire*, *Mulholland Drive*, or the *Twin Peaks* series. In all these narratives the production of sense literally explodes, frustrating any attempt to reduce them to a single clear interpretation. Moreover, in these works, the narrative – and also the characters' identities[36] – seems to develop primarily through emotional intensities, akin to the unconscious, challenging linear temporality. All this works express sense as a dynamic and fluid becoming, rather than a stable form. Additionally, referring to the phantasmatic and paranoid traps into which desire can fall, Betty's fall in *Mulholland Drive* appears as valid an example as Fred's fall in *Lost Highway*. The choice fell on the latter film because, in my opinion, the character of Renée/Alice is

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[35] Ivi, pp. 91-92.
[36] Cfr. M. Nochimson, *David Lynch swerves: uncertainty from Lost Highway to Inland Empire*, University of Texas Press, Austin 2013.

the keystone for demonstrating the productive desiring dynamics that permeate Lynch's poetics. This is the reason why the "desiring perspective" emerges from *Lost Highway* when examining the role of the female character(s), Renee/Alice, within the narrative framework.

In summary, through a reinterpretation of her assertion, "You'll never have me", as addressed to the plural, it is possible to represent the broader dynamics of desire and sense-becoming. In fact, this approach unveils the film as a multifaceted exploration of desire as a generative force. Lynch's cinematic craftsmanship manifests in the film's surreal and disjointed narrative, which operates as a canvas for exploring the fractured nature of the unconscious and the fluidity of desire and identities. Renee/Alice's journey, a pure "schizo's stroll", serves as a focal point for this exploration, embodying a rebellious assertion of autonomy and challenging conventional structures of desire and identity. Moreover, *Lost Highway* transcends mere storytelling to function as a producer of sense, inviting viewers to engage with a process of sense-making that extends beyond (*deterritorializes*) the confines (*territories*) of traditional narrative analysis. In a sentence, a peculiar manner of attempting to articulate the ineffable, of "telling the untold".

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Antonio Ricciardi

Il trittico Lynchiano e l'arte della frantumazione: una ontoritmologia della visione

Ouverture: He's the main guy

David Lynch, all'interno dell'importante libro-intervista redatto assieme a Chris Rodley, cita volentieri Francis Bacon come una delle sue più frequenti fonti di ispirazione. Il regista di Missoula sottolinea, infatti, come per lui "Francis Bacon sia il più grande, il numero uno, una specie di eroe […] riesco sempre a prendere il volo davanti ai suoi quadri"[1]. Di fronte alla domanda posta dal giornalista inglese riguardo cosa lo interessasse di più dell'opera del pittore irlandese, Lynch risponde: "Tutto. I soggetti e lo stile sono combinati, coniugati, perfetti. E lo spazio, la lentezza e le velocità, e poi le strutture, ogni cosa. […] Se Bacon avesse girato un film, in che modo l'avrebbe fatto, in che direzione sarebbe andato?"[2]. È dunque in maniera esplicita che Lynch si dice interessato tanto al *ritm*o dell'opera baconiana – "la lentezza, le velocità, le strutture" –, quanto alla ipotetica tra(s)duzione di questi motivi ritmici all'interno dell'universo e della produzione cinematografica – "in che direzione sarebbe andato?". Alla luce di questa prossimità, diviene interessante provare ad inquadrare l'universo filmico lynchiano tramite delle lenti *baconiane*: una prospettiva teorica che, seppur non del tutto inedita[3], merita certamente di essere esplorata più a fondo. Del resto, l'importanza del riferimento baconiano all'interno dell'opera di Lynch va ben oltre il mero attestato di stima. Come fa notare Jeremy Powell, l'influenza del pittore irlandese è

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[1] C. Rodley (a cura di), *Lynch Secondo Lynch*, Baldini&Castoldi, Milano 1997, p. 37.
[2] Ivi, p. 36.
[3] Un lavoro di questo tipo, per quanto diverso negli scopi e nelle conclusioni, è stato già tentato da: D. Dottorini, *David Lynch. Il Cinema del Sentire*, Le Mani, Genova 2004; J. Powell, *David Lynch, Francis Bacon, Gilles Deleuze: The Cinematic Diagram and the Hall of Time*, Discourse, Vol. 36, No. 3 (Fall 2014), pp. 309-339; G. Hainge, *Weird or Loopy? Specular Spaces, Feedback and Artifice in Lost Highway's Aesthetics of Sensation*, in E. Sheen & A. Davidson (edited by), *The Cinema of David Lynch: American Dreams, Nightmare Visions*, Wallflower, London 2004, p. 142; C. Colebrook, *Gilles Deleuze*, Routledge, London 2002, p. 39.

direttamente rinvenibile a molteplici livelli del lavoro di Lynch: dai quadri (citiamo in ordine sparso: *Wajunga Red Dog*, *Well . . . I Can Dream, Can't I?*, *Man Walking with dog*) alle fotografie (la collezione intitolata *Images* e la serie dei *Distorted Nudes*) fino al cinema. In tutti questi casi, proprio come varrà per Bacon, ciò che sembra interessare di più Lynch sarà "to present the actions of invisible forces upon bodies, rendered in a preintellectual sensation of intensities"[4].

Gilles Deleuze, all'interno del suo *Logica della sensazione*[5], libro interamente consacrato allo studio dell'opera di Bacon, dà vita ad un apparato concettuale che, a nostro avviso, risuona in profondità con quelli che sono i temi, gli assilli e i problemi posti dall'opera lynchiana. Nel dettaglio, è l'insistenza del filosofo francese sui temi del ritmo, del diagrammatico e delle forze a risultare decisiva. Questi motivi, così centrali all'interno della pittura baconiana, determinano la formazione di un vero e proprio campo (di individuazione, di intensità, di dinamismi) che, a nostro avviso, costituisce lo stesso spazio problematico dentro cui prende corpo l'opera dal regista americano. Un *campo* che contiene al suo interno molte possibili risposte: *pittoriche*, quelle baconiane; *cinematografiche* (ma anche fotografiche, musicali, pittoriche, videografiche, etc.) quelle lynchiane. Tanto per ragioni di spazio, quanto per quella che ci appare come una straordinaria risonanza creativa, sceglieremo di concentrarci solo su una parte – un *trittico* – del poliedrico universo creativo firmato David Lynch. Per farlo, partiremo da un concetto che Deleuze cita – e controvoglia – una sola volta all'interno del suo libro su Bacon. Un concetto che invece, a nostro avviso, risulta straordinariamente potente: quello della *frantumazione*. Bacon, difatti, amava definirsi come un frantumatore[6]: la sua arte consisteva nel fare a pezzi il dispositivo della rappresentazione, dell'illustrazione, per lasciare emergere una *Figura* colta in "una zona di indiscernibilità o di indeterminabilità tra due forme, delle quali una non era già più, e l'altra non era ancora"[7].

Questa specifica arte, cui Bacon darà corso lungo tutta la sua carriera, sembra risuonare in maniera limpidissima con l'opera dell'artista di Missoula[8]. In particolare, è all'interno di quelli che sono i suoi tre capolavori – *Lost Highway*, *Mulholland Drive* e *Inland Empire*[9] – che questa

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[4] J. Powell, *op. cit.*, p. 312.
[5] G. Deleuze, *Logica della sensazione*, Quodlibet, Macerata 2008.
[6] Ivi, p. 125.
[7] Ivi, p. 229.
[8] V. Re, *Oltre la soglia. Variazioni su un'aria a tre tempi*, in Claudio Bisoni (a cura di), *Attraverso MD. In viaggio con David Lynch nel luogo di un mistero*, Il Principe Costante, Pozzuolo del Friuli 2004, p. 89.
[9] Da qui in avanti ci riferiremo ai tre film attraverso gli acronimi *LH*, *MD*, *IE*.

arte sembra svilupparsi secondo una progressione costante. Se nel primo lavoro di questa angosciante trilogia la linea di frantumazione sembra tutta interna al personaggio di Fred, in *MD* questa incrinatura si duplica, fino a tracimare nella stratologica struttura di *IE*. I tre film, insomma, funzionano come un vero e proprio trittico baconiano. Ma in che senso?

Il Frantumatore

Francis Bacon, come detto, amava definirsi un *frantumatore*. Ma, nello specifico, cos'è che il pittore irlandese, frantumando, voleva scongiurare? L'assillo di Bacon era quello di togliere lo spettacolo dal quadro. Eliminare il *cliché*, secondo la lezione di Cézanne, ma farlo sottraendo dal quadro ogni storia possibile, ogni narrazione. "La pittura", difatti, "non ha né modelli da rappresentare, né storie da raccontare"[10]. In questo senso, a venire frantumata, ad essere *diagrammatizzata*, è la possibilità stessa di tradurre – e ridurre – il quadro dentro una rappresentazione estranea alla pittura. Non solo. A dover essere eliminato dal quadro sarà anche qualsiasi riferimento esterno, qualsiasi modello cui la figurazione sarebbe supposta conformarsi. In questo senso, Bacon annulla qualsiasi possibilità di rinchiudere il quadro dentro un riassunto, dentro un discorso che finirebbe per cancellare il quadro stesso. Del resto, come Lynch sottolinea, "as soon as you put things in words, no one ever sees the film the same way, and that's what I hate, you know. Talking – it's real dangerous"[11].

Il quadro, in questo senso, come la superficie assoluta di Ruyer[12], deve essere rigorosamente *senza sorvolo*. Non c'è un fuori dal quadro, o, se c'è, si tratta di un Fuori molto più profondo. Questo perché, tanto ciò che lo anticipava – il modello –, quanto ciò che lo seguiva – la riduzione in narrazione –, vengono risucchiati dentro il campo cui il quadro dà luogo. Il quadro è centripeto, ed in quanto tale fa sprofondare l'occhio dentro le tensioni che genera, costringendolo a *brucarne* le superfici, a farsi sguardo *aptico*[13]. Il metodo è per l'appunto quello della frantumazione, dove il *modo* della rappresentazione viene sezionato e fatto a pezzi, lasciando sussistere solo tre elementi:

> Le grandi campiture come struttura materiale spazializzante; la Figura, le Figure e il loro fatto; il luogo, cioè il tondo, la pista o il contorno […] il contorno è come una membrana attraversata da un doppio scambio […] Se

[10] G. Deleuze, *Logica della sensazione*, cit., p.14.
[11] J. Powell, *op. cit.*, p. 324.
[12] R. Ruyer, *La Superficie Assoluta*, Textus, L'Aquila 2008.
[13] G. Deleuze, *Logica della sensazione*, cit., p. 228.

la pittura non ha niente da narrare, nessuna storia da raccontare, avviene comunque qualcosa che ne definisce il funzionamento.[14]

Il procedimento di Bacon è dunque quello di un progressivo isolamento della Figura, volto a scongiurare qualsiasi funzione rappresentativa del quadro, poiché "la pittura non ha nulla a che vedere con l'illustrazione, in un certo senso ne è l'esatto contrario"[15]:

> È un procedimento molto semplice, che consiste nell'isolare la Figura. Sono però possibili anche altri procedimenti di isolamento […] L'importante è che essi non costringano la Figura all'immobilità; al contrario, devono rendere sensibile una specie di tragitto, una specie di esplorazione compiuta dalla figura in quel luogo o su sé stessa. È un campo operativo.[16]

È attraverso la composizione di questo "campo operativo" che Bacon punta a strappare la Figura (o il *Figurale*, come lo chiama Lyotard[17]) alla rappresentazione, così da riuscire a dipingere la *sensazione.* In che senso? All'interno del capitolo intitolato *Dipingere le Forze*, Deleuze scrive che "nell'arte […] non si tratta di riprodurre o di inventare delle forme, bensì di captare delle forze. […] Il compito della pittura si definisce come il tentativo di rendere visibili delle forze che non lo sono"[18]. La forza in quanto tale, che in *Differenza e Ripetizione* il filosofo francese chiamava *intensità*, è qualcosa che "è ma non agisce". Ciò che cogliamo nella Figura baconiana è per l'appunto questa dimensione di una violenta intensità che non si estingue, proprio perché non si rappresenta: "la sensazione non è qualitativa né qualificata, ha solo una realtà intensiva che in essa non determina più dati rappresentativi, bensì variazioni allotropiche, la sensazione è vibrazione"[19]. L'intensità non si estingue, e il segno di questa permanenza, di questa incessante ripetizione, è la vibrazione. La sensazione, dice Deleuze, è ciò che si trasmette da sé, che non ha bisogno di nessuna attività di decodifica, perché priva di codice: essa è puro *ritmo*.

> È ben noto che il ritmo non è misura o cadenza […] una misura, regolare o no, suppone una forma codificata la cui unità di misura può variare, ma in un ambiente non comunicante, mentre il ritmo è l'Ineguale o l'Incommensurabile, sempre in transcodificazione. La misura è dogmatica, ma il ritmo è

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[14] Ivi, p. 33.
[15] F. Bacon, *Conversazioni con Michel Archimbaud*, Le Mani, Genova 1993, pp. 26-27, in G. Zuccarino, *La nascita del quadro. Deleuze di fronte a Cézanne e Bacon,* La Deleuziana N. 0/2014 – Critica della Ragion Creativa.
[16] G. Deleuze, *Logica della sensazione*, cit., p. 9.
[17] J.-F. Lyotard, *Discorso, figura*, Mimesis, Milano 2002.
[18] G. Deleuze, *Logica della sensazione*, cit., p. 117.
[19] Ivi, p. 103.

critico, tesse istanti critici, o si tesse al passaggio di un ambiente in un altro. […] Il legame degli istanti veramente attivi (ritmo) si stabilisce sempre su un piano diverso da quello su cui si esegue l'azione.[20]

Ritmo, però, proprio alla luce di quanto scrive Deleuze, non può essere semplicemente la vibrazione che si abbatte sulla Figura. Per dirsi tale, il ritmo baconiano necessita dell'introduzione di quello specifico dispositivo che va sotto il nome di *diagramma*. L'esigenza nasce dal fatto che il ritmo non giace sullo stesso piano degli elementi su cui si esegue o avviene l'azione: il ritmo è piuttosto la figura che emerge dalla costante transcodifica che tra questi elementi sorge, o può sorgere. Il diagramma arriva allora a spezzare i legami senso-motori costituenti un'immagine rappresentativa, disfacendone le connessioni logiche, frantumandone il codice. L'arrivo di questa tempesta, di questa catastrofe, impone una ri-organizzazione, un modo diverso di stare assieme delle parti, che passa necessariamente per una transcodifica, per un costante lavoro di prestito e traduzione di pezzi di codice. Ma, nei fatti, come si costituisce un diagramma in pittura? Il diagramma è l'esito di quei gesti, rigorosamente *manuali* – lancio casuale di pittura verso il quadro, spazzolatura della Figura – che introducono un pezzo di caos all'interno dell'operazione pittorica. Ben lungi dall'essere una procedura astratta, la diagrammatizzazione del quadro avviene attraverso i più fisici dei gesti, contribuendo all'operazione della frantumazione. Cos'è che si frantuma? La stessa struttura del quadro, la sua rigidità, vacilla sotto i colpi a-significanti del pittore, che in questo modo fa passare il quadro attraverso un prisma fatto di pure forze, di tensioni. In questo senso, il diagramma non è, strettamente parlando, qualcosa di visibile. Piuttosto, il diagramma *fà vedere*: è la griglia attraverso la quale superiamo la figurazione per giungere al figurale. Dal punto di vista della genesi di fatto dell'opera (del quadro, certo, ma anche del film) il diagramma arriva in un secondo momento, separando delle parti originariamente unite, costringendole a trovare il ritmo della loro alleanza, del loro consolidamento. Ma, dal punto di vista della genesi di diritto, il diagramma è certamente primo. Esso, infatti, incarna la dimensione della pura intensità, lo spazio delle forze che preesistono a qualsiasi individuazione – e perciò a qualsiasi Figura o immagine – possibile. Riteniamo – e cercheremo di mostrare in che senso – che il dispositivo che regola questo passaggio, che presiede questo campo di individuazione, sia un dispositivo prettamente ritmologico, che in *Mille Piani* Deleuze e Guattari chiamavano Ritornello[21] e che noi qui, sulla scorta di Kodwo Eshun, chiamiamo rit-macchina. L'agente di una ripetizione dentro alla

[20] G. Deleuze & F. Guattari, *Mille Piani*, Castelvecchi, Roma 2006, p. 462.
[21] Ivi, p. 458.

quale l'intensivo è già da sempre virtuale, e dentro alla quale l'esteso, l'*attuale*, non è nient'altro che il consumarsi dell'intensivo. Il quadro è già una rit-macchina: "Poliritmacchine diffuse, reti combinate di ritmi poli*contro*contra*sfasati*incrociati che operano come l'architettura distribuita della vita artificiale e generano una coscienza emergente. […] Ritmo=reti di intermittenza, ritmi ciclici in sincrono ma fuori fase"[22].

A garantire tale statuto sono appunto i tre elementi citati in precedenza – campitura, Figura, tondo – assieme alla loro diagrammatizzazione. Difatti, sulla traiettoria che dalla campitura conduce alla Figura, fino al suo consolidamento attraverso il tondo, facciamo sempre esperienza di un contro-movimento, di una intermittenza. In questa, le figure non smettono di contrarsi e tendersi, nel tentativo di fuggire la membrana protettrice e dileguarsi nell'omogeneità della grande campitura. Ci ritroviamo così esposti ad un doppio movimento, ad una biforcazione che, se da un lato spinge la Figura verso il consolidamento, dall'altro la fa segretamente scivolare verso la disgregazione.

> Tutto si ripartisce in diastole e sistole diffuse ad ogni livello. La sistole, che contrae il corpo, e va dalla struttura alla figura; la diastole, che lo rilassa e lo dissipa, e va dalla figura alla struttura. Ma vi è già una diastole nel primo movimento, quando il corpo si distende per meglio rinchiudersi; e una sistole nel secondo movimento, quando il corpo si contrae per fuggire.[23]

Il trittico Lynchiano

In apertura, abbiamo sottolineato come la linea della frantumazione *baconiana* paia seguire, in Lynch e nel suo trittico, una progressione quasi lineare. La spaccatura che in *LH* taglia in due Fred Madison si duplica nelle infinite risonanze che accoppiano le due serie (Rita/Betty e Camilla/Diane) di *MD*, fino a collassare nella struttura *ad estuario* che innerva *IE*. Questa potenziale progressione sembra ricalcare, in maniera quanto mai puntuale, la distinzione delle tre diverse figure ritmiche che Deleuze individua analizzando i trittici di Bacon. Secondo il filosofo, infatti, all'interno dell'opera del pittore irlandese troviamo tre diverse *incarnazioni ritmiche*, così definite:

> Nella sensazione semplice, il ritmo dipende ancora dalla Figura, si presenta come la vibrazione che percorre il corpo senza organi, è il vettore della sensazione, ciò che la fa passare da un livello a un altro. Nell'accoppiamento

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[22] K. Eshun, *Più brillante del Sole*, NERO Edizioni, Roma 2021, p. 6.
[23] G. Deleuze, *Logica della sensazione*, cit., p. 77.

di sensazione, il ritmo si libera, perché confronta e riunisce i diversi livelli di sensazioni differenti: esso diviene risonanza […] Con il trittico, infine, il ritmo assume un'ampiezza straordinaria, in un movimento forzato che gli dà autonomia […] in questa caduta immobile, si produce uno stranissimo fenomeno di ricomposizione, di ridistribuzione, poiché è il ritmo stesso che diviene sensazione, è questo che diviene Figura.[24]

Vibrazione, Risonanza e Ritmo-Figura sono dunque tre distinti princìpi che paiono descrivere perfettamente la maniera attraverso la quale i tre film di Lynch che qui analizziamo sembrano procedere. Le tre figure ritmiche, però, sono come tre strati. La *Vibrazione* anima i singoli elementi, che formano un po' i costituenti del ritmo. La *Risonanza* li accoppia, li sintonizza, producendo quella necessaria transcodifica che li relaziona e li protegge dal caos. Il *Ritmo-Figura* costituisce invece la linea di frantumazione che separa e contemporaneamente ricompone questi frammenti eterogenei. Essi, piuttosto che risuonare, generano delle dissonanze, delle frizioni, delle divergenze irrecomponibili, ma ciò nonostante coese. È a partire da questa stratificazione ritmica che possiamo e dobbiamo approcciare l'opera del regista di Missoula. Tanto *LH* quanto *MD* ed *IE* si propongono, anzitutto, come degli universi narrativi all'interno dei quali ci sono dei pezzi di mondo, delle parti che – proprio come emblematicamente mostrato nella sequenza d'apertura di *MD* o di *Eraserhead* – sembrano galleggiare nel vuoto. È stato più volte sottolineato lo statuto quasi metafisico che alcune stanze posseggono all'interno dell'opera lynchiana[25]. Questo statuto così particolare è dato proprio dalla possibilità che alcuni di questi spazi liminali hanno (si pensi alla casa di Smithy o quella dei conigli in *IE*, il capanno di *LH*, il Club Silencio in *MD*) di connettere dimensioni profondamente eterogenee[26]. Il cinema di Lynch è, in questo senso, attraversato da una spaccatura che ci restituisce dei frammenti impossibili da ricomporre una volta per tutte. In quest'ottica, vale la pena richiamare la distinzione introdotta dal matematico Bernhard Reimann che, nella celebre prolusione del 1849 tante volte ripresa da Deleuze, separava molteplicità (talvolta tradotta con *varietà*) discrete e molteplicità continue:

Le varietà, dice Reimann, sono di due tipi: la varietà continua e la varietà discreta (o metrica). Nel caso di una varietà discreta abbiamo a che fare,

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[24] Ivi, pp. 137-138.
[25] Cfr. M. Chion, *David Lynch*, Lindau, Torino 2000; R. Sinnerbrink, *Cinematic Ideas: David Lynch's Mulholland Drive*, Film-Philosophy International Salon-Journal (ISSN 1466-4615) Vol. 9 No. 34, June 2005; D. Dottorini, *op. cit.*; G. Powell, *op. cit.*; G. Hainge, *op. cit.*; C. Colebrook, *op. cit.*
[26] R. Martin, *The Architecture of David Lynch*, Bloomsbury, London 2014, pp. 163-185.

dice Reimann, con elementi della varietà; nel caso di una varietà continua con punti. Questo spazio [la varietà continua], che definiamo topologico, solo localmente si comporta come uno spazio euclideo, ma globalmente ha un'altra struttura. Che cosa significa? Che solo se andiamo a "visitare" questo spazio negli intorni dei suoi punti, questo spazio si può comportare ancora come uno spazio euclideo.[27]

Una molteplicità continua non è perciò trattabile come uno spazio su cui valgono le normali regole degli spazi euclidei: è solo nell'*intorno* di un punto specifico che possiamo fare affidamento alle regole della geometria piana. In questo senso, Albert Lautman, uno dei più fini interpreti del pensiero di Reimann, può dire che

> due osservatori vicini possono individuare in uno spazio di Reimann i punti che sono nella loro vicinanza immediata, ma non possono, senza che si instauri una nuova convenzione, reperirsi l'uno in rapporto all'altro. Ogni vicinanza è dunque come un piccolo pezzo di spazio euclideo, ma il collegamento di una vicinanza alla vicinanza successiva non è definito e può costituirsi in una infinità di maniere. Il più generale spazio di Reimann si presenta così come una collezione amorfa di frammenti giustapposti senza essere collegati gli uni agli altri.[28]

È proprio nei termini di questa "collezione amorfa" che proponiamo di pensare il diagramma che sferza e *frantuma* le opere del regista di Missoula. Sebbene ognuno dei frammenti che costituisce *LH*, *MD* ed *IE* sia potenzialmente trattabile nei termini di un blocco coerente e lineare (euclideo), la loro connessione non lo è. Questi stessi frammenti, queste stesse *falde* (ad esempio, tutta la parte di *MD* che va dall'incidente di Rita fino alla visita al Club *Silencio*) sono in realtà attraversate da delle incrinature che danno luogo ad uno specifico ritmo, una specifica modalità di consolidarsi. Da un lato, perciò, c'è una linea verticale, che ha a che vedere con le singole falde, le loro componenti (sonore, visive, psicologiche: *ritmiche*) e la modalità del loro consolidamento. Dall'altro, una linea orizzontale che le connette fra loro, generando delle tensioni, delle divergenze. Il ritmo – il *diagramma* – del film è precisamente la linea diagonale che taglia questo schema trasversalmente, creando un circuito di prestiti, di tracce, di connessioni tra una falda e l'altra, garantendone il funzionamento. La questione centrale, tanto in Bacon quanto in Lynch, diventa allora quella dello stare assieme, della coesione, della forza quasi gravitazionale che le varie falde generano nel loro accostamento.

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[27] A. Montefameglio, *La Filosofia dello Spazio di Gilles Deleuze*, Mimesis, Milano 2023, p. 40.
[28] A. Lautman, *Les schémas de structure*, Hermann, Paris 1938, pp. 23, 34-35, citato in A. Montefameglio, *La Filosofia dello Spazio di Gilles Deleuze*, cit., p. 48.

Data un'immagine, si tratta di scegliere un'altra immagine che indurrà tra le due un interstizio. Non è un'operazione di associazione, ma di differenziazione, come dicono i matematici, o di "disparazione" come dicono i fisici: dato un potenziale, bisogna sceglierne un altro, non uno qualunque, ma in modo tale che tra i due si stabilisca una differenza di potenziale, un potenziale che sia produttore di un terzo […] È il metodo del TRA […] Far vedere l'indiscernibile, cioè la frontiera […] la "dispersione del fuori" o "la vertigine della spaziatura".[29]

LH: il diagramma macchinico

Appare evidente come, all'interno di determinate e specifiche falde dell'opera lynchiana, lo spazio-tempo si articoli in maniera lineare ed organica. Come per la molteplicità continua reimanniana, nell'intorno di un punto sono ancora valide le leggi della geometria piana. In questo senso, fino all'incontro di Fred col *Mystery Man*, *LH* sembra procedere in maniera coerente. Anche gli episodi che sembrano spezzare questa coerenza – la seconda videocassetta che Fred e Reneé ricevono li inquadra mentre dormono – vengono ricompresi dentro un orizzonte logicorazionale: i due chiamano la polizia, ipotizzando che qualcuno sia entrato in casa mentre dormivano. La curvatura della superficie su cui il film si sviluppa, fino a quel punto apparentemente irrilevante, e dunque formalmente interpretabile come *piana*, subisce però una brusca variazione. L'irruzione del *Mystery Man*, con la sua terrificante ubiquità, spezza la continuità dell'intorno sul quale ci trovavamo, disegnando immediatamente una nuova regione, un nuovo spazio su questa superficie topologica che è il film. La connessione con la regione precedente genera così una *disparazione* (per usare le parole di Deleuze) estremamente potente. Non solo: ci accorgiamo subito che alcuni "pezzi" della falda precedente – le videocassette – appartengono in realtà a questo nuovo spazio. Esse si configurano come delle interferenze (nel film ne compaiono molte altre) che, insinuandosi dentro una normale narrazione – una *figurazione* – avente per oggetto una coppia in crisi, agiscono come un diagramma, dando man mano luogo ad un puro *figurale*. Che cosa succede? Come avviene questo processo? Deleuze, nel suo *Foucault*, scrive che "le visibilità sono inseparabili dalle macchine"[30]: il *Mystery Man*, sempre armato di cinepresa – il suo vero *occhio* – è, in questo senso, una macchina che produce visibilità. Come il diagramma baconiano, egli, più che essere visibile, dà a vedere qualcosa. Il passaggio dalla pittura al cinema impone

[29] G. Deleuze, *L'Immagine-Tempo*, Ubulibri, Milano 2004, p. 201.
[30] Id., *Foucault*, Cronopio, Napoli 2002, p. 81.

al diagramma una trasformazione, che da manuale lo rende *macchinico*[31]. Le forze che sferzavano le figure di Bacon, deformandole sotto i colpi di un diagramma involontario carico di tratti a-significanti, diventano, in Lynch, le forze di un mondo-macchina (come già in *Eraserhead*) capace di operare le più incredibili trasformazioni. Di questo, il *Mystery Man* non ne è nient'altro che l'operatore, il *testimone*. Deleuze, nell'analizzare i trittici di Bacon, individua due tipologie di testimone. La prima, il testimone *figurativo* o apparente, è incarnata dal personaggio che sembra osservare ciò che accade sugli altri due quadri; la seconda, il testimone ritmico, detto anche *figurale* o profondo, è impersonata da una figura orizzontale – in un primo momento priva di funzione testimoniale – che, in qualche misura, assorbe su di sé i ritmi degli altri due dipinti, fungendo da superficie sulla quale questi si misurano[32]. Esso, vero e proprio "precursore buio"[33], connette due spazi, due lembi della superficie reimanniana, sprovvisti di una comune misura. Il testimone apre un campo di visibilità, fa vedere, perché è attraverso di esso che possiamo cogliere le tensioni, i movimenti e i ritmi presenti sugli altri quadri, sulle altre falde. Il *Mystery Man*, assieme alla sua macchina da presa, svolge precisamente la stessa funzione: egli connette delle serie disparate, inventando uno spazio di distribuzione all'interno del quale le serie, le falde del film, possono collocarsi. Questa dimensione rit-macchinica, dentro la quale il film ci spinge, appare profondamente segnata da una inquietudine irredimibile. Lo è perché, su di essa, ognuno dei piani (fatti di vibrazioni e risonanze) che prende corpo, così come i personaggi che li attraversano, non ha nessuna garanzia: tutti esposti ad un rischio di estinzione costante, tutti minacciati dalla fessura e dall'interstizio (il Caos) che li separa e li tiene assieme. Si è detto dei quadri di Bacon che, cancellando qualsiasi ipotetico modello, eliminano qualsiasi fuori-del-quadro. Lo stesso si potrebbe dire per *LH*: nel film, nel suo tessuto, nelle sue sequenze, non esiste qualcosa come un fuori campo, non c'è qualcosa che accade fuori da ciò che vediamo. Questo però non significa che il film, proprio come per Bacon, non scavi un fuori più profondo, più inquietante, costituito precisamente dal Caos sul quale galleggiano le varie falde. In questo senso, più che officiare un presunto ritorno del rimosso, come suggerito da Courtright[34],

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[31] "Una vera e propria *opera macchinica* […] riunisce gli ordini, le specie e le qualità eterogenee. Ciò che chiamiamo macchinico è precisamente questa sintesi tra eterogenei come tale […] I differenti rapporti in cui entrano un colore, un suono, un gesto, un movimento […] formano altrettante enunciazioni macchiniche", G. Deleuze & F. Guattari, *op. cit.*, p. 484.
[32] G. Deleuze, *Logica della sensazione*, cit., pp. 141-147.
[33] Id., *Differenza e Ripetizione*, Raffaello Cortina, Milano 1997.
[34] G. Courtright, *The "Mystery Man" as Uncanny Monster in David Lynch's Lost Highway*, in "Listening, Journal of Communication Ethics, Religion, and Culture", V. 52, N. 3, *Listening to our Monsters*, Fall 2017.

ci sembra che il *Mystery Man* sia chiamato ad un compito più profondo: egli è colui che traccia quella superficie lungo la quale le diverse falde possono connettersi, prestarsi pezzi, transcodificarsi.

Ma in che senso il film è una rit-macchina? Anzitutto, esso, come ogni macchina, ha bisogno di un operatore – il *Mystery Man* – per funzionare. Questo, vero e proprio *differenziante della differenza*, che ordina, distribuisce e *monta* gli spazi eterogenei del film, è a sua volta un prodotto della rit-macchina, del film, che in un certo senso lo "invoca". In secondo luogo, il film è rit-macchina perché, proprio come per Eshun, connette dei ritmi fuori fase, eterogenei (sonori, visuali, discorsivi, sessuali, psicologici, etc.) dentro un unico plesso, ancorché frastagliato e bucato da innumerevoli interstizi. Le singole falde (il lento deragliare della vita matrimoniale di Fred e Reneè, il *Mystery Man* e le sue riprese, il carcere, la vicenda di Pete e Alice, le sequenze nel deserto, e così via) si prestano costantemente pezzi di codice, si riflettono l'una nell'altra, senza però assomigliarsi. Esse divergono in maniera profonda, ma ciò nonostante hanno bisogno di questo sistema di scambi per sussistere. È questo procedimento, dove delle serie divergenti – addirittura *incompossibili*[35] – hanno bisogno l'una dell'altra per alimentarsi, che chiamiamo rit-macchina. Ognuno degli elementi parassita l'altro, se ne appropria e se ne alimenta: è un macchinismo generalizzato che necessita di trovare ritmo per continuare a pulsare.

Mulholland Drive: la potenza del falso

La macchina reimanniana vista all'opera in *LH* la ritroviamo sostanzialmente immutata in *MD*. Il film del 2001, miglior regia a Cannes ex-aequo con Joel Coen, sarà però contraddistinto da un'ulteriore complicazione. Se in *LH* la vibrazione deformante attraversava principalmente il personaggio di Fred Madison, in *MD* questo meccanismo si duplica, prendendo ad oggetto una coppia di donne, che prima conosceremo come Betty e Rita e poi, nella seconda sezione del film, come Diane e Camilla.
Senza voler ripercorrere l'intera vicenda che si dispiega nel film, vale la pena sottolineare come ci sia almeno un tema, estremamente significativo, che connette *LH* con *MD* e ne espande la struttura rit-macchinica: è il tema del *falso*. C'è, all'interno del film, una insistenza quasi didascalica rispetto allo statuto sempre potenzialmente illusorio di ciò che vediamo. Naturalmente, la sequenza che in questo caso fa scuola è quella del *Club*

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[35] G. Deleuze, *La Piega. Leibniz e il Barocco*, Einaudi, Torino 2004.

Silencio. "No Hay banda" dice il presentatore, "è tutto registrato", e così Rebeckah del Rio può svenire mentre canta *Llorando*, senza che la voce che sentiamo cantare si fermi. È tutto falso, sono solo dei nastri (come in *LH*) ma l'intensità, l'affetto, la sensazione, sono tanto reali quanto terrificanti. Quella del *Club Silencio* non è l'unica scena dove, a fronte di una situazione palesemente falsa o posticcia (si pensi alla scena del provino di Betty, o a quella di Dan da *Winkie's*), a prorompere è una intensità estremamente potente e disturbante. Questo contrasto tra l'illusorietà dei materiali (provini, sogni, spettacoli) e la consistenza quasi incandescente delle sensazioni è precisamente il figurale baconiano fattosi cinema. Qui, però, la rottura della rappresentazione è operata per falsificazione: un'unica potenza del falso passa attraverso tutte le serie[36]. Ma cos'è che succede di preciso? La performance di Rebeckah del Rio è particolarmente intensa, tanto che ad un certo punto, lei stessa sviene sul palco. La voce però, continua a risuonare in sala: si trattava solo di un misero *playback*. Quel che accade è che i vari elementi di cui si componeva la scena ad un certo punto non riescono più a stare assieme, digregandosi: lo straniamento di questa inattesa fine non cancella però l'affetto intensissimo che si era venuto a creare tra la performer, la musica e le sensibilità di Betty e Rita. Questa pura sensazione resta perciò nell'aria, ed è tanto più forte una volta svelatane la natura macchinica, artificiale[37]. Questo svelamento mostra come la sensazione non si distingua dalla figura ritmica che l'ha prodotta: come si diceva in precedenza, il ritmo, come il diagramma, è qualcosa che dà a vedere, che lascia emergere non solo gli elementi che esso articola, ma la loro stessa articolazione. Accade perciò che il *più falso* diventi anche il *più intenso*. In questi frangenti, come si trattasse di una *mise en abyme* del film stesso, le singole componenti (i lembi del tessuto reimanniano) si distanziano al massimo grado mentre, nello stesso tempo, l'intensità della sensazione aumenta a dismisura. È come se solo nella sospensione di qualsiasi veridicità, nel massimo grado della falsificazione, fosse possibile ritrovare le potenze della vita (il terrore di Dan da *Winkie's*, la sessualità durante il provino, la pietà al *Club Silencio*, etc.). Il falso scioglie il tempo cronologico, rendendolo cronico, producendo l'inesplicabile, che a sua volta libera le potenze e gli affetti. Sotto di queste, ad agitarsi, una potenza più radicale: quella del tempo e della sua forma, il *ritmo*.

MD indebolisce logica e cronologia degli eventi, li innalza a puri fatti e così facendo realizza – proprio come accade in certi polittici senza sintassi di Bacon – la coabitazione (ma forse la fluttuazione e il reciproco contagio) di

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[36] Id., *L'Immagine-Tempo*, Ubulibri, Milano 2004, pp.143-165.
[37] Cfr. D. Roche, *The Death of the Subject in David Lynch's Lost Highway and Mulholland Drive*, "e-Rea" [En ligne], 2.2 | 2004.

più universi soggettivi, non grammaticalizzandoli attraverso il riferimento a un'identità, a una storia […] ma sublimandoli nella purezza della sensazione. È esattamente quello che Deleuze, nell'analisi delle coppie ricorrenti nella pittura di Bacon, definisce *Matter of Fact* […] un diagramma il cui tratteggio non unisce che sensazioni; senza il minimo accenno a una storia plausibile.[38]

L'atto e la potenza sono sotto questo segno ricomposti nella formula dell'eterno ritorno: ciò che è *in atto* è ciò che *torna*, ciò che continua a battere, ciò che resiste alla prova della propria morte. "La differenza si annulla in quanto è posta fuori di sé, nell'esteso e nella qualità che lo riempie"[39], ma l'esteso perdura – pena la sua disgregazione – fintantoché quella differenza continua a tornare. È l'ipotesi di un mondo vibrazionale – deleuziano, whitheadiano, bergsoniano – in cui tutto ciò che esiste è l'esito delle differenze, delle intensità che lo strutturano. Ma, proprio come in Bacon, è solo nell'isolamento della Figura dalla storia, solo attraverso l'incontro con il diagramma, che possiamo fare esperienza della forza senza vederla estinguere. Attraverso la macchina-cinema Lynch scopre la natura ritmologica della realtà: "In Lynch è come se le articolazioni macchiniche, gli ingranaggi e le sinapsi […] le tubature di un sistema che fa corpo con le apparizioni e le storie, si manifestassero in quanto liberazioni di stati d'essere, di flussi energetici che si sprigionano in quanto inerenti al cinema come luce e suono"[40].

Da questo punto di vista, nessun riallineamento della fabula rispetto ad un ipotetico intreccio potrà restituire la complessità onto-ritmo-logica del tessuto filmico di *MD*: "this is not a puzzle in which all the varied pieces will eventually fall into place"[41]. Il film di Lynch non è un puzzle che chiede di essere ricomposto, perché i pezzi di cui si compone non combaciano; oppure combaciano su di un piano che non è piatto ed euclideo, ma topologico e reimanniano.

> l'interstizio – incognita spaziale, temporale e narrativa – genera un regime di indecidibilità nel tessuto del racconto, impone una coesistenza impossibile e pur tuttavia presente […] MD scioglie le immagini e la loro successione dall'espressività e dal riferimento reciproci, instaurando tra le parti relazioni dal carattere indeciso e mutevole […], i mondi del cinema di Lynch sono uno soltanto, messo però a soqquadro.[42]

[38] L. Malavasi, *David Lynch. Mulholland Drive*, Lindau, Torino 2008, pp. 165-166.
[39] G. Deleuze, *Differenza e Ripetizione*, Raffaello Cortina, Milano 1997, p. 243.
[40] B. Roberti, *Nella dualità della luce*, in "Filmcritica", n. 523, 2002, p. 126, citato in D. Dottorini, *op. cit.*, p. 74.
[41] D. Coffeen, *This is Cinema: The Pleated Plenitude of the Cinematic Sign in David Lynch's Mulholland Dr., Film-Philosophy*, 7.1, University Press, Edinburgh 2003, p. 1.
[42] L. Malavasi, *op. cit.*, pp. 129-130.

È la rit-macchina della falsificazione a produrre questa indecidibilità, che a sua volta, sospendendo la narrazione, produce un cristallo dentro al quale rilucono delle pure sensazioni. Come argomenta Sinnerbrink, a proposito delle fantasmatiche immagini che, aleggiando sul corpo esanime di Diane, chiudono il film, "these images are no longer anchored to the subjectivity of a character, or located within the objective diegesis of the narrative, they become inexhaustible cinematic Ideas that escape our attempts to determine any possible definitive meaning"[43].

A questa linea della falsificazione che taglia trasversalmente l'intero tessuto filmico, se ne affianca un'altra, che invece lo seziona in due: è la linea di cui si diceva inizialmente, che distingue le coppie Betty/Rita da Diane/Camilla. Anche per queste due macro-falde vale il discorso dell'inassegnabilità: esse, piuttosto che stare in un rapporto oppositivo (sogno/veglia, immaginario/reale, e così via), sono in un rapporto disgiuntivo, al pari dei trittici baconiani:

> Ciò che realizzano le due parti di MD è insomma un accoppiamento tra due sensazioni in lotta, "un corpo a corpo di energie" in cui l'impossibilità di una relazione non pregiudica l'esistenza di un rapporto […]: solleva le figure dal piano del racconto e ne offre una versione sublimata, corrispondente ai ritmi di base della narratività […] e al piano del sensibile.[44]

Inland Empire, "this is the way to the palace"

Ripercorriamo brevemente le tappe. *LH* era un film tutto pervaso da una estetica della vibrazione. Il diagramma macchinico che su di esso si abbatteva, sconvolgendolo e destrutturandolo, aveva il tratto della testa deformata – e profondamente *baconiana* – di Fred Madison. *LH* è stato spesso, a buona ragione, associato all'immagine del nastro di Moebius[45]. L'associazione è particolarmente pregnante: sebbene il film, così come il famoso nastro topologico, possegga due facce ben distinte, esse sono connesse in maniera continua, il passaggio dall'una all'altra è garantito e, tutto sommato, lineare. Al contrario, *MD* costruiva due blocchi attraversati da una profonda spaccatura. Le risonanze che tra queste due serie si generavano, erano bilanciate però da una divergenza che produceva una apertura irrecomponibile. Questa incrinatura, questo taglio, iniziava a

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[43] R. Sinnerbrink, *Cinematic Ideas: David Lynch's Mulholland Drive*, cit., pp. 13-14.
[44] L. Malavasi, *op. cit.*, p. 168.
[45] Cfr. D. Dottorini, *op. cit.*; B. Herzogenrath, *On the Lost Highway: Lynch and Lacan, Cinema and Cultural Pathology*, "Other Voices", v.1, n.3 (January 1999); D. Handelman, *Moebius Anthropology. Essays on the Forming of Form*, Berghahn Books, New York 2021.

funzionare alla maniera dei trittici (anche se qui si può parlare solamente di un dittico) baconaniani, aprendo il film su di "un immenso spazio-tempo [che] riunisce tutte le cose, *introducendo però fra loro le distanze di un Sahara, i secoli di un Aion*"[46]. Una procedura che, nell'ultimo film del trittico, si intensificherà a dismisura.

Per cercare di capire il funzionamento di questa strana macchina che è *IE*, occorre far riferimento ad un passaggio cruciale de *L'Immagine-Tempo*:

> Secondo la bella formula di Sant'Agostino, esiste un presente del futuro, un presente del presente, un presente del passato, tutti implicati nell'avvenimento, arrotolati nell'avvenimento, dunque simultanei, inesplicabili. […] Si scopre un tempo interno all'avvenimento, fatto della simultaneità di questi tre presenti implicati, di queste punte di presente deattualizzate. È la possibilità di trattare il mondo, la vita o semplicemente una vita, un episodio come un unico e medesimo avvenimento, che fonda l'implicazione dei presenti. Un incidente sta per accadere, accade, è accaduto; eppure è nello stesso tempo che avrà luogo, ha già avuto luogo e sta per avere luogo.[47]

Nikki vive costantemente momenti all'interno dei quali scopre di sapere già cosa accadrà, oppure dove ciò che sta per accadere è già accaduto in precedenza, tanto che "it is not easy to decide 'if it's today, two days from now, or yesterday'"[48]. Anche in questo caso, è la falsificazione operata dal tempo-come-potenza ad agire: rotta la cronologia, resta la cronicità, dove tutte le singolarità sono contemporanee le une con le altre[49], dove tutte i punti di ebollizione, solidificazione, scioglimento, condensazione sono come stelle di un unico firmamento. Ognuna di queste singolarità dà origine ad una serie di punti ordinari (la falda, che conserva una sua linearità) che si prolunga fino all'incontro con una nuova singolarità. Il film diventa così un estuario di serie ordinarie e punti singolari, all'interno del quale la divergenza, l'*incompossibilità*, non è solo ammessa, ma è addirittura invocata. Solo alla luce della scoperta della rit-macchina attraverso cui il mondo prende consistenza è possibile agire, rendersi potenti: Nikki deve rompere una rit-macchina infernale che produce nient'altro che oppressione, violenza, colpa. Per farlo, dovrà passare attraverso tutte queste serie, sforzandosi di agguantare quella *agency* che il film, a colpi di

[46] G. Deleuze, *Logica della Sensazione*, cit., p. 155.
[47] Id., *L'Immagine-Tempo*, Ubulibri, Milano 2004, pp. 115-116.
[48] J.D. Reid & C.R. Craig, *Agency and Imagination in the Films of David Lynch: Philosophical Perspectives*, Lexington Books, London 2020, p. 212.
[49] Infatti, come sottolinea Robert Martin, "it is more useful […] to consider Inland Empire as a film structured around simultaneity", R. Martin, *op. cit.*, Bloomsbury, London 2014, p. 165.

"temporal dislocation, spatial disorientation, and identity confusion"[50], sembra costantemente sottrarle. Il tessuto del film è tempestato di punti condensazione, di assi, di soglie e, proprio come dice Nichomson, "in Lynch's words, the nature of the infinite cosmos is composed of many universes, some of which become permanent, and 'take hold and grow'. Some last only brief seconds"[51]. I vari mondi, le varie falde, si appoggiano l'una all'altra, ma sono, in un certo senso, tutte delle ripetizioni di una stessa, identica storia: così come per l'eterno ritorno deleuzo/nietzscheano, a tornare è sempre la differenza, sotto forma di differenza d'intensità. La storia di *Axxon N*, intrisa di un orrore profondo ("they discovered something inside the story"[52] dice Kingsley a Nikki e Devon), continua a tornare incessantemente a molteplici livelli. Se ne contano almeno quattro: il radiodramma *Axxon N*, il film *Vier Sieben (47)*, *On High in Blue Tomorrows* e la vita di Nikki. Tutte queste storie sono disgiunte ma profondamente risonanti, anche se queste risonanze generano sempre degli spostamenti, delle deformazioni. È così che Piotrek, marito di Nikki, ha lo stesso corpo di Smithy, marito di Sue. Non solo: lo stesso attore – Piotr Andrzejewski – interpreta anche l'amante della *Lost Girl* con il quale avverrà il ricongiungimento finale, in quelli che sembrano essere i fotogrammi del mai terminato *Vier Sieben*. Attraverso questa proliferazione di livelli dove ogni storia sembra riflettere le altre, Lynch pare voler scongiurare qualsiasi verità possibile: come Deleuze diceva riguardo il cinema di Orson Welles, il falso "cessa d'essere una semplice apparenza, o perfino una menzogna, per giungere a questa potenza del divenire che costituisce le serie e i gradi, che supera i limiti, opera le metamorfosi"[53].

Quella di *IE* è allora una superficie intimamente attraversata da una instabilità, da una precarietà che viene ribadita con forza dall'utilizzo di una ripresa in digitale a bassa risoluzione – Lynch utilizza, per la prima volta in carriera, una Sony PD-150 – la cui immagine appare sempre sul punto di sfaldarsi, di sciogliersi. In questo senso, come fa notare Allister Mactaggart, riprendendo una riflessione di Lev Manovich, il cinema digitale, con la sua possibilità di intervenire direttamente sull'immagine, si trasforma a tutti gli effetti in un sottogenere della pittura[54]. Nelle parole del regista, "the quality is pretty terrible, but i like that. […] Sometimes, in a frame, if there's some question about what you're seeing […] the

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[50] J.D. Reid & C.R. Craig, *op. cit.*, London 2020, p. 209.

[51] M.P. Nochimson, *David Lynch Swerves, Uncertainty from Lost Highway to Inland Empire*, University of Texas Press, Austin 2013, p. 164.

[52] T. McGowan, *The Materiality of Fantasy: the encounter with something in Inland Empire*, in (edited by) F. X. Gleyzon, *David Lynch in Theory*, Praga 2010, pp. 8-23.

[53] G. Deleuze, *L'Immagine-Tempo*, Ubulibri, Milano 2004, p. 304.

[54] A. Mactaggart, *The Film Paintings of David Lynch. Challenging Film Theory*, Intellect, Bristol 2010, p. 144

mind can go dreaming. If everything is crystal clear in that frame, that's what it is, that's all it is"[55]. Lynch disfa l'immagine, lasciando emergere quel diagramma macchinico (la struttura in pixel di una camera digitale commerciale) attraverso il quale la figurazione cede il passo al figurale baconiano. Nel film, questa dimensione diagrammatica del macchinico varrà più volte doppiata dall'esposizione delle camere che stanno riprendendo *On High in Blue Tomorrows*: le macchine da presa analogiche appaiono come degli inquietanti testimoni, dei *voyeur* che, impassibili, assistono alla deformazione di Nikki in Sue, fino alla morte di quest'ultima. Ma la figura del testimone, del precursore buio, è anch'essa, all'interno del film, distribuita lungo una serie: di fianco alle macchine da presa, troviamo infatti i conigli (e la loro reincarnazione polacca nella forma dei tre anziani intenti ad invocare la *Lost Girl*), il Fantasma, la *Lost Girl* e la stessa Nikki. Tutti questi personaggi sono in grado di attraversare i diversi strati, le diverse falde di cui si compone il film, connettendoli. Secondo Nochimson, "we can see how crucial the Rabbits' patient endurance is as they are beset by the unknown and surrounded by the absurdity of public discourse […] Nikki will eventually reach this place"[56]. I conigli operano dunque a tutti gli effetti come i testimoni profondi dei trittici baconiani, fungendo da superficie orizzontale, da tessuto connettivo per i diversi ritmi, le diverse frequenze di cui si compone il film. Ma, come abbiamo detto, quello di Nikki è un percorso che ha lo scopo di interrompere un certo ritmo, una certa inarrestabile piegatura che attraversa le storie *IE*, imposta dal Fantasma/Crimp. È come se Lynch scoprisse, sotto ad ognuna di queste storie, quello che Deleuze e Guattari chiamano un Ritornello:

> esso agisce su ciò che lo circonda, suono o luce, per trarne vibrazioni di vario tipo, decomposizioni, proiezioni e trasformazioni. Il ritornello ha inoltre una funzione catalitica: non soltanto aumenta la velocità degli scambi e delle reazioni in ciò che lo circonda, ma assicura interazioni indirette fra elementi privi dell'affinità detta naturale […] Il ritornello fabbrica tempo.[57]

Il ritornello non smette di ripresentarsi a tutti i livelli del film, gettando la sua maglia di rapporti – il suo diagramma – su tutti i materiali che intercetta. Lynch ci mostra, allora, un lato inedito della rit-macchina, vale a dire la sua potenza di ripetizione (la sua pulsione di morte, se si vuole), che non desidera altro che sé stessa. La disattivazione di questo ritornello infernale, che passa per l'uccisione del Fantasma e la "libera-

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[55] D. Lynch in A. Jerslev, *The Post-perspectival: screens and time in David Lynch Inland Empire*, Journal of Aesthetics & Culture, Vol. 4, 2012, p. 2.
[56] M. P. Nochimson, *op. cit.*, p. 170.
[57] G. Deleuze & F. Guattari, *Sul ritornello*, Castelvecchi, Roma 1997, p. 65.

zione" della *Lost Girl*, imporrà alla protagonista il passaggio attraverso tutti i livelli, tutte le falde di cui si compone il film[58]. Durante questo processo, Nikki/Sue incontrerà numerosi schermi, svariati "riflessi" che, come misteriosamente insinuato dalla visitatrice#1 impersonata da Grace Zabriskie, presiedono alla nascita del male: "A little boy went out to play. When he opened his door, he saw the world. As he passed through the doorway, a ghost – a reflection – evil – was born". Lo schermo televisivo che incatena la *Lost Girl*, ma anche lo schermo cinematografico su cui Nikki vede sé stessa nei panni di Sue, sono tutti riflessi, tutte *rappresentazioni* che occorre frantumare per ricomporre il giusto concatenamento, spezzando la rit-macchina infernale predisposta dal Fantasma. All'interno di un discorso dalle chiare tinte oracolari, la visitatrice#1 dà anche una versione alternativa della storia: "And, the variation. A little girl went out to play. Lost in the marketplace as if half-born. Then, not through the marketplace – you see that, don't you? – but through the alley behind the marketplace. This is the way to the palace". Il "vicolo dietro il mercato", la "strada verso il palazzo", sono espressioni che ripetono la figura della strada (così centrale tanto in *LH* che in *MD*) come elemento connettivo, filo attraverso il quale inventare il concatenamento di due falde dello spazio reimanniano. Gli strati che compongono il film, tutti riuniti sotto il segno della differenza e della ripetizione, sembrano più che mai aperti su un caos, su un fuori che li minaccia costantemente. In questo senso, il film è a tutti gli effetti "a topology of cinematic spaces that enfolds different but related diegetic worlds, diverging narrative lines, cultural-historical locales, aesthetic sensibilities, and cinematic media"[59]. Quello che vediamo, allora, è lo sforzo di Nikki/Sue di trovare una possibile connessione, un possibile concatenamento che smonti, che spenga il risuonare incessante della violenza che attraversa le storie di *Axxon N*, *Vier Sieben*, *On High in Blue Tomorrows* e della stessa vita di Nikki. Nikki deve costruire una nuova rit-macchina, deve inventare una nuova unità distributiva, che imponga un nuovo ritmo a quel cristallo di tempo che è il film: presenti di presenti, presenti di passato e presenti di futuro devono trovare una modalità di stare assieme che rompa quella imposta dal Fantasma. Se in *MD* sembrava ancora possibile – ancorché sconsigliabile – assegnare uno statuto (reale o immaginario, virtuale o attuale) preciso a determinate immagini, con *IE* questa possibilità viene definitivamente meno. L'intero estuario di storie è l'esito di una macchina della falsificazione che non lascia sussistere nessuna verità. La versione più chiara di que-

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[58] Cfr. J. Goodwin, *The Separate Worlds of David Lynch's Inland Empire*, Quarterly Review of Film and Video, 31:4, p. 316.
[59] R. Sinnerbrink, *New Philosophies of Film*, Continuum, New York 2011, p. 144.

sta dimensione ce la offre la particolare *macchina* che serve a Sue per mettersi in contatto con la *Lost Girl*. Una volta indossato l'orologio ed eseguito il foro di sigaretta sul panno arrotolato, quello che resta da guardare non è nient'altro che un'altra trama di maglia, un altro intreccio: bucato il sipario non c'è nient'altro che un altro sipario da brucare.

Conclusioni: la rit-macchina, la psicanalisi, la crudeltà

Attraverso il cinema, Lynch sembra scoprire una serie di fratture che spezzano il tessuto apparentemente compatto del reale: la divergenza tra il visibile e il dicibile è raddoppiata da quella tra presenti incompossibili eppure appartenenti allo stesso mondo. "No Hay banda", "è tutto falso, è tutto registrato": ogni attualità, ogni identità è la provvisoria contrazione, la fugace rappresentazione di una intensità più profonda, inviluppata in un esteso, che è precisamente ciò che va smontato, frantumato. Tutto è macchinato, ed è una macchinazione profondamente inquietante. Non perché, come immagina Anne Jerslev[60], ci sia in Lynch una ossessione verso la dimensione della sorveglianza. Piuttosto, perché egli scopre, attraverso questo macchinismo generalizzato, la profonda precarietà di un mondo zoppicante, discontinuo, ritmato.

Mediante il suo diagramma macchinico, Lynch, proprio come accadeva per Bacon, rompe la figurazione (cancellando il modello), dando luogo ad un vero e proprio teatro. Teatro che però, perlomeno dalla prospettiva che si è scelto di seguire fino a questo punto, ci pare difficilmente inquadrabile da un punto di vista psicanalitico. Almeno – e qui siamo d'accordo con Sinnerbrink[61] – non nei termini definiti dallo Zizek de *Il ridicolo sublime*[62]. Sebbene l'interpretazione di *LH* fornita dal filosofo di Lubiana sia perfettamente plausibile, oltre che estremamente

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[60] A. Jerslev, *op. cit.*
[61] "For all its enlightening power, Zizek's attempt to reconstruct the narrative logic of *Lost Highway*, via a Lacanian psychoanalytic reading, suffers from what I would call a reductive 'rationalism' in its philosophical approach to film. By reductive 'rationalism' I mean the tendency to treat films as illustrations of theoretical concepts or ideological perspectives that can be properly deciphered only once submitted to conceptual analysis or subsumed within a philosophical metalanguage", R. Sinnerbrink, *Cinematic Ideas: David Lynch's Mulholland Drive*, cit., p. 2.
[62] S. Zizek, *Lynch. Il Ridicolo Sublime*, Mimesis, Milano 2011. Prendiamo qui, anche e soprattutto per ragioni di spazio, l'interpretazione zizekiana a modello di un certo modo – estremamente *intelligente*, va segnalato – di leggere psicanaliticamente l'opera lynchiana. Ciò che intendiamo far emergere è tutta la distanza che corre e che separa un approccio geneticamente *interpretativo* – quello psicanalitico –, da uno strutturalmente funzionalistico – quello ritmo-macchinico. Si tratta, in questo senso, di opporre ad una domanda del tipo "che cosa significa?", una del tipo "come funziona?".

accurata, essa pare tutta volta a ricomporre un'unità narrativa andata perduta. Una linearità che, pur necessitando i concetti della psicanalisi per esser spiegata, è lì in attesa di essere disvelata. La psicanalisi diventa, insomma, il codice attraverso cui interpretare una realtà deformata: "il codice" – però – "è necessariamente cerebrale, manca la sensazione […] ossia l'azione diretta sul sistema nervoso"[63]. Per quanto ci possa sembrare di essere vicini a Zizek nel momento in cui afferma che "la realtà, l'esperienza della sua densità, non è sorretta da un determinato fantasma ma da una serie incoerente di fantasmi, ed è questa moltitudine che genera l'effetto di densità impenetrabile, percepito da noi come realtà"[64], ne siamo al contempo lontanissimi. Quella a cui pensa il filosofo sloveno ci pare essere sempre una *realtà-per-un-soggetto*, una – certo complessa – trama di rappresentazioni, la cui *densità* finisce per risolversi in un puro effetto, in un artificio. Mentre, a nostro avviso, la superficie del cinema lynchiano costituisce un piano, un campo, risolutamente pre-soggettivo, intensivo, ritmologico. Un campo sul quale un soggetto *può* emergere, a patto di tracciare – proprio come fa Nikki in *IE* – quella inedita connessione tra i lembi della rit-macchina in cui è preso. Non, dunque, come vorrebbe Russell Manning[65], la proiezione degli inconsci e delle paure dei personaggi, quanto piuttosto il piano pre-personale a partire dal quale questi possono prendere consistenza. In questo senso, se v'è del teatro in Lynch, questo non può che essere un teatro *della crudeltà*. Vale a dire un teatro all'interno del quale non vi sono che forze, tendenze che si abbattono sui corpi e sulle loro immagini. Ci sarebbe, dunque, in Lynch, una teatralità che andrebbe ben oltre l'insieme delle sequenze dove questa è rappresentata in maniera esplicita. Contrariamente a quanto afferma Monica Cristini[66], infatti, è il film stesso a farsi teatro di una individuazione dentro alla quale corpi, soggetti e dimensioni sono tutti alla ricerca di un'alleanza ritmica che gli consenta di acquisire consistenza. Come per Bacon, anche per Lynch "la crudeltà sarà sempre meno associata alla rappresentazione di qualcosa di orribile, sarà mera azione delle forze sul corpo, o sensazione"[67]. Se "Bacon non smette di dipingere corpi senza organi, il fatto intensivo del corpo"[68], Lynch non smette di filmare quella soglia, quel passaggio mediante il quale il reale, nel momento stesso in cui pare

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[63] G. Deleuze, *Logica della sensazione*, cit., p. 174.
[64] S. Zizek, *op. cit*, p. 15.
[65] R. Manning, *The Thing About David Lynch*, in (edited by) W. Devlin & S. Biderman, *The Philosophy of David Lynch*, The University Press of Kentucky, Lexington 2011, p. 70.
[66] M. Cristini, *La realtà oltre il confine nei Teatri di David Lynch*, "Arabeschi – Rivista internazionale di studi su letteratura e visualità", n. 14, luglio-dicembre 2019.
[67] G. Deleuze, *Logica della sensazione*, cit., p. 104.
[68] *Ibidem.*

sfaldarsi, assume la sua consistenza. È in questo senso che i tre film analizzati compongono un vero e proprio trittico. Essi, inquadrati alla luce del prisma ritmo-macchinico che abbiamo provato ad abbozzare, conquistano una inedita "unità distributiva"[69]: un sistema di prestiti, risonanze e dissonanze che disegna una *superficie* sulla quale sembra possibile poter tracciare infinite traiettorie di senso. Il diagramma macchinico lynchiano, che al contempo frantuma e connette i molteplici lembi del trittico, genera un ritmo il cui propagarsi avviene "come una diffusione energetica e virale attraverso i nervi, in una sorta di microdinamica neurale che compone frattalmente il movimento […] in una serie di strappi involontari, di relazioni a velocità variabile e linee di fuga gravitazionali"[70]. Si disegna così un piano sul quale virtuale ed attuale collassano nell'intensivo, dove non è più possibile rinvenire nessun codice, poiché ad esso si è sostituito un ritmo che si propaga da sé: "il ritmo non è davvero qualcosa che ha a che fare con le note o i beat, riguarda invece le intensità, riguarda l'attraversare una serie di soglie lungo il tuo corpo, [il ritmo] attracca sulle tue giunture e si distribuisce lungo i tuoi arti, ti sequestra un muscolo […], ti cattura"[71].

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[69] *Ivi*, p. 155.
[70] S. Portanova, *Rhythmic Parasites: A Virological Analysis of Sound and Dance*. "The Fibreculture Journal", issue 4, 2005.
[71] K. Eshun, *Rapiti dall'audio*, "Kaiak. A Philosophical Journey" – n. 10 (2023).

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Marco Palladino
David Lynch. L'arte tra paticità e metafisica

1. Lynch e l'irriducibilità del sentire

È indubbio che il cinema di Lynch[1], anche solo implicitamente, si situi nell'orizzonte post-moderno della decostruzione radicale del soggetto. Le sue opere, da *Eraserhead* fino a *Inland Empire*, costituiscono certamente l'universo simbolico più adatto a incarnare l'idea, di freudiana memoria, secondo la quale l'io, abitato e divorato dalle forze imperscrutabili dell'inconscio, non è padrone in casa propria. Il famoso *Mystery Man* di *Lost Highway*, secondo questa linea ermeneutica, potrebbe rappresentare appieno la forza distruttiva dell'*Es.* In un noto passaggio cruciale dell'opera, quando i poliziotti controllano l'abitazione dei coniugi Madison, Fred, incalzato da uno degli agenti, rivela di essere estremamente restio a filmare gli avvenimenti della sua vita. Alla registrazione asettica e impersonale degli eventi preferisce l'interpretazione personale del ricordo, l'attiva rievocazione e riscrittura del vissuto originale. Questa scena si connette narrativamente e concettualmente all'ingresso dell'*Uomo misterioso*[2], figura fantasmagorica che sembra non solo la precipua mani-

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[1] Per inquadrare al meglio la figura e l'opera di Lynch rimandiamo il lettore ai seguenti saggi: D. Lynch, C. Rodley, *Lynch on Lynch*, Faber and Faber, Londra 2005; tr. it. di M. Borroni, *Io vedo me stesso. La mia arte, il cinema, la vita*, a cura di C. Rodley, Il Saggiatore, Milano 2016; D. Lynch, K. McKenna, *Room to dream*: *A life in art*, Faber and Faber, Londra 2018; David Lynch, *Catching the big fish*, TarcherPerigee, New York 2006; tr. it. di M. Pistidda (a cura di), *In acque profonde. Meditazione e creatività*, Mondadori, Milano 2008. Quest'ultimo testo, il più stampato e letto in Italia, nella sua brevità, fornisce le indicazioni fondamentali per inoltrarsi nel labirinto estetico ed esistenziale di Lynch. Per quanto riguarda invece la ricezione critica italiana, resta assolutamente imprescindibile il lavoro di Paolo Bertetto. Per l'autore, quella di Lynch, non è tanto la traduzione estetica di una filosofia preesistente, ma «filosofia in atto», esperienza integrale dell'abisso della realtà. Cfr. P. Bertetto, *David Lynch*, Marsilio, Venezia 2008, p. 26.

[2] *The Mystery Man*, oltre a figurare l'incombenza dell'Ombra di junghiana memoria, l'*Es* che continuamente erode la presunta stabilità del cogito, è un chiaro richiamo all'espressionismo tedesco di cui il cinema del Nostro rappresenta la compiuta elaborazione e trasfigurazione. Si può leggere questa figura interna alla coscienza di Fred come la rappresentazione caricaturale e distorta dell'oltreuomo nietzscheano. *Lost Highway*, a mio avviso è sì, come sostiene lo stesso Lynch, il racconto di una «fuga psicogena», ma questa

festazione dell'inconscio del protagonista, ma la concrezione di quell'inconscio estetico, rappresentato dall'immaginario dell'espressionismo, di cui Lynch già si è servito nelle sue prime opere. L'uomo, con la sua telecamera, non solo registra e fa riemergere il *rimosso* del protagonista, ma il *rimosso* del cinema. Il suo sguardo non è solo uno sguardo su noi stessi, sull'inevitabile sovrapposizione fra la colpa di Fred e la nostra, ma è lo sguardo del cinema che riflette su stesso, e, riflettendo su stesso, si presenta non tanto come la vittoria della memoria sull'oblio, della chiarezza e della distinzione di ascendenza cartesiana sulla telluricità dell'extracosciente, bensì come il disvelamento della memoria dell'oblio – genitivo soggettivo. Il cinema, ci suggerisce Lynch, non è solo memoria archivistica, serbatoio dei vissuti individuali e collettivi, delle storie personali e sovrapersonali, ma è, anzitutto, il ricordo di ciò che non può essere ricordato, la memoria della radice trascendentale di ogni memoria, la rammemorazione del suo costitutivo obliarsi[3].

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fuga è la fuga di un'intera civiltà. In questa prospettiva la vicenda di Fred Madison, ispirata dal caso di O.J. Simpson, è il racconto, sulla scorta di Nietzsche, di un triplice decesso metafisico. La morte del fondamento teologico di un'intera civiltà è la morte della morale (la ricostruzione genealogica dell'istinto morale come sublimazione della originarietà della volontà di potenza) e la morte della sostanzialità del soggetto propugnata dalle filosofie della trascendentalità del cogito. È vero, dunque, come osserva Mark Walling, che Lost Highway intende trascendere sul piano narrativo e filosofico il dualismo fra interno ed esterno, fra soggetto e oggetto, ma questo superamento più che riferirsi direttamente alla tradizione zen, si riferisce, indirettamente, alla temperie culturale generata dal nichilismo attivo di Nietzsche, il primo filosofo a mettere radicalmente in discussione il primato epistemologico e ontologico del cogito. Il filosofo di Röcken sostiene, ben prima di Freud, che non c'è un *Ich denke.* Si dovrebbe dire, all'opposto, che *Es denkt*, marcando il carattere impersonale della nostra attività cosciente, la cui unitarietà è costruita *ex post*. L'io, al pari dei concetti di *causa*, *sostanza*, *materia*, è un'ipostasi che ha una funzione puramente regolativa. Esso si configura come una mera estensione del soggetto grammaticale. Ciò che chiamiamo io, ancor prima della psicanalisi e della letteratura novecentesca, è una congerie frammentata di tanti io. L'io in cui ci identifichiamo è il despota degli altri io che pure ci costituiscono, ma ciò non impedisce che ognuno di questi io latenti possa, di volta in volta, divenire il baricentro della nostra soggettività. Cfr. F. Nietzsche, *Nachgelassene Fragmente*, de Gruyter, Berlin 1974; tr. it. di G. Colli, M. Montanari (a cura di) *Frammenti postumi* (1884-1885), Adelphi, Milano 1975, p. 203. Cfr. Remo Bodei, *Il baricentro di Nietzsche* in *Destini personali. L'età della colonizzazione delle coscienze*, Feltrinelli, Milano 2002, pp. 83-116. Cfr. David Lynch, *In acque profonde. Meditazione e creatività*, cit., p. 121. Cfr. Mark Walling, *All roads lead to the Self: Zen Budhhism and David Lynch's Lost Highway* in W.J. Delvin, S. Biderman (a cura di), *The philosophy of David Lynch*, The University of Kentucky, Kentucky 2011, pp. 95-130.

[3] Il cinema contemporaneo ha riflettuto più volte su questo nesso costitutivo tra memoria e oblio. Pensiamo a *Memento* di Nolan o a *Strange Days* di Kathryn Bigelow. Ma in Lynch questo nesso scavalca il piano meramente diegetico, costituendosi come perno metadiegetico attorno al quale ruota la sua idea di cinema. *Strange Days* pure riflette sul carattere intrinsecamente *meontologico* dell'immagine cinematografica, sull'atto del ricordare, sul suo sovrapporsi all'azione della macchina da presa, come atto ermeneutico di reinterpretazione e trasfigurazione del vissuto, ma non raggiunge la radicalità lynchana, riposizio-

David Lynch utilizza la macchina da presa, proprio come il suo *Mystery Man*, come se fosse un bisturi: con una precisione chirurgica svela l'abisso che scava da dentro il soggetto. Il suo cinema, prima ancora di essere un cinema eidetico, è un cinema del *sentire*, del sentire inteso come *apriori* di tutti gli apriori, come l'originario che struttura la nostra esperienza del mondo. Il sentire, nell'opera lynchana, è genesi, metodo e meta. La rappresentazione filmica, in questo senso, si svincola dalla sua funzione segnico-semantica, imponendosi come la traduzione dell'intraducibile, dell'eccedenza del sentire che non trova dimora presso alcuna rappresentazione. Se si potesse dare una definizione di questo cinema, una definizione tratta dall'universo pittorico da cui il Nostro proviene, si potrebbe dire che esso è un cinema *suprematista*. Come Malevič, padre del *suprematismo*, egli non è interessato alle apparenze esteriori della realtà. L'oggettività non ha alcun significato: ciò che conta è la chiarificazione dell'originarietà del sentire, la sua trascendenza immanente al fondo della soggettività. L'arte, in questo senso, appare come l'*espressione pura* di ciò che straripa dalle coordinate oggettuali e concettuali. Il *Mystery Man*, allora, oltre a figurare l'impersonalità dell'involontario, dell'*Es*, rappresenta la figurazione dell'antitesi più estrema del realismo. Si può leggere il suo corpo fuso con lo sguardo della telecamera come la più radicale controparte de *L'Uomo con la macchina da presa* di Dziga Vertov. La pretesa di oggettivare ogni lembo del reale, affinché nulla sia precluso all'occhio bulimico del cinema, al suo istinto documentale, è totalmente spodestata in favore di un *surrealismo metafisico* nel quale l'effettività bruta dei fatti è sostituita dall'inesauribilità dei *significati inconcettuali*. Il cinema di Lynch si attarda sempre sulla stratificazione del sentire, su quella irriducibilità che lo *Zeitgeist* reputa una mera escrescenza neurobiologica, un evento misurabile a colpi di bisturi. Da un lato assistiamo all'esaltazione sentimentalistica del sentire, al trionfo del più banale psicologismo; dall'altro lato, il riduzionismo tecno-scientifico ha determinato un'autentica atrofizzazione del sentire, una sua mortifera logicizzazione e meccanizzazione. L'immagine cinematografica, per Lynch, deve mostrare la metafisicità del sentire, la sua intenzionalità ontologicamente connotata. La lingua del cinema non è linguistico-referenziale, segnica, ma simbolico-metafisica. La sua grammatica fondamentale non sollecita la nostra mente logico-discorsiva, quella mente

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nandosi presto sui binari della linearità narrativa. Per l'analisi approfondita dell'opera rimandiamo il lettore al saggio di Mauro Di Donato. Cfr. M. Di Donato, *Strange Days: viaggio ai confini del cinema*, in P. Bertetto (a cura di), *L'interpretazione dei film. Undici capolavori della storia del cinema*, Marsilio, Venezia 2003, pp. 251-273. Sul nesso tra memoria e oblio ha scritto pagine pregne di spessore teoretico Paul Ricœur. Cfr. P. Ricœur, *La mémoire, l'histoire, l'oubli*, Seuil, Paris 2000; tr. it. di Daniella Iannotta (a cura di), *La memoria, la storia, l'oblio*, Raffaello Cortina, Milano 2003.

che opera tramite le categorie, ma la nostra *intuizione metafisica*. In questo senso, il riferimento implicito della riflessione lynchana è Bergson e la sua risignificazione del concetto di metafisica. Una risignificazione che si inscrive nell'orizzonte di una nuova chiarificazione dei rapporti tra la dimensione intuitiva e quella logico-categoriale. La metafisica in Bergson[4] non coincide con l'ontologia, con il lògos sull'eternità e l'incontrovertibilità dell'essere, ma con l'intuizione fondamentale della *durata*. Il cosiddetto *metodo cinematografico*, di cui sono vittime inconsapevoli tutte le metafisiche della sostanza, consiste nell'avvalersi dell'intelligenza, della sua funzione analitica, per isolare e fissare i frammenti di quell'*èlan vital* che ci costituisce in quanto soggetti e che, in ultimo, è la forza creativa che intride di sé la realtà. L'intelligenza scompone, ritaglia frammenti di divenire; l'intuizione coglie, con un unico colpo d'occhio, la dinamicità e la relazionalità del tempo. Allo stesso modo, in Lynch, l'attività di ricomposizione del tessuto narrativo decostruito, l'intelligenza, ha un ruolo ancillare e posteriore rispetto all'intuizione della totalità relazionale e dinamica delle immagini. Proseguendo lungo questa linea interpretativa, si possono leggere le opere più criptiche sul piano diegetico ed estetico come degli imponenti edifici cinematografi il cui compito principale è scalzare, da un lato, la presunta superiorità dell'intelletto sull'intuizione, dall'altro, connettere la dimensione metafisica alla durata soggettiva e sovrasoggettiva. In fondo, la frammentazione cui va incontro il cogito è, prima di tutto, l'esaltazione dell'intensità incommensurabile dell'immagine-tempo, la sua assoluta anteriorità rispetto alla biforcazione della realtà in soggetto e oggetto. Lynch opera al corpo dell'immagine una sorta di riduzione trascendentale, risalendo agli elementi costitutivi e genetici dell'esperienza. Questa riappropriazione del fondo esperienziale da cui emergono tutte le immagini, di cui il cinema si nutre, è sia gestazione creativa, meditazione anteriore a qualsiasi fare artistico, sia la sostanza stessa della costruzione filmica. Il cinema lynchano è l'immagine-tempo[5] che ci riconnette alla pre-logicità dell'esperienza, al suo sfondo trascendentale e patico. Se volgiamo lo sguardo all'incipit di *Blue Velvet*, a quell'indugiare della macchina da presa sui fiori rossi che si stagliano sul bianco della staccionata, ci accorgiamo non solo della decostruzione cui viene sottoposto il *noir* con l'inserzione di una scena così carica di lirismo, ma, soprattutto, dell'irriducibilità del sentire, del suo posizionarsi come *Ground* dell'esi-

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[4] Cfr. H. Bergson, *Introduction à la métaphysique*, Félix Alcan, Paris 1934; tr. it. di D. Giordano, *Introduzione alla metafisica*, a cura di R. Ronchi, Orthotes, Salerno 2012.
[5] Il riferimento è a Gilles Deleuze e al secondo volume della sua opera monumentale sul cinema. Cfr. G. Deleuze, *Cinéma 2. L'image-temps*, Les Éditions de Minuit, Paris 1985; tr. it. di Liliana Rampello, *L'immagine-tempo. Cinema 2*, Einaudi, Torino 2017.

stere. Quella che Pierce chiama *firstness*[6] e James *pure experience*[7] non è un essere indeterminato, un orizzonte primigenio che trascende soggettività e oggettività. Il fondamento dell'esistere è già relazione, intenzionalità sorgiva, sentire fondamentale che ci interpella. Il nostro rapporto col sentire originario che intride di sé l'essere non è un rapporto rappresentativo, ma primariamente emotivo[8]. Ogni pensiero che tenti di decifrare l'essenza della realtà trova dimora in un'emozione, ma non è vero il contrario. Ci sono emozioni, tonalità affettive, che non possono essere circoscritte dal pensiero. L'essere parla alle strutture fondamentali del sentire, come mostra la scena immediatamente successiva. Lo sguardo di Lynch si inoltra nel verde segreto del giardino. La macchina da presa si stringe su un orecchio mozzato, in principio di decomposizione. Jeffrey, interpretato da Kyle MacLachlan, non ritrova soltanto la traccia di una detection, un MacGuffin funzionale al disorientamento dello spettatore. Ciò che il protagonista ritrova è, anzitutto, un *oggetto metafisico*, un centro ontologico di condensazione semantica. Come ha scritto David Fo-

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[6.] Cfr. C. S. Peirce, *The list of Categories: a Second Essay* in *Annotated Catalogue of the Papers of Charles S. Pierce*, University of Massachusetts, Amherst 1967; tr. it. di R. Fabbrichesi Leo (a cura di,) *Categorie*, Laterza, Roma-Bari 1992.

[7] Cfr. W. James, *Essays in Radical Empirism*, Longmans, Green, and Co, New York 1912, tr. it. di S. Franzese (a cura di), *Saggi di empirismo radicale*, Quodlibet, Macerata 2009.

[8] È la lezione di Max Scheler, seguita da Heidegger. A Max Scheler va il merito di aver ribaltato la concezione comune secondo la quale le emozioni appartengono alla sfera del caotico, dell'irrazionale e dell'involontario. Le emozioni, secondo la prospettiva fenomenologica delineata da Scheler, sono dotate di un'intrinseca intenzionalità. È l'emozione che, attivamente, percepisce il valore. Ogni soggetto è calato in un'atmosfera emotiva che funge da sfondo di tutti gli atti percettivi e rappresentativi, una coloritura affettiva, una *Stimmung*, che non è diretta verso nessun oggetto in particolare e che, dunque, rompe la barriera che separa l'io dal mondo, l'interno dall'esterno. La dimensione patica dell'esistenza, quella che Heidegger chiama *Befindlichkeit*, è l'apriori di tutti gli apriori. Nell'ambito fenomenologico, oltre Heidegger, altri pensatori hanno ereditato ed elaborato l'impostazione fondamentale di Scheler: Aldo Masullo e Michel Henry. Il primo, ispirandosi a Weizsäcker, individua la paticità come l'autentico sapere assoluto. L'uomo non solo è affetto da qualche cosa, ma è affetto da sé stesso, dalla propria capacità originaria di affezione. Insomma, l'affezione è lo strato primigenio dell'essere, la struttura ultima della realtà. In questa direzione si svolgono le ricerche di Michel Henry, la cui fenomenologia si rivolge alla Vita che sente sé stessa, che patisce la sua perpetua incarnazione. Anche nelle opere di Lynch è possibile individuare l'affezione non solo come la caratteristica preminente dell'umano che sente e sa di sentire, ma come il sigillo delle cose, della realtà. A questa dimensione insormontabile della vita si riferisce l'arte cinematografica. Essa è la traduzione vivente e in atto della paticità del vivere. Cfr. Max Scheler, *Der Formalismus in der Ethik und die materiale Wertethik*, Verlag von Max Niemeyer, Halle 1916, tr. it. di R. Guccinelli (a cura di) *Il formalismo nell'etica e l'etica materiale dei valori*, Bompiani, Milano 2013. Cfr. A. Masullo, *Paticità e indifferenza*, il melangolo, Genova 2003; A. Masullo, *Filosofie del soggetto e diritto del senso*, Marietti, Genova 2000, p. 172. Cfr. Michel Henry, *L'essence de la manifestation*, Presses universitaires de France, Paris 1963; tr. it. di G. De Simone (a cura di), *L'essenza della manifestazione,* Orthotes, Salerno 2018.

ster Wallace, «a Tarantino interessa qualcuno a cui stanno tagliando l'orecchio, a Lynch interessa l'orecchio»[9]. Ossia, ciò che conta non è il *come* dell'esistenza, ciò che può essere narrato, ma il *che*, il mistero irriducibile della sua presenza, l'eccedente gratuità di cui parla Sartre ne *La nausea*[10]. L'orecchio, in questa prospettiva, presenta una triplice articolazione simbolico-ontologica. Esso è *cosa*, *simbolo* e *cifra*. In quanto simbolo, l'orecchio è la concrezione vivente di una pluralità semantica che ci aiuta a penetrare lo spessore psicologico della narrazione. Esso simbolizza il rimosso che perpetuamente lacera la presunta compostezza della nostra coscienza; rimanda alla paura inconscia della castrazione e, dunque, alla struttura edipica della personalità di Jeffrey; incarna la fascinazione di Frank, il villain sadomasochista, per tutto ciò che è abietto, perverso. D'altro canto, l'orecchio non è solo simbolo, ossia cosa indisgiungibile dalla sovrapposizione infinita dei significati cui allude, ma è anche, e soprattutto, *cifra*, nel senso di Jaspers[11]. Il simbolo slabbra i confini che separano la cosa dai suoi significati: ciò che simboleggia e ciò

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[9] D.F. Wallace, *A Supposedly Fun Thing I'll Never Do Again: An Essays and Arguments*, Little, Brown and Co., Boston 1997; tr. it. di V. Ostuni, C. Raimo, M. Testa, *Tennis, Tv, Trigonometria, Tornado (e altre cose divertenti che non farò mai più)*, minimum fax, Roma 2018, p. 1984. Sulla stratificazione simbolica dell'orecchio in *Blue Velvet* e, in generale, sulla ricostruzione psicologica ed estetica dell'opera rimandiamo al saggio di Ofelia Catanea. Cfr. O. Catanea, *Velluto Blu* in P. Bertetto, *David Lynch*, Marsilio, Venezia 2008, pp. 58-80.

[10] J.P. Sartre, *La Nausée,* Gallimard, Paris 1938; tr. it. di B. Fonzi (a cura di) *La Nausea,* Einaudi, Torino 2014, p.177.

[11.] L'esistenza e la Trascendenza sono incommensurabili. Questo iato, apparente incolmabile, necessita di una mediazione. Ad assolvere la funzione mediatrice è la *cifra,* la quale non va confusa, secondo Jaspers, né col segno né col simbolo. Il segno è indice di un contenuto oggettivo ed è totalmente separato da ciò di cui è indice. Il simbolo, invece, è inseparabile dalla cosa di cui è simbolo. Entrambi, però, possono essere interpretati dalla *coscienza in generale*, dall'intelletto. La cifra, all'opposto, non parla al pensiero categoriale, logico-discorsivo, ma solo al fondo dell'esistenza possibile, alla mia libertà. La cifra non concerne un contenuto oggettivo, ma l'ulteriorità di senso della Trascendenza. Ora, come osserva David Foster Wallace, *lynchano* è un *significato ostensivo*, un significato che mostra sé stesso e che, dunque, può essere carpito e interpretato solo dall'interno, mediante sé stesso. Come la cifra, esso non sollecita la nostra mente discriminante, logica, ma il nostro sé autentico. I film di Lynch, come le cifre jaspersiane, non vanno spiegati attraverso nessi e cause – *Verstanden* – ma compresi esistenzialmente – *Verstehen*. Il *ridicolo sublime* – la categoria estetica coniata da Žižek per tentare di descrivere l'irriducibile compresenza nel cinema di Lynch di elementi assolutamente angosciosi ed elementi assolutamente banali – può essere *mostrato*, indirettamente, ma non può essere *dimostrato*. Cfr. K. Jaspers, *Der philosophische glaube anseigchts der Offenbarung* (1962), Piper, München-Zürich 1984; tr. it. di F. Costa (a cura di), *La fede filosofica di fronte alla rivelazione*, Longanesi, Milano 1970, p. 569. D. F. Wallace, *Tennis, Tv, Trigonometria, Tornado (e altre cose divertenti che non farò mai più)*, p. 198. Cfr. S. Žižek, *The art of the ridiculous sublime. On David Lynch's Lost Highway*, University of Washington Press, Washington 2000; tr. it. di D. Cantone, L. Chiesa (a cura di), *Lynch: Il ridicolo sublime*, Mimesis, Milano-Udine 2011.

che è simboleggiato costituiscono due aspetti di un unico evento. Eppure, il simbolo, benché differisca dal segno, dalla sua costitutiva dualità, nonostante si presenti come rivelazione infinita della cosa stessa, risulta sempre qualcosa di analizzabile dalla mente discriminante, dall'intelletto analitico. La cifra, invece, non rinvia a un contenuto, a qualcosa di verificabile logicamente. La cifra è la fisicità dell'inoggettivabile, della trascendenza dell'essere. L'orecchio non solo ci conduce nei cunicoli della narrazione, ma, allo stesso tempo, ci permette di trascendere il piano meramente diegetico. Quest'oltre del piano narrativo non è una qualità dell'esistenza, ma la sua inesauribile inconcettualità. Non è un affetto determinato, ma la radice patica di ogni affetto, la *Grundstimmung* di cui è intessuta l'esistenza. La stranezza del mondo, evocata a più riprese in *Blue Velvet*, è la nota fondamentale che spira tra le pieghe dell'esistenza. Il mondo è strano non solo perché ambiguo, contraddittorio, impasto indiscernibile di logos e caos, ma semplicemente perché è. La stranezza consustanziale all'esserci del mondo è la sua presenza, la sua indebita sporgenza dal niente. Da questo centro ontologico, sospeso sull'abisso, di cui l'orecchio lynchano è incarnazione, si irradiano le *Stimmungen* preminenti dell'esistere: angoscia e stupore.

Il cinema di Lynch, nei suoi momenti apicali, è certamente un cinema dell'*Unheimlich*[12], dell'ignoto che scava da dentro la trama di tutto ciò che ci è familiare e intimo. È l'esperienza che, in misura diversa, investe tutti i protagonisti delle opere lynchane. Si pensi al finale della seconda stagione di Twin Peaks, al ghigno terrificante di Dale Cooper, a quello sfondamento spaventoso della quarta parete. Il volto rassicurante di Dale si stinge dei suoi tratti abituali: irrompe nel suo sguardo una luce sinistra, altra. Questo evento, però, non concerne soltanto la struttura psicologica dei personaggi: è il mondo stesso, l'essere, ad essere *Unheimlich*, estraneo nella sua intimità, assurdo nella sua presunta ragionevolezza. Questo evento è un evento metafisico che estorce un sentire rivelativo: l'*Angst*.

È Heidegger ad aver descritto minuziosamente, sulla scorta della lezione kierkegaardiana, la portata metafisica dell'angoscia. Lo ha fatto nell'opera capitale del '29: *Was ist Metaphysik?*[13]. L'opera tematizza, da un'altra angolazione filosofica, la *differenza ontologica*, chiarendo la centralità

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[12] S. Freud, *Das Unheimliche* (1919) in *Sigmund Freud: Gesammelte Werke. Werke aus den Jahren 1917-1920*, S. Fischer Verlag, Frankfurt 1947; tr. it. di Cesare L. Musatti (a cura di), *Il perturbante* in *L'Io e l'Es e altri scritti. 1917-1923*, Bollati Borignhieri, Torino 1977, p. 103.

[13] M. Heidegger, *Was ist Metaphysic?* (1929), Vittorio Klostermann, Frankfurt 1949; tr. it. di F. Volpi (a cura di), *Che cos'è metafisica?*, Adelphi, Milano 2001, p. 55. Già in *Sein und Zeit*, il capolavoro incompiuto di Heidegger, il filosofo aveva tematizzato la valenza metafisica dell'angoscia. M. Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit* (1927), Niemeyer, Tübingen 1977; tr. it. di F. Volpi (a cura di), *Essere e tempo*, Longanesi, Milano 2006, pp. 225-233.

del significato inconcettuale di *niente* per la comprensione dell'essere. Il niente non può essere concettualizzato. La concettualizzazione del niente è la traduzione sul piano logico di un'esperienza esistenziale che coinvolge la totalità del nostro *Dasein*. L'*Angst* è la *Stimmung* che risuona in noi allorché il nulla dell'ente, l'essere, si mostra, si rivela. L'angoscia non è, dunque, un sentire psicologico, perché la sua fonte non è un che di determinato, ma la radice inoggettivabile di ogni determinazione. L'angoscia è il sentimento che sorge allorché l'essere rivela la sua infondatezza, la sua inesauribile trascendenza. Questo sentimento, però, che nasce dinanzi al dileguare dell'ente, alla sua abissale nudità, si trasfonde in stupore. Lo stupore, che rivela ulteriormente e compiutamente l'estaticità del sentire, nasce di fronte alla meraviglia delle meraviglie: l'essere non dovrebbe essere, dal momento che risulta sprovvisto di ragioni, fondamenti e cause, e invece è, sporge sul niente. Questa esperienza converte l'*Unheimlich*, la duplicità strutturale dell'ente, il suo arretrare respingente, in *Urheimlich.* La stranezza del mondo, lo insegna Lynch, non è il sigillo definitivo del reale. Essa riposa sul fondo primigenio, nella dimora primordiale da cui scaturisce ogni familiarità. Il mondo è sia il luogo del *ridicolo sublime*, del grottesco che si unisce misteriosamente all'inquietante, ma anche, e soprattutto, il luogo di una *Heimat* immarcescibile. Questa patria, alla quale l'uomo è destinato, è la coscienza pura, il campo unificato della fisica moderna. L'essere/nulla della meditazione heideggeriana e la coscienza pura cui fa riferimento la meditazione trascendentale praticata da Lynch alludono a un orizzonte della trascendenza in cui il male che intride di sé l'esistenza è a un tempo evidenziato e negato. Questa luce di cui la coscienza di ognuno è scintilla, bagliore, traccia, rivela la sua insondabilità in rari momenti. Pensiamo al finale di *Eraserhead* – il film, a detta di Lynch, più spirituale – a quello di *Fire Walk With Me*, calato nell'immaginario simbolico-estetico cristiano, oppure al lirismo che accompagna la generazione metafisica di Laura Palmer nell'ottavo episodio di *Twin Peaks – The Return*, ai finali poetici di *The Elephant Man* e di *The Straight Story.* In questi frangenti la luce della coscienza pura dà notizia di sé, rivelandosi come mistero abbacinante che non può essere esplicato, ma solo suggerito, mostrato, dalla potenza evocativa delle cifre. Qui l'*Urheimlich*, la dimora di ogni immagine e di ogni vita, il destino verso cui tende ogni esistenza, parla attraverso il linguaggio del cinema, l'unico linguaggio universale, il solo capace di ridestare il nostro sentire più profondo dal torpore generato dalla produzione ipertrofica delle immagini. Nell'epoca del mondo ridotto a immagine[14], a segno incapace di

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[14] È la tesi estetico-ontologica di Heidegger. Cfr. M. Heidegger, *Holzwege*, Vittorio Klostermann, Frankfurt 1950; tr. it. di P. Chiodi (a cura di), *Sentieri interrotti*, La Nuova Italia, Firenze 1968.

rimandare a un sostrato ontologico-reale, il cinema di Lynch costituisce un'autentica sveglia esistenziale. Esso ci invita a un nuovo tipo di comprensione, una comprensione che coinvolge non solo i nostri concetti, le nostre tassonomie intellettuali, ma l'irriducibilità originaria del nostro sapere intuitivo. La realtà che incontra il nostro sentire più profondo non è un dato, ma un testo suscettibile di infinite interpretazioni[15]. La verità, quella verità che in ultimo è l'unità profonda di sé ed assoluto, è una rivelazione inesauribile. Ma tra la verità, la sua trascendenza, e le interpretazioni esistenziali, le prospettive veritative che appartengono alla singolarità di ciascuno, si instaura un vincolo indissolubile. È lo stesso Lynch a porre l'accento su questo tratto ermeneutico del suo modus operandi e vivendi quando dice di credere fermamente all'equazione fra mondo e sguardo[16], tra verità e interpretazione. Tra l'interpretazione esistenziale della verità, un'interpretazione che coinvolge il sentire, e la verità in sé si forma un nesso *a-duale*. L'interpretazione esistenziale non è altro dalla trascendenza della verità, ma è il modo attraverso il quale la trascendenza della verità si assolve dalla sua trascendenza e si immanentizza, rendendo dicibile la sua indicibilità. Il buio della sala, per Lynch, è l'unico rituale contemporaneo capace di immergerci nell'orizzonte del sacro, in un silenzio inconsueto, nel quale le diverse interpretazioni esistenziali, le diverse singolarità degli spettatori, generano un tessuto intersoggettivo, una particolare comunione esistenziale. Ogni sguardo sull'essere che il cinema rappresenta non è mistificazione, contraffazione della sua intima verità, ma il modo tramite il quale l'eccedenza del vero si incarna, si dice. Il cinema per Lynch è un'*ontologia dell'inesauribile*[17].

2. Lynch, la mistica e la formatività dell'esistenza

Che cos'è la gestazione creativa per Lynch? Quale idea di arte emerge dalle sue opere? Giustamente è stata sottolineata l'importanza che riveste la meditazione trascendentale nella genesi artistica. L'artista, secondo il Nostro, abbisogna di immergersi nel fondo della coscienza pura, ciò che la mistica indiana chiama *ātman* e che la mistica cristiana, invece, designa

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[15] «D: Signor Lynch, il suo film mi è piaciuto davvero tanto e vorrei farle due domande. La prima è: che cos'è la realtà? Lynch: Non ho idea di cosa sia la realtà. Sono certo che, quando lo scoprirò, ne rimarrò sorpreso» D. Lynch, *David Lynch Interviews*, University Press of Mississippi, Jackson 2009; tr. it. di F. Graziosi, *Perdersi è meraviglioso. Interviste sul cinema*, a cura di R.A. Barney, minimum fax, Roma 2012, p. 220.

[16] D. Lynch, *In acque profonde. Meditazione e creatività*, cit., p. 27.

[17] È l'espressione coniata da Luigi Pareyson per definire la sua concezione ermeneutica della verità dell'essere. Cfr. L. Pareyson, *Verità e interpretazione*, a cura di G. Riconda, Mursia, Milano 1971, p. 11.

come *Grund der Seele*, fondo dell'anima. Non è il dolore, la sua fattualità, a generare il gesto artistico, bensì il suo trascendimento, la sua trasfigurazione. Solo nell'orizzonte della trascendenza, di una trascendenza immanente alla sorgività del sé, è possibile collocarsi nel luogo precipuo dell'arte. Senza il distacco dal proprio io, da quella *Eigenschaft* che in *Mulholland Drive* conduce alla follia di Betty/Diane, l'artista è un clavicembalo tintinnante, incapace di produrre la melodia propria dell'arte. Quella melodia che strappa il tempo alla sua triste monotonia, trasfigurando il suo procedere inesorabile nel luogo di rivelazione dell'eterno.

Il cinema di Lynch, più che essere la traduzione audio-visiva dell'antropologia centrata sull'inconscio di matrice freudiana, è sicuramente il tentativo di rielaborare in maniera creativa la visione *cosmoteandrica*[18] della mistica indiana. L'inconscio, inteso come ricettacolo delle pulsioni rimosse, dei desideri obliati per la loro scabrosità, è solo una dimensione, fra le altre, della totalità soggettiva. Le nevrosi, i disagi psicologici che sfilano sulla scena dell'immaginario lynchano, non sono riconducibili soltanto a traumi di matrice sessuale. Ciò che Lynch tenta di mettere in scena è l'alienazione spirituale, la totale rimozione del Sé e l'intensificazione ipertrofica dell'ego psicologico. L'itinerario dell'agente Cooper e di Laura Palmer non ricalca soltanto il mito di Orfeo, ma il percorso soteriologico di ogni uomo, il quale, sprovvisto della verità, dell'esperienza dell'illuminazione, vaga nella rete illusoria di Māyā, nella fantasmagoria del proprio desiderio egoico. La domanda che attraversa l'ultima grande opera di Lynch, il suo testamento estetico e spirituale, *Twin Peaks – The Return*, riguarda il principio di tutta la realtà. Riecheggiando Chuang-tzu[19], Lynch descrive la condizione di gettatezza dell'umanità. Ognuno è come il sognatore che vive e sogna dentro al sogno. Ognuno vaga nella trama illusoria della propria esistenza, chiedendosi chi sia il sognatore, la fonte da cui scaturisce tutta l'esperienza del mondo. Questa domanda è la stessa domanda che il giovane Ramana Maharshi, uno dei mistici più importanti della tradizione indiana, si pose allorché, all'età di sedici anni, visse un'esperienza di destrutturazione radicale del senso della sua esistenza, una *situazione-limite* in cui gli si fece innanzi il senso di una morte imminente. Questa esperienza, che si potrebbe facilmente derubricare

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[18] *Cosmoteandrica* è l'essenza stessa del cammino spirituale così come è inteso da Panikkar, il quale ha introdotto il neologismo nel lessico filosofico contemporaneo. Il cosmo, l'uomo e il divino non sono tre enti, ma il ritmo triadico di un'unica realtà. La mistica non è, allora, l'esperienza di visioni estatiche, soprannaturali, ma l'esperienza integrale della realtà, la realizzazione del ritmo trinitario che intride di sé ogni momento e ogni ente. Cfr. R. Panikkar, *Mistica e spiritualità. Vol. II: Spiritualità. Il cammino della vita*, a cura di M. C. Pavan, Jaka Book, Milano 2011.
[19] *Chuang-Tzu*, Gallimard, Parigi 1969; tr. it. di C. Laurenti, C. Leverd, *Chuang-Tzu*, a cura di Liou Kia-Hway, Adelphi, Milano 1982.

come un comunissimo attacco di panico, fu, invece, l'occasione per rivolgere lo sguardo su di sé, sulla propria realtà interiore. Egli si stese sul letto, in attesa del momento supremo, chiedendosi se con l'estinzione del corpo scomparisse anche quella luce della coscienza che si chiede della morte e della vita di sé e di tutte le cose. Mentre la morte incombeva, il Sé, la sua luce imperitura, diradò le tenebre dello spavento supremo. Dopo siffatta esperienza, egli restò in uno stato di immersione profonda, sperimentando l'assoluto trascendimento dell'ego, l'unità indissolubile col principio eterno che intride di sé tutte le cose. Egli, in una raccolta di scritti che condensano le sue direttive spirituali, scrive:

> Conoscere il proprio sé è conoscere Dio. Immaginare una divinità separata e meditare su di essa senza conoscere il proprio Sé che medita, viene paragonato dai grandi all'atto di misurare la propria ombra con il proprio piede, o di cercare una banale conchiglia dopo aver gettato la gemma inestimabile che già si possedeva.[20]

L'esperienza del Sé è l'esperienza dell'adualità tra Sé e l'Assoluto. Credere che l'Assoluto sia altro dal Sé significa ricadere nei dualismi dell'ego psicologico. Dio, la Realtà assoluta, non è un ente, un oggetto trascendente, posto al di là del mondo, ma la sostanza più intima del nostro esserci. È questa intimità la vera trascendenza, il sognatore posto a fondamento di tutti i sogni soggettivi descritti da Lynch. Come Ramana Maharshi, egli sostiene che tutta l'educazione deve poggiare sulla conoscenza esperienziale della *coscienza pura*[21], dal momento che la comprensione intellettuale della propria interiorità è insufficiente. Soltanto la meditazione, in quanto sapere metodico in prima persona, può aiutarci a sondare la profondità della nostra coscienza. La scienza occidentale, imperniata sull'oggettivazione integrale dell'essere, riduce il principio coscienziale, lo sguardo posto a fondamento di ogni sguardo sensibile, a cosa fra le cose. Essa, sostanzialmente, tratta l'interno come se fosse un esterno, il soggetto come se fosse un oggetto.

Anche la psicanalisi, ripudiata da Lynch per il suo determinismo, presenta una visione riduzionista dell'umano. L'unico indirizzo psicologico capace di restituire la stratificazione dell'umano avallata da Lynch e

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[20] R. Maharshi, *The colleted works of Sri Ramana Maharshi*, Weiser Books, New York 1959; tr. it. di M. Mingotti (a cura di), *Opere*, Astrolabio Ubaldini Editore, Roma 2012, p. 38. L'esperienza occorsa a Maharishi Yogi, il maestro di Lynch, pur differendo da quella di Ramana, sostiene lo stesso. Il Sé è l'approdo ultimo dell'esperienza spirituale, la verità ultima che libera dall'allucinazione egoica. Cfr. M. Yogi Maharishi, *Science of being and art of living*, International SRM Publications, London 1966; tr. it. di G. Fiandri (a cura di), *La scienza dell'essere e l'arte di vivere*, Astrolabio Ubaldini Editore, Roma 1970.
[21] D. Lynch, *In acque profonde. Meditazione e creatività*, cit., pp. 185-188.

dall'antropologia tripartita della mistica indiana è la psicosintesi di Assagioli[22]. Essa individua l'uomo nei suoi aspetti biologici, psicologici e spirituali. Il modello delineato da Assagioli, infatti, è costituito da un *inconscio inferiore*, identificabile grossomodo con l'inconscio di matrice freudiana; un *inconscio medio*, nel quale stazionano gli elementi inconsci deputati a trapassare più facilmente nella coscienza; un *inconscio collettivo*, sede degli archetipi, dei miti, e dei simboli; un *inconscio superiore*, nel quale affiorano i valori spirituali, le intuizioni artistiche, scientifiche, gli slanci etici. Questa dimensione dell'umano trascende i limiti dell'io empirico: è una dimensione transpersonale, spirituale, che sovente resta latente. L'obiettivo della psicosintesi è quello di ridestarla.

L'ovoide, il diagramma psicologico messo a punto da Assagioli, pone al centro l'io e alla sua estremità il Sé, l'*ātman*. L'io tende a identificarsi con i suoi contenuti coscienziali – pensieri, desideri, volizioni etc. –, il Sé, invece, è immutabile e indipendente dall'accidentalità dei contenuti coscienziali che avvincono l'egoità. L'obiettivo della psicosintesi è la *dis-identificazione* dell'io, il suo ricongiungimento alla realtà transpersonale del Sé. La nientificazione di ogni identificazione determinata e dunque relativa del mio esserci è un processo di progressivo distacco dall'io. Come insegna Meister Eckhart[23], l'autentico sapere è il triplice distacco dall'avere – *nichts haben* – dal volere – *nichts wollen* – e dal sapere stesso – *nichts wissen*. Chi non fa il vuoto *di* e *in* sé stesso, non può conoscere l'abisso della *Gottheit*, non riesce ad esperire l'identità fra il *Grund der Seele* e l'*Abgrund* dell'Uno, del Dio *sine modis*, al di là di ogni cifra e categoria. La storia di Joseph Merrick, il protagonista di *The Elephant Man*, interpretato da un sontuoso John Hurt, è la storia di un uomo che, faticosamente, trascende l'immagine della propria deformità fisica e di quella deformità che la spietatezza dell'*uomo-massa* ha proiettato su di

[22.] R. Assagioli, *The act of will*, The Viking Press, New York 1973; tr. it. di M.L. Girelli (a cura di), *L'atto di volontà*, Astrolabio Ubaldini Editore, Roma 1977, p. 19.

[23] Cfr. Il sermone *Quasi vas auri solidum* in Meister Eckhart, *La nobiltà dello spirito*, a cura di M. Vannini, SE, Milano 2016, p. 158. Il *Grund* di sé è il punto infinitesimale dell'anima che non è soggetto al tempo e allo spazio, la luce interiore che trascende l'intelletto e la volontà. Essendo privo di determinazioni, assolutamente semplice, è *nulla*, come nulla è l'Uno, la *Gottheit* che si oppone al *Gott* in relazione alle creature. Nell'ambito della filosofia classica tedesca, Fichte, seguito da Schelling ed Hegel, è stato il primo ad ereditare la lezione eckhartiana, ponendo al centro della sua *Wissenschaftslehre* la differenza tra l'*io divisibile* e l'*io puro – Icheit*. L'io puro, come il *Grund der Seele*, l'*ātman*, la *coscienza pura* evocata da Lynch, è la radicale soppressione di qualsiasi residuo individualistico e soggettivistico. L'io puro non è l'io creatore che ingloba in sé tutta la realtà. Esso, all'opposto, è l'immagine dell'Assoluto, della Vita, dell'esistenza, la concrezione di una realtà universale. Cfr. J.G. Fichte, *Wissenschaftslehre 1804* (1804), Vittorio Klostermann, Frankfurt 1966; tr. it. di M.V. D'Alfonso (a cura di), *Dottrina della scienza. Seconda esposizione del 1804*, Guerini e Associati, Milano 2000.

lui. La sua evoluzione narrativa ed esistenziale è un progressivo processo di disidentificazione da un io reificato da una società che aborre la diversità, la singolarità di ciascuno. La sua storia è l'elogio dell'irriducibile e inviolabile dignità umana, ma soprattutto il racconto della biforcazione tra io empirico e Sé. Il nostro io esteriore, il nostro volto, non racchiude l'infinità che deborda dalla luce del nostro sguardo, quella luce che riflette la luce del Sé: «l'acqua scorre, il vento soffia, la nuvola fugge, il cuore batte. Niente morirà mai». Tutto muta, tutto si decompone, ma la luce infinita e abissale del Sé, del *Grund der Seele*, è inestinguibile. Di questa luce eterna, indistruttibile, noi siamo scintilla, sogno.

Oltre alla connessione tra esperienza mistica ed esperienza estetica, in Lynch si fa largo una fenomenologia dell'esperienza artistica che lo approssima alla teoria della formatività tematizzata dal filosofo torinese Luigi Pareyson[24]. Per Lynch, l'artista non crea soltanto per tradurre nel linguaggio cinematografico una *Weltanschauung* preesistente. Il processo creativo non è eterodiretto, ma è il libero flusso delle idee che vagano per frammenti. Queste idee che emergono dal fondo della coscienza pura, che ne additano l'abissalità, sono in vista di una *forma*, di una materia visiva formata che è fine in sé. L'atto creativo, in quanto formazione della materia, è senza uno scopo intrinseco alla sua pura formatività. Seguendo implicitamente l'assunto principale attorno al quale ruota l'estetica di Pareyson, Lynch intende l'arte come un formare che, nell'atto singolare, irripetibile, del conferire forma ad una materia, ad una folgorazione eidetica, introduce un nuovo modo di formare. L'artista segue delle regole, una sintassi fondamentale, senza esserne vincolato. Egli è artista solo nella misura in cui conferisce nuovo significato alla grammatica di cui si serve, solo nella misura in cui non la subisce passivamente. Come il poeta, anche il regista si muove nella datità insormontabile della lingua, ma, nell'atto creativo, egli trasfigura la datità, la costrizione della regola, in occasione di libertà, in slancio auto-trascendente. La situatività apparentemente intrascendibile della regola da chiusura claustrofobica si trasforma in possibilità di apertura, nel luogo di intersezione tra singolare e universale, personale e impersonale. Il nuovo modo di formare, infatti, è, a un tempo, espressione del carattere irriducibile della persona dell'artista, atto indisgiungibile dalla sua singolarità e irriproducibilità, e possibilità di costituirsi come norma dell'agire artistico[25]. L'artista, Lynch ne è la prova, nel suo fare inventa un modo di fare che sintetizza la sua esistenza singolare e la

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[24] L. Pareyson, *Estetica. Teoria della formatività* (1954), Bompiani, Milano 1991.
[25] L. Pareyson, *La mia prospettiva estetica*, in *Problemi dell'estetica I. Teoria*, Mursia, Milano 2009, pp. 137-150. L. Pareyson, *Esistenza e persona* (1950), Genova 1985, pp. 213-226.

pretesa, inaggirabile per l'arte, di eleggere il proprio modo di formare a modello di riferimento dell'atto artistico.

L'equazione lynchana tra arte e vita, testimoniata non solo dai suoi scritti, ma anche dall'ultimo documentario dedicato all'artista, non a caso intitolato *The Art of Life*, non ripropone soltanto la sovrapposizione, fino alla totale identificazione, di vita e arte tipica del romanticismo. La vita è arte non solo perché, come dice Bene, ognuno è chiamato a fare di sé un capolavoro, ma perché ogni aspetto del vivere è intriso di artisticità. Non solo il vivere in sé è arte, materia informe che richiede di essere formata, plasmata dalla nostra esistenza singolare, ma ogni aspetto del vivere, dal più semplice al più grande, richiede un'arte, ossia un formare che, formando, inventa il proprio singolare modo di formare, la propria sintesi di singolarità e universalità, personalità ed esemplarità.

L'opera di Lynch incarna al meglio la formatività integrale di tutta l'esperienza umana. Le sue opere hanno introdotto un nuovo modo di concepire la narrazione cinematografica, il rapporto tra immagine e suono, facendo implodere la sterile distinzione tra cinema d'autore e cinema di genere. Il suo cinema è la radicale controparte della memoria cinefila archivistica, del citazionismo colto. La sua memoria dei classici, da Fleming a Wilder, passando per Fellini e Tati, è fin dal principio assunzione personale, trasfigurazione estetica, sublimazione in qualcosa di inedito, mai visto prima. Il cinema lynchano è l'arte dell'inaudito, dell'inedito, dell'invisibile che tracima dall'orlo del visibile[26].

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[26] Un ultimo lavoro biografico, disponibile per i lettori italiani, sulla concezione estetica ed esistenziale lynchana è il seguente: D. Lynch, *Essere artisti*, a cura di M. Borroni, Il Saggiatore, Milano 2023.

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Maria Poulaki

Diving in the Ocean of Consciousness: Altered States, Psychoanalysis and Trascendental Aesthetics in David Lynch

1. Introduction

The term "psychedelic" is often encountered when reading about the experience of David Lynch's (not just cinematic) work. For example, curator Klára Szarka writes on a collection of Lynch's photographs exhibited under the title *David Lynch: Small Stories*[1]:

> *Small Stories* takes visitors on a psychedelic journey through the world of emotions, humour, playfulness and restlessness, while unveiling past memories and scars. Similarly to his films, these images are dominated by dreams with the fundamental driving force of his poetic vision being the connection between the subconscious and reality.[2]

This quote contains some of the key notions around which the scholarship on Lynch has revolved, i.e., dreams and the subconscious. Here, I will attempt to focus on another term mentioned in this quote: the "psychedelic" quality of his work, not strictly defined as the condition resulting from the consumption of psychedelic substances, but in a wider sense of his work's affordances for altering and expanding consciousness.

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[1] Small Stories was first exhibited in January 2014 in Paris at the Museum of European photography. It was also later exhibited in Budapest (March-June 2019 at the Budapest Photo Festival, Kunsthalle Chamber Hall), and in Luxembourg in 2023 (Cercle Cité's *Ratskeller*; see https://cerclecite.lu/en/event/small-stories-by-david-lynch).

[2] *David Lynch: Small Stories*. In *Műcsarnok* Kunsthalle Budhapest website. Retrieved from: https://mucsarnok.hu/exhibitions/exhibitions.php?mid=56fWnDFkWJd2JWjm-JPVUUw (access May 5, 2024).

Both filmmakers and scholars[3] seem to agree that cinema and other cinematic media have the means not just to represent altered states of consciousness (often referred to as "ASCs"), but also to induce similar states in the minds of viewers, even though empirical research on this subject is still in its infancy[4]. As director Alejandro Jodorowsky, talking about his own "psychedelic" cinema, observed, "when one creates a psychedelic film, he need not create a film that shows the visions of a person who has taken a pill; rather, he needs to manufacture the pill"[5].

As Lynch has stated in interviews, he has never been a user of psychedelic substances[6]; however, his deep interest in altered states of consciousness – and indeed, in the unconscious more broadly – is expressed through his long-term commitment to the practice of transcendental meditation (TM), arguably made manifest in his work, which feels, as a commentator puts it, as if "you enter an 'altered state'"[7].

Even though Lynch's keen advocacy of TM, culminating in his "David Lynch Foundation for Consciousness-Based Education and World Peace" (a foundation for promoting meditation in schools), has been criticized by fans and scholars[8], his interest in meditation, and through it, in altered states of consciousness, could provide further insight into the interpretation of his work, and its link to the unconscious – which so far has been mainly discussed, in scholarly and also in lay publications, through a parallelism to dreaming. The connection between Lynch's artistic creation and meditation has not entirely escaped scholarly attention[9]. However, such approaches

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[3] See, for example, P. Sharits, *Notes on Films/1966-68 by Paul Sharits*, in "Film Culture" Vol. 47, 1969, pp.13-16; A. P. Sitney, *Visionary Film: the American avant-garde, 1943-2000*. Oxford University Press, New York 2002; A. Powell, *Deleuze, Altered States and Film*, Edinburgh University Press, Edinburgh 2007.

[4] For example, recent neurocinematic research explores the therapeutic potential of "clinical trance" and "movie-based auto-hypnosis". See W. Mastnak, *Neurocinematic Therapy: An interdisciplinary perspective*, in "Proceedings of the European Academy of Sciences & Arts", Vol. 3, No. 2, 2024.

[5] A. Jodorowsky, quoted in D. Church, *The Doors of Reception: Notes Toward a Psychedelic Film Investigation*, in "Senses of Cinema", Vol. 87, 2018. Retrieved from: http://www.sensesofcinema.com/2018/feature-articles/the-doors-of-reception-notes-toward-a-psychedelic-film-investigation/ (access May 11, 2024).

[6] D. Lynch, *Catching the big fish: Meditation, consciousness, and creativity*, Penguin, New York 2016, p. 176.

[7] C. Bliss, *Like Electric Gold: David Lynch, bliss and the dive within*. In CharlesBliss.com (Blog). *Retrieved from:* https://www.charlesbliss.com/newsletter/david-lynch-and-transcendental-meditation/ (access May 11, 2024).

[8] See for example D. Lim, *David Lynch: The Man From Another Place*. Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, Boston and New York 2015, Chapter 12.

[9] See for example Z. Sheldon, *The Artistic Evangelism of David Lynch: Transcendental Meditation, World Peace, and Laura Palmer,* in "NANO: New American Notes Online", Issue 15, 2020, p. 10. Retrieved from: https://openurl.ebsco.com/EPDB%3Ag-

have been very limited in comparison to other discussions focusing on the dream state as evoked by his films. According to Richard Barney, since Lynch first engaged in transcendental meditation in 1973, "his interest in altered, distended, and enhanced states of consciousness" remains intact, as well as his "unwavering commitment to exploring the radical transformation of ego-based identity, whether or not that venture may lead to profound serenity or harrowing distress"[10]. In the present article, I will examine both these outcomes of Lynch's quest to explore, represent and transmit a sense of "radical trans-formation of ego-based identity", deriving examples from two cases from his filmography, which indeed demonstrate different approaches and aesthetics of altering consciousness, either pointing at "profound serenity" or a "harrowing distress". But before getting to the specific cases, I will first explore Lynch's notion and experience of altering consciousness.

2. Lynch, oceanic consciousness, and the "unified field"

In the book *Catching the Big Fish*, where Lynch talks extensively about transcendental meditation and the influence it has had on his life and ar-tistic creation, he uses the embodied metaphor[11] of "diving within" what he refers to as the "ocean of consciousness" to describe his meditative ex-perience[12]. The path to oceanic consciousness comes for Lynch through meditation, and it is the guru of TM, Maharishi Mahesh Yogi, whom he quotes using this phrase, as well as the ancient Sanskrit texts Upanishads as the inspiration behind Maharishi's metaphor: "One unbounded ocean of consciousness became light, water, and matter. And the three became many. In this way the whole universe was created as an unbounded ocean of consciousness ever unfolding within itself"[13]. Life's origin in water, and the idea of differentiation coming from primordial oneness is resonating in many areas of knowledge and inquiry, connecting theories of cosmog-eny, ontogeny, as well as theories of psychic development.

Apart from the reference to Hinduism through the Upanishads, Lynch adopts another, scientific perspective to oneness, this time taken

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[10] R.A. Barney (a cura di), *David Lynch: Interviews,* University Press of Mississippi, Jack-son, MS 2009, p. xii.

[11] A field of knowledge opened by G. Lakoff and M. Johnson through their seminal work *Metaphors We Live by*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago 1980.

[12] D. Lynch, *Catching the Big Fish*, cit., p. 60, p. 90.

[13] Ivi, p. 92.

from physics, through the notion of the "unified field"[14]. Lynch's ideas on the unified field are not derived from Einstein's use of the term and the latter's suggestion of unified field theory, but from John Hagelin, a physicist who got affiliated with the Maharishi International University, and later became president of the David Lynch foundation. In the later 1980s and the 1990s, Hagelin became known for his work towards a unified field theory in quantum physics (particularly in superstring theory); most notably, he attempted to extend the idea of the unified field to the theory of consciousness, and thus provide support to Maharishi's beliefs. Even though this ideological appropriation of scientific research has not escaped criticism[15], Lynch endorses Hagelin's ideas and seems to believe that the notion of unified field gives scientific support to the connectivity and "oneness" of consciousness. He also notes the origins of this idea in ancient Vedic science, according to which "this ocean of pure consciousness is called Atma, the Self"[16]. In any case, bracketing out the science or pseudo-science involved in these claims, for Lynch "Transcendental Meditation is a simple, easy, effortless technique that allows any human being to dive within, to experience subtler levels of mind and intellect, and to enter this ocean of pure consciousness, the Unified Field – *the Self*"[17].

The same idea of an unbounded and limitless self, experiencing oneness with the world and the other is at the heart of psychoanalytical theories of subjectivity. Specifically, the metaphorical association of consciousness with the ocean, beyond its genealogy in Eastern religion and philosophy, has a separate (and of course much shorter) genealogy in psychoanalysis. In 1927, soon after the publication of his work *The Future of an Illusio*n, Freud sent a copy to Romain Rolland, an important intellectual (Nobel winner, dramatist, writer as well as mystic) at the time, to ask his opinion over the debated chapter where Freud lays out his thoughts on religion. Rolland responded with his theory that "true religion arose from the mystical experience of oneness with the world" which he called "the oceanic feeling" [*la sensation océanique*][18], a sensation of the eternal, of that

[14] See *Unified Field Theory*, in "Britannica". Retrieved from https://www.britannica.com/science/unified-field-theory. (access May 11, 2024).

[15] See J. S. Hagelin, *Is Consciousness the Unified Field?: A field theorist's perspective*, Maharishi International University, Fairfield, IA 1987, pp. 29-87. For criticism, see M. Shermer, *Quantum Quackery. A hit film justifies hogwash with quantum mechanics*, in "Scientific American", Vol. 292, No. 1, 2005, p. 22; V. J. Stenger, *Quantum Gods: Creation, chaos, and the search for cosmic consciousness*. Prometheus Books, New York 2009, pp. 60-62.

[16] D. Lynch, *Catching the Big Fish*, cit., p. 93.

[17] Ivi, p. 94.

[18] W. B. Parsons, *The Enigma of the Oceanic Feeling: Revisioning the psychoanalytic theory of mysticism*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 1999, pp. 3-4.

without perceptible limits. It is not a coincidence that Rolland's term was inspired by Hinduism[19]. At the beginning of his subsequent work, *Civilization and Its Discontents*, Freud responds to Rolland's idea, linking oceanic feeling to the first stages of psychic development, when there is no concept of autonomous self, but a "primary narcissistic union between mother and infant"[20]; some people, Freud thought, preserve such feeling in their adulthood. According to Levine, "Freud will variously speak of the oceanic feeling or the Nirvana principle as the living embodiment of the hidden drive for self-dispersion and self-dissolution"[21]. Freud's views on the oceanic feeling as "a sensation of eternity, a feeling as of something limitless, unbounded'"[22], are considered by scholars such as W. Parsons and A. Kokoszka to be his account of altered states of consciousness[23]. As Parsons summarizes, Freud's oceanic feeling is his "phenomenological account of mystical experience whose essence and keynote consists in the fact of 'unity'"[24].

3. Psychology of consciousness: from the ocean to the stream

Apart from Hinduism, Rolland had also been influenced by a seminal scientific-psychological work on transcendental or "mystical" experiences, *The Varieties of Religious Experiences* by William James, one of the most important psychologists involved in "the earliest period" of the "debate over mysticism" (1880-1930), according to Parsons[25]. Rolland was "deeply impressed" by James's experiential approach to mystical experience, and by the emphasis James placed on its subconscious aspects[26].

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[19] Among his many interests, Rolland was a researcher of Hinduism; he wrote the biography of Hindu religious leader Sri Ramakrishna introducing his thought to a Western audience (see A. Maharaya [S. Medhananda], *Debating Freud on the Oceanic Feeling: Romain Rolland's vedantic critique of psychoanalysis and his call for a new 'science of mind'*, in A. Maharaya [S. Medhananda] (Ed.), *The Bloomsbury Research Handbook of Vedānta*, Bloomsbury, London, pp. 197–223). According to Parsons, Rolland was "deeply immersed in the 'Oriental renaissance' sweeping Europe in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries". (See Parsons, *The Enigma, cit.*, p. 13)
[20] W. B. Parsons, *The Oceanic Feeling Revisited,* in "The Journal of Religion" Vol. 78, No. 4, 1998, pp. 501-523, p. 501.
[21] S. Z. Levine, *Seascapes of the Sublime: Vernet, Monet, and the Oceanic Feeling*, in "New Literary History", Vol. 16, No. 2, 1985, pp. 377-400, p. 398.
[22] S. Freud, quoted in A. Kokoszka *States of Consciousness: Models for psychology and psychotherapy*, Springer, New York 2007, p. 71.
[23] Kokoszka, *cit.*, p. 72.
[24] W. B. Parsons, *The Enigma of the Oceanic Feeling: Revisioning the psychoanalytic theory of mysticism*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 1999, p. 10.
[25] Ivi, p. 8.
[26] Ivi, p. 65.

For James, the spiritual feeling (in all different forms, from Hinduism to Catholicism), which he too associates with a feeling of being "one" with the universe, stems mainly from the subconscious. In his study *Varieties of Religious Experience* he writes:

> The spiritual in man appears in the mind-cure philosophy as partly conscious, but chiefly subconscious; and through the subconscious part of it we are already one with the Divine without any miracle of grace, or abrupt creation of a new inner man. As this view is variously expressed by different writers, we find in it traces of Christian mysticism, of transcendental idealism, of vedantism, and of the modern psychology of the subliminal self.[27]

James referred to studies by George A. Coe that showed that spontaneous religious conversion was found more frequently in subjects with an "active subliminal self", prone to alterations of consciousness (for example, showing "hypnotic sensibility" or "such automatisms as hypnagogic hallucinations")[28]. Considered the first psychologist making a major contribution to the study of altered states, James studied many varieties of this "subliminal self" in the form of altered states of consciousness, including hypnotic trance, "vacancy" or lethargy[29], hypnagogic hallucinations, etc. Thus people susceptible to hypnotism and other such altered states in-between waking and sleeping are thus those in possession of an active subliminal self.

It would be easy to classify Lynch himself into this category. James's descriptions of subliminal experience resonate with Lynch's lucid account of transcending, alluding to a hypnagogic state:

> Many people have already experienced transcending, but they may not realize it. It's an experience that you can have just before you go to sleep. You're awake, but you experience a sort of fall, and you maybe see some white light and get a little jolt of bliss. And you say, "Holy jumping George!" When you go from one state of consciousness to another – for instance, from waking to sleeping – you pass through a gap. And in that gap, you can transcend.[30]

As a visual artist and filmmaker Lynch describes quite vividly (and in a manner that resonates with visual motifs prominent in his films) how

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[27] W. James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience: A study in human nature. Being the Gifford Lectures on Natural Religion delivered at Edinburgh in 1901-1902*, Longmans, Green, and co., New York 1917, p. 101.
[28] Ivi, p. 235.
[29] W. James, *The Principles of Psychology, Volume 1*, Chapter XI "Attention", p. 404, The Project Gutenberg Ebook. retrieved from https://www.gutenberg.org/files/57628/57628-h/57628-h.htm.
[30] D. Lynch, *Catching the Big Fish*, cit., p. 96.

this gap, and the oceanic (or, as he calls it, "pure bliss"[31]) consciousness experienced in it, feels like:

> I picture it like a round white room that has yellow, red, and blue curtains covering the white wall. The curtains are three states of consciousness: waking, sleeping, and dreaming. But in the gap between each curtain, you can see the white of the Absolute – the pure bliss consciousness. You can transcend in that little piece of white. Then you come to the next state of consciousness. The white room really is all around you all the time, even though the curtains cover most of it; […] With Transcendental Meditation, from the waking state of consciousness you can experience that white wall anytime when you sit and meditate. That's the beautiful thing about it.[32]

Even though, as already broached, the theme of dreaming is prominent in his films, Lynch seems to be interested in the transitions between the different states of consciousness more than he is in just the single state of dreaming – in "the gap between each curtain". "Bliss" lies, according to him, with the transition that allows to feel the connection of all different states, the undifferentiated "unified" field where all particular states of consciousness, with all sensations, thoughts and perceptions, emanate from.

Instead of looking for a scientific explanation for transcendence in physics (like Lynch does through the notion of the unified field), I find more productive linking his observations to the psychology of altered states of consciousness, of which James is a pioneer. He took interest in this transitory terrain between waking and sleeping, as already broached, that offers a glimpse of the "white room", to use Lynch's words. In James's view such experiences take place "in the twilight of general consciousness"[33]; the latter can be imagined as a constantly flowing stream (his famous notion of the "stream of consciousness"), which is attuned, through the "breathing and pulses of attention" that populates it, to a "changing process", a rhythm[34]. The rhythm of the stream contains "the *resting-places*", or "*substantive parts*", and the *"places of flight"*, or the "*transitive parts*"[35]. The move from one substantive part to another is ini-

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[31] Ivi, p. 97.
[32] Ivi, pp. 96-97.
[33] W. Wundt, quoted in J. James, *Principles of Psychology*, cit., p. 637.
[34] W. James, *The Principles of Psychology*, cit., p. 620. James draws particularly on the phenomenon of "fluctuations of attention" observed by Wilhelm Wundt and his students in the school of experimental psychology in Leipzig (see D. Lehmann, *Brain Electric Microstates, and Cognitive and Perceptual Modes*, in P. Kruse, M. Stadler (a cura di.), *Ambiguity in Mind and Nature: Multistable cognitive phenomena*, Springer-Verlag, Berlin 1995, pp. 407-420, p. 411).
[35] W. James, *Principles of Psychology*, cit., p. 243.

tiated by some sort of change, a sensation internal or external or "a process of attention or volition"[36]. We only attend to the substantive parts, while the transitive parts are hidden in the "twilight" of consciousness.

In the writer's words:

> In either case [the substantive part] stands out from the other segments of the stream by reason of the peculiar interest attaching to it. This interest *arrests* it, makes a sort of crisis of it when it comes, induces attention upon it and makes us treat it in a substantive way. The parts of the stream that precede these substantive conclusions are but the means of the latter's attainment[37].[…] It then appears that the main end of our thinking is at all times the attainment of some other substantive part than the one from which we have just been dislodged. And we may say that the main use of the transitive parts is to lead us from one substantive conclusion to another.[38]

We do not attend to the transitive parts of the stream, those gaps between the substantive parts described by James as "aching" for being filled[39]; and any thought and mental image or state we experience in-between "swims in a felt fringe of relations"[40] with the substantive part to which attention as well as fully conscious perception is attracted. Transitive parts are diffuse, and arguably unconscious. But they make this "glue" between substantive parts; creating the unity of consciousness that resonates with Lynch's idea of the "unified field" or "white room" which serves as the background and container of all distinct states of consciousness.

Despite long-held theoretical disagreements and misunderstandings revolving around James' acknowledgement (or not) of unconscious processes, as Joel Weinberger points out, his notion of the stream of consciousness includes an account for the unconscious; particularly the notion of the fringe surrounding and accompanying all substantive parts is "clearly a model of unconscious processing": "The fringe is not directly represented in consciousness. It is the latent (unconscious) connotation of our thoughts"[41].

Bridging the gap between James's discussion of the stream of consciousness in his major work *Principles of Psychology* and his discussion

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[36] Ivi, p. 620.
[37] Ivi, p. 260.
[38] Ivi, p. 243.
[39] "Whatever may be the images and phrases that pass before us, we feel their relation to this aching gap. To fill it up is our thoughts' destiny." Ivi, p. 260.
[40] *Ibidem*.
[41] J. Weinberger, *William James and the Unconscious: Redressing a Century-old misunderstanding*, in "Psychological Science", Vol. 11, No. 6, 2000, pp. 439-445.

of altered states in the same work as well as in others (like *The Varieties of Religious Experience* previously mentioned), we can consider altered states as modifications of the stream (instead of thinking of a separate, parallel stream altogether, as it has been suggested)[42]. In this vein, techniques such as meditation can be seen as methods of intentional modification of the experience of the stream, of letting oneself fall in its transitive "gaps" where attention is not resting on anything in particular, but stays diffused and lets itself swim in the fringes of experience, between its "substantive parts".

4. Meditation and altering consciousness

Meditative traditions differ both in their methods and their results (as well as the beliefs they reflect). A main difference is in the way they involve attention in their techniques to reach transcendence. One large category of meditative practice requires attentional concentration and is thus called "advanced concentration meditation" (or "concentrative (object) meditation", or "focused attention" mediation), while the other category is mentioned as "open monitoring meditation"[43]. In the former, attention gradually changes from "active and concentrated" to "still and absorbed"[44], as well as effortless, while in the latter, "the practitioner observes the occurrence of thoughts but does not engage with them"; object orientation is low as attention is not attached to any object in particular[45]. By "training" attention to let go, meditation loosens anchors to the "substantive parts" of consciousness; this could be imagined as a process of voiding attention and consciousness of its objects – phenomenologically experienced, as Lynch describes, as a feeling of diving into an ocean where no particular "wave" is different than another[46].

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[42] See T. Natsoulas, *The Stream of Consciousness: VIII. James's ejective consciousness (First Part)*, in "Imagination, Cognition and Personality", Vol. 14, No. 4, 1994-5, pp. 333-352.

[43] Markovic and Thompson, *Hypnosis and Meditation*, cit. J. Markovic, E. Thompson, *Hypnosis and Meditation: A neurophenomenological comparison*, in A. Raz, M. Lifshitz (Eds.), *Hypnosis and Meditation: Towards an integrative science of conscious planes*. Oxford UP, Oxford 2017, pp. 79-106. See also M. Lifshitz, A. Raz, *Hypnosis and Meditation: Vehicles of attention and suggestion*, in "The Journal for Mind-body Regulation", Vol. 2, No.3, pp. 3-11. Different visual points of concentration can be employed, such as mandala patterns, steadily moving or changing objects – e.g. a swinging pendulum, a ticking clock, or candlelight, etc. But focalization practices could also involve rhythm (such as the repetitive act of breath, a repeated word or sound, like a mantra, etc.).

[44] Markovic, Thompson, *Hypnosis and Meditation*, cit., p. 86.

[45] Ivi, p. 89.

[46] A process often described as equivalent to meditation in Western science is the phenomenological practice of *epoch*é, a concept first defined by Husserl as "the com-

Engaging in a comparative meta-analysis of studies on different kinds of meditation, Travis and Shear classify the type of meditation practiced by Lynch, namely transcendental meditation (TM), under a third category, aside concentrative and open monitoring meditation: what they call "automatic self-transcending"[47]. They describe it as meditation that through automatism ("relaxed attention to special sounds (mantras) repeated silently within the mind") reaches a level where the technique itself effortlessly disappears – in the sense that it does not need to be actively sustained anymore. The result is an "experience of unusual global states of consciousness, including in particular states devoid of phenomenological objects", reportedly feeling "objectless" and "empty"; in other words, "a deep, apparently phenomenologically qualityless stratum of consciousness"[48].

So far I have briefly discussed both Western Psychology's early interest in altered states (through the work of James) and cultural traditions of reaching such states (meditation); associating Lynch's reports of his experience of transcending with both. Letting go of particular attentional objects, feeling the "transitive" nature of the stream of consciousness, falling in the "gaps" between "substantive" thoughts and objects, in an intermediary and transitory state not aligning with waking consciousness but with hypnagogic states[49], and thus reaching a feeling of bliss: it would be challenging to think of all these aspects of experiencing transcendence in relation to aesthetics in Lynch's work.

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plete exclusion of every assumption, stipulation, and conviction with regard to objective time." See E. Husserl, *On the Phenomenology of the Consciousness of Internal Time (1893–1917)* (Vol. 4)., Springer Science & Business Media, Dodrecht 1991. Like meditation, *epoch*é as phenomenological practice aims at this exclusion of external influence, reaching a state of "letting go", of putting to rest the fluctuations of attention, in order to make felt the "ground" of consciousness out of which all particular perceptions and thoughts emerge.

[47] F. Travis, J. Shear, *Focused Attention, Open Monitoring and Automatic Self-transcending: Categories to organize meditations from Vedic, Buddhist and Chinese traditions*, in "Consciousness and Cognition", Vol. 19, No. 4, 2010, pp. 1110–1118, doi:10.1016/ j.concog.2010.01.007.

[48] *Ibidem*.

[49] Meditation has often been compared in its technical, phenomenological and neuropsychological aspects to another intermediary state between waking and sleeping, namely hypnosis (a Western medical practice popular in the 19th century but later devalued). The two have been found similar "in the attentional and concentration practices employed that result in altered states of consciousness" (see De Benedittis, G., *Neural Mechanisms of Hypnosis and Meditation*, in "Journal of Physiology – Paris", Vol. 109, 2015, pp. 152-164, p. 161; also see U. Ott, *States of Absorption: In search of neurobiological foundations*, in G. A. Jamieson (Eds.) *Hypnosis and Conscious States: The cognitive neuroscience perspective,* Oxford UP, New York 2007, pp. 257-270), as well as in "altered boundaries of the self and an altered perception of reality" (R. J. Pekala and E. J. Forbes, quoted in Markovic and Thompson, *cit.*)

5. Aesthetic manifestations of "diving in" the ocean of consciousness

In a sense, cinematic transcendence has been a main object of film theory for decades; Apparatus Theory[50] has addressed it as a dream-like state where spectators enter, aided by the conditions of projection as well as by the unconscious processes of identification at play. (Dreaming is here again, the main point of reference for the state of consciousness that cinema induces). The association of cinema with trancing has been a steady preoccupation in scholarship – from Jonathan Crary's *Suspensions of Perception*[51], a study positioning cinema as a crucial 20th century cultural practice of modifying and altering attention and consciousness, to Utte Holl's *Cinema, Trance and Cybernetics* – where the use of the term "cinema-trance" defines the medium as "a cultural technique of trance and transformation"[52], a system "that expresses and alters perception and the corresponding nerve-psychological relations in bodies as it transmits its impulses"[53]. In the context of such wider association of the medium of cinema with transcendence, however, it is less easy to highlight specific aesthetic moving image configurations as affording trance-like responses. Paul Schrader's book *Transcendental Style in Film: Ozu, Bresson, & Dreyer* offered perhaps the first comprehensive study of specific aesthetic attributes of films that can express "transcendental style" – which he approached as different ways filmmakers used to express "the Holy", or "spiritual emotions"[54]. Here I would like to suggest a different way to approach transcendental aesthetics through juxtaposing film techniques with techniques of specific trancing practices such as meditation.

Of course, film, and especially narrative film, is not a medium that is often associated with the type of transcendence that meditation achieves. After all, film's affordances for transcendence are mostly attributed to the effect of narrative transportation, which does not require attention to deepen, widen and become still and objectless, as in most types of meditative practice, but to flow from one narrative event to the other. Film constantly directs and manipulates attention, for some "attuning" to its

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[50] Among other contributions to this branch of theoretical approaches to cinema (such as those by Raymond Bellour, Jean-Louis Baudry, Jean-Pierre Oudart, and others), see Christian Metz's *The Imaginary Signifier: Psychoanalysis and the cinema,* Indiana University Press, Bloomington and Indianapolis 1981.
[51] J. Crary, *Suspensions of Perception: Attention, spectacle, and modern culture*, MIT Press, Cambridge, MA 1999.
[52] U. Holl, *Cinema, Trance and Cybernetics*, Amsterdam University Press, Amsterdam 2007, p. 13.
[53] Ivi, p. 23.
[54] See P. Schrader, *Transcendental Style in Film: Ozu, Bresson, Dreyer*, University of California Press, Berkeley 1972, p. 3.

natural fluctuations[55]. However, in films diverging from the established mainstream modes of storytelling, such as Lynch's, the treatment of attention can be more complex, with structures of emptying and voiding attention coexisting with, and at times prevailing over, conventional cinematic structures for guiding attention.

The transcendental aesthetics of Lynch's work in connection to his meditative practice have not escaped scholarly attention; for example, Nowocień and Szejko have focused on such aesthetics manifesting in the film *Blue Velvet*, noting its "combination of meditation music, slow sequences as well as contemplation of human mind and emotional reactions" characteristic of what they call "transcendental cinema", which, according to the authors, "teaches paying attention to single stimulus and staying in one thought"[56]. They describe it as a type of

> slow cinema featuring long shots, austere camerawork and acting devoid of self-consciousness. […] All these features [they argue,] bring transcendental style closer to philosophy of mindfulness characterized by the practice of purposely bringing one's attention to experiences occurring in the present moment without judgment.[57]

Taking into account such views on "meditative" cinematic practices, but also trying a different way to approach aesthetics of altering consciousness in film, I will attempt to trace instances in Lynch's work that afford voiding of consciousness and attentional diffusion, and can be considered to have a meditative effect in this sense. Aesthetics that can be thought as trance-inducing may be found in scenes that audiovisually embody a sense of "diving within", feeling unbounded and losing the sense of a separate self.

6. A straight path to transcendence

Out of Lynch's filmography, perhaps the most explicitly "meditative" film, adhering to the perspective on transcendental aesthetics adopted by authors such as Nowocień and Szejko, is *Straight Story* (1999). It is one of the later titles in Lynch's filmography and makes a stand-alone case, being perhaps his most straight-forward narrative film. It tells the

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[55] See J. Cutting, A. Candan, *Movies, Evolution and Mind: From Fragmentation to Continuity*, In "*The Evolutionary Review*", Vol. 4, No. 1, 2013, pp. 25-36.

[56] J. Nowocień, N. Szejko, *Transcendental Cinema and Psychiatry. The case of Blue Velvet by David Lynch*. In "European Psychiatry", Vol. 64, No. 1, 2021, doi: 10.1192/j.eurpsy.2021.1993

[57] *Ibidem*.

linear, literally and figuratively, (true) story of Alvin Straight, the elderly man who decides to visit his estranged brother at the other side of the country using the only means of transportation he can have under control and drive, that is his old lawn mower. The script was not written by Lynch himself but by John Roach and Mary Sweeney, making this certainly less personal than other titles in his filmography. Transcendental aesthetics is embedded in *Straight Story*'s narrative structure and at the same time foregrounded by means of style, especially, as I am going to argue, through an abundance of shots having "fractal" properties.

Fractals are structures in nature and culture that have mathematically been proven to be self-similar in different scales. Ruth Herbert notes the fractal properties of many invariant and self-similar structures in nature and the living environment, among which stars and fire, as well as landscapes, both man-made (e.g. cityscapes), and natural[58]. Sounds "such as wind, rain, and running water" are also "fractally invariant"[59]. According to Herbert, the regularity and iterative nature of fractals allow their classification with other "repetitive figurations"[60] such as mandalas, i.e. graphical symbols representing the universe is Hindu and Buddhist traditions, which are used as visual aids for meditation, because their shape's regularity restricts attention and affords "absorption"[61] (a kind of deep and still attention associated with meditation) and trancing.

As already broached, fractal motifs flourish in *Straight Story*. Prominent ones are the aerial shots of corn fields not "contained" in a single frame but revealed through multiple self-similar shots of different width and length, combined through editing to offer different views of the landscape from various distances. Also, close ups of fire (that the protagonist lights when he camps on the side of the road overnight) are frequently inserted into dialogue scenes. The sight of stars is another recurring fractal visual motif, serving a narrative purpose (as they are associated with a childhood memory of the protagonist with his brother) as well as contributing to viewer's absorption. At the end of the film the fractal structure of stars is explored through camera movement, with the last shot being a continuous, slow and hypnotic zoom into the night sky, with the end credits superimposed on the shot without cutting.

The slow pace of camera movement is characteristic throughout *Straight Story*, especially following the equally slow-paced but steadily moving forward trajectory of the hero on his lawn mower towards his

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[58] Ivi, p. 181.
[59] Tooby and Cosmides, quoted in Herbert, *cit.*, p. 181.
[60] R. Herbert, *Everyday Music Listening: Absorption, dissociation and trancing*, Ashgate, Farnham 2011, p. p. 153.
[61] Ivi, p. 162.

destination. The frequent shots of the road resonate with the narrative's linear structure, also conveying the sense of a "straight line" – literally giving shape to the stubborn and persisting goal of the protagonist to reach his brother. However the sheer act of moving forward down this never-ending road, which is always changing and always seeming the same, shares some of the meditative affordances of the fractal images.

Through the frequent insertion of fractal shots such as those described, as well as by connecting different layers of cinematography, editing, and sound (the lyrical synth-based soundtrack composed by Lynch's steady collaborator Angelo Bandalamenti) through self-similar patterns, Lynch prepares for the viewer transitions between the "waking" conventional narrative parts and the non-narrative inserts (i.e. the fractal shots as transitive parts) that afford shifts in attentional concentration, causing attentional diffusion and affording an experience akin to trancing. In the end this proves to be a not-so-straight story, cinematically creating an embodied metaphor of the transitive nature of consciousness[62], allowing the mind to wander and get lost in the gaps between the film's beginning and ending – which feel like eternity. A sense of bliss or "profound serenity" is thus transferred not just through the narrative resolution (the hero's apparent reunion with his brother) but through the overall experience of the film.

7. A different case of transcendental aesthetics in *Eraserhead*

Even though a definition of transcendental cinema such as that given by Nowocień and Szejko highlights cinematic aesthetics with "meditative" properties, such as attentional focusing and "letting go" of intentional objects, aesthetics of altering consciousness (a term I prefer over transcendental[63]) can also be thought, as already broached, in terms of various stylistic techniques constituting embodied metaphors of mental transportation.

In his own discussion of meditation, Lynch keeps using embodied spatial metaphors to refer to his experience of trancing; i.e. "you go to the Unified Field beneath the building – pure consciousness"[64]. Thus, scenes of falling into or entering openings, tunnels and corridors, holes

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[62] As well as an excellent example of the "source-path-goal" conceptual metaphor in its cinematic embodiment (see G. Lakoff and M. Johnson, *Philosophy in the Flesh: The embodied mind and its challenge in Western thought*, Basic Books, New York 1999).
[63] The term "transcendental" has been used in this context in the sense of transcending / trancing, and not in the sense the term has in philosophy – as in transcendental idealism.
[64] D. Lynch, *Catching the Big Fish*, cit., p. 172.

and chasms can be considered as embodied metaphors of trancing which allude to alterations of consciousness. Lynch's early film *Eraserhead* abounds in such images – which I will attempt to describe in more detail.

In its opening sequence, the superimposed head of the protagonist of the film, Henry, appears floating against a black background of night sky full of stars. A very slow zoom into the sky bypasses Henry and approaches a dark, round and rough-surfaced object, which gives the impression of a planet. The camera flies close above the object exploring its texture. A few shots later, the moving viewpoint descends and "enters" a black hole in what seems like a building on the ground of the planet. While an alien creature in the shape of an umbilical cord or sperm emerges out of Henry's open mouth, a mysterious man shown sitting by a window inside the building pulls some levers which seem to cause the creature's ejection towards an unknown direction.

The film being black and white accentuates textures and at the same time makes it hard to discern light from darkness, as well as forms from their contours. An illuminated circular form on the surface of the planet is recognized as a pond only when the creature is thrown into it causing a splash of water. A few frames later a white circular object moving horizontally in black background turns out to be the opening of the same pond now seen from within its dark depth, probably from the perspective of the creature that dived in it, which we now share. The sense of orientation is at first ambiguous, as it is uncertain whether the moving POV we share is still "diving in" or ascending towards this white hole. Finally passing through its gap to the light and transferred out we can hardly discern the shadow of what seems like hair in the contours of the hole; this impression is enforced by the subsequent shot: an image of Henry's head, first time seen upright rather than horizontally, with its characteristically tall and bushy hair. The match between the two shots creates an association suggesting that the mysterious creature is being brought out into the world through Henry's head (something actually depicted later in the film). This "world" is also new to us viewers; it seems like we're out of a surreal dream or nightmare of the opening abstract sequence into what feels like a more "real" diegetic world, in a sense being "born" with the creature, with whose perspective we have aligned.

With the passage from the opening sequence to the main body of the film, a world of round objects and floating movement is substituted by one that is more rectangular and upright. Yet another passage, this time through a tall imposing gate in an industrial landscape, takes us with the protagonist to one more layer of this "real world" where his story will unfold. In this part of the plot he will again encounter the creature, mysteriously having been born by a woman (Mary) who seems to be Henry's girlfriend and claims it to be their child, even though all seems incom-

prehensible to him. Henry himself seems to be just born too, with his terrified and full of questions facial expression, while the absence of any backstory or exposition on who his character is reinforces this impression to the viewer.

Images of chasms and holes recur in this part of the film, reminiscing some of the opening shots. For example, the image of the pond on the "planet" in the opening sequence resonates with later scenes featuring holes filled with water – like the puddle full of muddy water in which Henry accidentally steps as soon as he exits into the "world" – or the pond where later, in what gives the feeling of a dream sequence, he and his mysterious neighbor find themselves making love, eventually being swallowed into its murky waters.

A more complex recurring motif in the film is that of the (spatial-graphic as well as conceptual) juxtaposition of positive and negative. Round forms and objects seem to act as the "positive" doubles of holes and gaps. The prominent solid form in the film is of course the "head", in all its different variations, oversized and deformed (like the head of the "radiator lady" starring in the protagonist's phantasies), or even decapitated, like Henry's head lying on the floor in a nightmarish scene[65]. Moreover, the frequent juxtaposition of close-ups of heads, especially the protagonist's and his "child's", suggests an exchange and connection between him and the creature, as if one's lack is filled by the other, through some sort of transformation of one into the other. The latter could not be made more explicit than in the scene of (another) nightmare where the sperm-like creature "pops out" of the protagonist's head, knocking it off.

A variation of the pattern of positive-negative is also found in the binary opposition between sharpener and eraser; in the characteristic surreal scene at the pencil factory, the protagonist's head serves as the sharpener triggering the assembly line-style "reproduction" of numerous pencils, in a mechanical and at the same time uncontrollable fashion. This opposition and juxtaposition of positive-negative (including the variations of sharpener-eraser) makes a recurring conceptual and symbolic pattern in the film, accentuating its existential concerns – in my reading having to do with reproduction, and its uncontrollable nature, meaning the impossibility to control one's own birth and existence. The notion of the eraser alludes to the desire to "erase" and

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[65] The function of the head as passage in *Eraserhead* is reminiscent of another organ functioning as such, in his later film, *Blue Velvet*; the ear. "It had to be an opening through the body" Lynch remarked in an interview about *Blue Velvet*, (Barney, *David Lynch: Interviews, cit.*, p. 38). Indeed in that film, the ear serves as the portal for the transportation through its labyrinth back and forth the "underworld" and the surface world, the conscious and the unconscious, making *Blue Velvet* another transcendental – both conceptually and aesthetically – film by Lynch.

undo, perhaps by returning to a phase of primordial existence before birth (alluded to in the opening sequence).

This "desire" is perhaps fulfilled by the film's closure. The final sequence completes a circle returning to the theme and the visual motifs of the opening sequence: the inflated head of the child/creature turns into the dark planet we saw at the beginning, with editing making the graphic match between the two prominent. The "planet" then cracks like an egg under the terrified gaze of Henry whose head is shown in reverse shot against a background of stardust and stars. The crack reveals a black hole inside the planet toward which we are attracted, entering it with a zooming camera movement. We are then found again in the same place where the creature was initially spewed out from, and the last shot of the film finds Henry embracing the radiator lady, now more evidently a mother-like figure, until everything gets washed in white light and dissolves.

8. Psychoanalytical and other interpretations

Adopting a psychoanalytical perspective, it would be rather easy to link *Eraserhead*'s images of holes and cavities to Oedipal concerns, like phantasies of penetration and fears of castration. Todd McGowan's Lacanian reading of *Eraserhead* is intriguing, as it aligns the mysterious creature of the film with Lacan's reference to an amoeba-like creature he called "lamella" and used as a metaphor for "what the sexed being loses in sexuality"[66], "the life substance itself"[67], on the lack of which (and the resulting dissatisfaction) every desire for the Other is grounded in later life. Indeed, the very notion of "life", and beyond it, as already mentioned, existence itself, seems to be the central concern in the film – this becoming manifest through the use of image schemas that act as material embodied metaphors of the passage into existence.

Even though the application of the theory of embodied metaphors to cinema adopts a primarily cognitive perspective[68], traditionally contrasted to the psychoanalytical one, the two can be combined. Embodied metaphors in cinema can be thought to operate through what Christian

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[66] J. Lacan, *Seminar XI*, quoted in T. McGowan, *The Impossible David Lynch*, Columbia University Press, New York 2007, p. 31.
[67] McGowan, *Ibidem*.
[68] See M. Coëgnarts, *Cinema and the Embodied Mind: Metaphor and simulation in understanding meaning in films*, in "Palgrave Communications", 2017; M. Coëgnarts, P. Kravanja, *Embodied Visual Meaning: image schemas in film*, in "Projections", Vol. 6, No. 2, pp. 84-101. Also J. Littlemore, *Metaphors in the Mind: Sources of Variation in Embodied Metaphor,* Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2019.

Metz called "primary identification", the type of identification promoted through sharing the perspective, movement and "subjectivity" of the camera, before (and rather than) that of the characters on screen – which he associated with the "secondary identification" process at play. In Metz's own words, "every cinematic identification, primary or secondary or beyond, insofar as I confuse myself with an other – human, animal, or technical – stages a return to the 'primitive undifferentiation of the ego and the non-ego'"[69].

Reich and Richmond adhere that Metz's concept of primary (rather than secondary) identification in particular, opens up possibilities for re-thinking cinematic identification beyond (or before) the Lacanian mirror stage, as an identification with the camera and the screen that can provide a sense of unboundedness and Ego dissolution, and allow "for a mobile, labile, polymorphically perverse experience of the film world"[70]: "The primary cinematic process is one in which my ordinary boundedness and self-possession are dissolved, captured and organized for a while by the cinema itself"[71]. This type of identification, according to the authors, psychoanalytically corresponds to a stage of psychic development before differentiation, and thus highlights an aspect left aside by traditional Lacanian psychoanalytical film theory, which has approached cinematic spectatorship and subjectivity through the concept of "phallic lack" associated with the later Oedipal stage.

Through identification with the camera and the image schemas it materializes as embodied-conceptual metaphors (being beneath, rising to surface, exiting or entering the abyss), as well as the positive-negative visual and conceptual juxtapositions, which points at the lack, desire and possibility of oneness, *Eraserhead* makes a whole film-conceptual metaphor of transcendence (between existence and non-existence). And watching the film as a whole, one could argue, makes for a transcendental experience.

But at the same time the film also alludes, through its weird and incomprehensible feel (also a trademark of Lynch's style), to a transitive state of constant uncertainty that blurs the borders between conscious and unconscious, a state of consciousness perhaps akin to

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[69] E. Reich, S. C. Richmond, *Introduction: Cinematic identifications*, in "Film Criticism", Vol. 39, No. 2, 2014-15, pp. 3-24, p. 14; quoting C. Metz, from *The Imaginary Signifier*.
[70] E. Reich, S. C. Richmond, Ivi, p. 10; the phrase "polymorphously perverse" comes from S. Freud's work *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality* (1905). See *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Volume VII (1901-1905): A Case of Hysteria, Three Essays on Sexuality and Other Works*, pp. 123-246, p. 234) and refers to the first phase of infantile sexuality (between two and five years of age.
[71] E. Reich, S. C. Richmond, Ivi, p. 14.

a hypnagogic state. It employs various stylistic means, especially in its more abstract opening and closing sequences, some of which I have described, in order not just to represent trancing but to induce the feeling of it to the viewer. And this of course is a quality retained throughout Lynch's subsequent filmography and work overall; the quality that makes it "Lynchian".

9. Bliss

Even though as already said, *Eraserhead* abounds in images representing a passage, primarily the passage to existence itself, no sense of bliss seems to be transmitted through it (apart perhaps from the very last scene of the film). On the contrary, gaps, holes and passages acquire a terrifying quality, in the prospect of attracting into the abyss like whirlwinds, or ejecting the abyss – in the form of disgusting liquids (like the blood bursting out of a cooked baby chicken at the dinner table), or monstrous creatures (like the sperm-like child itself). The soundtrack, a mix of industrial and distorted natural sounds often giving the sense of wind blowing through a vacuum, reinforces the feel of the whole film as an expressionistic nightmare. *Eraserhead* expresses a great existential terror and indeed a deep sense of "harrowing distress"[72]; the torment of existence and of being a Self; and the desire to abandon the Self.

It might not be a coincidence that *Eraserhead* was made during a very troubled phase in Lynch's life[73], as he struggled both financially and psychologically; but this was also the time when he discovered meditation, which helped him pull through. He confesses *Eraserhead* was a movie that came as a revelation as a whole:

> *Eraserhead* is my most spiritual movie. No one understands when I say that, but it is. *Eraserhead* was growing in a certain way, and I didn't know what it meant. I was looking for a key to unlock what these sequences were saying. Of course, I understood some of it; but I didn't know the thing that just pulled it all together. And it was a struggle. So I got out my Bible and I started reading. And one day, I read a sentence. And I closed the Bible, because that was it; that was it. And then I saw the thing as a whole. And it fulfilled this vision for me, 100 percent. I don't think I'll ever say what that sentence was.[74]

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[72] R. Barney, (a cura di), *David Lynch: Interviews*, cit.
[73] D. Lynch, *Catching the Big Fish*, cit., pp. 73-74.
[74] Ivi, pp. 69-70.

If *Eraserhead* is seen as a film about the passage to existence, transcendence here takes a more spiritual quality, like Lynch himself confesses. We will probably never get to know the "meaning" that Lynch himself found in the film. But interpretations have been countless. Beyond common psychoanalytical readings, the attempt to associate these images with a psychic stage before differentiation might be more enlightening, and closer to Lynch's own spiritual concerns – as would be the connection of this particular state of non-differentiation with what James called "a religious experience", the same sort of experience that intellectuals of the turn of the last century such as Rolland and Freud tried to understand, the latter through the first pre-Oedipal stages of psychic development.

Thinking in terms of primary identification, mediated by a combination of stylistic elements of cinematography, editing, mise en scene and sound, images such as those I described in *Straight Story* and *Eraserhead*, in their ambiguity and iteration, and the sense of bodily illusions[75] they introduce, can be said to have an effect of Ego dissolution. The sense of unboundedness is what the fractal images present in Lynch's work induce, through their never-ending self-similarity and self-replicating on different scales. Also, the bodily engagement and identification with Lynch's images of diving in, trespassing, falling, entering, etc. through holes and chasms, also challenges the borders between spectator and screen forming embodied metaphors of consciousness alteration and (terrifying or not) Ego dissolution.

Unboundedness and Ego dissolution are, as already noted, the characteristics of oceanic consciousness that Lynch refers to as the goal of meditative practice. The sense of undifferentiation alludes to the idea of the "unified field" of consciousness that he subscribes to through his belief in – and devoted practice of – TM. And perhaps this pre-Oedipal and "polymorphically perverse" experience can account for instances of bliss he describes; a feeling of "diving in" this white, rather than blue, ocean of consciousness; perhaps a place such as that Henry finds himself at at the end of *Eraserhead*. It is described as absolute and unbounded happiness.

Bliss is the opposite of fear; in meditation Lynch found a way to be in nothingness, beyond the binary opposition and dialectic of existence – non-existence. The terror of void gave way to its embrace, and to finding plenitude and connection in abandoning the boundaries of the Self. Lynch's trajectory as a filmmaker, balancing between "harrowing distress" and the "profound serenity" of what he would call "bliss", can be seen as a path to give cinematic expression to this struggle.

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[75] Another term suggested by Richmond – See S. C. Richmond, *Cinema's Bodily Illusions: Flying, floating, and hallucinating*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis 2016.

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Steffen Hven
Lynchian Atmospheres and the Optical Unconscious

1. Introduction

Describing a childhood visit to his grandparents in Brooklyn, David Lynch[1] connects his experience of the horrific, uncanny, and unsettling to the sensory overstimulation he felt as a young boy visiting the modern city for the first time. As he recalls, "In a large city I realized there was a large amount of fear, because so many people were living close together. You could feel it in the air"[2]. Lynch's recounting of how entering the subway was like a descent into hell adequately describes his fascination with exploring the *terra incognito* of the affective and unconscious impacts of the physical environments we inhabit:

> As I went down the steps, going deeper into it, I realized it was almost as difficult to back up and get out of it as to go forward and go through with this ride. It was the total fear of the unknown – the wind from those trains, the sounds, the smells, the different light and mood – that was really special in a traumatic way.[3]

As Lynch continues, a frequent pattern in his films becomes recognizable in the childhood memory: "I learned that just beneath the surface there's another world, and still different worlds as you dig deeper. I knew it as a kid, but I couldn't find the proof. It was just a kind of feeling. There is goodness in blue skies and flowers, but another force – a wild pain and decay – also accompanies everything"[4].

Nowhere is this childhood experience as acutely expressed cinematically as in the opening sequence of *Blue Velvet* (1986) that transports its viewers between two radically opposed atmospheric constellations that recur in the cinema of Lynch. At first, we are welcomed to Lumberton,

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[1] D. Lynch, *David Lynch (1990)*, in Richard A. Barney (a cura di), *David Lynch: Interviews*, University Press of Mississippi, Jackson 2009, pp. 60–105.
[2] Ivi, p. 62.
[3] *Ibidem.*
[4] *Ibidem.*

a North American small-town where the white clouds are as perfectly arranged on the blue sky as the red roses matching the freshly painted white fence and the flawlessly mowed green lawn. Reminiscent of advertisements in the Golden Age of domestic consumerism, the scenery is populated by friendly firefighters waving towards the camera in slow motion and children safely crossing a quiet street as the soothing tones of Bobby Vinton's "Blue Velvet" (1963), whose nostalgic mid-century mood the film was allegedly built upon[5], occupies the soundtrack. The placid atmosphere of this world, however, ends abruptly as a man, soon to be revealed as the protagonist's father, falls to the ground with a heart failure while watering his garden.

The scene's atmospheric transition from the polished, orderly, and constrained surface to the rotten state of decay upon which this world is erected is effectuated by an innovative use of a series of filmmaking techniques. First, Lynch again employs slow motion, yet this time to create an eerie and unnerving image of the gardener's dog drinking from the still spraying water hose. As the soft tones of "Blue Velvet" gradually recede into the background, the soundscape becomes noisier and the image grainier. What follows is the remarkable tracking shot in which the camera leaves the daylight scene to plunge into a microscopic sub-terrestrial world of mud, dirt, and insects hidden just beneath the brightly colored suburban landscaping. This dual atmospheric condition sets the tone of the film and expresses its thematic core as revolving around a dynamic of processes that mediate between disclosure and occlusion; the visible and the invisible; the surface and its depths; the socially, sexually, and legally permissible and the criminal, repressed, and perverse.

This continued intrusion of the repressed, uncanny, and perverse into the unspoiled world of small-town America has caused Lynch's films to be taken as textbook examples of how (often Lacanian) psychoanalysis can produce textual analyses revealing a deeper-lying meaning and logic in his cinema.[6] Here I propose another path for understanding the atmospheric effects of Lynch's cinema as related to the "uncanny", "weird", "dreamlike", "eerie", and "strange" by examining them through the lenses of Benjamin's concept of the *optical unconscious* and his media theory more generally.

[5] D. Lynch, *Lynch on Lynch*, a cura di C. Rodley, Faber and Faber, London and Boston 2005, p. 134.
[6] Examples of such Lacanian readings of Lynch include B. Herzogenrath, *On the Lost Highway: Lynch and Lacan, Cinema and Cultural Pathology*, in "Other Voices", vol. 1, no. 3, 1999, http://www.othervoices.org/1.3/bh/highway.php; S. Žižek, *The Art of the Ridiculous Sublime: On David Lynch's* Lost Highway, University of Washington Press, Seattle, WA 2000; T. McGowan, *The Impossible David Lynch*, Columbia University Press, New York 2007.

2. The Optical Unconscious and the New Instrument of Vision

Developed first in reference to photography in his 1933 essay *Small History of Photography* [*Kleine Geschichte der Photographie*] and later to cinema in the different versions of *The Work of Art in the Age of its Technological Reproducibility* [*Das Kunstwerk im Zeitalter seiner technischen Reproduzierbarkeit*] published between 1935-1939, the optical unconscious designates the ability of photography and film to facilitate forms of perceptual experience beyond the scope of natural human perception. As Eadweard Muybridge's chronophotographic motion studies of bodily postures in the act of walking had shown, the photographic camera makes it possible to isolate movement into discrete units and thereby to observe the constituent elements of walking that occur too fast for the human eye to capture. Similarly, the extreme close-up photographs of plants presented by Karl Bloßfeldt in *Urformen der Kunst* (*Originary Forms of Art*, 1928) had revealed "ancient columns in horse willow, a bishop's crosier in the ostrich fern, totem poles in tenfold enlargements of chestnut and maple shoots, and gothic tracery in the fuller's thistle"[7]. Through the magnification of scale new aesthetic principles inherent in nature become visible and in it a "geyser of new image-worlds hisses up at points in our existence where we would least have thought them possible"[8].

For Benjamin both Muybridge and Bloßfeldt exploit the capacity of photography to promote a "new way of seeing". In this assessment Benjamin draws equally from the formal-aesthetic and socio-historical perspectives on photography advanced by László Moholy-Nagy and Siegfried Kracauer respectively[9]. In comparing photography to visual perception, Benjamin did not seek to express a mistrust towards human vision, at least no less than remarking upon how vision can be aided by instruments such as the telescope or the microscope would entail doing

[7] W. Benjamin, *Little History of Photography*, in M. W. Jennings, H. Eiland, and G. Smith (a cura di), *Benjamin: Selected Writings (Volume 2, Part 2)*, tr. di R. Livingston, The Belknap of Harvard University Press, Cambridge MA 2005, p. 512.
[8] W Benjamin, *News about Flowers*, in M. W. Jennings, H. Eiland, and G. Smith (a cura di), *Benjamin: Selected Writings (Volume 2, Part 1, 1927-1930)*, The Belknap of Harvard University Press, Cambridge MA 2005, pp. 155–57.
[9] For examples of formative texts that have shaped Benjamin's theory of photography, see L. Moholy-Nagy, *Malerei, Photographie, Film,* Albert Langer Verlag, München 1925) and S. Kracauer, *Photography*, in *The Mass Ornament: Weimar Essays*, tr. di T. Y. Levin, Harvard University Press, Cambridge MA 1995, pp. 47–63. For a recent anthology dedicated to the 'optical unconscious' in relation to photography, see S. M. Smith, S. Sliwinski (a cura di), *Photography and the Optical Unconscious,* Duke University Press, Durham and London 2017.

so[10]. Benjamin did not see photography or cinema as "prostheses" or "extensions" of vision but rather sought to understand the ways human perception is co-conditioned by technological *dispositif*s that evolve and change over time. By casting perception in a historical and material light, Benjamin examined the ways in which technologies reveal new aspects of reality previously hidden from the domain of the perceptible. With photography this includes a suspension of time (chronophotography); a magnification of objects (extreme close-ups); and the revelation of the internal structure of objects opaque to ordinary light (X-ray photography).

In terms of cinema, Benjamin takes the example of slow-motion, which he argues apart from retarding a natural movement can also create its own movements that express "gliding, floating, supernatural movements"[11, 12]. Benjamin[13] goes on to argue that the camera unveils a different nature than ordinary embodied experience, because the spatiotemporal coordinates are no longer aligned with ordinary perception. The camera then gives rise to an "other" nature or reality "above all in the sense that a space informed by human consciousness gives way to a space informed by the unconscious"[14]. Engrained in the cinematic techniques are then resources for "swooping and rising, disrupting and isolating, stretching or compressing a sequence, enlarging or reducing an object."[15] From this Benjamin concludes that it is "through the camera that we first discover the optical unconscious, just as we discover the instinctual unconscious through psychoanalysis"[16].

By comparing how cinema alters the spatiotemporal coordinates of the worlds it not only depicts but also constructs to the Freudian discovery of the unconscious, Benjamin suggests that the cinematic world is no

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[10] For an elaboration of this argument, see M. Turvey, *Doubting Vision: Film and the Revelationist Tradition*, Oxford University Press, New York 2008). Here Turvey raises an argument against the 'revelationist' tradition of early film theory, whose main proponents he holds to be Kracauer, Balazs, Vertov, and Epstein. For a countercriticism of Turvey's critique from the perspective of Epstein's writings, see S. Keller, *Introduction*, in S. Keller and J. N. Paul (a cura di), *Jean Epstein: Critical Essays and New Translations*, Amsterdam University Press, Amsterdam 2012, pp. 23–50.
[11] W. Benjamin, *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*, in H. Arendt (a cura di), *Illuminations*, tr. di H. Zohn, Schocken Books, New York 2007, pp. 236.
[12] The reference is to an essay first published in 1933-essay on 'Slow Motion', see R. Arnheim, *Film as Art,* University of California Press, Berkeley 1957, pp. 116–17.
[13] W. Benjamin, *Little History of Photography*, in M. W. Jennings, H. Eiland, and G. Smith (a cura di), *Benjamin: Selected Writings (Volume 2, Part 2)*, tr. di R. Livingston, The Belknap of Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA 2005.
[14] Ivi, p. 510.
[15] W. Benjamin, *The Work of Art in the Age of Technical Reproducibility [First Version]*, tr. di M. W. Jennings, in "Grey Room", vol. 39 (Spring), 2010, p. 39.
[16] *Ibidem.*

longer confined to the physical laws that govern conscious perception but modeled instead on the plastic material of its photographic imprint that through various techniques and devices such as camera movements ("swooping and rising"), editing ("disrupting and isolating"), slow motion, time-lapses, and freeze frames ("compressing a sequence"), and scaling ("enlarging or reducing an object") allow for the constructing of "another reality".

Although we are about to examine the reasons for Benjamin's somewhat counterintuitive decision to align cinema's ability to act as a 'new instrument of vision' to psychoanalysis and the unconscious, this alignment of cinema and psychoanalysis is, at least, supported by the countless of examples of films exploring the relation of cinema to processes of the unconscious: the uncanny, the repressed, dreams, psychoses, hallucinations, and the pathological. Yet, Lynch does more than representing the themes of psychoanalysis in cinematic form, he locates the uncanniness, the repressed, and the unconscious in the operations of the medium itself. By drawing connections between the uncanny, repressed, and unconscious with the disturbances, irregularities, and "noises" of modern communication media Lynch's cinema renders visible its atmosphere: the "nebulous primal matter that condenses into individual shapes" that is the "air and aroma" that Béla Balázs has identified as the "soul of every art"[17].

As an example of how this nebulous, atmospheric primal matter is rendered visible in the cinema of Lynch consider the ending of *Mulholland Drive* (2001) where Diane's (Naomi Watts) bedroom suddenly fills up with smoke appearing in ever new constellations in the flickering blue light soon to be disrupted by the "visual noise" of a superimposed image merging two places into an indefinite, semitransparent space. Thereby not only is Diane's dissolving personality expressed visually but also the very disintegration of the medium itself. Justus Nieland[18] argues that Lynch understands filmmaking as "a way of shaping, plastically, a moving environment" one that further is as "affectively unstable, as riddled with temporal ambiguities, as filled with hybrids of nature-culture as the postwar world that haunts his filmic imagination. "In these atmospheres", Nieland continues with an allusion to the first lines of *Twin Peaks* and the discovery of Laura Palmer's body, "spectators are wrapped in plastic"[19].

[17] B. Balázs, *Béla Balázs: Early Film Theory: Visible Man and The Spirit of Film*, E. Carter (a cura di), tr. di R. Livingstone, Berghahn Books, New York 2011, p. 22.
[18] J. Nieland, *David Lynch*, University of Illinois Press, Urbana, Chicago, and Springfield 2012.
[19] *Ivi*, p. 4.

3. Photography, Film, and the Unconscious: Freud, Benjamin, Lynch

As French philosopher Sarah Kofman[20] has demonstrated, the medium of photography (particularly the photographic negative) acted as an important metaphor for Sigmund Freud in conceiving the unconscious. In the same way that the printed photograph originates in a negative, the concealed counterpart of conscious experience is the unconscious. As Kofman stresses, Freud's metaphor is not directed towards photography's supposed "objectivism" and "To pass from darkness to light is not, then, to rediscover a meaning already there, it is to construct a meaning which has never existed as such"[21]. Moreover, the passage from the negative to the positive print is "neither necessary nor dialectical. It is possible that the development will never take place"[22]. This in turn means that repression is originary and that "there is always an irretrievable residue, something which will never have access to consciousness"[23]. As it has been argued, the notion of the unconscious as quasi-photographic process accentuates its "machinic character", as a pre-personal set of automated functions: "the unconscious automatically produces dreams, fantasies, slip of the tongue, and the like, which is to say it produces symptoms"[24].

Recognizing the connection between the unconscious and the photographic process, Benjamin reverses it to emphasize the unconscious as a model for the operation of images. As Rosalind Krauss argues in *The Optical Unconscious*[25] – adopting the concept as title of her book "at an angle to Benjamin's"[26] – readers are likely struck by the "strangeness of this analogy" because "what in the visual field can we speak of that will be in analogue with the unconscious itself"[27]. In either case, the structural similarity that Benjamin proposes is founded in the shared ability of photography and psychoanalysis to reveal previously concealed aspects of reality. In *The Psychopathology of Modern Times* Freud[28] delineates the domain of the instinctual unconscious [*treibhafte Unbewusste*] in the

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[20] S. Kofman, *Camera Obscura: Of Ideology*, tr. di. W. Straw, Cornell University Press, Ithaca, N.Y 1998.
[21] Ivi, p. 28.
[22] Ivi, p. 26.
[23] Ivi, p. 27.
[24] J. Fardy, *Freud, Photography, and the Optical Unconscious*, in S. M. Smith, S. Sliwinski (a cura di), *Photography and the Optical Unconscious,* Duke University Press, Durham 2017, pp. 80–92.
[25] R. Krauss, *The Optical Unconscious,* MIT Press, Cambridge 1999.
[26] Ivi, p. 179.
[27] Ivi, p. 178.
[28] S. Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, tr. di. James Strachey, The Hogarth Press, London 1903,1955.

domain of language by demonstrating that a "slip of the tongue" – a phenomenon that prior to this work would barely merit a remark – had become a symptom revealing deep-seated insights about our psyche.

Yet rather than being a proper philosophical term with a stable and fixed meaning, the optical unconscious is a productive metaphor whose main power lies exactly in a shifting of perspective that Freud would probably have disapproved of, namely the relocation and externalization of the unconscious (or, at least a part of it) from the psyche of the individual onto the material world and the sensorial environment[29]. This grafting of affect onto the environment is also exactly what makes the concept suitable for exploring the *atmospheric* dynamics of cinema; be it in the cinema of Lynch or more generally. It is also what allows a reconsideration of how moving image media influence psychological processes–on perception, affection, memory, cognition, and imagination – in ways that often operate beyond conscious registration. More precisely, it allows us to address the process in which we become aware of 'unconscious' image operations as being aligned with the psychoanalytical process in which the patient becomes aware of the workings of the instinctual unconscious.

Following Benjamin, the instinctual and optical unconscious are further linked by the fact that many "of the deformations and stereotypes, transformations and catastrophes which can assail the world of optical perception [*Gesichtswahrnehmung*] in films afflict the actual world in psychoses, hallucinations, and dreams"[30]. Cinema projects outwards into its mediated sphere "the individual perceptions of the psychotic and the dreamer" and thereby "it can be appropriated by collective perception"[31]. For Benjamin, this is less achieved by actual depictions of "the dream world itself than by creating figures of collective dream, such as the globe-encircling Mickey Mouse"[32]. Although he recognizes the potential dangers of cinema in engendering in the masses "tensions that at critical stages take on a psychotic character"[33], Benjamin also claims that cinema can act as a "safety valve of the psyche", where the "forced development of sadistic fantasies or masochistic delusions can prevent their natural and dangerous maturation in the masses"[34]. Thus the "therapeutic release"

[29] For a similar understanding of the 'optical unconscious' as a productive metaphor more than rigorous philosophical term, see M. B. Hansen, *Cinema and Experience: Siegfried Kracauer, Walter Benjamin, and Theodor W. Adorno,* University of California Press, Berkeley 2012.
[30] W. Benjamin, *The Work of Art in the Age of Technical Reproducibility [First Version]*, cit., p. 31. ´
[31] *Ibidem.*
[32] *Ibidem.*
[33] *Ibidem.*
[34] *Ibidem.*

that Disney and Chaplin, and the collective laughter they incite can be taken as a "preemptive and healing outbreak of mass psychoses"[35].

The "most important social function of film," Benjamin[36] argues, is the establishment of an "equilibrium between human beings and the apparatus"[37]. This is furthermore achieved "not only in terms of man's presentation of himself to the camera but also in terms of his representation of his environment by means of this apparatus"[38]. Thereby cinema advances insights into "the necessities governing our lives by its use of close-ups, by its accentuation of hidden details in familiar objects, and by its exploration of commonplace milieux through the ingenious guidance of the camera"[39]. According to this logic, it could be argued that Lynch's exploration of the "irrational underside of life heretofore unseen by normal human perception but now revealed through the mechanical prosthesis of the camera"[40], has educational value in terms of revealing the operative and manipulative mechanisms of the cinematic medium. In either case, the redeeming qualities Benjamin ascribes to the cinema via the optical unconscious remained a constant point of dispute between him and his contemporaries. In a letter from his friend Theodor W. Adorno[41], Benjamin is accused of exaggerating the progressive aspects of cinema while denying its reactionary aspects. The ethical and ideological implications of cinema's optical unconcious, however, are not to be determined beforehand but should be evaluated in relation to individual films as part of their larger historical, political, and work-internal contexts.

4. Medium as the Atmosphere

In line with the proposed aim to examine what could be understood as a particular kind of "Lynchian" atmospheres within the context of Benjamin's media theory, the concept of "atmosphere" will here be employed according to two interrelated, yet slightly divergent, meanings. First of all, atmosphere will be understood in accordance with recent interdisciplinary research on the subject as related to the affective character of an environ-

[35] *Ibidem.*
[36] W. Benjamin, *The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility: Second Version*, in M. W. Jennings and H. Eiland (a cura di) *Benjamin: Selected Writings (Volume 3, 1935-1938)*, The Belknap of Harvard University Press Cambridge 2006.
[37] Ivi, p. 117.
[38] *Ibidem.*
[39] *Ibidem.*
[40] J. Nieland, *David Lynch*, cit, p. 112.
[41] T. Adorno, *Letters to Walter Benjamin*, in tr. di. R. Taylor, *Aesthetics and Politics*, Verso, London 1980, pp. 110–33.

ment, situation, interpersonal relation, landscape, event, or work of art[42]. Secondly, the term will be considered in the post-Aristotelean tradition of *diaphanous media*, i.e. the atmosphere is the ambient medium, the surrounding environment *through which* perceptual experience is enabled in the first place. In this tradition of thinking about the environmental conditioning of perception, appearances are made possible on the basis of "media of perception" such as the diaphanous and translucent substances of air, smoke, vapor, crystal, and water that in turn shape and form the condition of perceptual appearance[43]. In Benjamin's extended application of this Aristotelean media theory, cinema acts as the 'medium of perception' *through which* the optical unconcious can be unveiled.

Antonio Somaini (2016b, 2016a) has demonstrated exactly the importance of Benjamin's media theory in bringing this elemental understanding of media to bear on modern media of mass communication. In conceptualizing the assemblage of techniques, technologies, and operations that enable historically situated and techno-mediated modalities of perception in environmental terms, Benjamin distinguishes between the apparatus (the material and technical artifact) and the medium (the field of potentialities upon the background of which individual forms of sensory experience is made possible). This led Benjamin[44] to propose the controversial and much-debated thesis of the "historicity of perception", according to which perception is not transcultural, innate, universal, or hardwired:

> Just as the entire mode of existence of human collectives changes over long historical periods, so too does their perception. The way in which human perception is organized – the medium in which it occurs – is conditioned not only by nature but by history.[45]

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[42] For a recent overview of this growing body of literature, see T. Griffero, *Is There Such a Thing as an „Atmospheric Turn"? Instead of an Introduction*, in T. Griffero and M. Tedeschini (a cura di) *Atmosphere and Aesthetics: A Plural Perspective*, Palgrave Macmillan, Cham 2019, pp. 11–62. For an exploration of the implications of atmosphere for the projective arts, see G. Bruno, *Atmospheres of Projection: Environmentality in Art and Screen Media,* University of Chicago Press, Chicago 2022. For cinema more specifically, see S. Hven, *The Atmospheric Worlds of Cinema*, in a cura di S. Hven, *Enacting the Worlds of Cinema,* Oxford University Press, New York 2022, pp. 41–66.

[43] For a recent phenomenology of images operating in this tradition, see E. Alloa, *Looking through Images: A Phenomenology of Visual Media,* Columbia University Press, New York 2021. For examples of contemporary 'elemental' approaches to media theory, see J. D. Peters, *The Marvelous Clouds: Toward a Philosophy of Elemental Media,* The University of Chicago Press, Chicago 2015, E. Horn *Air as Medium*, in "Grey Room" vol. 73, 2018, pp. 6–25, and Y. Furuhata, *Climatic Media: Transpacific Experiments in Atmospheric Control,* Duke University Press, Durham 2022.

[44] W. Benjamin, *The Work of Art in the Age of Technical Reproducibility [First Version]*, cit.

[45] Ivi, p. 15.

An important underlying assumption of Benjamin's media theory is that sensorial experience is never immediate but configured, organized, and modulated by environmental, material, and technological instances of mediation that change throughout history[46]. Benjamin is particularly keen on understanding how photography and cinema as 'media of perception' can mobilize mass audiences. For him, a key function lies in the shielding and protective mechanisms of the overabundance of sensorial impressions the urban population were exposed to – much akin to Lynch's childhood experience of Brooklyn[47]. Benjamin cites Freud when stating that for the "living organism, protection against stimuli is almost more important than the reception of stimuli"[48] since the energies operating in the external world could cause disequilibrium in the internal preservation of energy within the singular organism. Benjamin extracts from this that the less the consciousness registers the external "shocks" of the environment, the less likely these are to have a traumatic effect on the psyche. As the artform of modernity per se, Benjamin's assigns an important task for the film in "training" the modern individual in coping with these shocks and thereby to prevent "mass psychoses".

When the writer David Foster Wallace towards the end of the century visited the set of *Lost Highway* (1997) and wrote a "gonzo" piece on his experiences, he coined the term "Lynchian" to describe "a particular kind of irony where the very macabre and the very mundane combine in such a way as to reveal the former's perceptual containment within the latter," adding that Lynch's "deconstruction of this weird irony of the banal has affected the way I see and organize the world"[49]. Wallace exemplifies this by a temporal operation: for a facial expression to become 'Lynchian' it does not suffice for it to be simply 'grotesque' it also has to be sustained "longer than the circumstances could even possibly warrant" until its readily apprehendable 'coded' meaning becomes defamiliarized and thus reopened to a multitude of interpretations. If for Benjamin the "shocks" of cinema held the potential to train the masses into coping with an increasingly rapid technological pace and flow of

[46] On Benjamin's media philosophy, see A. Somaini, *Walter Benjamin's Media Theory and the Tradition of the Media Diaphana*, in „Zeitschrift Für Medien-Und Kulturforschung" no. 7, vol. 1 2016, pp. 9-25; A. Somaini, *Walter Benjamin's Media Theory: The Medium and the Apparat*, in "Grey Room" vol. 62 (Winter) 2016, pp. 6-41.
[47] For a rhizomatic genealogy on the protective functions of media informed partly by Benjamin's media theory, see F. Casetti, *Screening Fears. On Protective Media,* Zone Books, New York 2023.
[48] W. Benjamin, *Little History of Photography*, in M.W. Jennings, H. Eiland, and G. Smith (a cura di) *Benjamin: Selected Writings, Vol. 2. Part 2*, p. 317.
[49] D. F. Wallace, *David Lynch Keeps His Head*, in „Premiere", Sep.1996, www.lynchnet.com/lh/lhpremiere.html, sec. 6.

information, Lynch appears to suggest that the cinematic operations have become so mundane and consequently invisible to us such as to themselves requiring defamiliarization.

A central component of the "global aesthetic expression" or "cine-aesthetic world feeling"[50] we associate with "Lynchian atmospheres" lies in how Lynch's stories always end up turning our love of film into a nightmare[51]. Despite its surface appearance, *Blue Velvet* is an example of Lynch's reintroduction of the repressed, uncanny, and perverse into the sheltered media-utopias of mid-century and post-modern US popular culture not only through a satirical take on formal, narrative, and genre conventions but also by accentuating the uncanny "noises" of the material basis of mediation. In this fashion, Lynch is able to address his audience "unguarded" leaving them in the defenseless position of the dreamer, or, put differently, Lynch's films enter us like a dream[52].

5. Haunted by the Optical Unconscious: The Videotape as Atmospheric Device in *Lost Highway*

Reflecting on the film actor, who performs no longer to an auditorium but a camera, Benjamin argues that this comes with a feeling of estrangement comparable to looking at one's mirror image, although in this case "the mirror image has become detachable from the person mirrored and has become transportable"[53]. An enactment of the transportable mirror is found in *Lost Highway* (1997) in which the couple Fred (Bill Pullmann) and Renee Madison (Patrica Arquette) receive a series of mysterious videotapes. Marked by the grainy image of surveillance- or home-video footage, the first videotape contains a short segment of shots taken from outside the couple's L.A.-mansion. As the video segments approach closer towards the entrance of the couple's home, the eeriness of these mysterious recordings is amplified by the soundtrack's ominous drone and stabs of static and strings before resolving back into the humming void of the tv-static from which it emerged.

[50] On the ability of atmospheres to take on a more global character and become expressive of the "world" of a particular filmmaker, see D. Yacavone, *Film Worlds: A Philosophical Aesthetics of Cinema,* Columbia University Press, New York 2015.

[51] I am here referring to the title of a recent blog post on Lynch's intertextual references, see Z. Zanatta, *How David Lynch Turns Our Love For Movies Into a Nightmare*, in „Cinemasters", May 2, 2023, https://www.cinemasters.net/post/how-david-lynch-turns-our-love-for-movies-into-a-nightmare.

[52] D. F. Wallace, *David Lynch Keeps His Head,* cit.

[53] W. Benjamin, *The Work of Art in the Age of Technical Reproducibility [First Version]*, cit., p. 23.

The same grainy, 90s television aesthetics recur in the second video-tape, which contains the same shot of the mansion from the outside but then moves inside the house and down the murky hallway. Occasionally disturbed by pierces of both audio and visual electromagnetic noise, this segment includes an "impossible" floating camera movement hovering above the bed with the sleeping couple ("a singularly gliding, floating, su-pernatural motion"). Because it could not have been technically achieved without professional equipment such as a crane, this shot breaks with the notion of being a home-video recording, prompting the epistemological and ontological uncertainties of its origin. Do these sender-less images materialize out of the electronic disturbances, the noises and the tv stat-ic, of our communication devices? These recordings indeed appear to invoke "a different nature than meets the naked eye", where conscious experience is replaced "by one penetrated by the unconscious".

This suspicion of the videos being somehow connected to the uncon-scious is further established as Fred receives the third videotape while Renee is away. The recording begins with the usual flickering followed by the exterior shot of the house. This is followed by the floating crane shot, again intermittently distorted by bursts of noise and extreme close-ups of the cathode-ray tube's pulsating raster, which now enters the couple's bedroom to reveal Fred naked, in a psychotic state, kneeling over Re-nee's mutilated corpse. For an instant, the grainy black and white imag-es cut, without breaking continuity, to high-contrast color images of the blood-smothered Fred looking directly into the camera[54].

In a fashion typical of Lynch these segments are atmospherically bathed in the uncanny in all the nonspecificity and ambiguity that this concept entails[55]. By intruding first into the private space of the home and later into the intimate sphere of the bedroom, the videotapes involve a gradual process of turning the homely (*heimlich*) into something unfa-miliar, haunted, and strange (*unheimlich*). The sudden flash of a bright color palette in the final videotape foreshadows Fred's metamorphosis into the mechanic Pete Dayton and can be viewed as a cinematic articula-tion of the "psychogenic fugue". Lynch[56] himself has alluded to this rare clinical condition (now referred to as "dissociative fugue") defined by a loss of personal memories (psychogenic amnesia) and identity as well as "physical relocation" as a possible way of understanding Fred's condition

[54] This could potentially be one of several references Lynch makes to *The Wizard of Oz* (Fleming, 1939) that uses a similar color-scheme of black-and-white for the "real world" of Kansas and its revolutionary technicolor for the fantasy world of Oz.
[55] For an introduction to Lynch's cinema as structured around the uncanny, see C. Rodley, *Introduction*, in a cura di C. Rodley *Lynch on Lynch*, cit.
[56] See D. Lynch, *Lost Highway Article – Filmmaker Winter 97*, in „Filmmaker Magazine", Winter 1997, http://www.lynchnet.com/lh/lhfm.html.

(rather than being *the* key to solving all the film's mysteries)[57]. This idea of Fred taking flight away from conscious awareness finds an acute cinematic expression in the images of him in the hallway, dressed in black and almost completely devoured in darkness[58].

Bearing in mind Freud's definition of the uncanny as the return of the repressed, the interpretative framework provided by Lynch could imply that the videotapes materialize from Fred's unconscious as a return of the repressed memory of him murdering his wife before "relocating" himself into a surrogate, fantasy world. One could further note that Freud has argued that memory and the conscious are two interdependent but separate systems[59]. Whereas it is the main task of consciousness to register the impressions, affects, and stimuli of the environment, it is the task of memory to store these in the form of "permanent traces" (*Dauerspuren*). These permanent traces remain a latent part of the system, even if they are never actualized or enter conscious awareness. This is because it is one of the basic functions of consciousness to form a protective shield (*Reitzschutz*) for the psyche and to ensure it is blocked from experiencing overstimulation.

Such a reading of the videotapes being a visualization of how Fred, suffering from a dissociative disorder while sitting on death row, is haunted by repressed memories of murdering his wife, however, fails to recognize the intersubjective nature of the videotapes, as watched by Renee, the policemen, and as serving as evidentiary material in the sentencing of Fred. The videotapes do appear to have a particular connection to Fred's unconscious and memory, yet in accordance with an interpersonal flow of communication that folds inside and outside onto a singular continuous plane. Being both mental and environmental, the videotapes could be taken as instances of what Proust termed *mémoire involontaire* (involuntary memory), that is as a passive, unintentional, and contingent type of memory triggered by external factors such as the famous madeleine. In his writings on Proust, Benjamin argues that photography can be aligned with the willful recollection of the past (*mémoire involontaire*)[60]. "The

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[57] Lynch further explains it as a condition, "where a person gives up himself, his world, his family – everything about himself – and takes on another identity" and continues: "That's Fred Madison completely. I love the term *psychogenic fugue*. In a way, the musical term fugue fits perfectly, because the film has one theme, and then another theme takes over. To me, jazz is the closest thing to insanity that there is in music", see D. Lynch, *Lost Highway Article,* cit.

[58] On the cinematography of *Lost Highway*, see S. Pizzello *Lost Highway – Highway to Hell*, in „American Cinematographer", March 1997, https://theasc.com/articles/lost-highway-highway-to-hell.

[59] On the separate functions of memory and consciousness, see S. Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle,* tr. di. J. Strachey, the Hogarth Press, London 1955.

[60] W. Benjamin, *On Some Motifs in Baudelaire*, in M. W. Jennings and H. Eiland (a cura di), *Benjamin: Selected Writings (Volume 4, 1938-1940)*, The Belknap of Harvard University Press, Cambridge 2006, pp. 313-55.

techniques inspired by the camera and subsequent analogous types of apparatus," Benjamin argues, "extend the range of the memoire *volontaire*; these techniques make it possible at any time to retain an event – as image and sound – through the apparatus"[61]. In *Lost Highway* the videotapes assail Fred in the same way as involuntary memories do. Bursting out of the tv-static, these images seem to transpire from some reservoir of "non-perceived", unconscious images that operate beneath the surface of perception in a repressed sphere of noises, disturbances, and deformations.

6. Lost in the Medium

In an interview, screenwriter of *Lost Highway* Barry Gifford[62] explains that him and Lynch used the topological figure of the "Möbius strip" – a strip of paper twisted 180° and then looped such that it has one continuous side that if you followed it will variously be on the inside or the outside – as a guiding metaphor for how the "story folds back underneath itself and continues"[63]. This inside-outside logic can be illustrated by the film's ending where Fred is revealed to be the sender of the mysterious message ("Dick Laurent is dead") he receives over his intercom in the film's beginning. As this example illustrates, the Möbius strip not only elucidate how Pete's and Fred's respective narratives fold in on each other as Fred morphs into Pete and back into himself again, it equally works as a metaphor of the many feedback loops, disturbances, and noises that disturb the linear flow of our communication technologies; a key atmospheric strategy in the film.

In Shannon and Weaver's influential theory of information, communication is understood on a 5-step linear model of sender (or information source) producing the message; transmitter encoding the message into signals (i.e., the intercom); a channel connecting the transmitter and receiver; a receiver reconstructing the message from the signal; and a destination, where the message arrives. The sixth element of this model is the disturbing side effects of the system in the form of "noises" interfering with and endangering successful transmission of communication. A central issue of this model lies in the optimization of the signal-to-noise ratio (SNR) in the transmission of the message. The less noise, the better the chances are for successful communication. In *The Parasite* (1982), philosopher Michel Serres challenges this

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[61] Ivi, p. 337.
[62B.] Gifford, *Interview: "Lost Highway Screenwriter Barry Gifford"* in "Film Threat" (blog), 1997, http://www.lynchnet.com/lh/lhgifford.html.
[63] Ivi, para. 3.

model and posits that it is not the transmission between sender and receiver that should be of interest but the relation between communication and noise.

In *Lost Highway* some of the most noticeable and eerie atmospheres are created by disturbing the linear, information model and by accentuating the instabilities in communication instantiated by "noises" in the system. At a party Fred is approached by the Mystery Man (Robert Blake), who informs him of his current presence in his home. To prove the veracity of this illogical proclamation the Mystery Man hands Fred an oversized portable phone with the prompt: "call me". Baffled Fred calls his house, where the Mystery Man answers the phone on the other end of the line: "I told you I was here." As both sender and receiver, the Mystery Man appears to defy time and space and stand above or beyond the "laws of communication" thereby embodying of the interpersonal communicational flow of the (optical) unconscious.

Remarking on the overabundance of communication technologies in *Lost Highway* (electricity, videotapes, telephones, intercom, cameras, etc.) Bernd Herzogenrath[64] argues that the film is penetrated by a "communicational electro-smog". Depicted in the film is a world in which technological forms of mediation have merged with reality to the extent that these communication devices have become part of our physical and sensorial existence. This parallels a shift in communication technologies observed by contemporary media philosophers, where media are no longer tools to be used but environments to be inhabited. The data we collect and the technology we use are no longer tools used for particular purposes rather the sentient human being has itself become the operating function within a communicational feedback loop is, as the Benjamin-inspired philosopher of 'new media' Norbert Bolz[65] has posited.

The idea that the human has become inscribed into the flow of communication informs Lynch's connection of the uncanny to the undesirable energies of the medium: its noises, grains, tv static, and glitches. Whether the medium in question is that of television (as in the two first seasons of *Twin Peaks*, 1990-91*)* or digital media and streaming platforms (as in *Twin Peaks: The Return*, 2017), it is a trademark of Lynch to accentuate the dysfunctionality of the 'media of perception' that informs the backdrop to his works. In *Lost Highway* the Möbius structure informs a transgression of the sender-receiver model and its replacement with the feeling of being stuck in an endless recursive feedback loop, which lends

[64] B. Herzogenrath, *On the Lost Highway: Lynch and Lacan, Cinema and Cultural Pathology*, in "Other Voices*"* vol. 1 no. 3, 1999. http://www.othervoices.org/1.3/bh/highway.php.
[65] N. Bolz, *Theorie der neuen Medien* Raben Verlag, München 1990.

the film with an atmosphere of "being lost in the medium"[66]. Whereas for Benjamin cinema could reveal the 'optical unconscious' and thereby a new domain of perceptual experience and hence of reality, Lynch far more envisions this domain of the optical conscious as an uncanny black hole threatening to devour us completely.

Consider in this context the double notion of atmosphere as equally pertaining to the affective feeling tone of a film, artwork, or situation, but also to the ambient space of the medium itself as that through which something is perceived. The atmosphere thus pertains to the in-between within "the structure of perception" that is "not 'I see something' but rather 'in the medium, the presence of things is perceivable'"[67] 99). By exposing their "medium of perception", the noises and glitches of electronic and digital information technologies, both an affective component and a historical rootedness of these *dispositifs* become apparent. Although it is certainly possible to experience such "noises" as disturbances, it is equally possible, especially when a historical distance is installed, that they evoke pleasant atmospheres such as when the crackling of a vinyl player conveys a homey "nostalgic feel" or when an old filmstock provides "authenticity" to the historical portrayal of a film. However, with Lynch this media nostalgia is invoked only as part of an atmospheric strategy that eventually turns our familiarity and intimacy with communication technologies uncanny such that the disturbances of the media, whether the ear-pitching drones or the tv static, threaten to swallow us up into a *mise en abîme* of electronic feed-back loops.

7. Conclusion

The most condensed cinematic display of the central atmospheric strategy of connecting the uncanny, repressed, and unconscious to the "noises" of modern communication media is found in Lynch's short-film *Premonitions Following an Evil Deed* (1995). The film was produced as part of the celebration of the 100th anniversary of the first cinematic screenings featuring the short films of Auguste and Louis Lumière. Along with 40 other prominent filmmakers and artists (e.g., Sarah Moon, Spike Lee, and Wim Wenders), Lynch was invited to shoot a short film simulating the conditions of the earliest moving pictures. For the occa-

[66] On "being lost in the medium" in *Lost Highway*, see Alanna Thain, *Funny How Secrets Travel: David Lynch's Lost Highway*, in „Invisible Culture: An Electronic Journal for Visual Culture", vol. 8, 2004, pp 1–17.
[67] G. Böhme, *An Aesthetic Theory of Nature: An Interim Report*, in tr. di. John Farrell, „Thesis Eleven", vol. 32, 1992, pp. 90–102.

sion, Philippe Poulet, a researcher at the Museum of Lyon and one of the initiators of the project, had restored the *Cinématographe* of the Lumière brothers: a hand cranked camera that also functioned as a projector built with brass, glass, and mainly wood resembling a small box. Poulet also recreated the film stock by using the original formula (although nitrate was replaced with acetate for safety reasons). In addition, each film had to obey certain restrictions: no synchronous sound (then unavailable) could be used although a soundtrack could be added; only natural lighting was permitted; the film had to be accomplished in a maximum of three takes (once the camera was rolling you weren't allowed to stop it); and the film could not exceed 52 seconds.

Apart from its duration of 55 seconds, *Premonitions* conforms to these restrictions, yet it creatively introduces montage and scene shifts using black screens and the burning of a veil thereby making his film closer in spirit to the cinema of Méliès than that of the Lumière brothers. Through an accentuating of film materiality (the grains on the film stock, its gradient overexposures of the images, the jolted movements resulting from the hand-cranked camera) combined with its more "modern" soundtrack (consisting of acoustic noises in the style of *musique concrète* and the eerie, ambient score of Angelo Badalamenti), Lynch finds a way to express his own childhood "premonition" of a repressed subterrain of reality lurking beneath the surface that he "could feel in the air". *Premonitions* connects this to the "primal scene" of the birth of the cinema by displaying the medium's capacities to uncover the macabre hidden in the mundane. In its short duration the film blends two storylines, one more "realistic" in tone (three police officers find the body of a young boy in the forests and inform the family) and the other more grotesque and phantasmagoric seemingly taking place in some monstrous parallel reality (in a torture chamber three deformed figures give electro shocks to a naked woman floating inside a translucent tube).

In the cinema of Lynch, story or narrative is not *opposed* to the parameters of the affective, atmospheric, the medium-specific, or the informational noises disturbing the flow of information; it is dependent on it. When defending narrative against the rigid, binary logic of information theory in *S/Z*, Roland Barthes[68] makes a plead for its "cacographic" nature: "One might call *idyllic* the communication which unites two partners sheltered from any 'noise' […] linked by a simple destination, a single thread. Narrative communication is not idyllic; its lines of destination are multiple, so that any message in it can be properly defined only if it is specified whence it comes and where it is

[68] R. Barthes, *S/Z*, tr. di. R. Miller, Paperback, Blackwell-Wiley, Berlin 1990.

going"[69]. This could qualify as an acute description of how Lynch envisions cinema as an artform intimately connected to an otherworldly dimension dominated by the murky, the deformed, the repressed, and the noisy. Only here, as Barthes emphasizes, this "noise is not confused, massive, unnamable; it is a clear noise made up of connections, not superpositions: it is of a distinct 'cacography'"[70]. In a manner characteristic of Lynch[71], he opts for a joke to express a similar critical viewpoint about conforming stories to a communication model: "If you want to send a message, go to Western Union"[72].

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[69] Ivi, p. 131, author's emphasis.
[70] Ivi, p. 132.
[71] D. Lynch, *David Lynch (1990)*, in *David Lynch: Interviews,* cit.
[72] Ivi, p. 63.

Id., "The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility: Second Version" In M. W. Jennings and H. Eiland (a cura di), *Benjamin: Selected Writings (Volume 3, 1935-1938)*, The Belknap of Harvard University Press, Cambridge MA 2006.

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Geli Mademli

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[1]. 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"[2] so processes of "making a means visible as such"[3] 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-

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[1] 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.

[2] 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.

[3] 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.[4]

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"[5].

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

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[4] 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.
[5] 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 stylobate 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 'Lynchean' 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"[6], 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.[7]

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"[8]. The meaning of this desktop, I argue, transcends the boundaries of *The Fabelmans'* diagetic 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

[6] D. Lim, *David Lynch: The Man From Another Place*, Amazon Publishing, New Work 2015, p. 148.
[7] 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.
[8] 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[9] 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:

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[9] 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-naif 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 cloudly", 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 regonisable 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)"[10]. Offering a theory of remediation avant la lettre, decades

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[10] 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]henever 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"[11] 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"[12]. 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"[13],

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[11] J. D. Bolter, R. Grusin, *Remediation. Understanding New Media*, MIT Press, Cambridge 2000.

[12] G. Deleuze, *Cinema 2: The time-image*, Continuum, London 2005, p. 68.

[13] 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 film-maker'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 keep-ing 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 "coales-cence" proposed by David Lynch, yet it cannot be considered *represen-tative*: 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 fur-thermore, and all the more importantly, the archival agency that is repeat-edly 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"[14] (an inher-ently archival function), representation entails two functions at the same time: On the one hand, the constant re-apparition 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 refer-ential world (a critique that was crystallized as the crisis of representation in cultural theory[15]). On the other hand, it includes the often arbitrary act of sorting out according to properties shaped through standardized worl-

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[14] 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.
[15] 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.

dviews 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"[16]. 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"[17] 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"[18]. 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"[19] 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

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

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

[18] *Ibidem*.

[19] 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-abime 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[20]. In this archive of self-reflections, the face becomes the medium that leads us through different constructions of visuality. 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

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[20] Contesting Hugo Müstenberg'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 eyeline match rendering the human face an *inter*face for archival mediation – a condition that understands reality as an ontology beyond representation in a non-exclusive realm of visuality (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 reluctancy of its maker to facilitate interpretative 'meaning-making' as defined by David Bordwell[21], Dennis Lim highlights the archival agency of the se-

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[21] 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"[22].

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"[23] 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"[24]. 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"[25], 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"[26] – 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-

[22] D. Lim, *Memento Mori*, in "Artforum", n. s., a. LVI, n. 143, 2017.
[23] 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.
[24] 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.
[25] G. Lovink, *Networks Without a Cause: A Critique of Social Media*, Polity, Cambridge 2011, p. 2.
[26] 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.

culiar 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[27], 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-

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[27] 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")[28]. After all, the box's architecture alludes to an inverted, transpar-
ent 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 direct-
ly 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-cin-
ematic devices as a powerful agent in this uncanny viewing dispositif that
functions with a database logic[29], feeding a classified and taxonomized
storage of standardized memory cards, the filmmaker elicits an archaeo-
logical, 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"[30], the desktop for its activation is not
conceived as a physically flat area, but as a significant space where differ-
ent 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 compari-
sons. 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 win-
dow – the opening from which the image of the external physical would
enter a camera lucida, hence the viewers' expectations of reality are al-
ready subverted. Once he crosses this threshold, cross-cutting editing

[28] E. Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, Duquesne University Press, Pittsburgh 1961.
[29] L. Manovich, *Database as a Symbolic Form*, in "Millennium Film Journal", n. s., a. V.,
n. 34 ("The Digital"), 1999.
[30] 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"[31], 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,

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[31] 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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