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“Lynch and Non-Lynch: A Cinematic Engagement with Process Philosophies East and West”

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## Introduction

I have envisioned what follows as, primarily, a work of comparative philosophy. My understanding of the *sense* of ‘philosophy’ extends beyond the accepted foundational works of logic, epistemology, and metaphysics, to include psychoanalytical frameworks, as well as aesthetic theories and their aesthetic objects. Whether thinking it or living it, and regardless of its particular effects, philosophy is a fundamentally creative endeavor, so artistic processes especially have a natural place alongside any mode of analytical reasoning.

Given these premises, readers of this essay should not expect to find any thorough arguments as to *why* a given filmmaker might need to be approached philosophically. This project simply accepts that the filmmaker at hand *does* philosophy, and it intends to characterize said philosophy by explicating complementary figures and paradigms and then reading particular films accordingly. Furthermore, given the comparative nature of the overall project, it might be best to make an attempt at disposing of our presuppositions regarding the primacy of the argumentative as such. In what follows, there are certainly critical moments and movements; for instance, the essay’s very first section attempts to (briefly and incompletely) deconstruct Sartre’s dualistic ontology. Nevertheless, these negative interventions are incidental to a project which is meant to be primarily *positive* and serve as a speculatively affirmative account of David Lynch’s film-philosophical explorations.

The essay that follows is split unevenly into two chapters or divisions, but the fundamental worldview developed throughout its course necessitates the equally fundamental interdependence of their specific conceptualizations. The first division, “Self and No-Self,” brings two complementary psychological accounts to bear upon a proposed Lynchian philosophy. First, it traces a deconstruction of egoic life and subjectivity through the Imaginary, the Symbolic, and the

Real – the three intertwined psycho-semiotic registers developed by psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan. Then, a connection will be drawn between Lacan’s structural revelations and Marty Heitz’s metaphorical heuristic model of everyday selfhood, the Pac-Mind. The mental limitations and collapses which these systems elucidate will be examined further in, and mobilized by way of, a formal and thematic analysis of Lynch’s *Mulholland Drive* (2001).

In the second chapter, “Process, Reality, and the New,” we shift the earlier psychological account into the development of its necessary metaphysical condition. By tracing some of Gilles Deleuze’s arguments regarding received notions of identity and difference, as they are presented in *Difference and Repetition* (1968), we might arrive at a satisfactory account of how better to understand the basic workings of reality in the absence of any foundational selfhood or subjectivity. After a brief departure serving to explain my decision to pass over the vivid notions of cinematic temporality given in *Cinema 2: The Time-Image* (1989), I will explore Deleuze’s three syntheses of time – those of the living/passing present, the virtual *a priori* past, and the eternal return of pure difference – and then develop them through their actualizations in all three seasons of *Twin Peaks* (1990-1991; 2017) as well as the prequel film *Twin Peaks: Fire Walk with Me* (1992).

Throughout the entirety of this project, ‘Eastern thought’ – as it has been developed in Zen Buddhism and Daoism, in particular – continuously permeates the background. Though I will refer to and cite several Zen teachers and monks, I have felt no need to present a structural rendering of any East Asian philosophies. On the contrary, I find it vital to leave that pathway open. Perhaps more than any other feature, the refusal to provide systematic answers to age-old philosophical questions binds and invigorates Chinese and Japanese paradigms.

## Acknowledgments

First, I must acknowledge the contemporary scholars without whom I would have been left adrift in the turbulent seas of Lacan and Deleuze. My understanding of Lacan's registers largely owes itself to the clear and sympathetic readings found in *The Subject of Semiotics* (1983), by semiotician and media scholar Kaja Silverman, and *Lacan: A Beginner's Guide* (2009), by psychoanalyst and psychiatrist Lionel Bailly. My principal secondary sources for furthering my understanding of Deleuze's general metaphysical project were Henry Somers-Hall's *Deleuze's Difference and Repetition: An Edinburgh Philosophical Guide* (2013) and Levi R. Bryant's *Difference and Givenness: Deleuze's Transcendental Empiricism and the Ontology of Immanence* (2008). Most importantly, I owe a massive debt to the thorough and creative treatment of Deleuze's three syntheses provided in James Williams's *Gilles Deleuze's Philosophy of Time: A Critical Introduction and Guide* (2011).

I would like to thank Jeff Menne and Marty Heitz, my mentors in film studies and philosophy respectively, for serving as the primary catalysts for my scholarly development and academic achievement. Additionally, Graig Uhlin deserves special recognition for introducing me to film theory in general and film-philosophy in particular, through the *sui generis* work of Stanley Cavell. I would also like to thank Rachel Millard, Laurielle Prema, and Robert and Pamela Osburn, for their attentiveness, love, and unfailing moral support. Finally, I would like to express my gratitude to the Wentz Foundation for their generous financial support.

*“Whenever we see something wrongly, some injunction as to the primordial ‘idea’ of the phenomenon is revealed along with it.”*  
– Martin Heidegger<sup>1</sup>

*“. . . the path of knowledge is so ugly, hence so rarely taken, whatever its reputed beauties. The knowledge of the self as it is always takes place in the betrayal of the self as it was. That is the form of self-revelation, until the self is wholly won.”*  
– Stanley Cavell<sup>2</sup>

## I. Self and No-Self

Given that “the shadow of Descartes lies across French philosophy,”<sup>3</sup> it stands to reason that Jean-Paul Sartre, perhaps the most ubiquitous French thinker of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, would construct at least a similar program. For Sartre, consciousness is distinguished constitutionally from the substantial reality upon which it turns itself. Martin Heidegger, Sartre’s phenomenological predecessor and one-time intellectual opponent, might well have argued that Sartre erroneously founds his accounts of consciousness and ontology on the basis of the mere appearance of the present-at-hand.<sup>4</sup> Implicit in the explicit reflection upon any single ‘object’ is the reflexive awareness of subjectivity as the source of conscious awareness. That is to say, “the foundation of philosophizing, rather than being focused upon an explicit, indubitable self-awareness, is instead identified as a flow of awareness that is implicitly conscious of itself.”<sup>5</sup> Here, the question which refuses to be ignored first arises—what is the *self* of which *it* is implicitly conscious? Perhaps the very formulation of this question—one assumed and necessitated by Sartre’s method—instigates dualism and, as such, becomes the type of inquiry as to which the Buddha could only ever remain silent.

Both following and departing from Descartes, Sartre refers to his notion of *implicit* self-awareness as the pre-reflective *cogito*. Whereas the former’s foundation was believed to be an unchanging self—a protective boundary against which the radical skeptic could lean in the attempted reclamation of his existential balance—Sartre wants to say that instead of being certain of the “I” that thinks, we can instead be certain of the fact that thought (as influenced by and directed toward the world) *is occurring*. Again, taking this proposition by itself presents little to no problem. Nevertheless, conceiving of an inherently reflexive pre-reflective awareness *as a*

background, *as* an epistemological foundation, and so as something that must *necessarily* (in my eyes) be *grasped*, has drastic consequences for the successive attempt to craft a metaphysic that underlies a drastic conception of radical freedom. Any philosopher who “accept(s) Descartes’s basic model of a free and rational consciousness set against a mechanical, physical world”<sup>6</sup> will inevitably propose a structural reality defined by fragmentation.

This model leads Sartre into the trap of proposing “two distinct and irreducible categories or kinds of being: the in-itself (*en-soi*) and the for-itself (*pour-soi*), roughly the nonconscious and consciousness, respectively.”<sup>7</sup> In this regard, the father figure of existentialism fits neatly into what is perhaps the most enduring metaphysical strand of the dominant mode in Western philosophy. Within his ontology, we find – at the very least – echoes of the Milesian distinction between the *archē* and a world of incomplete appearances; the Platonic hierarchy that emphasizes the universal over and against the particular; the Cartesian dualism of mind and body; and the Kantian division between phenomena and noumena.

It is the *a priori* self-grasping of the *pour-soi*, the implicit reflexivity of the pre-reflective *cogito*, that allows the philosopher to cling to such a metaphysical distinction. Only by way of allowing the belief in an original source of reflection to congeal into its own metaphysical category can the in-itself be distinguished and separated from the activities of the mind; and vice versa—only by misrecognizing the external world as something static and enduring can the relative flux of mental activity be judged ontologically primary, at least in terms of ostensible use-value. With this antagonism in play, we remain within the longstanding tradition that unravels nothingness *only* and *always* in contradistinction to Being. Even Hegel, from whom Sartre borrows his metaphysical designations, would disapprove and reiterate that “the negative is just as much positive, or that what is self-contradictory does not resolve itself into a nullity, into abstract

nothingness.”<sup>8</sup> Heidegger, in a direct critique of the entire project of *le premier existentialiste*, claimed that Sartre “stays with metaphysics, in oblivion of the truth of Being.”<sup>9</sup>

Hardline Sartreans are unlikely to be swayed by this standard response. After all, how could Sartre be so quickly aligned with the rest of the Western tradition when he denies the existence of a unified ego? Surely, in this sense, we must allow him a place in the dialogues of East-West comparative philosophy or at least name him as a primary forerunner to the likes of Lacan, Deleuze, and Guattari.

Unfortunately, as we have already seen, “the *cogito* [inevitably] emerges as a result of consciousness's being directed upon the pre-reflectively conscious.”<sup>10</sup> Sartre obviously makes a distinction between the pre-reflective and egoic, but on what basis? If reflective consciousness, over which our control is practically assured, can grasp a foundation that is utterly *other* to the enduring substantiality of the world, then why not build our psychological shrines upon it? My conclusion regarding whether or not Sartre's project allows for an ego or for ego construction follows from C.S. Peirce's third and final degree of the clarity of an idea—his pragmatic maxim. His commonsensical prescription is that we “consider what effects, which might conceivably have practical bearings, we conceive the object of our conceptions to have.”<sup>11</sup> Should the effects of two separate propositions be identical, any distinction made between said propositions is only valid at the level of thought or language, i.e. at the level of abstraction. Though Sartre may forward a *provisional* difference between a unified ego and his conception of the pre-reflective *cogito*, the effect that both propositions produce is that of a subjective ground and an unassimilable external reality, the synthesis of which can only be considered abstractly, as “an ideal being.”<sup>12</sup>



## **To Study – To Forget**

In the third volume of their cogent comparative-philosophical work, David L. Hall and Roger T. Ames claim that “the modern self collapsed as soon as it was formed, its very apotheosis signaling its demise.”<sup>13</sup> Because Sartre’s work took the philosophical limelight during World War II and throughout the decade that followed, we seem justified in positioning his project as both the apex of modernist pessimism and the (perhaps negatively conceived) origin or foundation of postmodernist irony and anarchism. In bringing the philosophy of selfhood to its ostensible *telos*, he managed to divorce humanity from the world, to the detriment of both sides. In proclaiming radical freedom, he condemned the mind to unending neurotic reflection. Postmodernism and post-structuralism, at least in their artistic forms, would come to gather up these and other aporia in order to reveal sardonically the presuppositions of the supposedly antifoundational.

However, it would be unrewarding, and even ultimately injurious to the values of comparative philosophy, to reduce post-structuralist thought to cynical, anti-modernist condescension. This essay is meant to bring into dialogue complementary conceptions of non-duality in the East and the West as a means of broadening cinematic and philosophical thought and their interrelationship. To have such a goal entails a faith in the contemporary state of continental philosophy to produce works that undercut not only the hegemonies of social, political, and religious institutions but also the gaining ideas that Greek metaphysics and German idealism set and that prevalent modernist programs failed to refute.

If, as Hall and Ames contend, we are truly living in and out the collapse of the modern self, then the first step of this project must be a discovery (or, should one follow historicist accounts of our own philosophical paradigm, a reclamation) of the positivity inherent in emptiness, in formlessness, as it relates to a post-structural humanity. Through a comparative dialogue on the

movement from self to selflessness (in more than one sense), we might arrive at the realization that “the identity of an entity is always already based on inter-subjectivity, and the self is from its inception heterogeneous.”<sup>14</sup>

Selfhood having been Western philosophy’s object of uneasy infatuation for two millennia, we could conceivably pick the name of any contemporary intellectual out of a hat and discover a thorough construction or critique of the subject. However, in the interest of building a case for non-duality one step at a time, I have chosen to explore a discipline whose concern begins and ends with the mind and its relationships with the self and the ego. That discipline is psychoanalysis, and for a half-century, the preeminent psychoanalytic voice of a post-structural world has been none other than Jacques Lacan.

There is an unfortunate air that surrounds Lacan’s name and his work in the context of film and media studies. His innovations in articulating the linkages between vision, language, authority, and illusion were reduced to the ideological tools of an aesthetic elitism with antecedents dating back to, at the very least, Plato’s *Phaedrus*—that of the suspicion and the successive dismissal of new media or new rhetorical modes. Lacan’s ideas provided the foundation for a conception of the cinematic as fundamentally illusory and infantilizing. Nevertheless, “film theory’s understanding of Lacan was largely mistaken.”<sup>15</sup> Just as an evaluation of the use-value of Sartreanism (predicated, for instance, on his politically fervent support of so-called engaged literature) would be compromised by a refusal to engage with the problematic hierarchies entailed by his ontology, any attempt at addressing what really makes Lacan’s systems valuable that presupposes the accuracy of psychoanalytic film and literary theory will inevitably shroud the former beneath a veil of demagoguery.

Instead, Lacan should be noted and respected for the free spirit that he brings to his line of work. Beyond simply affirming that “human identity is ‘*decentered*’,”<sup>16</sup> he manages to find the positive power that lies beyond the artificial psychological structures which must be broken through. “Given their rich allusiveness, their humor, and complexity,”<sup>17</sup> Lacan’s published works find even a common *rhetorical* ground with the productively paradoxical writings of contemporary Zen masters. Moreover, having traveled to Japan twice for the proper study of Zen<sup>18</sup>, the French psychoanalyst clearly demonstrated an investment in cross-cultural conversation as well as in a general interdisciplinarity, both of which he would develop throughout a career spanning four decades.

For our comparative purposes, we will focus on what is perhaps his most enduring addition to psychoanalysis and to the philosophy of mind—the register theory.

### **Registering Emptiness**

First, a brief summary of the individual’s introduction to egoic processes:

The child, who is still physically uncoordinated, finds reflected back to itself in the mirror a gratifyingly unified image of itself; and although its relation to this image is still of an ‘imaginary’ kind – the image in the mirror both is and is not itself, a blurring of subject and object still maintains – it has begun the process of constructing a centre of self. This self, as the mirror situation suggests, is essentially narcissistic: we arrive at a sense of an ‘I’ by finding that ‘I’ reflected back to ourselves by some object or person in the world. This object is at once somehow part of ourselves – we *identify* with it – and yet not ourselves, something alien. The image which the small child sees in the mirror is in this sense an ‘alienated’ one: the child ‘misrecognizes’ itself in it, finds in the image a pleasing unity which it does not actually experience in its own body.<sup>19</sup>

Such misrecognition, or *méconnaissance*, sets the mind on a path overdetermined by the complementary torments of power struggle and self-doubt. Any semblance of ultimate control is offset by the appearance of an irreparable lack. This unstable psychical region, in which the domination of the construction of a self-same identity fights an unwinnable battle against a negatively-conceived emptiness, Lacan refers to as the Imaginary.

Because of its utter impossibility, ego-maintenance falls out of favor with the advent of post-structural theories of the mind. Whereas “the object relations, ego-psychology, and self-psychology schools all privilege the importance of developing a coherent or integrated ego or self-identity,”<sup>20</sup> Lacanian psychoanalysis “deflect(s) therapeutic attention away from the ego to the unconscious.”<sup>21</sup> Though we will later touch briefly on the notion of the unconscious, it will suffice to say here that Lacan’s perspective emphasizes both the strength *and* the utter unreality of egoic consciousness. The Imaginary register, “dominated by identification and duality,”<sup>22</sup> has *real* effects on the ways in which we engage with ourselves and with the world, but it is the result of an undue condensation of moments whose import is mistakenly sublimated to the level of spiritual-ontological truth. Following Lacan’s explication of the Imaginary, we might relegate the Sartrean split discussed above to that very register. Within the mirror stage, the child’s “recognition of itself as a (potential) totality is correlative with its recognition that the world as a whole is *not* its own.”<sup>23</sup>

The child cannot unify itself with its specular image of wholeness, with which it nevertheless identifies. The mistake is to collapse its own *re*-presentation onto the properly existential. Moreover, because the field of the Imaginary expands beyond the individual ego in order to shape existential reality to the will of that ego, similar reductions and concomitant alienations abound in terms of object-relations. With regard to the breast as well as “the gaze and voice of another,”<sup>24</sup> identification and lack are *inseparable*. Egoic identification—that which “has

the distinctive task of covering over or defending against the lack or absence of self”<sup>25</sup>—desires completeness, the experiential realization of non-duality, only because it misrecognizes duality as that which is ultimately real. In the case of the breast, when it is first taken away, the child perceives it as a part of itself from which it has been divided. This identification might *seem* to presuppose a primordial sense of the non-dual that is *rightfully* broken by such a division. On the contrary, it is the reflection upon the breast’s removal that posits this primary non-duality, a *false post-reflective* non-duality first engendered by the illusion that a momentary lapse in the fulfillment of desire necessarily posits a sudden existential gap between the child as a subject and the breast as an object. Separation, to the dualistic mind, identifies, distinguishes ontologically, those ‘objects’ which have been ‘separated.’ Genuine non-duality, as we will see, does not demand an eternal *attachment* of subject to object but instead forgets, or unlearns, the distinction. Any separation is transient and so not reflective of any essential disconnect.

Because this duplicitous non-duality entails duality, egoic life presents itself as a wild goose chase. ‘Lost objects’ become the ego’s prey, like the unfulfilled hopes and dreams of an earth-bound specter. Lacan terms any such perceived remnant of an original non-dual state an *objet petit a* – “the ‘a’ in question represents the French word ‘*autre*,’ which in English would be ‘other,’”<sup>26</sup> and this designation emphasizes the antinomies at play in egoic desire. Though the object is believed to be a remnant of the self, its physical separation renders it essentially alien. Though the value of the object is believed to be the non-duality entailed in its previous connection with the whole self, that value is somehow able to exist – to remain valuable – when separated from the self. In this way, we can understand desire for the *objet petit a* as its own illusion and as the maintenance of that illusion. In actuality, this desire’s ultimate target is “not this or that specific

object . . . but what is aimed at or sought after that seems to be *contained within* . . . the real world object.”<sup>27</sup>

What the real-world object involved in the *objet petit a* covers over is “‘the object cause of desire’ . . . what an Other desires, what I must be so as to be the object of an Other's desire, what would at last lay to rest my restless strivings and yearnings . . .”<sup>28</sup> and so on. The inclinations of such particular causes are so multipliable as to be irreducible—to be utterly foundationless. An ostensibly substantive desire can cycle back around onto a myriad of other distinct, even incompatible, desires. This is how the ego, differentially self-conceived, maintains its static image—by positioning itself over and against those (false) objects of desire, the attainment of which changes nothing, and thus whose ‘cause’ is once again deferred so as to uphold the illusion that such a cause has an inherent, self-same value.

It does not, however. *L'objet petit a* is empty. And this discovery, while terrifying in the suddenness with which it hits, holds an immense potential for human authenticity. “To transcend the ego-functions means to strip them bare of their imaginary thought coverings,”<sup>29</sup> and in the aftermath of egoic dissolution one more fully realizes how to engage with the processes of life as they unfold. Therein lies the value of Lacan's conception of the three registers; they are interconnected, so within those that elevate passing phenomena to the level of the existentially given (i.e. the Imaginary and the Symbolic), we will always discover holes leading to the emptiness of self that is simultaneously the fullness of potential. *L'objet petit a* is the unnerving but productive gap of the Imaginary register.

At this point, it behooves us to introduce that aspect of Lacan's work which has been most influential for literary and philosophical audiences – semiotics, or the processes of signification. In his *Écrits*, he declares that “it is the whole structure of language that psychoanalytic experience

discovers in the unconscious.”<sup>30</sup> This linguistic turn in the analysis of mental activities allows us to comprehend more fully the unreality of egocentrism—its reliance upon artificial construction—but even more importantly, it allows us to confront directly the roles taken up both by the individual and by society in relation to this construction, thus initiating a paradoxical positivity in the very ills of which we hope to shed ourselves. “By exposing the imaginary intentions of the subject’s discourse,”<sup>31</sup> we might arrive at the fullness of a dynamic, non-signifiable existence.

Lacan “equates the signifier with the paradigmatic, and the signified with the syntagmatic.”<sup>32</sup> In this sense, (linguistic) meaning is only achieved by means of the progression of “a signifying chain . . . [i.e.] the syntagmatic alignment of signifiers.”<sup>33</sup> Just as any utterance can only be successfully communicated through the effective, and effectively *solidified*, cooperation of its several constituents, so any ego (and moreover, any fragment of the Imaginary) maintains itself only by way of a personalized, hyperactive authoritarianism. Picking and choosing what factors with which to identify and from which to disassociate, it forges a domain that is only successful insofar as it can withstand encounters with any psychical intruder or combatant.

Therefore, the illusory wholeness of the Imaginary register is the product, the signified, *l’énoncé* of psychological semiotics. While the human subject in relation to larger forms of social semiosis is “split, a double, a doppelgänger . . . a lack that constantly demands the closure of an identity,”<sup>34</sup> the imaginary ego *is* that very insupportable identity, either doomed to crumble or certain to be seen through. *L’objet petit a* stands as both the possibility and the reality of either result. Because one experiences it within the realm of the ego, and because it is “a divergence, a metonym, a lack of the real, displaced onto a substitute,”<sup>35</sup> the individual can come to a direct confrontation with the façade covering the incompleteness of *l’énoncé* and thus of the Imaginary. This is why “the analyst is one who identifies with the *objet a*, the leftover within any system, that

which can unravel it”<sup>36</sup>; the intersubjective dialogue of the psychoanalytic session serves the express purpose of assisting the analysand in realizing their own capacities of decentering and deconstruction.

However, within Lacan’s schema, the work is not finished. It may not be enough to confront the deception of the Imaginary, for this register is simply built upon that of the Symbolic. This is the realm of production, signification, *l’énonciation*. If the realm of the ego traffics in a unified self-image of properly delimited meaningfulness, then “the Symbolic body is the social body of language and perception; in other words, the subject as a signifier.”<sup>37</sup>

Luckily, the Symbolic may be even easier to dethrone—or, at least, its gap might be easier to discover. The constituents of this order, given their alignment with the paradigmatic, have no meaning in themselves because meaning requires the connective tissues of a sequence. Instead, they consist in “meaningless, nonsensical materiality”<sup>38</sup> that resists any self-same use value. In other words, for this register,

failure is necessary because the signifier must open up a space through which the subject can enter: a perfectly functioning system allows for no new entrants, no new subjects. As a consequence, if the symbolic order is determinative in the path that it lays down for the subject, it doesn’t lay down this path smoothly but in a way that is fraught with peril. That is to say, the symbolic order continually comes up against a barrier that disrupts its smooth functioning—a barrier that Lacan calls the Real. This barrier is not external to the symbolic structure: the Lacanian Real is not a thing in itself existing beyond the realm of the signifier. Instead, the Real marks the point at which the symbolic order derails itself, the point where a gap occurs within that order.<sup>39</sup>



Still, Sartre's paradigm has already demonstrated for us that such emptiness can be misused. To hold on to nothingness is to endow it fruitlessly with the same status previously set upon the rigidity of the imaginary egoic structure (indeed, to defer it *from* that structure). Dualistic understandings of fullness and of emptiness entail one another but always do so incompletely; they must be set against one another hierarchically. Non-duality goes beyond entailment. In non-dual awareness, fullness and emptiness refer neither to a complementary pair nor to an antagonism. Moreover, the words 'fullness' and 'emptiness' cannot even refer to the undivided state in which their realities abide. Such is the unreal yet still potentially productive character of the Symbolic; by acknowledging that which cannot be symbolized, that which *must* be engaged with experientially, we come that much closer to the heart of being.

### **The Egoic 'Pac-Mind'**

When awareness goes beyond or falls through the gaps in the socially-constructed Symbolic, it comes face to face with the psychical capacities that provide the very lifeblood of that register. (Lacan might include these within the order itself, but I believe that they deserve their own distinct explication.) This encounter brings to light the manner in which Buddhist practice and Lacanian psychoanalysis can peacefully coexist. After all, to meditate "is to be aware of what is going on – in our bodies, in our feelings, in our minds, in the world."<sup>40</sup>

The arch-theoretical mode of scholarship might demand that, in order to advance a realm in which the individual comes face to face with her own capacities for psychological signification *without* stepping away from or admonishing them, we must *go beyond* Lacan's model by introducing a more perfect substitute. However, even if we ignore the ironically egoic echoes at work in such a method, we would still arrive at the assumption that Lacan's philosophy of mind closes itself off to change, or at least closes its registers to one another. Therein lies the rub of

dialectics—in proposing a synthesis, it must presuppose the delimitation, the separability, of thesis and antithesis.

In my view, the Buddhist conception of egoic process (sometimes referred to as the ‘Monkey Mind’<sup>41</sup>, though I will introduce shortly another analogy with more specific emphases) and Lacan’s register theory articulate so well as to proffer two possible moments of mutual inscription—one wherein the Monkey Mind stands at ground zero of the non-Real registers, and one wherein it extends both behind and beyond those registers. In either case, or in both, the situation now to be introduced suggests the value of engaging with the production and the product of psychological processes as they truly are.

Our new analogy, borrowed from the work of Professor Marty Heitz, takes comparative philosophical work as its basis:

This simple model I have come up with brings together the wisdom teachings from Buddhism, from Hinduism, from Daoism, from contemporary spiritual teachers. I have seen the basics of this through all of them. This is not my invention, and this is not a theoretical construct which we can conceptually argue about. It is a model, a *kind* of heuristic model, an interpretive model, to help us to watch our mind and become more awake to how it does what it does.<sup>42</sup>

Named after the ubiquitous 1980 Namco-Midway arcade game *Pac-Man*, the ‘Pac-Mind’ taps into the representative capabilities of the titular character’s movements and goals.

It is primarily a “hungry mind,” “constantly moving” and “constantly eating.”<sup>43</sup> Compulsive by nature, it is never content just to *be*. The Pac-Mind makes a mockery of lived existence by attaching itself to moments that are inherently fleeting. This is the mind we might notice most easily in the overworked academic or in the exhausted stay-at-home parent. It fools

itself into a false sense of psychical composure, mistaking compulsive intentionality for a complete, self-identical signifying chain. If it *just keeps moving*, it will not be forced to look into itself—to reckon with its inherent heterogeneity. Here we find the Pac-Mind’s point of articulation with the Lacanian Symbolic; it covers up a frightening mess of empty signifiers by way of *attachment* to arbitrarily conceived authorities of the self and of the Other.

The result of these compulsive processes is the ego’s self-narrative, which nurtures and determines the relative strength of the Imaginary. This narrative, unfolding in “psychological time,”<sup>44</sup> negates the productive capacities of past, present, and future. Though we will later have cause to engage with a nondual understanding of metaphysical time, we can delineate here the problems of attached time. The present moment with which the Pac-Mind is ever-concerned is a false present, in turn overdetermined by a reductionist past and a hypothetical future. Here I expand slightly beyond Heitz’s original model by suggesting that the ego’s incapability of living the current moment *as it truly is* stems, at least in part, from a psychical refusal of the fluidities of past and future. We compartmentalize and personalize past events in order to make sense of the here and now—a here and now reduced to the express purpose of codifying a stable identity. To propose a continuity of past and present is not inherently problematic; the issue is found within the egoic conception of continuity, one based on the undue identification of the two totalities *with themselves*, which renders them graspable and thus conformable to psychical construction. These false identities are then projected onto an as-yet-unlived future, denying its virtuality and reaffirming the Pac-Mind’s constitutive cycle.

This talk of self-sameness, of false identification, leads this model into its relationship with this project’s ultimate object of inquiry and critique—duality. “Without establishing a *this* versus a *that*, there’s no mental content that can be entertained,”<sup>45</sup> and so the Pac-Mind would be utterly

without sustenance. This is what grounds Lacan's non-Real registers as well as the through line that extends across the entire psychical apparatus. *L'énoncé*, the ego's self-narrative, requires a stability over and against which it can assert its own, and the false gap created between the two can be conceived as both the cause of suffering and the entryway into the rich emptiness of the nondual.

### **Identification and Deconstruction in *Mulholland Drive***

Before diving into a formal/narratological analysis of David Lynch's *Mulholland Drive* (2001), and thus beginning to explicate the articulations that the 'Lynchian' has with the no-self psychologies of Lacan and Zen, it behooves us to briefly summarize the ideas that we have elucidated so far. The purpose here is not to simply recapitulate these frameworks independently but instead to show how both can help us to dissolve the attachments of self-narrativizing and reach beyond, or look within, the fears and desires that found them.

The mind is a powerhouse that most easily and most frequently expends its natural energies, its constitutive processes, on complex illusions. Bare, transient emotions – guilt, contempt, infatuation, greed, and so on – become catalysts for an intense if nevertheless failure-prone '*me-machine*.' We learn to construe, collect, and categorize the passing presents that make up our lives; out of them, we construct products-for-identity. Then, we project these systems upon our very Being. The Self, considered spiritually, ontologically, psychologically, is that conglomerate upon which we confer the status of a pre-given totality, a totality that decides 'who we are' first and foremost. Much of the history of Western philosophy has been dedicated to describing and justifying, in one manner or another, the necessary status of the 'I' as a foundation for all judgments and all understanding. For Descartes, the 'I' was an epistemological foundation – a genuine gift from God allowing us to connect our ultimately spiritual cause to the contingencies

of the material world. For Kant, in a certain sense, the ‘I’ itself *became* God; the transcendental subject, in this instance, was the sufficient reason for empirical sense and knowledge, for our commonsensical perceptions of space and time. And finally, for Sartre, as we have seen, the ‘I’ is the nothingness confronted by the nausea-inducing impenetrability of the not-I, whether the latter comes in the form of Others who reduce us to our affects or in the form of “an absolute plenitude, self-identical, complete without consciousness”<sup>46</sup> which, when *thought* alongside the for-itself, reveals that “reality fails ultimately to cohere as a whole.”<sup>47</sup>

However, neither those egoic processes nor the subjectivities that we derive from them can ultimately endure the powers of their own immanent aporias. It is impossible for these systems to remain complete – or at least stable, in a way that properly satisfies the mind. Processes cannot be contained and represented in isolable units if their natures *as processes* are to be upheld. Moreover, that processual nature of the life of the mind, as with life more generally, insists upon itself. As D.T. Suzuki affirms, “the Zen masters all proclaim that there is no enlightenment whatever which you can claim to have attained. If you say you have attained something, this is the surest proof that you have gone astray.”<sup>48</sup> Our psychological attachments are driven to fail; at their heart, within the empty centers that they cover over, is the perduring change of lived existence. Everything comes back to Being, even the most powerful illusion.

This egoic collapse is ultimately a positive force, and it has been my experience that throughout the filmography of David Lynch – which is often replete with the uncanny, the horrific, and the impenetrable – that basic, freeing positivity abides. Perhaps Eric G. Wilson puts it best:

I assume that for Lynch instability is liberating, a mode that transcends staid material conditions and possibly connects one to something like vital spirit. Likewise, I believe that Lynch’s notions of fantasy push against constraining habits and potentially generate actual

visions of being . . . not a meaningless stasis but a rich abyss that approaches the no-thing that is being itself.<sup>49</sup>

There are several points of departure between my readings of Lynch and Wilson's. Wilson's hermeneutic fields are those of British Romanticism and American transcendentalism. He often relies upon the foundations of the Self or the Subject instead of breaking through them; indeed, his interests in the aforementioned aesthetic movements likely preclude such a breakthrough. He has an antipathy toward what he sees as an undue adherence to popularized interpretive models, to the "cultural continuity" of "Lacanian psychoanalysis or Deleuzian philosophy or [even] the Reagan eighties."<sup>50</sup> For my part, I believe that the depths of Lacan and Deleuze are rarely investigated with the originality and the openness that their systems demand, and articulations with Lynch construe my vision of richer understandings for all involved. Finally and most importantly: despite the fact that Wilson draws upon Lynch's personal interest in Transcendental Meditation, and despite his insistences that "the religion of Lynch is grounded on no ground" and that his films operate on the principle that "outside of dualism and monism is emptiness,"<sup>51</sup> his project resides entirely within the bounds of contemporary Western religiosity. In his text, there are no references to the vital discussions of non-duality found in the various literatures of Daoism, Hinduism, or Buddhism.

I hope to demonstrate equally my allegiance with and my distance from Wilson's work. My project is, fundamentally, a work of comparative philosophy. It will have use only insofar as it brings diverse intellectual and spiritual paradigms into a healthy dialogue. Nevertheless, as the quotation from Wilson makes clear, I am certainly not the first academic to understand David Lynch by way of the very freedom of Being – the constitutive formlessness that founds all forms, all actualizations in language or 'selfhood.' It is important that this be understood; this essay *does not* proclaim to fathom Lynch in a previously undisclosed light. Instead, it is a furthering. We are

attempting to *open up* no-self psychologies, processual metaphysics, and Lynch's strange cinematic worlds such that they fall into one another organically.

This emphasis on *continuation* and *development* of well-founded philosophical paradigms and theoretical models will hold sway throughout my analysis of *Mulholland Drive*. My philosophical understanding rests upon, or even radicalizes, a recapitulation of a dominant reading of the film, explicated by the scholarly projects of Wilson and Justus Nieland, as well as by a popular online article from a film and television journalist who goes by the playful pseudonym Film Critic Hulk. (I must insist upon the boundary-crossing nature of Lynch's influence and this very sort of semiotic analysis. Nothing seems more in line with the film's [and filmmaker's] utter strangeness than balancing academic publications alongside a cogent but accessible write-up, by an author who hides his identity beneath that of a bestial superhero.)

Generally, the dominant reading precedes as follows. *Mulholland Drive* is split unevenly into a dream and a reality. Its final half hour presents to its spectators, albeit obscurely, a truth that has been covered over by the illusory wish-fulfillment of the film's first 100 minutes. That truth comes in the form of the personalized tragedy of Diane Selwyn (Naomi Watts). Diane is a failed actress, who arrived in Hollywood after winning a jitterbug contest, and who survives on money left by her deceased aunt. She leads a melancholic existence in the shadows of her former lover and fellow actress, Camilla Rhodes (Lauren Elena Harring). After Camilla augments her many successes with an engagement to director Adam Kesher (Justin Theroux), Diane, in a fit of jealous rage, hires a contract killer, who (it is implied) successfully assassinates Camilla. Consumed by remorse and pursued by the police, Diane commits suicide.

Sometime after learning of Camilla's death but before taking her own life, Diane falls asleep and dreams of a far superior set of circumstances. In this complex dreamstate, Diane is

‘Betty Elms,’ a young star-struck hopeful who has just arrived in Hollywood and who is already on the road to success. (Her living aunt has given her a place to stay and secured her an audition.) Camilla is ‘Rita’ (after Hollywood starlet Rita Hayworth), an amnesiac survivor of an assassination attempt, which was thoroughly botched due to a sudden automobile collision. When Diane arrives at her aunt’s home, she finds the weak and startled ‘Rita’, and the two embark on an investigation into the latter’s true identity – an investigation which, while lending ‘Betty’ a level of power utterly unknowable by the ‘real’ Diane, inevitably leads to the dissolution of the egoic protection afforded by the dreamstate itself.

How will the analysis which follows deepen this dominant reading of Lynch’s film? I insist that the privileged distinction of dream/reality is ultimately derivative of a more primordial set of processes being unearthed and explored in both sections of *Mulholland Drive*. The first 100 minutes do not *merely* present a dream-as-wish-fulfillment; they also portray *l’énoncé* of the Imaginary register, the narrativized product of the Pac-Mind, an ideal self bombarded by its own attachments and doomed to fall into those hidden gaps which must always be revealed within them. The final portion of the film – its supposed ‘reality’ – is even stranger than the first, and that very strangeness helps to align it with the Symbolic register, or in terms of ‘Pac-Minding What Happens,’ with the processes (but not the *products*) of projection and reaction. It is filled with fragmented affects, floating signifiers without inherent signifieds, which (having been reached *through* the gaps of *les objets petits a* in the Imaginary of the film’s first portion) remain irreconcilable and ultimately reveal the positive possibility of *anatman*, or no-self.

The film begins with a sudden pop-art extravaganza; a precarious image of a translucent, smiling ‘Betty’ is superimposed upon a collage of disjunctive retro couples doing the jitterbug against an otherwise nondescript pink background. For Film Critic Hulk, “it is a Brechtian gesture.



Lynch is noting the artifice . . . We are being prepped for the fact that what we are about to see is not real.”<sup>52</sup> However, ‘artifice’ does not here refer *only* to the formal construction of the film itself or to the economy of image-making that undergirds Hollywood as such. This Lynchian foregrounding has a psychoanalytical scope; his sheer formalism serves as a ‘cinematic’ rendering of egoic narrativization, as a product, and of its underlying production, as a process.

The three distinct planes of the image seem to have no *semiotic* connective tissue. Their mere *composition* connotes the sickly-sweet sheen of 1950s America and the thin but gripping hopes of Hollywood stardom. But, beneath the collage, there is nothing. The candy-colored background means nothing without the projections of soda shops, classic cars, and teenage love. The couples slip between actualized figures and black silhouettes, prefiguring the film’s instantiations of *l’objet petit a* as those entities that give the lie to their own import by falling into formlessness. Most importantly, the image of ‘Betty’ is metastable. It settles into solidity alongside the artificial splinters of ecstatic glamor, but along with their slippages, it loses its own grounding. The conditional reality of ‘Betty’ and her story is thus always threatening to reveal its own unreality, its inherent non-endurance. *Mulholland Drive*’s opening scene reaches through all of Lacan’s registers and across the entirety of the heuristic model of the Pac-Mind. It emphasizes the illusory nature of the ‘Betty’-identity, divulges the signaletic materials of the specific visual culture out of which that identity has been construed, and portends the non-signifiable emptiness at the heart of it all.

If the film’s phantasmagorical overture corresponds in some way to each unique aspect of the apparatus of psychological illusion – and so to something like a particularly Buddhist interpretation of the Sanskrit terms *avidyā* (ignorance or misunderstanding) and *maya* (illusion) – then another of the film’s infamous digressions makes explicit the possibility of falling-through and returning-

to. The false ego, the constructed ‘story of me,’ can act as its own limit situation, allowing the existing being underneath “to abandon the securities of its limitedness, and so to enter new realms of self-consciousness.”<sup>53</sup>

At a diner called Winky’s, two unknown men sit and discuss a dream over which one of them has been fretting. The camera, mounted on a special jib arm<sup>54</sup>, floats ceaselessly between them, as if it is anxious to unburden itself of a fatal secret. The dreamer, in his dream, could see a terrifying face through the walls of the diner – the very diner in which the interlocutors currently sit. He hopes never to see that face again. The other man insists that they are here to make sure – that the dream was truly a dream, that the monster beyond the diner will not actually appear. They leave the building and slowly walk around to the rear. As they obliquely approach a right-angled wall, the horrific face briefly slides into view from behind it. The dreamer stumbles in fear and falls to the ground, clutching himself. The film itself, in its aural and visual tracks, seems threatened, as if its very exhibition might result in combustion.

Nieland argues that the monster’s revelation confirms “the reality of the dreamer’s paranoid dream,”<sup>55</sup> but we can improve upon the accuracy of this conclusion. As Film Critic Hulk notes, this scene “is not a dream within a dream, but a reference to a dream within a dream. [And this is a] key difference.”<sup>56</sup> If the macrocosmic illusion – Betty’s ‘dream’ – is being presented here in miniature, then the diner’s dream could not possibly justify itself. Instead, what occurs in this scene is an explication (in the most direct sense of ‘making-explicit’) of the non-systematized emotional intensity that underlies egoic structuration. In the dream, the dreamer sees the terrifying face through the diner’s walls; the face is that unknowable Thing which alienates the dreamer from the dream’s capacity for wish-fulfillment – for a complete, self-identical narrative. In ‘reality,’ it is not alienation that confronts the dreamer; instead, it is pure affect that runs *through* him and

*through* the film itself. The power of this confrontation amounts to the pure sensibility of the Deleuzian *encounter*, “a sensation that cannot be thought, that cannot find the empirical category under which an object can be recognized.”<sup>57</sup> With this equation, I push back against the notion that the monster *means* any particular thing. This is even underlined by the possibility that said monster might simply be a disheveled homeless person. Instead, the monster’s *unmeaning* serves as an impetus for meaning-*making* – for psychological semiotics. (We will return to this reading in our discussion of the film’s final act.)

In a certain sense, the aforementioned scenes act in the capacity of *l’objet petit a* for the spectator herself. They signify the limits of signification, wrapping us up in the strengths of sheer imagism and cinematic coding only to then unground us. Diegetic instances of *l’objet petit a* remain, individually and for the most part, less disruptive, even as they multiply in the descent toward emptiness. The first example arises after ‘Betty’s’ arrival in California. On the plane ride, she had made the acquaintance of a kind and happy elderly couple who seem to have given her advice and support. However, once ‘Betty’ departs from them, we see the couple in the back of a taxi, and their faces are contorted into obscene grins that extend beyond common sense or good taste. What Film Critic Hulk takes to be a twisted discourse on stardom, “a direct commentary on misguided optimism,”<sup>58</sup> I read as another visual symptom of the self-narrative’s immanent instability. There is something radically *incomplete* and non-understood about the world of ‘Betty’ and ‘Rita,’ and that lack will force us into deeper registers of existence. Similarly, the dialogue’s constant return to the “content-less quality of deixis”<sup>59</sup> – those pronouns, adverbs, and demonstratives that can only properly refer within the context of a given speech-act – delivers us and the dreamworld over to the impermanence of personality. The overtness of deictical speech in some of the film’s most memorable sequences (*This is the girl . . . I wanted to come here . . . It’s*

not *your* film anymore . . .) opens up the entire script to an understanding in terms of such slippages. The *I* of ‘Betty’ and the *I* of ‘Rita’ are always contingent forms, and so the surface story is always threatening to give way to a more basic realm (whether it be Ideal, abyssal, or something beyond such distinctions) into which these instants always pass.

The story of ‘Betty’ finally dissolves at Club Silencio. The encounter at the center of this sequence makes explicit to ‘Betty,’ and so too to Diane, the instability of the ego but also the “sincerity hatched at the very core of artifice.”<sup>60</sup> A riveting impresario treats us to the sounds of a trombone, a muted trumpet, and the dulcet tones of Rebekah Del Rio, but in between each performance, he assures us that there is no band, that it is all a recording. This does little for our interest or the interests of ‘Betty’ and ‘Rita’ – the show is still astounding. But, we now know that the illusion cannot last. ‘Betty’ pulls from her purse a blue box, which will accept the strange blue key discovered at the beginning of the mystery. Her search has reached its end – an end that will overturn the very structures of the mystery itself. The camera will plunge into the depths of the box, and we will now discover the affective fragments out of which ‘Betty’s’ story of *me* has been constructed.

If the dreamworld of ‘Betty’ and ‘Rita’ finds its liminal spaces in the unnerving eccentricities of the film’s *mise-en-scène*, then the ‘real world’ of Diane and Camilla uncovers constitutive psychical processes through a drastic tonal shift and a suddenly fragmented mode of montage. In the final act, the scenes taken by themselves pose few if any interpretive issues. Diane has an icy encounter with a woman who served as a romantic rebound. Diane and Camilla have a sexual encounter that turns hostile. Camilla and Adam reveal their engagement at a house party, where Diane is thoroughly humiliated and heartbroken. Diane hires a hitman and receives a blue

key when the task has been completed. She is haunted by the specters of the monster beyond the diner and the devil-grinned elderly couple. She shoots herself.

What gives this denouement its power is the sheer disorder in which its constitutive scenes are presented. (Nieland refers to the “linearity of the shorter second section,”<sup>61</sup> but I simply cannot understand how any viewer could come to such a conclusion.) Leading up to the final moment of Diane’s life, we are being thrown from one memory to another, unable to rely upon the comforts of a classical, teleological narrative. Make no mistake – I am not denying the emotive nature of these scenes. They are clearly imbued with Diane’s genuine feelings. However, she cannot put them to egoic use. ‘Betty’ – the anyone-but-Diane – cannot be made whole again, as her image was never complete to begin with.

Nevertheless, Diane’s ‘reality’ is still determined by its position in the aftermath of the self-narrative. In Heideggerian terms, we might say that the film has *not* returned us to inauthentic existence as it is lived “proximally and for the most part.”<sup>62</sup> That would be analogous to jumping from one ‘story of me’ into another. Instead, Diane has come face to face with her own inauthenticity, even though she remains unable to find herself at home in the unconditional peace of Being itself. If the Symbolic is the mind’s social register, the realm of the Other-structure, then we can say that Diane’s ‘reality’ demonstrates how, in its “inconspicuousness and unascertainability, the real dictatorship of the ‘They’ is unfolded.”<sup>63</sup> Each constitutive scene seems like a more-or-less quotidian encounter, contract killer notwithstanding. However, their fragmentations and displacements, and the correlative absence of any overarching narrative structure, reveal the powers with which they had otherwise been imbued by the attachments of the They-Self (in the dualistic reversals of the world of ‘Betty’ and ‘Rita’). The film’s final act brings

the They close in several explicit respects – through post-breakup rituals, unbearable small talk, Hollywood excess, and so on.

Despite Diane’s confrontation with artifice, and her reckoning with certain They-structures (through the contract killing most directly), she remains in a sort of psychological purgatory; “her nostalgia is for a lost object . . . that the film at once mourns and celebrates as an empty space.”<sup>64</sup> In other words, she is lost – divorced from the sureties of the Pac-Mind and the They-Self – but she cannot yet accept the freedom, the openness of genuine Being, in this indeterminateness. She is still driven to identify haphazardly with her fleeting affective states, even if she cannot synthesize them into a unified ‘I.’

This final obstruction does not merely deny her an immanent peace. At the same time, it threatens to draw her back into the systematization of a self-narrative. This is why the figures of the elderly couple and the monster beyond the diner abide even within Diane’s ‘reality’; they affirm the fact of that reality’s conditioning – by the image-politics of Hollywood, by interpersonal violence, by the very human propensity for the crafting of an illusion. While terrifying in the most basic empirical terms, they nevertheless perform the function of driving Diane through the final constitutive register of subjectivity – into the gaps of the Other-structure. It just so happens that this breakthrough seems to come in the form of a literal suicide.

However, the way in which this ‘suicide’ is presented denies the very morbidity of the act and opens up the possibility of an optimistic reading of Diane’s fate and thus of *Mulholland Drive*’s finale. When she pulls the trigger, what should be gore is instead a sudden upsurge of smoke filling the bedroom. The *mise-en-scène* here alludes explicitly to two other scenes in the film. In the first instance, we can refer to the cloud of smoke that consumed the vehicular collision which would precipitate the illusory reconciliation of Diane (as ‘Betty’) and Camilla (as ‘Rita’). In the second,

we can recall the decayed body of Diane terrifying ‘Betty’ and ‘Rita’ and thus acting as another encounter, with *un objet petit a*, directed toward the ultimate dissolution of the ‘Betty’-narrative. In the dominant reading of the film, both of these moments are relegated to the ‘real’ Diane’s dream of being ‘Betty’; in my own development, they are fixtures of the Imaginary register. Thus, both analyses agree that the film encodes smoke and Diane’s corpse in terms of *unreality*. From these premises, we are invited to induce a positive understanding of the film’s ending – that Diane is not truly ‘dead,’ that her presence abides in some way – and to deduce a general strategy toward a non-dual, processual conception of Being with which the film, as a whole, operates.

Both sections of *Mulholland Drive* circle death, but these are deaths of illusion and convention. ‘Betty’ passes away, and with her goes the artifice of an abiding self-narrative. Diane, *insofar as* she has been *defined* in terms of immanently ephemeral states of emotional intensity *and* in terms of oppressive social systems, passes away as well. Everything *comes to pass*, and with the passing, the false dichotomy of identity and nothingness has been overturned. All forms return home to formlessness. Finally, we see – superimposed upon one another – the translucent images of Hollywood, the monster beyond the diner, and Betty/Diane and Camilla/Rita. The blue-haired Club patron speaks: “*Silencio.*” No image is denied; all is silently affirmed. If, as Nieland argues, Lynch manages to think “the being of cinema and the being of a person in love as somehow analogous to each other,”<sup>65</sup> then such a cinema is one of diverse, open processes mutually determining one another, and such a love is utterly unconditional, unified with an infinite possibility beyond the ego, beyond the self, and beyond attachment.

*“This is now. And now will never be again. Blue sky, cool air and green, green forests. Mountains, lakes and streams. The wind, the wind. Water, earth, air and fire, red, yellow, purple and white. We come from the elemental and we return to it. There is change, but nothing is lost. There is much we cannot see.”*

*- Margaret Lanterman<sup>66</sup>*

*“Tao that can be spoken of, is not the Everlasting Tao. Name that can be named, is not the Everlasting name.”*

*- Lao-Tzu<sup>67</sup>*



## II. Process, Reality, and the New

The guiding question of this work as a whole will continue to be: to what degree do Lynch's filmmaking practices accord with and develop non-substantive philosophical systems? In the first section, we traced these articulations through a deconstruction of the egoic self, as formalized by Lacan's register theory and aestheticized by the film *Mulholland Drive*. However, the no-self *itself* calls for further inquiry into the non-substantive processes which underlie and construe the empirical world of actualized forms.

### Realization and Presupposition

If we were to begin this analysis from a (processual) perspective on the cinematic itself, an obvious theoretical starting point would seem to arise – that which was developed in Gilles Deleuze's works on the aesthetic and philosophical developments of film history, *Cinema 1: The Movement-Image* and *Cinema 2: The Time-Image*. Instead of continuing in the direction of the epoch's popular Marxist and psychoanalytical readings, Deleuze developed a filmic taxonomy on the basis of a return to what he saw as the fundamental formal elements of cinematic art – movement and time.

To this end, he developed a system which divided film history into two image regimes. Classical American and European cinemas were “mastered by [a] figure of rationality where the identification of movement with action assures the continuous unfolding of adjacent spaces.”<sup>68</sup> This domain is that of the movement-image. Despite this domain's assumption of “an initial cosmic matter-flow of mutually interacting images, within which the living image emerges as a center of indetermination,”<sup>69</sup> it continues to prioritize the relationship of a sensory-motor system to a homogeneous space carved (as an interruption) out of a heterogeneous flow of time, which in

turn can only be represented indirectly through mobile cuts of *durée*. However, in the aftermath of a worldwide epistemological collapse, “a reversal has happened in the movement-time relationship; it is no longer time [as a representation] which is related to movement, it is the anomalies of movement which are dependent on time.”<sup>70</sup> Here, time returns to its elemental, formless form, as a radical field of non-causal differentiation, and the images it produces cannot be rendered identical or continuous. If, as Rodowick notes, “each era thinks itself by producing its particular image of thought,”<sup>71</sup> then the era of the time-image is one wherein thought is divested of any natural, logical, or teleological determination.<sup>72</sup> We could quite easily extend our reading of *Mulholland Drive*’s formal structure to include mobilizations of both regimes. The film’s first section – the egoic dream state – affirms continuity through rational divisions of adjacent spaces, while the second section works through radical disjunction, cleaving and scattering spaces and times both physical and emotional. But, is there a way to understand the film’s ultimate unity of identity and nothingness on the basis of the cinema books? Can we rescue non-duality from the dichotomous schema of abstract and direct presentations of time?

Deleuze’s cinema books are dense, unique, and eminent works of film-philosophy. They are important continuations of his dramatic investments in process as it relates to empirical-transcendental relations. They should be studied widely and intently for their argumentative rigor and for the suppleness of the several formal analyses contained within them. Nevertheless, I do not find the time-movement distinction, at the center of their project, to be an adequate *model* for Lynch’s processual rendition of the ante-cinematic through cinematic means. Prior to a brief rehearsal of what *does* constitute the most properly non-dual model for the close readings to come, we can trace the conditional limitations of Deleuze’s film philosophy through three stages: 1) Masao Abe’s reading of a traditional Zen discourse, 2) the dogmatism (possibly) upheld in one

fashion or another by Descartes, Kant, Sartre, and the cinema books themselves, 3) the systematization of these traditional propositions provided by Deleuze's own account of the Dogmatic Image of Thought.

The traditional Zen discourse from Qingyuan Weixin, though often delivered with slight variations, is presented by Abe as follows:

Thirty years ago, before I began the study of Zen, I said, 'Mountains are mountains, waters are waters.'

After I got an insight into the truth of Zen through the instruction of a good master, I said, "Mountains are not mountains, waters are not waters.'

But now, having attained the abode of final rest [that is, Awakening], I say, 'Mountains are really mountains, waters are really waters.'<sup>73</sup>

Within this formulation, we find the heart of Zen psychology and metaphysics. Our attachments to the world of things, and the widespread objectifications that they imply, are quotidian illusions. Perceptions do not merely abide in the ways we expect and hope that they will. When one begins to study the Buddhist conceptions of impermanence and no-self, and to realize them through *zazen* (sitting meditation), they will develop an understanding of the emptiness at the center of all arisings. The moments of our lives, and the objects of our knowledge, are always passing, and this passing affirms that the only absolute is itself the non-absolute nature of impermanence.

However, the *existential* realization of ultimate truth is still incomplete at this stage. In this nothingness, as Abe notes, "there is no positive ground for one's life and activity."<sup>74</sup> It is not that the emptiness of the second stage is conceptually disingenuous; the issue is that, in its current understanding, it cannot be *lived* genuinely. In the third phase, the "'this-ness' (*haecceity* in western medieval theological terms) of this world and [of] things is grasped from another

perspective.”<sup>75</sup> (A Western analogue to Abe’s affirmation would be Heidegger’s characterization of human existence; “to Being-in-the-world . . . belongs the fact that it has been delivered over to itself – that it has in each case already been thrown *into a world*.”<sup>76</sup> That is, the Being of a human being is always factual – engaged in concrete involvements with other entities which, when taken together, construe a totality of meaning.) Returning to Abe and Weixin, we must see this final stage as a realization of the *non-duality* of nihility and the substantive, of emptiness and form. When one truly awakens to their ownmost possibility of authentic peace, they are able to live mindfully with *both* the groundless ground of Being *and* the ephemeral moments and contexts which are always arising and falling away, in one form or another. To quote a similar rehearsal from Toshiya Ueno: “Mountain remain mountain, but is *becoming* all other things. Flower continues to be flower but fuses into bird, and bird still lingers existentially as bird but flower is *becoming* bird.”<sup>77</sup>

Few Western philosophers adhere so closely, throughout the entirety of their metaphysical systems, to the first stage of understanding as presented by Weixin, but we can read the Cartesian cogito in light of it. As Descartes seeks to demonstrate, even if we doubt all previous judgments and experiences, to the point of doubting our very existence, we cannot doubt the occurrence of doubting, and that very act seems to presuppose a thing which does the doubting (or more generally, a thing that thinks). In comparing this methodological ground to the first stage of understanding, we can divide that stage into three aspects which imply one another. First, for any experience to take place, there must be a thinker, a perceiver, a *subject*. Second, on the basis of that firm subjective ground (which will be founded, in turn, upon the infinite intellect of God)<sup>78</sup>, we experience an objective world that we can trust to give us accurate knowledge about the states of things. Finally, in what amounts to a reiteration of both aspects in their combination, the world

consists of objective identities (including the identities that we *are*) which make themselves clear to our thoughts.

Kant's transcendental idealism pushes back against the Cartesian *cogito* in a manner that, so to speak, keeps one foot in Weixin's first stage while also leaping forward into the second. Deleuze himself, while ultimately unsatisfied with the final characterization, approves of Kant's first move; for the philosophical introduction of time as change, "nothing is more instructive than the difference between the Kantian and the Cartesian Cogito."<sup>79</sup>

Descartes was satisfied with allowing God to synthesize the instants of our thoughts and experiences, but Kant insists that "all thinking has to take place in time. It is an *essential* determination of thinking."<sup>80</sup> We apply the "I think" and the determinations that come with it (i.e. the determinations of phenomena and their modes based upon *a priori* categories) to the temporal manifold of intuition, in which we ourselves are present as *given*, through the synthesis of an active, transcendental subject. For Kant, "the indeterminate self and the self that determines it are the same subject, and yet they are distinct."<sup>81</sup> In other words, the transcendental 'I' cannot reflect directly upon its own determining activity, due to the very fact of it being a transcendental *a priori*. The impermanence of time cuts through the possible identification of the 'I think' and the 'I am.' That to which the transcendental subject applies the 'I think' is "merely an empirical after-effect of it"<sup>82</sup> – a conditioned determination of an appearance that cannot be identical to either the transcendental activity which does the determining *or* the entirety of determinable existence as it is *lived* in time. This difference between thought and being, for Deleuze, "splits the subject into two unequal halves: the empirico-transcendental doublet."<sup>83</sup>

Kant's model fails because, while introducing change into the self, such that it cannot be identified with any single moment in which it seems to arise, the model continues to rely upon the

self-sufficient identity of the transcendental ego, which we can analyze by way of analogy with the structures of judgment (which in turn rely, as Deleuze will argue, on a subject-object understanding of reality that accords with Weixin's first stage). In other words, despite Kant's introduction of a necessary asymmetry between (or, a constitutive difference *running through*) the transcendental and the empirical, the passings of the latter are ultimately grounded upon a central identity abiding in the former.

The problems inherent to the Kantian distribution recur to a certain extent in Sartre's account of consciousness. In the first analysis, Sartre and Deleuze might seem wholly aligned. In *The Transcendence of the Ego*, Sartre argues that "the *I* only appears at the level of humanity," and when we understand the *I* in these terms, "the transcendental field becomes impersonal, or, if you like, pre-personal, *without an I*."<sup>84</sup> For Sartre, there is no transcendental identity synthesizing consciousness; that synthesis is relegated to the identities of objects themselves.

Unfortunately, the echoes of Weixin's first stage remain. Sartre's new conception of synthesized consciousness must presuppose a reality construed by objects, to which our individualities are indebted. Again, this empirical basis rears its head, objectifying the transcendental field and leaving no room for *genuine* formlessness. Moreover, encounters with other instances of consciousness, always an impetus for struggle in Sartre's philosophy and his fiction, prevent a characterization of the transcendental field as truly pre-personal or pre-individual. Henry Somers-Hall thoroughly diagnoses Sartre's contradictions:

. . . although the two consciousnesses share the same transcendental field, each one asserts his own right to be an individual, and this struggle between individuals itself takes place within the transcendental field. Each has the potential to 'disintegrate' the other's relations to the world through 'the unfolding about itself of its own distances.' This means that I see

the other as a part of the transcendental field, but as a part which individuates itself through the particular relations it holds to the world about it. The look is the attempt by each consciousness to subsume the other within its own synthesis of the transcendental field . . . This is to say that consciousness is not merely an individuating, but also a personalized presence within the transcendental field . . .<sup>85</sup>

Despite the attempt to characterize consciousness *as* nothingness, Sartre's insistence on the utter division between the in-itself and the for-itself sets his ontology on the path to identity. We reduce the Other to the constitution of the in-itself, attempting to utilize them for our own synthesis on the basis of worldly relations. However, these struggles do not occur in the empirical realm, amongst the iterations of the *I* that we put into the world. Distinct *instances* of the nothingness of consciousness fight one another for the dominance of liberation. This limits Sartre's notion of nothingness; as Abe makes clear in his reading of Weixin's discourse, "one is apt to objectify and become attached to no-self as something distinguished from ego-self."<sup>86</sup> Sartre, distinguishing one nothingness from another nothingness, placing them in existential combat, reiterates the first stage of understanding at the transcendental level – within the very conditions for human experience. The dualistic ego of self-narrativization will inevitably arise, as it finds its necessary condition in the very structures of reality. As Hazel E. Barnes, an expert in Sartrean ontology, concludes: "Perhaps a consciousness in good faith is *obliged* to practice the kind of self-reflection that produces the ego."<sup>87</sup>

While the Cartesian *cogito* remains entirely within the bounds of objective self-knowledge given in Weixin's first stage, Kant and Sartre reach toward the value of impermanence while ultimately falling back upon the articulation of the empirical world with a transcendental identity. They are dogmatic culprits who "trace the transcendental . . . from the empirical."<sup>88</sup> My hesitance

to use Deleuze's cinema books is not based upon arguments surrounding the self-reflection of consciousness, though the presence of determinate and indeterminate centers in those texts leads me to believe that a critique on this basis may be warranted. Instead, I believe that Deleuze's work on cinema, despite its rigor and its fruitfulness, follows an understated identity discourse by emphasizing the rhetorical/ideological functions of the actual and the virtual (i.e. the statuses of movement and time as frameworks for philosophical thought) *separately* – as *modes* of a more primordial plane of images – and above their prior functioning as mutually-dependent registers of a processual ontology. (My preference for the nondual metaphysics of *Difference and Repetition* over the film-philosophy of the cinema books is less critical than it is rhetorically, aesthetically, and methodologically based. The regime of the time-image, in which Lynch's work most likely falls, remains a *kind* of image, a *degree* of contraction. Neither image regime is *better* suited to a non-dual presentation of the transcendental within the empirical, because both conjunctive and disjunctive formal tendencies remain *actualizations* and thus instances of the empirical.)

To quote the Heart Sutra: form is emptiness, and emptiness is form.<sup>89</sup> A genuine processual, non-dual aesthetic of cinema might be formulated as follows: time conceived as the open whole of *durée* exists *directly* within the movement-image as its generative condition, and the open whole of *durée* can only be imaged cinematically (indeed, can only be said *to exist*) through its contractions (or crystallizations) into the innately transformative identities of quotidian perception. In this rendering, there would be no room for a discussion of a plane of images grounding both movement (as a spatial rendering of time as external difference) *and* time (as pure difference without prior measure). Instead, time-as-pure-difference would itself be the origin or the generative condition of the cinematic image, and it would *always* give rise to the movement-



image. (Just as facticity has its ground in existentiality, inauthenticity has its ground in ownmost Being, form has its ground in emptiness . . .)

Of course, this brief characterization of the cinema books is certainly not sufficient for a critique of Deleuze's film-philosophy as a whole; such a project is beyond the scope of this essay. Nevertheless, we might develop some of the limitations (for our current project) of that film-philosophy, through a comparison of Weixin's leaps from conventional to lived truth with Deleuze's account of the traditional Image of Thought. Moreover, this negative, systematic critique will lead us into the positive account of process developed throughout the first two chapters of *Difference and Repetition*.

The Dogmatic Image of Thought, as Deleuze characterizes it, can be understood through the interdependency of eight postulates. We can examine the first three through the recapitulations of Cartesian, Kantian, and Sartrean models of the self presented above. The first Deleuze calls "the postulate of the principle" which presupposes the "good will of the thinker and [the] good nature of thought."<sup>90</sup> For Descartes, the clarity of self-reflection allows us to participate in the perfection of God's infinite intellect. For Kant, the laws that govern and allow for the development of the natural sciences are based in the categories of the understanding attributed to a transcendental subject. For Sartre, the non-substantive for-itself is nonetheless the ground for radical freedom and for the attribution of any moral schema to the world in which the for-itself abides. Thought is seen as identical with, or as the sole tool for, the realization of the Moral Good.

Deleuze's second and third postulates make explicit the interdependent registers in which the good nature of thought consists. The postulates of "common sense" and "recognition"<sup>91</sup> affirm, respectively, a subjective and an objective pole to proper philosophizing, and we have seen the presence of both poles in every model that we have summarized so far. (It is important to note that

these postulates operate in the systems of the academic philosopher and in the conventional psychical structures of the everyman. Here we find an important correlation between Deleuze's critique and Heidegger's deconstruction; the history of metaphysics is founded upon the ways in which humanity has interpreted itself *through* its "closest everydayness."<sup>92)</sup>

Again, the issues I take with Deleuze's film-philosophy cannot be reduced to the immanent, hierarchical contradictions of subject-object duality. However, Deleuze's fourth postulate provides a cornerstone upon which I might further justify my preferred distance from the cinema books. This is the postulate of "the element, or of representation" wherein "difference is subordinated to the complementary dimensions of the Same and the Similar, the Analogous and the Opposed."<sup>93</sup> The structures of judgment and representation (which, for Deleuze, are the same) organize differences in terms of an underlying identity. For Aristotle, a central genus precedes speciation whereas for Kant, a subject (or, in terms of the categories, substance) precedes its predicates (or the modes of a substance).<sup>94</sup>

Under this image of thought, when we truly understand an entity in-itself, we can only relate it to other entities in a negative sense, rendering "determination an external, merely epistemic procedure."<sup>95</sup> Unfortunately, this privileging of *external difference* is something that seems to recur even in the movement-time distinction operating in Deleuze's cinema books. In his study of Deleuze's philosophy of time, James Williams attributes this dualistic understanding to the influence of Henri Bergson on the cinema books, and Levi R. Bryant summarizes the faults in Bergson's thought as follows:

In Bergson it is always a question of dividing between two or more tendencies, one containing all the differences in kind, the other containing all the differences of degree. For Bergson, it is always a matter of time as opposed to space, of matter opposed to memory,

of living matter opposed to inert matter. As a result, Bergson perpetually finds himself caught within dualisms, in such a way that the gulf between the internal and the external comes to appear insurmountable.<sup>96</sup>

This inevitability is, perhaps, bound up with the very nature of a taxonomical project; for the development of a complex web of filmic signs, movement and time serve as predicates *and* as identities grounding further predications. The two regimes are themselves presented as two Images of Thought which “retain screen images as the prompt, support, and central reference” and thus “retain the representational frame as our first point of understanding and explanation.”<sup>97</sup> Though Deleuze presents the time-image as a kind of formlessness that is beyond the spatial determinations of the movement-image and of the sensory-motor schema, he fails to bridge the two primordially through the univocity of difference-in-itself, a *pure, internal difference*, and the coming-to-actualization of external forms. Thus, to know the non-duality of emptiness and form, we must reach deeper than this current understanding in terms of external relatedness. As Abe notes, we must overcome the separateness of “differentiation as in the first stage and no differentiation as in the second stage.”<sup>98</sup>

### **Identity, Difference, and Time**

This is precisely the nature of Deleuze’s project in *Difference and Repetition*. He “wants to provide an account of the genesis of *real* experience, that is, the experience of this concretely existing individual here and now.”<sup>99</sup> The dualistic treatments of judgment and representation – grounded in presupposed identities and giving the empirical only in modes of external relatedness – have not adequately constructed such a genetic account. Kant’s concepts and categories were mere overlays giving proper form to an unknowable content whose constitution would remain, for all intents and purposes, foreign to real experience. Deleuze attempts to affirm a transcendental realm, itself

devoid of identities, that is constitutive of and *immanent in* actualized entities (which includes thoughts and even egoic attachments).

He begins with a deconstruction of difference – which also amounts to a deconstruction of a presupposed generality – as it has been conceived throughout the development of Western thought. He explores and critiques, to varying degrees of intensity, the systems of Aristotle, Scotus, Descartes, Leibniz, Spinoza, Kant, Hume, Hegel, Kierkegaard, and Nietzsche. Some of these examinations are positive, and some are resoundingly negative, but in each case the ideas therein give way to new avenues for metaphysical exploration. As Somers-Hall notes, Deleuze’s historical investigation performs “an enquiry into the principle of difference which neither sees it as conceptual nor sees its non-conceptuality as the end of our enquiry.”<sup>100</sup>

In other words, the transcendental conditions of form – and thus, the generative conditions of conceptual thought – cannot themselves be *formed* but must be that which allows for the coming-to-be of actualities, the arisings of form. To conceptualize difference as an external measurement is to *presuppose* those forms, those identities, given in the act of relation, without accounting for their genesis. Deleuze’s speculative move is to free difference from the primacy of the empirical and the theoretical and, so to speak, *dig* difference into a transcendental field empty of any substantive foundations. For Deleuze, difference *is* the transcendental. From this perspective, *pure* difference, or difference in itself, “does not have fixed identity. It is an ongoing variation of relations, rather than any *given* [my emphasis] object, substance, or quality.”<sup>101</sup>

Still, Deleuze has no interest in *denying* the existence of real objects, substances, and qualities. There are two inextricable aspects of his methodology – the transcendental *and* the empirical. His widespread philosophical project attempts to account for the constitution of our real experiences, as well as for the illusions that they often engender. As we have seen, the constitution

of the transcendental realm consists in the open variability of pure difference in itself. To break with the received duality of matter and form, the transcendental must be *immanent in* what it conditions – those forms which it actualizes. How can we characterize this immanent constitution, and in what ways might it make us rethink the nature of forms (and their actualizations) as such?

For the actualization of forms within the formless, Deleuze uses the term ‘repetition.’ Though he and Heidegger proceed with similar projects, both amounting to a renewed description of average experiences *given their formalized ontological bases*, their rhetorical systems are diametrically opposed. Whereas Heidegger, quite infamously, replaced the received terms of metaphysics with neologisms adequate to “the poetics of being,”<sup>102</sup> Deleuze often holds fast to a traditional metaphysical vocabulary in an attempt to introduce, into that received discourse, “all sorts of shifting, slipping, dislocations, and hidden emissions.”<sup>103</sup> That is to say, he seeks to affirm a “differential system of multiplicities”<sup>104</sup> by weaponizing the very language that has traditionally denied internal difference or reduced its constitutive character by relegating it to the internal contradiction of opposing identities. (With this last, we might grasp the identity discourse operating in Hegelian dialectics.)

Therefore, when we encounter Deleuze’s use of ‘repetition,’ we must realize that he means to explicitly challenge and dispense with the commonsensical notions attached to the term. The concepts at work in *Difference and Repetition*, like those forwarded in classical Buddhist texts, come together to serve as “a generative practice that might unlock fixed ways of being.”<sup>105</sup> Deleuze’s repetitions are *not* repetitions of the *same* - the same Thing, the same Idea, the same Event, so on and so forth. Instead, they are comings-to-form of formless difference-in-itself, expressions of “actual processes of becoming at different degrees of intensity.”<sup>106</sup> To live

responsively, *with* the elemental changes that construe us, is to be primordially mindful of these repetitions – to *exist* them.

Deleuze delivers over his novel characterization of repetition through a similarly novel philosophy of time. The upshot of this philosophy, and its interdependency with pure difference, certainly accords in certain ways with his overview of the time-image in the second cinema book. However, given my reading of *Difference and Repetition* in terms of the generative non-duality of emptiness and form, I believe that his earlier systematization of time is more deeply rooted in a desire to overturn dominant metaphysical hierarchies. Deleuze's philosophy of time runs through three syntheses which depend upon and complete one another, and which seek to characterize the several coexistent ways *in which time is lived*.

A slippage introduced into David Hume's arguments about causality and induction gives us Deleuze's first synthesis of time; "Hume sees habit formation as a process whereby past instances of [a] sequence are contracted together to form generalities by the imagination. The imagination operates like a 'sensitive plate' ..."<sup>107</sup> Here, Hume argues that the concept of causality is given to us through a contraction of habits (a series of similar perceptions about the world) which are then projected into a general future conforming to a self-same principle. Hume's argument is a psychological one; the use of 'imagination' works to presuppose a thinking thing at the base of this synthesis, even if that presupposition lacks the clarity of the Cartesian cogito or the Kantian transcendental subject. Deleuze's move is to ground the psychological explication in an authentically transcendental one – to insist that "habit is not itself a psychological phenomenon, but instead operates throughout the world."<sup>108</sup> In Deleuze's first synthesis, multiple, particular, irreducible processes (the proximal past) are contracted into a **living present** that awaits a general future. It is a 'passive' synthesis; it does not rely upon receptive selves maintained by the forms of

intuition or active, determinate identities abiding in the transcendental field and governing the attribution of concepts. On the contrary, and as Deleuze notes, “we do not contemplate ourselves, but we exist only in contemplating – that is to say, in contracting that from which we come.”<sup>109</sup>

Herein lies the first distinction that we must draw between Deleuze’s first synthesis and one of the structures of Pac-Mind. At first, there seems to be an obvious articulation; psychological time, in which the Pac-Mind abides, similarly involves projections into the future on the basis of reactions to the past. However, this aspect of Pac-Mind, as with all others, only operates through the assumption and the constant reification of an identical self, enduring continuously from past to future. The first synthesis of time, on the other hand, is subject-making or subject-founding. A subject only exists passively, *as* the living present insofar as it synthesizes processes (which, only upon reflection, can be deemed past *instants*).

The second distinction to be drawn involves the characterizations of past and future as experienced empirically by the Pac-Mind and as affirmed speculatively in Deleuze’s transcendental work. As we have noted, the retained past of the living present is an irreducible series of processes, whereas the reactionary past of psychological time takes the form of a nominal collection of instants solidified into an ego. The nuanced characterizations of the future clarify further the distinction between psychological and metaphysical times. The Pac-Mind’s projected future needs the total continuity of time; it must be *identified* with the retained past. However, the future *as* a dimension of the living present contains no particulars. It is not a specific future *expected* but a general future *awaited*. In the first synthesis, given the asymmetrical movement from particularity to generality, Deleuze refers to the direction of qualitative duration as “the arrow of time.”<sup>110</sup>

There is yet another aspect of this living present, and a rather obvious one – the present *passes*. But, if the past-of-particulars and the general-future as we have characterized them so far are merely dimensions of the living present (for Deleuze, only the present can be said to *actually* exist – we will return to what is meant by ‘actual’ in due time), then how could the present pass? There is no past prior to the living present’s synthesis. Deleuze concludes that there must be another past, a *different* past, into which the living present – as retention and awaiting – passes and is always passing.

This leads us into the second synthesis, a synthesis of the *pure past*. This past is general, in the same sense that the awaited *future* of the first synthesis is general. To be general, for Deleuze, is to contain *no* independent, indifferent particulars; “the pure past cannot be the cause of the present or completely determine it.”<sup>11</sup> If it does not contain these, then what is this pure past? It is nothing, or more accurately, a *no-thingness* – a formless mélange of ever-changing relations without limits or metaphysical borders. It is a non-actualized region that is immanent to, and a condition for, every individuation, and into which each of those actualized instances must return. Emptiness becomes form, and form becomes emptiness.

We have touched upon the first synthesis’s relation to repetition. Beings repeat on the basis of the multiple syntheses that their living presents retain and the general field of expectation that they await. Because we move from particular to general, this repetition implies novelty; we do not merely repeat particulars, but we introduce novelty (or *difference*) into the process in retaining those particulars. This is how Deleuze decides to define ‘habit.’ Authentic habit, for Deleuze, involves a maximal responsiveness to the interrelations of all of those syntheses, such that instantiations of a habit are not merely ‘mindless’ rehearsals of identities but are instead *new* repetitions on the basis of ever-changing processes of synthesis. But, how does repetition relate to



the second synthesis, that of the pure past? We find novelty taking center stage once again. We repeat *all of the past* (all conditions, all constitutive relations, but *not* any particular past present or nominal collection of them) to greater or lesser degrees and on different levels, and we do that repeating in every present. Here, we see one of the several ways in which Deleuze's speculative metaphysics emphasizes the complex unity, or *univocity*, of Being; "what characterizes one being at any one point in time are the particular intensities running through that being, intensities and forces that may run through others, though differently configured at any one time."<sup>112</sup>

From the point of view (i.e. from an argumentative perspective, which shifts the emphasis from the first synthesis to the second) of the second synthesis, the living present is the maximally contracted 'point' of these myriad relations. Because we have the contracted being founded upon and referring back to the uncontracted, Deleuze draws upon Bergson's model of the cone of memory – the point of the cone being an actualized moment of ever-shifting relations and the remainder of the cone becoming more and more generalized as it 'expands outward.'<sup>113</sup> From this perspective, form arises out of – is the most contracted state of – formlessness. Deleuze calls form the 'actual' and its constitutive formlessness the 'virtual.' (It's important that we do not get too caught up in contemporary connotations of 'virtual', especially in light of the fact that *Difference and Repetition* was released in 1968.)

Deleuze gives us one final synthesis, though he does not refer to it as either active or passive. Frankly, even after an extensive examination, I am not certain that the *upshot* of the third synthesis actually requires that it be characterized as a 'synthesis' at all, despite Deleuze's redirection of the term. Nevertheless, the nature of the third synthesis – the synthesis of the future – is such that it provides a valuable characterization of both other syntheses together, and thus of the open wholes of time and of a nondual reality. This is the synthesis of the 'eternal return.' As

we have seen with both prior syntheses, what gets repeated, what *returns*, is difference – a different synthesis of the immediate, retained past (in a habit) or a different synthesis of the whole of the virtual past (in our lived present but also in our use of memory). So Deleuze’s proclamation in regards to the eternal return is this:

Eternal return affects only the new, what is produced under the condition of default and by the intermediary of metamorphosis. However, it causes neither the *condition* nor the *agent* to return; on the contrary, it repudiates these and expels them with all its centrifugal force. It constitutes the autonomy of the product, the independence of the work . . . It is itself the new, complete novelty . . . It allows only the plebeian to return, the man without a name.<sup>114</sup>

Though the ‘virtual’ conditions the actual, and though the multiplicity of events/instants are synthesized into the living present, these cannot *completely determine* the present and/or the future according to some pre-given model or identity. There is a way – another perspective – in which what returns, what gets repeated, is utterly new, is independent of the determinacies that have led to such novelty. Dependence and independence go hand in hand. The past – the whole of the virtual past and the immediate-particular past – they condition without determining, push forward without limiting. That which comes to pass *always* plays out relations that have preceded it, but it always plays out these relations in a manner which is utterly irreducible to any other moment. You can both live with the past and “burn yourself completely”<sup>115</sup> in each living present. Completing his metaphysical account of time – as perpetual change – with the eternal return of lived novelty, Deleuze positions himself alongside Buddhist practice, which “offers an ethical programme aimed, ultimately, at a kind of self-transcendence, at least of a self that is fixed and set against the world.”<sup>116</sup>

### **The Novelties of Twin Peaks**

Pithily summarizing the preceding critiques and affirmations, Deleuze himself proclaimed: “What a strange confusion – that of void with lack. We really do lack in general a particle of the East, a grain of Zen.”<sup>117</sup> My recapitulation of Deleuze’s philosophy of time, as a speculative, processual metaphysics affirming a non-duality of emptiness and form similar to that realized existentially in Zen practice/enlightenment, is meant to demonstrate the degree to which his ideas have planted or tended to a similar seed in the West. In our second examination of one of David Lynch’s major works, perhaps we will find an artistic or cinematic ground for the furthering of this non-dual East-West articulation.

Here, we will engage – to varying degrees – with all three current iterations of *Twin Peaks*, as they affirm and mobilize Deleuze’s philosophy of time, and thus a sense of reality as both united and processual. As a media event, the original ABC primetime experiment can stand on its own as an animation of “the future as the new and the new as pure difference . . .”<sup>118</sup> The discourse surrounding its April 8, 1990 premiere “fit with the standard logic of the cultural legitimization of television, in that it was distinguished, first and foremost, from TV itself, and especially from its commercial aspects.”<sup>119</sup> Critics held fast to the idealization that television could become highbrow only by ceasing to be itself, and *Twin Peaks* was to serve as one of several object lessons in such a coming-to-fruiting by way of self-alienation. In my view, this resistant and intolerant tack is foreign to Lynch’s sensibility; despite his well-known reservations about the medium, what drew him to it was a positive impulse and not a desire for critique. For Lynch, “there’s something about a soap opera that’s fantastic because it just keeps going and going . . . you can go so deep and open up the world so beautifully, but it takes time to do that.”<sup>120</sup>

And open up a world he did, drawing novelty from within televisual habit, with time and change as his primary aesthetic tools. Often, that novelty will take the form of dissolved dualities, pushing the series forward into the ever-unexpected. In the words of Kenneth C. Kaleta, “Lynch’s series amalgamates. Consequently, suspense, film noir, and television are molded; evil and good coexist; comedy and horror overlap; parody and reverence intermingle.”<sup>121</sup> Thematically, narratively, and aesthetically (perhaps even theologically), distinct realms are made to flow into one another, and we might use Deleuze’s living present as a hermeneutical model for the series as a multiplicity of processes of retention and (open) expectation.

Laura Palmer, the slain homecoming queen herself, personifies the first synthesis of time. She is the retention of possibly distinct lines of flight – white privilege, an upper-middle class domestic background, romantic triangles, meaningless sex, murder, an international drug trade, angels and demons – which sets the show’s mostly unpredictable narrative in motion. Each of the interesting lives and domestic dramas that construe the town of Twin Peaks serves as a particular living present, and the town itself synthesizes them all, repeating the process at a wider level. With so many twisted threads, and at 30 episodes ranging between 60 and 90 minutes, the first iteration of *Twin Peaks* is far too complex to allow for any systematic reading. Instead of such an attempt, I will limit my focus to the second season’s final scene, which will begin a pattern of tracing Deleuze’s philosophy of time through the (ir)resolutions of each iteration of the saga.

In the final episode of the second season, entitled ‘Beyond Life and Death’, Cooper enters the Black Lodge and the Red Room – for the first time in a state of apparent wakefulness. This ‘space’ is constituted by stylistic *mélange*, absurd humor, and a “gothic horror [which] delivers direct and revealing encounters”<sup>122</sup> with entities and events that cannot be brought under the conspicuous domain of any given conceptual determination. Images from the Red Room – which

themselves endure without fail amongst Lynch fans and within the televisual imaginary<sup>123</sup> – themselves uncover, resurrect, and synthesize the greatest events and figures of the first two seasons. In a sense, the entire series up to that point is recapitulated through various refractions and abstractions which tie Dale Cooper, Laura Palmer, and the strange interstitial-metaphysical town of Twin Peaks to a groundless ground of impermanence, of reprisals, of shadows and slippages. (We will quickly unearth and explore the transcendental capacities of the Red Room, and the Black/White Lodge, in the discussion to come.)

The episode's final moments serve as a microcosm, a maximal contraction, or a primary empirical synthesis for the manner in which the Red Room's innately transformative powers draw novelty from *habitus*. The Cooper we know is 'trapped' in the Black Lodge while BOB's malevolent spirit once again enters the empirical world of Twin Peaks through Cooper's doppelgänger. When the doppelgänger awakens in Cooper's room at the Great Northern Hotel, he enters the bathroom and proceeds to smash his head into the mirror, to the point of drawing blood. He mocks his own false expression of care – 'How's Annie?' – while he and the mirror image of BOB share a malevolent cackle, and the first iteration of *Twin Peaks* comes to an end.

This scene puts Deleuze's first synthesis of time into motion through the 'twin peaks' of violence and the embodied façade. "What we say of a life may be said of several lives,"<sup>124</sup> and the most proximal passive synthesis, enveloped in the multiplicity of the final scene's living present, is that of Leland Palmer, the first person in the series to be explicitly overtaken by BOB's spirit and made to exact unspeakable horrors on those closest to him. Despite Leland's position at the extreme end of a spectrum of mystery, the discovery of his crimes founds the positioning of the murders of both Laura and Maddy as singular events bound up in a manifold of personal and interpersonal relations, which will demand their being taken up into future living presents.

As Williams notes, “Deleuze’s account of the first synthesis of time demonstrates that past and future collide in many movements determined by singular events.”<sup>125</sup> Here, the singular events being united *through* their differences are the violent outbursts to the self and to others perpetrated by both Leland/BOB and Cooper’s doppelgänger. Leland is a murderer, and at the realization of those murders, he/BOB rams his head into a heavy cell door until it kills him. Cooper’s doppelgänger has yet to kill anyone; such evil deeds are delivered over to the awaited future as a dimension of the living present. (And of course, at the time of the episode’s premiere, viewers had no way of knowing if such a future would ever be *actualized*.) Moreover, the cranial damage that the doppelgänger inflicts upon himself seems to do little genuine harm; on the contrary, its combination with the scornful repetitions of ‘How’s Annie?’ bespeaks a stronger, more caustic embodiment of evil than anything yet brought forth in the series. This final scene presents us with something that we have seen before but also something *that we cannot possibly have seen before*. A synthesis of Cooper’s myriad talents and BOB’s insistent malevolence draws an iniquitous novelty from a *habitus* construed by seemingly incompatible competencies.

Leland’s time as an avatar for ‘the evil that men do’ passes; the havoc to be wrought by Cooper’s doppelgänger will similarly come to pass, as *Twin Peaks: The Return* (2017) makes clear. What Deleuze’s philosophy of time demonstrates for us is that there must necessarily be another, virtual past, in and by way of which these actualized, living presents are made to pass. On the one hand, these presents cannot simply slip into a *mere* nothingness or void; part of the necessity of Deleuze’s arguments about the virtual arises from his dismissal of any sort of ultimate metaphysical *lack*. (Once again, following both Deleuze and Zen – we *must not* confuse a positive void with a negative lack.) On the other hand, they cannot merely be contained within a nominal past; this past-as-container model merely articulates (sans sufficient reason) a thought, without a

corresponding reality, and a series of realities without any essential mechanism for their mutual dependence or their tendency for transformation. This second set of necessary conditions emphasizes a methodological factor that remains, in my eyes, somewhat underexplored even in Williams' thorough treatment of Deleuze and time. The distinct moments of the retained past in the living present, as well as the multiple syntheses construing any one such present, can only be understood *separately* upon some secondary act of reflection by a passive subject, which has in turn been constituted by those very syntheses.

We have seen that certain elements of the first iteration of *Twin Peaks* serve to actualize the first synthesis of time – the drawing of difference from the novel repetitions of *habitus*. In order to mobilize the synthesis of the virtual past within the same saga and by way of the same film artist, we will now turn briefly to the , misunderstood, derided, but subsequently renewed prequel film<sup>126</sup> *Twin Peaks: Fire Walk with Me* (1992). In many ways, what follows will recapitulate the comparative nature of this entire project in miniature; the thorough and visceral readings of the film's myriad dimensions, found in book-length studies of Lynch's work completed independently by Martha P. Nochimson and Allister Mactaggart, have already laid the groundwork for an understanding of the film that is positive, optimistic, non-dual, processual, and open to an originary field operating prior to and at the foundation of generated identities. My work will consist in explicating the valuable connections such readings have with Deleuze's second synthesis and the general Buddhist fundament of an ante-empirical interconnectedness of Being.

As Nochimson notes in her first paragraph on the film, "Lynch's dramatized rejection of the power of the detectives in the first thirty minutes has not been understood by enough of the audience as a cue to shift *away* from the detective sensibility that unified the televised narrative through Dale Cooper."<sup>127</sup> The film's first act, without being an outright dismissal, differentiates

itself from the complementary structures of investigation and detection that grounded the television show's first two seasons. Such structures openly communicate that movement inherent to the arrow of time's first synthesis – the synthesizing of (ostensibly) disparate figures or patterns into a retention-toward-multiple-possibilities (i.e. solutions to the given case). Lynch upends the apparent primacy of this synthesis by deconstructing the realm of its proper authority, by demonstrating detection's ultimate insufficiency in the face of the supernatural but also, and more importantly, when confronted with a reality deeper than any flux of appearances.

However, even this scene is not truly the *beginning*, though it provides the ground upon which viewers might construct a novel interpretive frame. Instead, the static and white noise of an analogue television set leaves us afloat in an abstract introduction, unable to find foothold or handhold, until Leland/BOB destroys that ephemeral peace in pursuit of his first victim, Theresa Banks. Mactaggart understands this tonal and aesthetic transition in terms of the groundbreaking developments in post-Lacanian semiotics forwarded by Julia Kristeva. This allows us to trace an articulation between the pre-conceptual metaphysic of Deleuze and the semiotic structures we examined in the first chapter. Mactaggart writes:

. . . within the narrative signified, there is another level of meaning, an excess that runs counter to that of the symbolic and which threatens to undo its manifest meaning, and to offer counter- and anti-narrative levels of signification . . . In this opening extract, we start with pure colour, abstracted from, or rather predating, narrative, floating hypnotically over the entire screen. Slowly, as the camera pulls back to indicate the source of these images and to reveal the television frame, we are introduced to the narrative. These shots, therefore, initiate the change from pure cinematic signifiers to the narrative signified, yet, at the same time, they indicate that the narrative was/is predated by the signifier; that the extra- and



anti-narrative, as Julia Kristeva (1988) writes about in her essay on Giotto's use of colour in the frescoes of the Arena Chapel in Padua, are constantly in play, to supplement and disrupt any overt signifieds, as a form of excess which saturates narrative sense.<sup>128</sup>

For Mactaggart, the film's opening scene thus presents us with the very exercise of the primordial processes of sensibility which ground and unite conceptual and animate beings – in Deleuze's words, “not a sensible being but the being *of* the sensible . . . not the given but that by which the given is given.”<sup>129</sup> The stories that we tell, the clichés by way of which we communicate with one another, the foundational principles of logic, epistemology, and metaphysics, these are all ultimately expressions of a deeper meaningfulness that cannot be captured in any one thought or in any single phrase, though all thoughts and phrases continue to participate in that fundamental meaningfulness. *Twin Peaks: Fire Walk with Me*, as a *prequel*, is that ungiveable sensible ground of shifts and slippages which gives us the investigative world of the original series, which in turn remains incapable of providing viewers with the *suchness* of Laura's tragic life *despite* having that tragedy as its generative condition.

Nochimson explores later moments in the film that similarly blur the conceptual and the anti- or ante-conceptual – Lil's baffling theatricality, Philip Jeffries' disconcerting appearance and disappearance<sup>130</sup> – but I believe that it would be possible to examine each moment, or at least each scene, with the purpose of exploring this meaningful give-and-take. For our purposes, we can leap to the film's final moments, ‘after’ Laura's murder, when Lynch finally brings us to the virtual ground of the many mysteries of *Twin Peaks*. We might keep Mactaggart's central question in mind: “where is this wistful place and time, this sad, beautiful though meager, mournful, dream-like space to which I now crave to return?”<sup>131</sup>

Our subject is the Red Room, the Black Lodge, the White Lodge, the place above the convenience store – a place and a no-place that goes by many names and remains without a name. Laura has been killed; the troubled and abused prom queen is no more. But her existence abides in a new form, in a formless form, in a place beyond places which was responsible for her coming-to-be in the first place – the Red Room. At the level of the signified, *Twin Peaks: Fire Walk with Me* gives us few clues and no answers as to the ultimate meaning or purpose of this phantasmagorical arena. However, at a level of *aesthesis* beneath or before any received realm of categories, the film – a *prequel* by necessity, a revelation of the *a priori* without the maintenance of any permanent ideas – presents us with a realm of impermanence, a sphere of difference, which nevertheless remains innately bound up with the commonsensical world of laws and identities. It constitutes the processes of the interconnection of *all that is*, rehearsing images, words, and sounds, that *pass* from the empirical world of Twin Peaks, returning to the pure, generative past of *Twin Peaks*. (*Let's rock . . . Sometimes my arms bend back . . .*)

Despite the preceding two hours – recounting one of the most unbearable domestic tragedies in history of American cinema, if I may be so bold – the cathartic coda rediscovers peace in the eye of a melancholic storm. Her pain and suffering turn to tears of elation, her desperate life becomes a last smile, and she's surrounded by beauty – her own, the beauty of the room, the beauty of Cooper's care, and the beauty of the angelic presence that hovers over her. For Nochimson, we must remember that in Lynchian metaphysics “the real is a simultaneous presence of the bound and the free”<sup>132</sup> and that the film's final “burst of joy resolving into contentment suggests not the usual stasis of the Hollywood ending but the apogee of a cycle and thus the capacity for future motion.”<sup>133</sup> The apogee of a cycle might be restated as the maximal contraction of a cone of memory; in either case, we are given the mutual dependency of the present moment and the open

relations which constitute the entire history of existence. For a more localized reading, we can return to Mactaggart, who notes:

. . . Cooper and Laura were/are always in *Twin Peaks*, in one form or another [my emphasis]. In the Red Room, Cooper is always with Laura, and the viewer, providing catharsis from the horrors of evil as depicted on the level of narrative, so that even though the audience of the television series had been left with the threatening image of an evil Cooper, or more likely his doppelgänger in *Twin Peaks*, we know, or hope, that ‘he’ really exists in the Red Room offering support and comfort to us all. Here there was no murder; Laura and the viewers are safe, protected by Special Agent Dale Cooper.<sup>134</sup>

Of course, these are not the Cooper and the Laura of the series; they are *virtual doubles*, becomings of the characters we know and love *and* of new individuals beyond our knowledge and ahead of our care. The film’s final scene does not comfort us with the promise of a separate afterlife, an arena for the eternal abiding of self-same souls. Instead, it grounds us in a boundless and equitable capacity for change, a capacity which binds us with all that is and ever has been. Deleuze’s second synthesis of the virtual *a priori* past, and the perduring transformations of the Red Room, meet one another in a processual ontology, wherein “sense is not to be located in the predicate affixed to the subject, but in the verb . . . [in] the event that gathers together all other events in a unity or open whole.”<sup>135</sup> *Twin Peaks: Fire Walk with Me* is a field of swirling infinitives, recapturing the empirical world to generate it anew, and its operatic finale of mournful euphoria serves as a microcosm of such processes.

### Interdependent Syntheses and the Eternal Return of Pure Difference

In a thorough and engaging blog post<sup>136</sup>, journalist and cultural critic David Auerbach presents the argument that there is a brutal determinacy – a genuine closure – to be found within the gargantuan leaps and twisted pathways of *Twin Peaks: The Return* (2017). His pessimistic rendering positions Cooper and the FBI as willing actors in a scheme formulated by White Lodge entities, whose ultimate purpose is to defeat Judy, a malevolent spirit that possesses human souls, feeds on anguish (visualized by a darkly humorous cream-corn-monstrosity called *garmonbozia*), and manifests its power through surges of electricity. This scheme is deeply cruel but is supposedly in defense of the greater good; it uses the personal traumas of Laura and Diane to lure Judy into an alternate dimension – though, in the absurdly multiplicitous world of *Twin Peaks*, what signification could ‘alternate’ possibly maintain? – itself manufactured and formed by the psychological repressions and displacements from which Laura’s spirit will never be freed. Once Judy has entered the trap, it becomes Cooper’s task to seek out Laura’s new form (a woman by the name of **Carrie Page** living in Odessa, Texas) and bring her to Laura’s childhood home – an act which should cause such a sudden resurgence of suffering on Laura’s part that both Judy and the dreamworld into which she has been drawn will be destroyed. In effect, Cooper, Diane, and Laura/Carrie find themselves in the midst of an interdimensional suicide mission.

Auerbach’s reading is forceful, persuasive, and from my perspective, ultimately uninteresting. Most generally, frequent examinations of Lynch’s creative processes, and of his antagonistic response to the ‘need’ for linguistic interpretations of his works<sup>137</sup>, have led me to the paradoxical belief that, in order to remain properly grounded, any single reading of his films must remain *open*. If I were to accept any arguments concerning the supposed rigidity of Lynch’s semiotic structures, said arguments would have to clarify that those structures manifest themselves

through self-contradictory multiplicities – that is to say, through set significations which mutually conflict and thus deny any synthesis of ultimate intelligibility. (*Sensibility*, as Deleuze makes clear, is another issue entirely.)

As concerns Auerbach's particular reading, I have two major reservations. On the one hand, it seems to presuppose – without thoroughly mobilizing – a no-self psychology and a non-dual metaphysic, both of which collide into an apocalyptic finality in ignorance of the open endurance common to both paradigms. Laura and Cooper both transform, Judy becomes Sarah Palmer, and multiple dimensions spring into being without losing connection to all others. Nevertheless, the final dimension is given pride of place as a narratological tool while being simultaneously reduced to a tertiary metaphysical arena, and this leads me into my second reservation. The recurrence of thoughtforms, *tulpas*, and dreamstates (*'But who is the dreamer?'*) forces me to question the very basis of Auerbach's methodology. By what explicit logic can any spectator confidently determine a given dimension to be 'authentic' or 'original,' another to be 'derived' or 'dreamed,' and what elements of Lynch's aesthetic seem to affirm the primordial value of these sorts of dichotomies? Despite my reluctance to engage with Deleuze's extensive taxonomy of film-images, his account of the crystal-image accentuates the Lynchian indiscernibility which, I find, ultimately undercuts Auerbach's reading and any others of its ilk:

Contracting the image instead of dilating it. Searching for the smallest circuit that functions as internal limit for all the others and that puts the actual image beside a kind of immediate, symmetrical, consecutive or even simultaneous double . . . If we take this direction to its limit, we can say that the actual image itself has a virtual image which corresponds to it like a double or reflection . . . Indiscernibility constitutes an objective illusion; it does not suppress the distinction between the two sides, but makes it unattributable, each side taking

the other's role in a relation which we must describe as reciprocal presupposition, or reversibility. In fact, there is no virtual which does not become actual in relation to the actual, the latter becoming virtual through the same relation: it is a place and its obverse which are totally reversible . . . The indiscernibility of the real and the imaginary, or of the present and the past, of the actual and the virtual, is definitely not produced in the head or the mind, it is the objective characteristic of certain existing images which are by nature double.<sup>138</sup>

Despite my abiding reservations about the relationship of this account to Deleuze's earlier work on time and the virtual<sup>139</sup>, it helps us upend any attempt to reduce a multidimensional narrative/aesthetic to any particular hierarchical schema. The 'Lynchian' openly undermines the prioritization of a given order over its dissolution, or of a given image over its uncanny double. Searching for a self-same complex within Lynch's circuitous morphology comes across as ultimately facile or futile. (Intriguingly, the comment thread to which Auerbach provides a link<sup>140</sup>, and which apparently served as the catalyst for the development of his own interpretation, contains numerous theories which proceed from identical premises while resulting in antithetical conclusions with distinct moral, modal, and narratological repercussions.)

Finally, and at the risk of stating the obvious, our current project simply does not concern itself with the clarification of plot – the reduction of Lynch's sensibility to water-cooler fodder. Instead, we seek a provisional explication of his 'worldview,' by way of the hypothesis that his filmmaking practices follow from a metaphysical affirmation of process and subject-object/spirit-substance non-duality. In what follows, we will pair the finale of *Twin Peaks: The Return* with Deleuze's third synthesis of time, but we should remember that all three syntheses (like Lacan's

three psycho-semiotic registers) are utterly inextricable. Therefore, our reading of the miniseries should allow us to work our way through them all.

Three recurrent elements of *The Return* exemplify the first synthesis of *habitus*, through lenses both positive and negative. As Matt Zoller Seitz notes, “every frame of this thing has been the scripted-TV equivalent of what clichéd tech industry executives call ‘a disruption’ — a rock hurled through prestige TV’s stained-glass window.”<sup>141</sup> One such ‘disruption,’ and one that some fans and critics have found particularly egregious, is the continual focus given to unknown characters with trivial backstories presenting us with a multiplicity of loose ends, and such encounters typically take place at The Bang Bang Bar (referred to by locals as ‘The Roadhouse’).<sup>142</sup> Often, in the closing moments of an episode, Lynch will linger on conversations that cannot possibly have a determinate meaning for viewers, but despite their indiscernibility, they nevertheless manifest, without fail, the communal illness that has always circulated throughout the town of Twin Peaks. Its many vices – careless sex, violence, narcotics – recur again and again by way of the uncanny discourse of The Bang Bang Bar; these living presents minimize their open futures by limiting the capacity of *habitus* for the drawing-out of difference. Such scenes – the most obviously socio-critical in the series, and perhaps in Lynch’s entire *œuvre* – underline the most limited, superficial version of Deleuze’s first synthesis, one determined by the Pac-Mind or the Imaginary-Symbolic dialectic. It’s no coincidence that many of these scenes are preceded by unnecessary exterior establishing shots; we are being conditioned to understand these encounters and discussions as egoic façades, as surfaces of human iniquities in ignorance of deeper capacities operating beyond good and evil. (Late in the season, a bloodcurdling scream from one of the Roadhouse’s patrons will serve to shatter the façade, to reveal its incompleteness. However, we must delay for now an examination of the primal power of inarticulate voices.)

Lynch's disruptions do not take up self-destructive narcissism as their only target. The same deconstruction that Nochimson traced in the first act of *Fire Walk with Me* gets recapitulated in the early episodes of *The Return* by way of the police forces in Twin Peaks and Buckhorn, South Dakota. Sheriff Frank Truman, unfamiliar with the irrational and supernatural threads underpinning his town, and Deputy Chief Hawk, withered by loss and doubt and time, lead a team consisting of a corrupt Deputy Sheriff on the one hand and a more-oblivious-than-ever Andy and Lucy on the other. The Buckhorn police department, while ostensibly construed of more attentive minds and more upright intentions, is continually impeded by inexplicable occurrences and federal encryptions. Methods of empirical investigation and detection, so easily assimilated to the digestible linearity of a classical narrative, repeatedly arrive at their own inherent limitations. (However, and in keeping with the interconnectedness of the three syntheses, both police forces present and enact important movements within the trajectory of *The Return*, and Andy himself experiences a vital moment of clarity in the White Lodge.)

If the Roadhouse asides actualize the synthesis of *habitus* only through the most minimal drawing of difference, and the several empirical investigative forces (so to speak) naturally drain their capacity for differentiation, then what does the first synthesis of time look like when it operates *without* limitations and *in tandem with* the other two syntheses? Lynch responds: perhaps to an ego-bound, narrative-driven perspective, it looks like the slapstick absurdity of Dougie Jones. Dougie is actually a memory-wiped Dale Cooper, who reentered 'our world' only to be ensnared in a trap set by his evil doppelgänger – an intermediate form whose 'spirit' would be sucked back into the Black Lodge in BOB's place. Despite an apparent absence of typical cognitive functions, Dougie experiences nothing but success in his personal and professional 'endeavors.' He wins a small fortune at a casino, uncovers a widespread pattern of insurance fraud, saves his own life, and



revitalizes the love between himself and his wife, Janey-E. Ultimately, and at just the right moment, he will also cause himself to recover the memories and investigative abilities of Dale Cooper.

Against all odds, what could possibly account for such hysterical prosperity? Deleuze and Zen give us complementary answers. The former might say: Dougie synthesizes an always-evolving present by retaining (and *repeating*) the passing phenomena that surround him and thrusting them forward into an awaited future *empty* of attachments or expectations. (Of course, this necessarily involves an openness to the *a priori* past and the eternal return of pure difference.) A Zen practitioner might simply understand Dougie's continuous well-being as the outcome of a clear and open engagement with the present moment. Additionally, we can emphasize the wholly undivided nature of the enlightened mind and average everydayness. As Shunryu Suzuki affirms, in regards to enlightenment, "before you attain it, it is something wonderful, but after you attain it, it is nothing special."<sup>143</sup> Dougie has no interest in the 'difference' between knowledge and stupidity, truth and error, ego and enlightenment. Within his comic incompetence and indifference, there is a germinating seed of responsiveness that carries him through both still and troubled waters. He affirms and mobilizes another of Suzuki's wise proclamations: "There is no need to remember what I say; there is no need to understand what I say. You understand; you have full understanding within yourself. There is no problem."<sup>144</sup>

*Fire Walk with Me*, as a whole and through its ethereal conclusion, presented us with a cinematic rendering of virtual-actual interplay – the passing of a living present into the *a priori* past, the dissolution of form into the formless. Given the spectator's care for Laura's trauma, and the wistful peace of her last tearful smile, the Red Room finale can be thought of as a representation of the non-duality of good and evil – of living and dying – *from* the perspective of the good and

*through* the tendencies of a vibrant vitalism operating as the fundament of all beings. That same non-duality seems to be appropriated by the ‘opposite pole’ in *The Return*’s now infamous eighth episode. A bastardized or inverted creation myth bears witness to the births of Judy, of Bob, and of all postmodern evils.

Early on a July morning of 1945, in a desert called Jornada del Muerto (*Journey of the Dead Man*), the Trinity Test forever changes our country, our livable environment, and our capacities for both fear and destruction. Less than a month later, the same weapon would be used to annihilate more than 100,000 Japanese civilians. Lynch situates the advent of the atomic age as the point of differentiation giving rise to the macabre legacy of *Twin Peaks*. Out of a compacted nothingness, a great black fire storms into our world, belying the promise of enlightened progress and forever putrefying the essence of unchecked technological innovation.

In a recent essay for the *New Review of Film and Television Studies*, Monique Rooney interprets the surreality of episode eight in terms of the primary nuclear event which “compromised everyday environments, making breathers anxiously aware of our vulnerability to an air-envelope that has been weaponized.”<sup>145</sup> Primarily, this explication of the very medium of life – the air which we breathe and through which we converse – occurs as a result of the event itself. That tool by means of which we survive and communicate our shared humanity has had its immanent impermanence (*as such*) foregrounded. (Good or bad, invigorative or destructive, the cinematics of the virtual *a priori* proceed by way of a foreground-background reversal. Episode 8 and the finale of *Fire Walk with Me* both centralize a nonlinear generative field which can only be represented indirectly, though it is rarely represented at all.) Secondarily, “this mode of warfare explicate(s) the precariousness of our air, affecting not only breathable atmosphere but also newspaper, radio, television, and other mass media ‘vectors.’”<sup>146</sup>

Rooney's essay articulates the 'real' environment with the dense media environments of modernity and its descendant, convergence culture, explicating in one fell swoop the conjoined fears of 'real' mortality and *discursive* obliteration. Nevertheless, as a recapitulation of the open flux from which arises all growth *and* decay, the eighth episode of *The Return* must have its own positive pole, and Rooney elucidates it – with a debt to Derrida - through a peculiar but productive notion of revitalization. The irrational limit to which nuclear devastation brings the world opens up an arena “for thinking about the potential for language to begin again,”<sup>147</sup> in the aftermath of an extinction-level event. Given the ontological thrust of the philosophers discussed throughout this project, we must not reduce such a potential to any concrete linguistic idea or speech act. The recommencement of language is itself founded upon a co-arising sensibility and responsiveness, which is fundamental to all of reality (as Deleuze would attest), and this sensibility is, in turn, immanent to a univocal, processual metaphysics which cycles between actualizations and virtual becomings, revealing or uncovering in the process that primordial non-duality of ostensible oppositions or contradictions which is of such importance for Lynchian aesthetics.

The call to cataclysm brings forth putrid, 'homeless' spirits from the room above the convenience store. Both image- and sound-tracks stutter, reverse, and recycle, as if to remind us that the emptiness from which these beings have sprung can reclaim them at any moment, without warning. But when these creatures, along with Judy, Bob, and the Woodsman, are borne from (or *with?*) the black fire of the Trinity Test, the White Lodge entities respond accordingly. “If the Woodsman is a new *Peaks*-ian force for evil, there's also another force for good,”<sup>148</sup> and this force seems to take the form of a figure, credited as Señorita Dido, appearing alongside The Giant (who, importantly, travels between the Red Room of the Black Lodge and the purple-sea-side tower of the White Lodge, and who is only credited via several question marks).

The Giant, upon seeing a projection of the Trinity Test and its malevolent conjurings, levitates to the ceiling of an elegant concert hall, emitting a stream of shimmering gold (in a parallel image of the garmonbozia-vomiting Black Lodge entities). From this stream descends an orb envisaging Laura Palmer; Señorita Dido kisses the orb and sends it to its actualization in Twin Peaks, Washington. The steadfast leeward side of the mountain has responded to the calamity of the windward side. The virtual realm of *Twin Peaks* – its generative field, its generous void – has balanced the upsurge of evil with the promise of hope. If we accept the primordial co-existence of good and evil, it may not be necessary to ask *how* or *by what means* the White Lodge could appropriately respond to the Black Lodge, but in an uncharacteristically unambiguous move, Lynch provides us with an answer nonetheless.

In the first episode of *The Return*, The Giant told us and Cooper to ‘listen to the sounds’ of a phonograph found in both the Black and White Lodges. Its scratchy static is a continuation of yet another of the filmmaker’s trademarks – “a Lynchian electrical storm, an environment of intersecting worlds whose circuits are impossibly wired in a network of . . . vibrations.”<sup>149</sup> The presence and the importance of the phonograph manage to expand and particularize the Lynchian philosophy of interconnectedness that we have been developing. “Editing and sound build and connect insides across gaps in space and time” such that “a kind of irrational sympathetic correspondence”<sup>150</sup> abides between unfathomable spatiotemporal distances or differences. In tandem with a processual/temporal metaphysics, *Twin Peaks* – most fully in its final iteration – gives us a philosophy of sound, an account of the special responsiveness which properly belongs to hearing and listening.

The Giant and Señorita Dido sense the Trinity Test through the circuitous acoustics of the phonograph. A blink-and-you’ll-miss-it transition clues us in to this primordial discursive

transference – as the camera approaches the window of the convenience store, what appears to be a sudden cut to black is actually the camera’s entrance into the phonograph’s horn. (This is Lynch at his most experimental, so it is impossible for us to be certain of the horn’s identity. Nevertheless, the ridges and curvatures which literally frame this rapid transition make it a strong candidate.) A silent interdimensional dialogue prioritizes a hearing or listening beyond any particular content or referent, and this analysis pairs well with Rooney’s conclusions about that which must necessarily ground the recommencement of language itself. Such aural solicitude divulges “the possibility that bare or primal forms of communication will or can reconstitute themselves in the face of catastrophe . . .”<sup>151</sup>

With these premises ready at hand, we might better understand the dual functionality of the Woodsman’s hypnotic monologue. ‘*This is the water, and this is the well. Drink full and descend. The horse is the white of the eyes, and dark within.*’ Despite the abstract *sense* of this bulletin – the fluidity of its inner logic – the rustic sandman’s words, and their ready tangibility, seem to ingrain themselves in the minds of his listeners. Perhaps providing a metacommentary on the rigorous theorization that always seems to accompany the contemporary state of television viewing, this scene more generally associates a tendency for evil or suffering with substantial attachments to particular words or phrases. The Woodsman’s victims fall prey to the very state *which these words themselves conjure*. However, and at the very same time, the ability to listen and hear *understandingly* is aligned with White Lodge entities and average, everyday ‘folk,’ who form a middle third populated by intersections of listening, suffering, and regurgitating. (I am not sure that interpreting the *sense* of the Woodsman’s phrases is worth our time, but they nevertheless manifest several complementary juxtapositions – that of exteriority and interiority, form and content, darkness and light.)

In bringing Rooney's analyses of air media and the "primal vocality (of breath and voice)"<sup>152</sup> to bear on both the primordial sensibility of listening and Deleuze's third synthesis of time (the eternal return of pure difference), we might be able to clarify further the philosophical bent arising throughout the final episodes and moments of *The Return*. Once Cooper's memories have returned, and he has banished BOB to the Black Lodge with the help of old friends and new faces, we are greeted by one of the uncanniest images in the whole of Lynch's filmography. The same feminine figure who helped to rescue Cooper from the Red Room – an inarticulate creature with smooth skin over the area where human eyes might otherwise dwell – approaches him, and Cooper's stunned face becomes superimposed over the next several minutes of the episode.

The otherworldly creature is credited as Naido, "a Japanese name meaning 'inner path'."<sup>153</sup> This character is simultaneously a critique of sight and an affirmation of sound, a diagnosis of the spatializing of substance and a remedy through the temporalizing of process. Our sight-sense operates through a pragmatic logic – it situates, separates, identifies, *reifies*. Though it certainly exceeds the bounds of our current project, there is a convincing argument to be made that the Western history of substantive metaphysics, in its myriad forms, stems from the natural dualisms and distinctions provided to us by sight. (*My solid thingness is here, and yours is there. And sight alone provides no finalized argument for our interconnection.*) Auditory perception certainly has its practical pole; prey must hear the predator. But, more fundamentally, aural sensibility precedes categorization and proceeds by way of a resolute responsiveness which slips through the cracks of overt logical structures. When we genuinely hear, we hear *presently*, without the derivations of projected events or identities, and in the context of secular and supernatural evils, "the hearing which understands . . . undisguisedly"<sup>154</sup> allows the better angels of our nature to "express faith in the possibility of living with, rather than fully disclosing, the nature of our dark times."<sup>155</sup>

The aforementioned scene presents us with these interesting oppositions of sight and sound, but Lynch can, of course, only mobilize these comparisons *strangely*. Cooper's superimposed visage – shocked into the reality of the present moment – *senses* without impressing any rational structure upon the flows of time and understanding; paradoxically, this time-honored cinematic technique visualizes a *non-visual* mode of responsive sensibility, that of anti-reactionary auditory perception. Moreover, this sensing *senses* the ego-errors that Cooper himself will soon perpetrate. The empirical Cooper leaps back onto the paths of investigation and detection, and he attempts to navigate an innately processual world accordingly. Regardless of his intentions – whether he desires to save Laura from her past traumas or use them for some 'greater good' – he makes the mistake of believing that the temporal processes of the world can rest permanently in his hands, that he can change the particularities of the past and/or wholly determine the arrival of the future.

When Cooper brings Carrie Paige to what, in some other time, was Laura Palmer's childhood home<sup>156</sup>, he cannot *make* sense of what he finds. The remnants of Laura's life remain, but they do not remain in a manner sympathetic to the linear continuity of his plan, whatever it may be. *What year is this?* Cooper asks of the void before him, as if there is *an* answer that will solve his problems, problems with their source in the very natures of good and evil. Which dimension is this? What dimension was that? Which is primary, and what constitutes the relations between them all? These questions are epistemologically and metaphysically *baseless*. "The order of time has broken the circle of the Same" and "the form of time is there only for the revelation of the formless in the eternal return."<sup>157</sup>

Carrie Paige hears a harsh whisper from Laura's mother. '*Laura . . .*' At that moment, she is fully Carrie and fully Laura, and nothing provokes us to distinguish between the two. In another sense, in a deeper sense, she has become – in an unlimited instant – someone utterly new, without

a name or a definite space in the whole of reality, a novel bubbling of infinite lives and times. The words of Zen teacher Dainin Katagiri can lead us to more wholesome understanding of the fundamental interconnectedness of novelty:

What produces time and occasion? . . . Dogen says it is just *arising only* . . . Time is identical with action, motion, or energy. There is nothing to hold onto, because everything in the universe exists as arising only. That is the meaning of saying the origin of the way is perfect and all-pervading.<sup>158</sup>

. . . and separation and connection:

One aspect of time is to separate; the other is to connect. The aspect of time that separates you from others is the human world. The aspect of time that connects you to others is universal truth. You are connected to all beings *in time* [my emphasis], which permeates into every inch of the cosmic universe, and space, where everyone and everything exists in peace and harmony. So you are you, but you don't exist alone; you are connected with others: to dogs, cats, trees, mountains, the sky, stars, Dogen, and Buddha.<sup>159</sup>

. . . with which Lynch provides us. Carrying all forms with her, yet leaping always and forever into the formless future, Carrie/Laura shrieks. It is a sound meant to pierce the armor of sight – “the scream, call or gasp . . . expresses what it is to encounter a perplexing threshold.”<sup>160</sup> Her scream, perhaps, reaches throughout the vast reaches of time, calling upon Cooper's deepest auditory understanding, which is in turn connected to the very flux of sensibility which gives rise to all that *is*. A cut to black leaves us with *nothing to see*; we must abide by what we hear, what we most deeply sense – time itself, the pure difference that dissolves all identities.



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126. There are several popular articles that rehearse and oppose the film’s early negative reception, but I prefer Martyn Conterio’s “Fire Walk With Me: how David Lynch’s film went from laughing stock to the key to *Twin Peaks*,” published by *The Guardian* on September 2, 2017, and Julie Muncy’s “The Maligned *Twin Peaks: Fire Walk With Me* Is Better – And More Important – Than You Know,” published by *Wired* on May 5, 2017.
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130. Nochimson, 178-180.
131. Mactaggart, 25.
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133. *Ibid.*, 197.
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135. Bryant, 37-38.
136. David Auerbach, “*Twin Peaks* Finale: A Theory of Cooper, Laura, Diane, and Judy,” *Waggish* (blog), September 7, 2017, <https://www.waggish.org/2017/twin-peaks-finale/>
137. In my estimation, the best resource for understanding and collecting instances of Lynch’s limited self-commentary remains *Lynch on Lynch* (Farrar, Straus and Giroux: New York, 2005), a series of interviews with the filmmaker, conducted and edited by Chris Rodley.
138. Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 2: The Time-Image*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Robert Galeta (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989), 68-69.
139. If the virtual is the generative transcendental field of pure difference, containing no particulars, then how could we refer to an actualized mirror-image – reflecting an actualized individual – as itself ‘virtual’? Would it not make more sense to deduce the give-and-take of the actual-virtual circulation from the starting point of the transformative relations between complementary actual images? However, this would undercut Deleuze’s insistence that time crystals, and the time-image more generally, give us a direct presentation of temporality. In my estimation, images must be actual; the virtual is that full, primordial emptiness which delivers over actualized images – that, by and from which, which the given is given.

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141. Matt Zoller Seitz, “In *Twin Peaks: The Return*, You Can’t Go Home Again,” *Vulture*, September 4, 2017, <http://www.vulture.com/2017/09/twin-peaks-the-return-showtime-review.html>.
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143. Shunryu Suzuki, 32-33.
144. *Ibid.*, 39.
145. Monique Rooney, “Air-object: on air media and David Lynch’s ‘Gotta Light?’ (Twin Peaks: The Return, 2017),” *New Review of Film and Television Studies* 16, no. 2 (2018): 125.
146. *Ibid.*
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148. Joanna Robinson, “*Twin Peaks*: Trying to Make Sense of the Show’s Most Bonkers Episode,” *Vanity Fair*, June 26, 2017, <https://www.vanityfair.com/hollywood/2017/06/twin-peaks-episode-8-recap-easter-eggs-references-callbacks-woodsman-water-well-horse-white-eyes>.
149. Nieland, 88-89.
150. *Ibid.*, 16.
151. Rooney, 128.
152. *Ibid.*
153. *Ibid.*, 139.
154. Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 342.
155. Rooney, 139.
156. Interestingly, as is discussed in Devon Ivie’s piece “How the Laura Palmer House’s Actual Homeowner Ended Up in *Twin Peaks: The Return*’s Final Scene” published by *Vulture*, the actress who opens the door to greet Cooper and Carrie is Mary Reber, the real-life homeowner of the ‘Palmer residence’ in Everett, Washington. Of course, the intrusion of our reality into the diegetic web of *Twin Peaks* has provided perfect fodder for conspiracy, but my reading of Lynch’s intentions is rather simple: the temporal forces operating throughout the strange worlds of his filmography are the very forces that we sense, in one form or another, in our everyday lives.
157. Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, 91.



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158. Dainin Katagiri, *Every Moment is the Universe: Zen and the Way of Being Time*, edited by Andrea Martin (Boston & London: Shambhala Publications, 2007), 33.

159. *Ibid.*, 11.

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