Between Self and Other: Abjection and Unheimlichkeit in the Films of David Lynch

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Abstract

This thesis re-evaluates David Lynch's films and their critical reception, with particular reference to psychological models employed in the context of 'Lynchian' themes such as identity, the self, the maternal, doubling and ambiguity. In repositioning readings and arguing for a new approach, I identify the flaws in the critical reception and, proceeding from the contention that the reception of the films suggests complex and specific psychological responses, explore possible origins with reference to two principal and associated theories. The five films selected as subjects are *Eraserhead, Blue Velvet, Twin Peaks: Fire Walk With Me, Lost Highway* and *Mulholland Drive*.

The uncanny, or more specifically, *Unheimlichkeit* (as described by Jensch, Rank, Freud et al) is encapsulated as 'something which ought to have remained hidden but has come to light' and encompasses a cluster of associations, e.g. doubles and doppelgangers, repression, ambiguous humanity, madness, amputation, the womb and the domestic. Distinct but closely related, the abject (as described by Kristeva), describes visual and physical elements associated with the uncanny but is often less nuanced and more extreme, engendering revulsion, loathing, and ultimately a *jouissance* epitomised by the act of self effacement or the destruction of the self that often concludes an inevitable, heightening and terminal process of uncanniness.

I argue that the symbiotic relationship between the uncanny and abject (the concepts coexist and each is implicated in the action of the other) pervades Lynch's films and test the hypothesis that the balance between them shifts throughout the course of his career, identifying a trajectory characterised by an early predominance of visually disturbing abjects through to a more pronounced and complex preoccupation with the uncanny in the later films. I will relate this exploration of the relationship between the uncanny and abject to questions of reception, examining how it problematises readings.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Since his first work in film in the 1960s, David Lynch has established a reputation as 'the creative mind behind some of the darkest, most disturbing films in cinematic history' (Borger 2003). Although he divides critical opinion, Lynch has no shortage of accolades; a feature on the world's best directors in the Guardian placed Lynch a clear first in a field of forty, above Martin Scorsese, Quentin Tarantino, Pedro Almodovar and Lars Von Trier (Bradshaw et al. 2003). He has been nominated for an Academy Award three times for Best Director (in 1980 for *The Elephant Man* (1980); 1987 for *Blue Velvet* (1986) and 2002 for *Mulholland Drive* (2001)). In France, he has received both the Palme d'Or (for *Wild at Heart* (1990)) and the Légion d'honneur. Lynch's career as a film maker can be divided broadly into three stages of approximately fifteen years each. The early phase, from the 1960s, is exemplified by short films and his first feature length work, *Eraserhead* (1976)*.* These films were produced on restricted budgets and tend to have few lines of dialogue. The earliest are wholly or substantially monochromatic, feature a preoccupation with literal genesis (birth, reanimation, fecundity), and demonstrate the influence of sculpture, animation and painting. Lynch originally trained as a painter, counting Francis Bacon, Jackson Pollock and Edward Hopper amongst his early influences (Nochimson 1997, p.16), and had intended to spend four years in Europe studying with Austrian expressionist Oskar Kokoshka (Barney 2009, p.53). While Lynch continues to paint, *Six Men Getting Sick* (1966) represents the affirmation of his preoccupation with film. A hybrid of painted sculpture and projected image, the minute long 16mm loop won Lynch an end of term award at Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Art (Rodley 1997, p.36) and led to him securing funding for further film projects, including a grant from the American Film Institute for *The Alphabet* (1968), a four minute short that combines animation and live action, featuring 'the alphabet poured into a cartoon representation of a human body... that oscillates between seeming masculine and seeming feminine, [then] haemorrhages.' (Nochimson 1997, p.169). In summarising Lynch's career here, largely in a commercial context, I wish to identify some of the choices, pressures and

successes he has faced and assess the degree to which these have shaped his filmmaking.

The film that epitomises the early period, *Eraserhead*, represents a culmination of the themes and ideas explored in the first short films – the leaking bodies of *Six Men Getting Sick*, the messy, uncontrolled autogenesis of *The Alphabet* and the dysfunctional, ambiguously human family members of *The Grandmother* (1970), in which the protagonist's parents communicate exclusively in animalistic grunts, barks and whimpers (the sound design marking the beginning of Lynch's long collaboration with Alan Splet). The production, due to last six weeks, began in 1972, continued long after the exhaustion of the original AFI grant of ten thousand dollars (Hughes 2001, p.21), and was not completed until 1976. Now considered a quintessential 'cult movie' (Paszylk 2009, p.146), the initial reception was highly negative and bordered on loathing. Lynch recounts the story of one man standing up and screaming his disapproval during a screening (Rodley 1997, p.82); the film was rejected from both the Cannes and New York film festivals. Interest grew slowly but dramatically after acceptance at the Los Angeles Film festival, bringing Lynch, then an unknown, to the attention of Mel Brooks, who subsequently backed him to direct *The Elephant Man* and essentially launched his career as a professional film maker. In later years, both Charles Bukowski and John Waters cited *Eraserhead* as their favourite film, while Kubrick screened it for the crew of *The Shining* (Stanley Kubrick, 1980) 'to put them in the mood' (Hughes 2001, p.31).

The middle phase occurs in the 1980s and early 1990s, during which Lynch produced some of his most commercially successful work, often featuring Kyle McLachlan, such as *Dune* (1984), *Blue Velvet* (1986) and *Twin Peaks* (1990-1992). Following the commercial and critical success of *The Elephant Man*, Lynch opted to work on *Dune* after turning down an offer to direct *Return of the Jedi* (Richard Marquand, 1983) over concerns about creative control (McGowan 2007, p.68). With several troubled years already behind the *Dune* project (Frank Herbert, the writer, and Ridley Scott, the original director, both left), the production itself was beset with problems. During post production, producer Dino de Laurentiis insisted Lynch's cut was

[2]

overlong. The theatrical release was reduced to two hours and seventeen minutes (Sheen 2004, p.40). A subsequent three hour and nine minute 'miniseries' release for television, produced without Lynch's approval, led to him removing his name from it[1]. Critically the film was badly received; commercially, it was a disaster, making only around a third of its $52 million budget and leading Lynch to consider abandoning film making entirely (Hughes 2001, p.59). In 1985, Dino de Laurentiis, despite the poor box office performance of *Dune*[2], agreed to fund *Blue Velvet* (albeit with a budget of less than a tenth of the size of *Dune*). The success of *Blue Velvet*, particularly in critical terms, was such that Lynch succeeded not only in healing the damage to his reputation but established himself as a filmmaker of major significance. *Twin Peaks*, the series that Lynch conceived with Mark Frost, was 'an immediate sensation' (Booker 2002, p.98) and developed into an international television phenomenon, although the film *Twin Peaks: Fire Walk with Me*, which is set immediately before the events depicted at the beginning of the series, was neither critically nor commercially well received.

The later phase of Lynch's career, from the late 1990s, is characterised by the elusive meaning, highly complex narratives and the multiple identities of *Lost Highway* (1997) and *Mulholland Drive* (2001). Lynch has spent this period existing on the extreme fringe of the mainstream and producing films often too complex narratively and controversial thematically to attract mass popularity; *Lost Highway* performed particularly badly at the box office, earning well under half of the estimated production budget. Although unconventional, resistant to interpretation and difficult to synopsise, both (particularly *Mulholland Drive*) garnered critical attention of a largely positive nature. Lynch had achieved a kind of commercial equilibrium; successful enough to continue attracting financial support for his projects, without the expectations of a large budget production like *Dune*. More recently, the development of yet another phase of his career can be inferred from a move away from analogue technologies.

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[1] in addition to the traditional 'Alan Smithee' as director, Lynch changed his screenwriting credit to 'Judas Booth' (Fischer 1989, p.108).

[2] *Dune*'s lifetime domestic gross was approximately $30m, against a $40m production budget (http://www.boxofficemojo.com/movies/?id=dune.htm)

This is evident in the use of digital video cameras in *Inland Empire* (2006), which develops the eclecticism of *Mulholland Drive*, including material that originated in short films on his website, especially from his online miniseries *Rabbits* (2002).

While he has been less successful commercially than contemporaries like Steven Spielberg, Martin Scorsese or Ridley Scott, there has been no shortage of critical acclaim. This reception has been polarised, however; reactions to Lynch's films may be passionate, condemnatory or at times uncertain, but they are never indifferent. Although the nature of Lynch's films changed significantly between the 1970s and 2000s, some perceptions have remained remarkably immutable, as can be seen from juxtaposing writing on the release of *Eraserhead* with reviews of *Mulholland Drive*. As I will detail in examining the reception of all of the films under discussion, observations of strangeness in both *Eraserhead* and *Mulholland Drive* are to be expected as part of the universal response to Lynch's work. More remarkable, however, is the similarity of language evident in critics' assessments of two very different films separated by more than two decades. The comparison, for example, of *Eraserhead* to 'early Buñuel' (Dignam 1979) is echoed in the assessment of *Mulholland Drive* as 'as perverse and withholding in its narrative as anything in Buñuel' (Hoberman 2001) – both critics also invoke the language of dream and nightmare. Hoberman's comment that the awkwardness of Betty in *Mulholland Drive* is 'possibly modelled on... Lynch himself' (ibid) is reflected in Nigel Andrews' (1979) observations of the strange mannerisms of Henry Spencer, a character whom, as I will explain in discussing *Eraserhead*, was frequently posited by critics as a representation of the director.

I will contend during the course of the thesis that, as an artist, Lynch has followed a consistent and gradual progression. This progression has been affected only minimally, and then in almost exclusively practical terms, by commercial pressures. This is remarkable given that any summary of his career in a commercial context, e.g. (Hammond 2005, p.44), identifies a pattern of peaks and troughs in which the lows were extreme enough to endanger Lynch's ability to secure funding for future projects. It is possible to speculate that *The Straight Story* (1999) would not have been made

had it not been for the poor financial returns of *Lost Highway,* for example[3]. Yet there is no indication that Lynch has ever compromised his artistic vision for commercial reasons; the making of *Blue Velvet* after *Dune* was a compromise entirely in the other direction. This consistent progression, I will argue, is specific in nature and can be discerned in large part from a Freudian reading of the films from *Eraserhead* to *Mulholland Drive*. This approach not only provides a rationale for the similarity of each film's effect upon audiences despite radically different form and style, but offers a unified theory of the reasons for the peculiar, often resistant reception of the films, as well as the chance to identify implicitly similar themes amongst ostensibly heterogeneous critical interpretations.

The reasons for Lynch's significance as a contemporary director and his enduring appeal have been explored for more than twenty years without the emergence of any definite consensus. In 1991, Parkett magazine asked a number of prominent artists, critics and writers, including Jeff Koons and Kathy Acker, to explain whether and why they consider Lynch to be an important film maker (Ammann 1991). Although the seriousness of the responses varies[4], the diversity of the ideas and associations raised is notable. *Eraserhead*, *Blue Velvet* and *Twin Peaks* are cited repeatedly and equally, despite the differences in date of production, popularity and format (the first season of *Twin Peaks* had aired on ABC in 1990 and exposed an entirely new demographic to Lynch via television). Of the respondents who made observations about specific qualities, rather than general impressions, there is such a wide array of perspectives and references that there is little opportunity to discern points of agreement. Lynch depicts an America that is familiar yet hyper-realistic; evokes the surreal, the postmodern and the gothic; is someone who disturbs conventions yet is not an innovator; is morally offensive and a moralist; an artist of the

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[3] *Lost Highway* had a budget of an estimated $15m (Patterson 1997) and took $3.8m (Nash Information Services 2008) at the box office.

[4] Koons refers to himself in the third person in asserting that he does not believe in 'important' people, while other comments are self indulgent and tangential.

disturbing and weird: 'during a David Lynch movie... the weirdness comes on unannounced, and then it's really weird, because it has no name.' (Ammann 1991)

'Weird' is not only the epithet most frequently applied to Lynch's oeuvre but is often used in reference to the director himself. It has been used as a byword, almost a synonym, for the coinage 'Lynchian', and as his multitude of colourful nicknames attests – 'the Czar of bizarre' (Corliss 1990, p.84), 'the Sultan of Spook' (Wood 1997), 'Jimmy Stewart from Mars' (Leonard 1990, p.36) – its use is encouraged not only by the films, but by his persona. Cited examples include his fondness for conducting artistic experiments on dead animals[5], his fascination with the symbiosis of man and industry and his on-set 'uniform' of khaki trousers and white shirt buttoned tightly at the collar: 'The first thing people want to know when you've met David Lynch is, "Is he weird?" (Hewitt 1986, p.4) The perceived weirdness of Lynch's persona is often used as a prism through which to interpret his work; the association between this persona and the character of his films is so closely drawn that the idea of questioning an assumed status as an auteur is regarded as unnecessary.

Generally, the dominant tone of reaction to Lynch's work – I will discuss critical responses to specific films in the appropriate chapters – has been one of cautious scepticism and discomfort, combined with fascination, reflecting the perception of a director working outside of, or at the very extremities of, mainstream American film. A brief survey of popular reception – reviews in newspapers and magazines, for example – reveals various degrees of uncertainty about many aspects of the films; how to approach them, to interpret them and respond to them (I will look at this in greater detail in reviewing the reactions to the individual films in later chapters). Aspects somewhat arbitrarily designated 'weird' often inform this apparently incongruous reaction, but while 'weird' implies a liminal resistance to otherness, it takes little intensification of this resistance for it to manifest as rejection or even repulsion. Its

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5 Crispin Glover recalls Lynch describing a paperweight he made by freezing a dead mouse in resin. 'Just as the resin was hardening, pressure caused the mouse's mouth to open and out floated a small maggot' (Ryan 1992, p.90)

nebulous generality and emphasis of conventionality enable the presentation of 'weird' as something facile and ostentatious:

> It's all too easy to be weird – stick a dwarf in a
> red room and screw with the soundtrack and you'll get
> points for originality… [it] may be satisfying simply for
> being out of the ordinary, especially in a culture where
> the conventional is so all-pervasive, but it's still a
> surface effect – it's attention grabbing but superficial.
> (Rapfogel 2009)

As this decontextualised example, referring to *Twin Peaks*, suggests, one way to displace confusing or challenging aspects, those which are resistant to interpretation, is to dismiss them as shallow or even pretentious (an accusation that has been levelled at Lynch on more than one occasion). Yet it also supports the view that the undemanding nature of the word 'weird' itself tends to encourage accusations of superficiality, as its employment accompanies an unwillingness to examine below the textual surface. An alternative to affirming a paradigm by rejecting parts of the text is to subtly, perhaps even unconsciously, oversimplify both; accordingly, criticism frequently projects conventionality in an attempt to draw the films back from the space outside of acceptable and normative frames of reference, to within the reach of the most familiar critical approaches. This is readily apparent in the form of genre classifications; *Blue Velvet* (Wittenberg & Gooding-Williams 1990, p.149), *Lost Highway* (Levison 2007, p.88) and *Mulholland Drive* (Cahir 2006, p.225) have all been referred to on occasion as films noir without much substantiation. In the case of either the rejection or oversimplification models, 'weird' serves to reinforce normative conceptions of mainstream film while implicitly disassociating Lynch's films from them. This effectively permits the problem of incorporating disturbing or difficult qualities to be displaced by privileging the conventional. The observation that approaches that are overly rigid tend to etiolate and denature the films has been made frequently, e.g. (Lopate 2001, p.49, Herzogenrath 1999).

Approaches that project conventionality struggle to accommodate the later, more narratively complex films in particular. If the result serves no purpose other than to euphemise the experience, it is necessary to challenge the value of perceiving the films in these reactionary terms. Different approaches are needed to illuminate their 'weirdness', to clarify the often difficult nature of the films and to understand how they come to generate such powerful reactions from audiences. Lynch has consistently refused requests to explain his work: 'If things get too specific the dreams stop.' (Rodley 1997, p.223), also stating that:

> In my mind, it's so much fun to have something that has clues and is mysterious -- something that is understood intuitively rather than just being spoonfed to you. That's the beauty of cinema, and it's hardly ever even tried. These days, most films are pretty easily understood, and so people's minds stop working.
>
> (October Films 2005, p.6)

Lynch's emphasis here encapsulates the hermeneutic gap between what the films communicate and how they are received. I will argue that although this develops over the course of several films, there is a consistency and specificity in the meanings generated, even when they are intuited but not directly realised by the spectator; that is, what the films encourage the spectator to experience without exegesis is something that, *post hoc*, can be defined and understood in specific terms, without the vagueness associated with an uncritical perception of weirdness. In tracing the implications of this 'weirdness' that is so strongly associated with Lynch, I wish to clarify the problems that it introduces, ultimately concluding with a more satisfactory and specific definition of the qualities it conveys so nebulously. The word expresses something ambiguously abnormal and extraordinary; an elusive, mildly unsettling effect that resists further qualification. It affirms the similarity extrinsic to the apparent referent – that is, it indicates absence, the lack of reassuring familiarity and conventionality, much more effectively than it suggests specific qualities. Accordingly, it would be easier to predict

what a person asked to 'draw something weird' would not draw, rather than what they might. It encapsulates the common perception of Lynch's films as effectively as it inadequately describes their content. Although the idea of 'weirdness' is too general to explore productively, I will consider the possibility that this vagueness can be clarified and the affecting nature of the films ascribed to more specific causes. Challenging reductive interpretations dismissive of the narrative and ontological complexity of films such as *Lost Highway* and *Mulholland Drive*, I will argue that the misattribution of convenient but unsubstantiated categories, commonly in terms of genre, often originates as a response to an effect that is much more than the product of controversial themes or a manufactured unconventionality.

In seeking to reach a more specific understanding of the effect of the films on critics and audiences, one approach has been to align Lynch with Surrealism, although this raises theoretical problems (I will discuss these in the following chapter). Lynch has also demonstrated some resistance to being classified as a Surrealist, citing the distinction of his interest in narrative (Chion 1995, p.25) and claiming 'I don't even know that much about surrealism' (Sheen & Davison 2004, p.17). Another approach, primarily psychoanalytical in emphasis and suggested by the perception (present in almost all discussions of the director and his oeuvre) of an unmistakably and powerfully disturbing quality within films like *Eraserhead* and *Blue Velvet*, is to discuss the films in the context of the *unheimlich* (uncanny).

The conceptualisation of the uncanny – which I will discuss in depth in the next chapter – precedes Freud but is often considered Freudian in origin due to his work on summarising existing writing and exploring associations with his psychological corpus (Freud 1934). Although complex in its etymology and meaning, the uncanny has been summarised (originally by Schelling, before Freud) as that which 'ought to have remained hidden and secret, and yet comes to light.' (Freud 1934, p.376). It is 'a specific form of frightening phenomenon that we find in literature and life.' (Thurschwell 2000, p.232) Resonance with the elusive weirdness described in Lynch's films can be observed in the association of the uncanny with a disconcerting potential, the engendering of cognitive dissonance and ambiguity:

> If it is hard to define not only the experience of
> watching a Lynch film but also to pinpoint the very
> nature of what one has seen, it is because the uncanny
> – in all its nonspecificity – lies at the very core of
> Lynch's work.
>
> (Rodley 1997, p.ix)

As with Rodley, in most work on Lynch that raises the uncanny, the concept itself is mentioned briefly and its implications left unexplored, despite the significance of Rodley's contention - although there are occasional exceptions, e.g. (Moon 1998). It is my intention in this thesis to approach a more definite understanding of the significance of the uncanny in Lynch's work, to explore indications of the effect of this uncanniness on critics and audiences, and to trace the development of the uncanny as an important feature of Lynch's films throughout the course of his career. The uncanny encompasses a cluster of associations and is often found in the context of doubles and doppelgangers, repression, ambiguous humanity, madness, amputation, the womb (the universal, original home – the '*heim*' of '*unheimlich*') and domestic spaces. I will go beyond Rodley's assertion of the centrality of the uncanny, exploring textual instances in which the uncanny is generated and further arguing that the emergence of uncanny themes indicates that, between *Eraserhead* and *Mulholland Drive* (the first and last films I will discuss), it is increasingly possible to characterise Lynch's work in terms of the uncanny and to observe the manner in which this phenomenon has problematised reception.

Distinct but closely related, the abject (Kristeva 1982) describes a quality of visual and physical elements strongly associated with the uncanny but is often less nuanced and more extreme, engendering revulsion, loathing, and ultimately a *jouissance* epitomised by the act of self effacement or the destruction of the self that often concludes an inevitable, heightening and terminal process of uncanniness, 'a massive and sudden emergence of uncanniness which ... now harries me as radically separate, loathsome' (Kristeva 1982, p.2). As with the uncanny, the abject is associated with the maternal, but Kristeva also cites food loathing, the corpse and that which is

expelled by the body – particularly vomit and excrement. Whereas the uncanny, while not properly explored, is referred to in several discussions of Lynch's work, there are no significant, explicit considerations of the abject. Steven Jay Schneider's piece on *Eraserhead* describes the film's abject qualities superbly, repeatedly citing examples of disgust, loathing, leakage, decay, disease, of 'leprous growths, rolled-back eyes and a mouth completely rotted on the inside' (Schneider 2004a, p.9) without invoking abjection directly, without naming it.

The abject, I will argue, predominates in the early films (and is overwhelming in *Eraserhead*). It does not exclude the uncanny, which can be discerned in all of the films, regardless of the power and immediacy of the abject – but rather subsumes it and makes its experience less immediate. The abject is less likely than the uncanny to provoke the bewilderment evident in reception of later films like *Lost Highway*; a likely response would be characterised not by the cognitive dissonance that often accompanies the uncanny but by shock or revulsion (which may nevertheless be pleasurable).

In the course of the chapters that follow, I will address indirectly the two problems of reception represented by the diversity of approaches and the evidence of critics' difficulties with adopting a confident position. I will also explore the hypothesis of the existence of an arc of artistic development during the course of Lynch's career, characterised by a transition from the predominance of the overt abject to the uncanny, approaching a unifying theory employing the psychoanalytical perspectives that are most characteristic of literature on Lynch and demonstrating how more peripheral ideas relate via the abject and the uncanny.

Chronologically, the scope of the thesis will be from *Eraserhead* to *Mulholland Drive*, although occasional reference will be made to earlier and lesser known work such as Lynch's student film making and various short films that were previously available on his official website. Not all of the films produced in this period, between 1976 and 2001, will be discussed at length. While reference is made to them, there is no sustained exploration of *The Elephant Man, Dune* or *Wild at Heart*. Most immediately, in order to explore each in appropriate detail without exceeding length

requirements for the thesis, I have allowed for approximately ten thousand words per film. To include more than five films, it would have been necessary to reduce this allowance by twenty percent. There is also an issue of chronology to be addressed; in exploring the hypothesis that a transition is evident over the course of Lynch's career and explaining the nature of this transition, it would not be appropriate to use a disproportionate number of examples from one period rather than another. The films I will discuss are well distributed throughout the years: 1977, 1986, 1992, 1997 and 2001. By contrast, *The Elephant Man* was made three years after *Eraserhead*, while *Blue Velvet*[6] was produced two years after *Dune.* A discussion of all four of these films would have meant a greater emphasis on the 1980s than on the following decades.

Of the five films selected, there is one from each of the first two decades, two from the third[7] and one from the fourth, which I will argue illustrate Lynch's changing approach well: *Eraserhead*, *Blue Velvet*, *Twin Peaks: Fire Walk With Me, Lost Highway* and *Mulholland Drive. S*electing these films, which were all directed and either solely or jointly written by Lynch, allows for closer analysis of the development of his approach to filmmaking by reference to those films over which he had the most direct and evident creative control. These films, unlike those which were written by others, attract less questions regarding authorship and therefore do not require an extended discussion of auteur theory.

Eraserhead, Lynch's first feature length film, provides an essential example of the preoccupations of the earliest films with the corporeal, with the visual representation of the abject. *Blue Velvet*, which has been cited as the most influential film of the 1980s (Collins 1993, p.242), is the focus of the majority of academic writing on Lynch and is arguably his most critically successful film. My analysis looks beyond existing, general psychoanalytical approaches to consider the subgroup of abject and

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[6] as his best known and most highly regarded film, excluding *Blue Velvet* is not an option for anyone writing about Lynch.

[7] In seeking a balanced spread of films, there is an apparent anomaly in selecting two films from the 1990s - however, the period between the two is consistent (five years, plus or minus one year) with the gap between four of the five films.

uncanny, and indicates how this illuminates several apparently disparate areas of enquiry. I have chosen to write about *Twin Peaks: Fire Walk with Me* in place of *Wild at Heart*. Both were released in the early 1990s and are characteristic of a particular period of Lynch's career, but *Twin Peaks: Fire Walk with Me* is, I will argue, a thematically pivotal film that is much more indicative of the transition between early and later phases. I will investigate whether the film can be said to represent a balance of the abject and the uncanny and argue that it signifies an evolution of key thematic elements such as identity, the dysfunctional family and unsettling domestic spaces. In discussing *Lost Highway*, I will examine developments in the representation of the self and questions of identity, also considering the implications of the substantial difference in narrative structure from earlier films and arguing that this too relates to the intensification of uncanniness. The final film I will discuss at length is *Mulholland Drive*. Bearing similarities to *Lost Highway* in terms of narrative complexity and characters which seem to have multiple selves, it represents a further emphasis of the transition from the midpoint of *Twin Peaks: Fire Walk with Me* away from the directly corporeal concerns of earlier films and towards the more purely uncanny.

Although my discussion encompasses a range of output from the earliest short films to *Mulholland Drive*, the concentration over the following chapters is less on an exhaustive analysis of the sum total of Lynch's output than in considering how, over the course of his career, the stylistic and thematic attributes that make his films distinctive and immediately recognisable have developed. Considering the films in chronological sequence will better allow for the observation of these formal and stylistic developments.

Chapter 2: Weird – Abjection, Uncanniness and Doubling

'If you see your whole life in a mirror, you will

see death at work, like bees in a glass hive.'

Hertebuise, in *Orpheus* (Jean Cocteau, 1950).

From the researcher's perspective, available academic literature on Lynch is challenging in its diversity. A clear reason for the limited amount of consensus is that the range of ideas discussed is wide, as is the range of approaches employed; it is usual for anything more than a short study to take a theoretical branch and follow it in a new direction, in preference to looking again at the body of work on Lynch and drawing conclusions from the whole:

Some critics have focused on Lynch's connection to surrealist traditions. Other critics have interpreted Lynch's movies as parodies... still others have employed a poststructuralist model... others have used the psychoanalytical theories of Freud or Lacan... other critics have focused on Lynch's depictions of evil... Lynch's relationship to American culture... Lynch's conservative moral vision... Lynch's exuberant optimism...

(Wilson 2007, p.vii)

The broad but patch body of work on Lynch is limited in comparison to research into his contemporaries – a significantly larger amount of work is available on Tim Burton, for example. Available material favours certain films, peaking with *Blue Velvet*. While *Mulholland Drive* saw a re-emergence of academic consideration, little has been revisited or redeveloped, with the result that established theoretical directions are abandoned in favour of new approaches. The result is a body of work in which there are, overtly at least, few common threads.

I will refer to Chion (1995) as the first significant work to examine the films collectively and in a theoretical context. Beginning with brief overviews of *Six Men Getting Sick* and concluding with *Twin Peaks: Fire Walk with Me*, Chion takes a predominantly psychoanalytical approach with close analysis of the films, some unusual work on soundtrack, and passages of biographical interest. Chion's work is interesting in additionally supplying some emergent analysis in the form of the 'Lynch Kit' appendix, a collection of interconnected ideas that hint at the possibility of uniting the apparently fractured parts of form and style in the films into a coherent whole. In addition to Chion's monograph, a number of texts will be engaged which, while not referring to Lynch directly, are of crucial importance in detailing the different theoretical emphasis I wish to bring to a consideration of the films.

Other significant monographs include works by John Alexander, Kenneth Kaleta and Martha Nochimson. Alexander's early and paradigmatically unusual book (1993) avoids Freudian references in favour of Jungian analogies (such as the allegory of psychological alchemy that he infers from *Eraserhead*). It is chiefly of interest for some of the work on the background to the productions and an extended discussion of *Twin Peaks*. Kaleta's study (1992) examines six films, beginning with *Eraserhead* and concluding with *Wild at Heart*; the films are discussed in chapters of approximately equal length, meaning that some atypically in depth consideration is given to films regarded as somewhat less significant by other authors. Kaleta, for example, dedicates thirty seven pages to *The Elephant Man*. Martha Nochimson's unconventional analysis (1997) commences with a discussion of painting, examining the director in the context of Edward Hopper and Francis Bacon, and goes on to argue a positive view of Lynch's representation of gender. More recently, works by Wilson (2007) and especially McGowan (2007) have emphasised Lacanian readings, following Slavoj Žižek's remarkable study of *Lost Highway* (2000).

Lynchian Weirdness

Filled with dualities, conflicting meanings and unstable characters, Lynch's films are often most effective when they resist attempts to make sense of them, or when

they are most 'weird'. Most perceptibly, disordered narratives with complex structures make these films resistant to convention, enigmatically encouraging explanation yet simultaneously opposing and frustrating the process of interpretation. Partly, the result evokes the knowledge of and fondness for Surrealist film that Lynch demonstrates in a 1987 BBC documentary, *Ruth, Roses and Revolvers*, in which he introduces extracts from films by Man Ray, Jean Cocteau and Hans Richter, describing himself as 'very happy to be a fellow traveller with any one of these guys'. While deeming Lynch a Surrealist is a step forward from the simple and more common determination of general weirdness, it is at best no more than a qualification of the same drive to find a convenient context. At worst, 'surreal' is employed inappropriately as a synonym for 'weird', a conflation evident in the fact that "[Lynch's] name can hardly appear in print without adjectives like 'cult', 'surreal and 'disturbing'" (Vass 2005, p.12). In this case, the categorisation loses, through inaccurate application, any meaning it potentially had.

Although many writers have made reference to it in discussing Lynch's work – for example, Lowenstein (2007, p.67); Mazullo, (2005, p.506); Godwin (1985, p.43) – I do not believe that a substantial investigation of Surrealism will be more productive than an approach that concentrates, beyond this context, on the uncanny and the abject. While the uncanny and the abject are not excluded by it, Surrealism is both a potential distraction and introduces a number of theoretical hazards. One is the occasional misuse of surreal as a synonym for weird, rendering it equally unspecific; another is the fact that while he may acknowledge a tradition or allude to Surrealist tropes or methods, Lynch is by definition not a Surrealist (in the sense of Surrealism as an organised movement). A more substantial reason is that, in any discussion of Lynch in the context of Surrealism, observations are made of the dreamlike or oneiric quality of his films, and it is often this quality that is held to be the most authentically, characteristically Surrealist.

While ostensibly promising to help define weirdness, attempting to isolate authentically dreamlike properties is also problematic. Observations of the similarities between film and dreams have been made since the invention of the medium and the

'oneiric metaphor' associating the two is credited as a major influence on film theory, prompting the 'convergence of cinema and psychoanalysis' (Rascaroli 2002, p.5). While there is a difference of consciousness, in that the dreamer will typically be less aware of the dream than the spectator is of the film[8], the experiences of the dreamer and the spectator correspond, taking place 'in darkened rooms in which the dreamer or spectator passively perceives, identifies with and believes in a flow of images that appear real but have no corporeal existence' (Williams 1992, p.15).

While the validity of the observation is not dependent on a determination that Lynch's films are *uniquely* oneiric, the inherently analogous nature of film and dreams naturally limits the significance of an assertion that Lynch's films are dreamlike. While it could be argued that they are more dreamlike than a film in which meaning is readily accessible, the imagery straightforwardly verisimilitudinous and the narrative easily familiar, this only emphasises the inadequacy of this 'oneiric metaphor' as an analytical tool in itself, instead encouraging a progression beyond it.

In moving beyond the perception that Lynch's films are particularly dreamlike and the implications of a Surrealist influence, I will look towards the psychoanalytical method suggested by both to propose that they are united by the uncanny, and will accordingly concentrate on this in future chapters. Importantly, and in distinction to the vagueness of the oneiric, it is possible to define and distinguish what is *unheimlich* from what is simply inherent to the medium, weird or frightening. This decision to isolate the uncanny from the surreal is reinforced by Barbara Creed's assessment of surrealist elements in Lynch's work, in which, referring to the work of Hal Foster (1993), she explicitly invokes the uncanny:

> there is one term that comprehends Surrealism -
> the uncanny... many of the Surrealists... were drawn to
> the uncanny, and the return of the repressed, the basis
> of the uncanny, which is central to Surrealist notions of

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[8] unless the dream is lucid, constituting 'a gap in the hermeneutic sealing-off that ordinarily define[s] dreaming' (Metz 1983, p.104)

the marvellous, convulsive beauty and objective
chance.

(Creed 2007, p.116)

The Uncanny

The concept of the *unheimlich* originates in a 1906 article by Ernst Jentsch. Starting with the uniqueness of the German word, Jentsch describes a sensation that is distinctly affecting yet elusive. It is disorienting and disquieting, but easier to experience than it is to define; much like the unspecific weirdness perceived by Lynch's critics. In the uncanny, however, exists the possibility of further definition through exploration in psychological terms; this specificity allows and encourages not only a naming of the phenomenon but precision in determining its causes and effects. In proceeding to narrow down the concept, Jentsch juxtaposes the ideas of familiarity and intellectual uncertainty, arguing that the most powerful confluence occurs in the form of a doubt 'as to whether an apparently living being really is animate and, conversely, doubt as to whether a lifeless object may not in fact be animate' (1997, p.12)

Thirteen years later, Freud attached to Jenstch's description a correlation with castration fear and repression. Freud agrees that the phenomenon Jentsch describes is powerful and distinctive enough to be identifiable 'within the boundaries of what is fearful' (1934, p.368), thereby justifying the use of a specific term – '*unheimlich*'. Following Jentsch, Freud commences by considering the etymology of the word '*unheimlich*', additionally tracing it through a range of polyglossic implications, encompassing ten languages (including German), showing broadly that most of these languages have terms that carry related associations, and enabling the word 'uncanny' as an acceptable English term. *Heimlich*, meaning comfortable, familiar, homelike – describing a state where one feels 'at home' – provides the base to which *unheimlich* might be assumed to be a direct opposite – estranged, unfamiliar, disquieting.

This configuration is complicated by a second meaning of *heimlich*; hidden away, clandestine, secret: 'on the one hand, it means that which is familiar and

[18]

congenial, and on the other, that which is concealed and kept out of sight.' (Freud 1934, p.375). In fact, *unheimlich* is not an appropriate antonym of *heimlich* in either case. It does not imply the quality of being evident yet unfamiliar (Freud goes on to explain why the opposite – the hidden yet familiar – is more appropriate). The *unheimlich* is infrequently evident or readily accessible, meaning the word is rarely used in this context, while if we attempt to apply it to the first meaning as an antonym, to make the familiar, comfortable *heimlich* the contrary, *unheimlich* paradoxically takes on the function of a synonym.

The two meanings of *heimlich* are different but compatible; consequentially, the meaning of *unheimlich* partially converges with the word we would expect it to serve as an antonym; *unheimlich* does not mean 'not *heimlich*'. The *unheimlich*, with an action comparable to that of the abject – the strongly associated but distinct concept described by Julia Kristeva (1982) – destabilises linguistic borders, breaking down the border between positive and negative concepts implied by the presence or lack of the prefix un- . The *unheimlich,* Freud argues, connecting the term with repression, is a 'sub-species of *heimlich*', that which 'ought to have remained hidden and secret, and yet comes to light.' (1934, p.376). Freud's concise definition of the uncanny here seems prompted by Jentsch (although Freud glosses over the implications of uncertainty):

> That which has long been familiar appears not only as welcome, but also – however remarkable and inexplicable it may be – as straightforwardly self-evident. No-one in the world is surprised under usual circumstances when he sees the sun rise in the morning, so much has this daily spectacle crept into the ideational processes of the naive person since early childhood as a normal custom not requiring commentary. It is only when one deliberately removes such a problem from the usual way of looking at it – for the activity of understanding is accustomed to remain

> insensitive to such enigmas, as a consequence of the
> power of the habitual – that a particular feeling of
> uncertainty quite often presents itself.
>
> (Jentsch 1997, p.8)

Freud's method of arriving at a definition (although it is subsequently clarified and refined) has been repeatedly criticised. Masschelein argues that the *unheimlich* is a negative concept, unthinkable in the same way that 'the very notion of unconscious excludes the idea of a conscious, rationally thinking subject.' (Masschelein 2002, p.7) This threatens to undermine the validity of discussing the uncanny completely; yet both Freud's explanation and subsequent analyses demonstrate that the uncanny cannot be adequately described – despite the appearance of the word – simply as what is not *heimlich* or what is excluded by the *heimlich*. The misinterpretation of the uncanny as a purely negative concept may lie in Freud's occasional imprecision when describing the relationship between the two words. Considering the two statements, 'among its different shades of meaning the word *heimlich* exhibits one which is identical with its opposite' (1934, p.375) and '*heimlich* is a word the meaning of which develops towards an ambivalence, until it finally coincides with its opposite, *unheimlich*' (1934, p.377), Freud cannot be talking about one word being the antonym of the other, as he also describes their meanings as being convergent, interrelated and in certain circumstances even interchangeable; the *unheimlich* is embraced by the *heimlich*, not negated by it. While the prefix 'un' conveys the lack or privation of a quality, e.g. of happiness, safety or truth, *unheimlich* connotes more than lack of or opposition to what is *heimlich*. Freud's attempt to relate the literal basis of his pursuit of *unheimlich* to a supposedly more empirical root affirms the interdependence of *heimlich* and *unheimlich* by elucidating the implicit association of *heim* with the body. The mother's body is the original *heim,* and is therefore universally *heimlich*; it is therefore particularly implicated in the generation of *unheimlich* feelings. The relationship of the two terms is one not of direct opposition but one in which 'the prefix 'un' is the token of repression' (1934, p.399):

> An uncanny experience occurs either when repressed infantile complexes have been revived by some impression, or when the primitive beliefs we have surmounted seem once more to be confirmed … these two classes of the uncanny experience are not always sharply distinguishable.
>
> (Freud 1934, p.403)

It is important to note that, while the return of repressed material tends to be considered foremost in the generation of the uncanny, and although the uncanny requires awareness of the resurfacing of repressed material, repression is not the only way such material can be made *heimlich*. Examples specified by Freud indicate the breadth of context in which the uncanny can be found; the fulfilment of presentiments (1934, p.392), dread of the evil eye and belief in the omnipotence of thoughts (1934, p.393) are all more easily ascribed to the return of surmounted beliefs than to the return of repressed complexes.

Three categories of 'things which are frequently called uncanny' are identified by Creed from Freud's conclusions:

> i.   those things that relate to the notion of a double: a cyborg; twin; doppelganger; a multiplied object; a ghost or spirit; an involuntary repetition of an act.
>
> ii.   castration anxieties expressed as fear of the female genitals or of dismembered limbs, a severed head or hand, loss of the eyes, fear of going blind.
>
> iii.   a feeling associated with a familiar/unfamiliar place, losing one's way, womb fantasies, a haunted house.
>
> (Creed 1993, p.53)

This is not an exhaustive list, and it should be noted that Jentsch's formulation of the uncanny is not excluded by it. To the first category – or perhaps somewhere between the first and the second – we can add the *splitting* of the self, as in the mental double (a more specific term than repetition or multiplication); to the third category, familiar/unfamiliar disturbance of a temporal as well as spatial nature[9]. The third category also seems like the most appropriate for the doubt as to whether something is inanimate or not – as in the case of something non-living that becomes alive or something that appears to be alive, but is not. A severed hand that crawls across the floor is, potentially at least, more intensely uncanny than one that is simply a dead, unmoving severed hand (Freud 1934, p.397). Its uncanny animation is clearly separate from its uncanny allusion to castration threat. This emphasises that the uncanny is most often to be found in between the familiar and unfamiliar, in all its various forms, and that the nexus of the concept can be found within this space where the two coincide and become indistinct. This is central to the notion of the double, which encapsulates the familiar self splitting into the equally familiar and unfamiliar self/other self.

In addition, specific psychological conditions are necessary in order to generate *Unheimlichkeit*. In the narrative, there must an impression or consensus of what is possible, which the uncanny will destabilise: '[the uncanny] cannot arise unless there is a conflict of judgement whether things which have been 'surmounted' and are regarded as incredible are not, after all, possible' (Freud 1934, p.404). In a fictional text where it is demonstrated to be diegetically customary for inanimate objects to come to life, the uncanny would lose its power and would therefore not be perceptible. If we 'regard souls, spirits and specters as thought their existence had the same validity in their world as our own has in the external world … we are spared all trace of the uncanny.' (1934, p.405). For a text to convey the uncanny, it must contain sufficient verisimilitude to enable the uncanny to be perceived (by the spectator) in the same circumstances that it can be experienced outside of the text, as 'everything that in real

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[9] Arnzen (2005) describes the uncanny as 'a subjective flux akin to déjà-vu'.

life gives rise to feelings of uncanniness has the same effect in fictional work.' (Kofman 1991, p.127). Fiction has the potential to communicate the uncanny much more effectively, however, as the effect can be widened and intensified by the ability of literature or cinema to represent conditions, locations and situations that occur with great infrequency outside of fictional narratives. There is, however, the inherent danger that uncanniness will be improperly communicated if this licence is misused. Freud provides an example in which a writer 'deceives us into thinking that he is giving us the sober truth, and then after all oversteps the bounds of possibility … we retain a feeling of dissatisfaction, a kind of grudge against the attempted deceit' (Freud 1934, p.405)

Intellectual Uncertainty

Additionally, the existence of an impression of 'intellectual uncertainty' may catalyse the impression of uncanniness. Freud struggles with this notion, which could potentially interfere with his attempt to produce a specific and indisputable characterisation of the uncanny, but he nevertheless concludes that it is, in many instances, essential and indeed often easily observed. He cites Jentsch's assertion that:

> One of the most successful devices for easily creating uncanny effects is to leave the reader in uncertainty whether a particular figure in the story is a human being or an automaton; and to do it in such a way that his attention is not directly focussed upon his uncertainty, so that he may not be urged to go into the matter and clear it up immediately, since that … would quickly dissipate the peculiar emotional effect of the thing.
>
> (Freud 1934, p.378).

This is juxtaposed with an analysis of E.T.A. Hoffmann's[10] *The Sandman*. This short story, first published in 1817, is discussed at length by both Freud and Rank can therefore be considered the definitive text in the conceptualisation of the uncanny. Also, as Michael Moon has demonstrated, *Blue Velvet* contains a significant degree of intertextuality with it (I will discuss this further in the appropriate chapter). A detailed discussion of Freud's analysis is useful here to outline how I intend to approach the uncanny in the context of Lynch; Freud's qualification of what is and is not uncanny in the story indicates criteria and a methodology that can be applied to the films. While it would be convenient to simply label anything unusual as uncanny, Freud's discussion of Hoffmann isolates not only the circumstances which are most likely to give rise to feelings of uncanniness, but also what tends to diminish or neutralise the effect. Also, Freud points out that 'there are many more means of creating uncanny effects in fiction than there are in real life' (1934, p.404), emphasising that not only is the uncanny to be found in the context of fictional works but that it is more likely to be discerned. Even before considering the similarities between *The Sandman* and *Blue Velvet*, the uncanny potential of written fiction that Freud describes in his discussion exists to an even greater degree in film.

Freud concludes that the main figure of uncanniness in the story is the eponymous character, and that 'the idea of being robbed of one's eyes' is chiefly responsible for the psychologically unsettling nature of the text. He adds that 'intellectual uncertainty has nothing to do with this effect'. (Freud 1934, p.382). Freud's outright dismissal of the possibility that another source of the uncanny in *The Sandman* is Olympia, Spalanzani's ambiguous daughter/doll, has been contested by both Cixous (1976, p.533) and Kofman (1991, p.125), and not as a response to Freud's typical disinterest in female agency or significance alone. Both propose that one motive for Freud's rejection of Olympia as a source of the uncanny is his desire to maintain the impression of an empirical process behind his formulation of the concept, and to disconnect the uncertainty that surrounds *the production* of the uncanny from uncanniness itself.

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[10] Hoffmann is also cited as an architect of the uncanny by Jentsch (1997).

Similarly, taking Freud's position in accepting that the Sandman is the focus of the uncanny, the contention that either the figure of the Sandman, or the idea of being robbed of one's eyes, are entirely divorced from intellectual uncertainty, can be disproved in a number of ways. Firstly, there is the motif of eyes and sight, which is repeatedly multiplied and disguised; the Sandman throws sand into children's eyes, Coppelius steals eyes and Coppola is an optician. More significantly, 'eyes'[11] are referred to so frequently and in such a multitude of ways – opening, weeping, staring, gazing, yearning, blazing, piercing – that they become an almost universal presence, but are always metaphorically, and occasionally literally, separated from the body. This intensifies the threat Freud asserts as being at the root of the uncanniness through the figure of the Sandman, but confuses where the threat originates due to continual multiplication and diffusion. Secondly, the Sandman is a double whose very existence is subject to a highly perceptible level of uncertainty. Hoffmann introduces the character by way of the protagonist Nathaniel's confused recollection of his mother sending him to bed by telling him that the Sandman was coming. Although the mother assures the son that there is no terrible Sandman, that it is a figment, Nathaniel decides that it exists as the alter-ego of Coppelius, an associate of his father's, although he later concludes that 'Coppelius and Coppola only exist in my own mind and are phantoms of my own self'.

Rationally, we have no way of ascertaining what the Sandman is, or, to paraphrase Freud, whether the Sandman's existence has the same validity in Nathaniel's world as our own has in the external world. The identity of the Sandman and the associations it carries are altered and shifted so relentlessly that we are consistently unsure of who – Coppelius, Coppola, perhaps even Nathaniel's father – is the *original* being doubled, especially as these 'identities' appear to be highly permeable. As Freud emphasises that 'the feeling of something uncanny is directly attached to the figure of the Sand-man' (Freud 1934, p.230) the dismissal of the involvement of any related intellectual uncertainty in this area seems unreasonable. His assertion that 'the conclusion of the story makes it quite clear that Coppola the

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[11] The word is used sixty-five times and is present in almost every paragraph.

optician really is the lawyer Coppelius and thus also the Sand-man' (Freud 1934, p.383) plainly refers to how the story ends, rather than the confusion that inhabits it for the most part.

The Definite Ambiguity of the Uncanny

Freud's differing attitudes to notions of ambiguity in the production of the uncanny and the experiencing of it are crucial in this context. Whereas a writer 'should keep us in the dark for a long time about the precise nature of the conditions he has selected for the world he writes about' in order to retain the chance provoking the uncanny as it can be provoked 'in the external world' (p. 405):

> At the story's end, the reader makes a decision
> even if the character does not; he opts for one solution
> or the other, and thereby emerges from the fantastic. If
> he decides the laws of reality remain intact and permit
> an explanation of the phenomena described, we say
> that the work belongs to another genre: the uncanny.
> If, on the contrary, he decides that new laws of nature
> must be entertained to account for the phenomena, we
> enter the genre of the marvelous. (Todorov 1975, p.41)

While it is important to note that Todorov's conception and employment of the uncanny here is unconventional – his attempt to redefine the uncanny as 'the supernatural explained' (1975, p.41) does not adequately encapsulate the meaning of *unheimlich*, nor does it affect or challenge Freud's position – this nevertheless applies to two aspects of the uncanny as Freud discussed it. It suggests that the opposite of *unheimlich* is not to be found in the removal of the prefix, but in the marvellous. This is supported by the assertion that the uncanny, should it be greatly removed from the possible and credible, creates 'a feeling of dissatisfaction… a grudge against the attempted deceit.' (Freud 1934, p.405), in addition to the emphasis placed by Freud on the potential ability of fictional constructs to reproduce the conditions that 'produce

uncanny feelings in real life' (ibid). Whereas the return of repressed complexes may be recognised by everyone (Kofman 1991, p.127), the return of surmounted ones is more problematic. It is in this case that Freud argues that intellectual uncertainty is necessary to enable the uncanny (Freud 1934, p.404), and without which it would be something less, something insufficiently significant or powerful to justify being described as uncanny.

Ontological Splitting

Creed's emphasis on the double as a notable and definite manifestation of the uncanny (1993, p.53) is worth exploring in greater detail, not only because it gives an opportunity to discuss an early example, by Freud himself, of film analysis, but also because there are clear examples of doubling in Lynch's work which can be usefully related to the uncanny. In its most customary form, the double appears as a doppelganger, a visual duplicate, perhaps stepping out of a mirror; one of the most commonly referenced examples in cinema is *The Student of Prague* (Stelan Rye & Paul Wegener 1913), another text analysed in detail by Freud and Rank in refining the concept of the uncanny and a key text in the context of the uncanny, the double, and film. Due to the significance of the film, its resonances with Lynch's work and the importance of establishing the relationship between the double and the uncanny, a brief synopsis is helpful.

An odd-looking man called Scapinelli approaches Balduin, a poverty-stricken student. Balduin has fallen in love with Countess Margit von Schwartzenberg after rescuing her from drowning; Scapinelli offers him her love and a large sum of money in exchange for anything from the student's sparsely furnished room. To Balduin's horror, Scapinelli chooses his reflection, educes it from the mirror, and leaves with it. Later, Balduin meets the Countess, who is already engaged to her cousin, a Baron. The two express their love for each other and promise to meet in secret at a graveyard, later in the evening. On his way to this rendezvous, Balduin encounters his now autonomous mirror image. The Baron finds out about the clandestine meeting and challenges Balduin to a duel; Balduin, however, is renowned for his skill with a sword and the

Countess' parents implore him to spare the Baron. Balduin swears he will, but when he arrives for the duel, he discovers his reflection, holding a sword already stained with the Baron's blood. Balduin, disgraced and shunned by the Countess, plays a game of cards with his double for the right to exist. He loses and flees to his apartment. The moment that he believes he is alone, the double materialises. Balduin shoots the doppelganger, but discovers he has mortally wounded himself. Scapinelli appears and gloats over his corpse. Finally, the double appears again, perched on Balduin's grave.

Often regarded as an antecedent of the horror film, *The Student of Prague* is discussed in two seminal texts in the theorisation of the double. While Freud's essay 'Das Unheimliche' (1934) refers to it, Rank's 'The Double' (2000) discusses it in greater depth as part of an exploration of the phenomenon of the double through references to literature and film. Further to these references, an eclectic range of anthropological examples highlights the point that the double exists as more than a literary or cinematic device. Although this aspect of Rank's study has been criticised for being insufficiently scientific (as it was not customary at the time to do empirical field research), the strong cultural and religious resonances of the double are clearly demonstrated, even if the implied universality is not defensible by modern anthropological standards.

Naturally, Rank and Freud's discussions also explore psychological origins for the disturbing effect that doubles typically generate. Rank proposes the idea of an immortal soul is an ancient form of the double, emphasising its role in shielding against the apprehension of mortality, the threat inherent in knowledge of the inevitable extinction of the ego. If the idea that the projection of the double functions as a form of protection for the self, then why do doubles often invoke feelings of anxiety and dread? Considering it ostensibly offers protection from extinction, 'shouldn't one's double be a source of psychological *security*?' (Schneider 2004b, p.108). Given that this aspect of the double originates not from its status as a cinematic or literary motif, but from its nature as a 'construction of traditional culture' (Zivkovic 2000, p.1), we can see that the development of the concept of the double over time has tended towards a view characterised by trepidation or even horror; Rank notes a number of fearful

superstitions and cultural practices relating to shadows (2000, p.51) and mirrors (2000, p.63).

This is underpinned with a psychological explanation. The identification of two equally crucial aspects of the double, 'love meaning' and 'death meaning' (2000, p.70), isolates the interdependence and conflict between the two; the love meaning, the narcissism that provides the initial source of the ego-projection of the double, is symbiotically associated with but also masks the underlying horror of death that, unsuccessfully repressed, supports the projection and invests it with the potential to become terrible and disturbing. Originating in primary narcissism, the early stage in child development in which the self is the sole focus of the libido, the love meaning itself is characteristically flawed. The double's narcissistic origins reflect and intensify the 'defective capacity for love [of] almost all double-heroes' (2000, p.72), commonly resulting in an inability to compensate effectively and the creation of a double that functions as rival to the originator, especially for the love of another.

The points of autoscopic confrontation between Balduin and his double are significant for more than Rank proposes, concentrated as his analysis is on thematic and psychological aspects. The theorisation of the double, from Rank to Schneider, suggests a wider range of considerations, corresponding to the strongest associations carried by the it. In terms of origins, we should be looking towards representations of defective domestic spaces; unhappy homes, familial discord, uncomforting rooms, especially when these are allied to the sexualised symptoms of the action of the double, such as self-abuse, incest, frustrated, unrequited love, and associated with scenes of themes of voyeurism and performance. While preserving the sense that, through the manifestation of a fundamentally malevolent double, Balduin's desire overwhelms his agency, complicating and eventually subsuming his self, it is possible to characterise the confrontations in a different but equally valid way to Rank. Briefly, the double appears amongst overtones of carnality and mortality at his and the Countess' secret graveyard liaison; it pre-empts him by killing the Baron when he agrees to the *performance* of the duel, and following fatally preordained game of chance in which it asserts its existence over his, he discovers it present *in his home* –

the etymological origin of the *unheimlich* as well as the location in which it often manifests. Classical doubling as epitomised by *The Student of Prague,* educed in the context of performance and the domestic and prefiguring destruction, invites immediate comparisons with some of the most intriguing and well known scenes in Lynch's films; in *Mulholland Drive*, two women who both have dual identities sit in 'Club Silencio' watching a stage show enacted by a band that is not there. In *Twin Peaks: Fire Walk with Me*, Laura Palmer is repeatedly tormented in the family home by the dual selves in one body of Bob/Leland.

Physical and Mental Doubles

In a recent taxonomy of cinematic doubling[12], Steven Schneider has underlined the extent and variation of examples, drawn from *Metropolis* (Fritz Lang, 1927), to *The Silence of the Lambs* (Jonathan Demme, 1991), separating doubles into physical and mental manifestations. Physical doubles encompass natural, artificial and supernatural entities that reproduce the appearance of a human subject by duplication. In such cases, the doppelganger does not necessarily require splitting of the subject of the doubling; examples of this category include identical twins and shape changing entities, although it should be noted that the physical and mental categories are permeable, and physical doubles may possess some characteristics more readily associated with other types.

The category of mental doubles is arguably more interesting and involving – and is certainly the more productive and revealing of the two when considered in the context of Lynch's work. With mental doubles, the doubling is achieved through splitting of a 'recognizable, unified psychological entity into separate, complementary, distinguishable parts represented by seeming autonomous characters' (Rogers 1970, p.5).

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[12] Schneider defines cinematic doubling as 'the experience of seeing or otherwise coming to believe that an on screen character has another self, whether or not this 'other self' is actually observed by this character, or is merely sensed, intuited or empirically discovered by him or her.' (2004c, p.108)

Schneider subdivides the category of mental doubles into 'schizos, shape-shifters, projections and psychos' (Schneider 2004b, p.112). Schizos and projections demonstrate behavioural disassociation in time and space respectively, providing the major opposition between these subcategories; in the first, the mental doubling remains within the same body, which remains the same body even if superficial changes of clothing, mannerisms or speech patterns may change. In the second, mental doubling is projected, manifesting as another body or bodies, so that original and double(s) have separate spatial, rather than temporal, existences. The remaining two subcategories, psychos and shape-shifters, lie outside of this opposition. The psycho, 'the most speculative category of this taxonomy ... exhibits neither behavioural disassociation nor physical transformation' (Schneider 2004b, p.113). Shape-shifters exhibit their separate consciousnesses through physical transmutation, but the affected body cannot be considered separate in the sense that the mental doubling is not externalised to allow the original and double to have a separate and simultaneous *physical* existence.

The greater uncertainty that surrounds mental doubles has the potential to heighten the unnerving, disorientating effect to a level less often engendered by the more readily understood physical double (assuming it does not also, as mentioned above, have attributes of the mental double). Being aware of how, if not why, the physical process of doubling has occurred may have the effect of normalising and dispelling some of the ambiguity. The effect is further attenuated if the doubling entity is disassociated from the original, the being it duplicates – if our sense of the correlation between the self and the other self is allowed to dissipate.

The reliance on splitting inherent in the mental double, and particularly in the subcategory of projections, corresponds closely with other processes that, as I will show, can be seen functioning with Lynch's films. I wish to demonstrate these similarities further by drawing on principles described by Webber (1996). Briefly, these contend that the doppelganger:

1. is a figure of visual compulsion.

2. operates divisively, e.g. on language.

3. represents the performative character of the subject.

4. contests unequivocal cognition.

5. is concerned with the exchange between ego and alter ego.

6. displaces the host and conventions of genre and narrative.

7. forms structures both intertextually and intratextually.

8. is axiomatically male.

9. indicates the domestic as a source of *Unheimlichkeit*.

Missing from this summary is the irremovable association between the doppelganger and sexuality (Kane 1999, p.51). While manifestation in the context of desire, often of an overtly sexual nature (appearing as a sexual rival, for example) is characteristic of many forms of the double, this is encompassed by Rank's analysis (Rank 2000, p.86), as is the exchange between ego and alter ego. Further to this, the remaining principles refer to the nature of the double with greater emphasis on its place within a host text, and its potential to affect this text. It should be noted that Webber's discussion of the double is predominantly concerned with literature and largely eschews cinematic references. Although, as is evident from the body of academic work that has applied Rank and Freud's work to cinema, the principles are transferable almost in entirety, exceptions exist. One such exception is the assertion that the double is 'axiomatically male'. While this may be axiomatic in the case of literature, it is less true of cinema, in which the theme of female doubles has been explored in films as well known and diverse as *Metropolis, Vertigo* (Alfred Hitchcock, 1958)*, Aliens* (James Cameron, 1986)*, The Double Life of Veronique* (Krzysztof Kieślowski, 1991) and, of course, *Lost Highway* and *Mulholland Drive*.

Once employed in a text as a motif, the conflicts that characterise the double naturally influence narrative in a way that splits recognisable structures, especially in relation to genre. Physical, and more frequently, mental doubles commonly challenge 'unities of character, time and space, doing away with chronology, three dimensionality and with rigid distinctions between animate and inanimate objects, self

and other, life and death.' (Zivkovic 2000, p.122). Because of the inexorably mutating and evolving process that creates and sustains them, doubles often cannot be contained within fixed boundaries, instead demonstrating them to be porous or indistinct. The double in *The Student of Prague* materialises and dematerialises; when Balduin runs back to his room to escape it, we do not imagine it hurrying to arrive before him. We have already seen it vanish before Balduin's eyes - it is not limited by definable physical or temporal laws, instead possessing a relationship to time and space that is fluid and indefinite.

This, however, deals with the splitting of structures, rather with the creation of new ones, even though the process of splitting is highly characteristic – and thus indicative – of the action of the double within a text. Doubles may form structures in their own right, not merely by acting on existing ones extrinsic to the double itself. The possibility of creating a cohesive topology indicates that cinematic doubles possess their own conventions, which are not necessarily dependent on those of particular genres or narratives. Rank's observation that the exacerbation of the essential conflict between exclusive self-love and extreme thanatophobia can often only be resolved by the death of the doubled subject is a prime example, necessitating a narrative trajectory of self-destruction (Rank 2000, p.77).

The potential of doubles to create structures both intratextually and intertextually is supported by the existence of the double across a range of media, and in mythical and religious contexts, but it is no coincidence that Rank, with a vast quantity of literature to use as a source, chose a film as his point of origin in exploring the double. The cinematic medium emphasises the visual principle of the double, enabling us to experience it not only as a vague phantasm, but also as 'a fact capable of independent confirmation – just pause the film in the appropriate places' (Schneider 2004b, p.108)

The Visuality of the Uncanny

In the case of the doppelganger, cinema allows the spectator to witness the visual compulsion of the double most immediately, to *see* when 'the autoscopic, or

self-seeing, subject beholds its other self as another, as visual object, or alternatively is beheld as object by its other self.' (Webber 1996, p.3). Schneider, however, cautions that doubling, 'that the experience of seeing or otherwise sensing, feeling, or believing that there exists another "you," from inside your own self' (Schneider 2004b, p.107) is broader than the autoscopic, 'the bilocation of the subject in the visual field' (Webber 1996, p.3). As it represents doubling through visual self-duplication, in which the double and doubled are separated spatially but not temporally, the doppelganger can be described in terms of autoscopy more easily than some other forms of double.

The double is often associated with scenes of overt performance, the significance of which can be divided into two strands; firstly, the intrinsic correlation between performer-performed and self-other self, and secondly, the relationship between exhibitionist and voyeur. In both cases, voyeurism is the essential other, the counterpart that responds to the visual emphasis of the double, enabling and facilitating performance: 'the scopic field is always divided by forms of autoscopy … for Lacan as for Freud, the voyeur is always also a subliminal exhibitionist, beheld even as s/he beholds.' (Webber 1996, p.54). In this way, the double both draws on and contributes to the foregrounding of the visual principle.

Initially promising 'immortal survival to the self, the double eventually appears as precisely the opposite, a reminder of the individual's mortality, indeed, the announcer of death itself.' (Rank 1958, p.74). Barthes, describing a photograph of a man awaiting execution, writes that 'the *punctum* is: *he is going to die*. I read at the same time: *This will be* and *this has been*; I observe with horror an anterior future of which death is the stake.' (Barthes 1993, p.96). This *punctum* – not an element we are consciously interested in but 'this element that rises out of the scene… that accident which pricks me… bruises me, is poignant to me' (Barthes 1993, p.27) - evinces the visual dreadfulness of the double; the ordinariness of the physical outer shell, the form in which the double exists, is suspended by the dreadful significance of the correlation between the double and the self from which it originated and to which it can never be reconciled. Inherently, the double portends extinction. It is a harbinger of death and a visual expression of the inevitability of the annihilation of the self. It proffers the

illusion of immortality as a duplicate, but simultaneously exists as a reminder of the mortal anxiety that helped to create it. In taking form, the double makes the threat of inevitable extinction explicit and *visible*.

This also highlights the relationship between thanatophobia and narcissism that provides the origin of the double; the internecine interaction between death-fear and self-love inevitably leads to the very circumstances the double was created to defend against, namely the annihilation of the ego. The double, embodying the exclusive self love and fear of death of narcissism and thanatophobia, frequently results in the commencement of a process of irreversible (self) destruction via a 'dénouement of madness … [resulting from] the paradox of the suicide who seeks death to escape thanatophobia.' (Rank 2000, pp.74-77).

In an analogous manner to Barthes' *punctum*, and comparable with immediate visual impact possessed by the cinematic double and lacked by its literary counterpart, the medium has the potential to invest the double with an audible voice that may be experienced in a similarly immediate way (although this excludes renowned silent examples). This provides the double with yet another compellingly perceptible means of troubling and challenging the self from which it was created, an ability that it possesses in any medium. The self and the other self become dialogically interrelated, rival voices, '[divorcing] the subject from its own acts of speech and writing' (Webber 1996, p.55). Looking at this in a wider context, the conflict erodes the articulation of self-identification, undermining 'the 'I' as enunciation of the self's identity as grammatical subject (speaking, that is, on behalf of self-identical being)' (Webber 1996, p.52).

It is clear that uncanniness in its various forms is strongly implicated in the generation of the weirdness that is axiomatically linked to Lynch's work. From the disorientating effect of causally/spatially/temporally inconclusive or contradictory narrative information to the terrible manifestation of the double, the influence of the uncanny can be discerned on numerous levels. The potential intensity of cinematic doubling, though, originates not just from the ability of the medium to confront us with the immediate and verifiable visual dreadfulness of the double, or from its

capacity to invest the double with an audible, destabilising voice. The medium *itself* is uncanny 'in that its technology animates a series of inanimate still pictures' (Arnzen 2005, p.2), resulting in an illusion capable of producing emotional responses even though we know 'such objects and events do not really exist' (Schneider 2004b, p.120).

The point at which the familiar and unfamiliar are difficult to distinguish, the space that dispels the illusion of diametric opposition between *heimlich* and *unheimlich*, is not the realm of the uncanny exclusively; what belongs to this space does not necessarily belong to the uncanny, but that which is most uncanny is often characterised by ambiguity. What this invokes in addition is potentially even more terrible and fascinating.

The Abject

The crisis represented by the existence of the double is above all a spectacular and horrible exposition of the insecurity of subjectivity. In *Powers of Horror*, Kristeva reconsiders the relatively stable notion of the self postulated by Freud and Lacan. Freud believed that material repressed to the unconscious could ordinarily be prevented from interfering detrimentally in consciousness; Lacan believed the self, or 'human subject', was less stable, but that the repression of desire through signification and the structuring effect of language enabled the maintenance of some degree of equilibrium. Kristeva continues the movement away from the notion of a stable self in proposing instead that self and other can never be satisfactorily delineated (Kristeva 1982, p.7). Incessantly in a state of fluidity, the subject is never securely established; the demands of unconscious material and, ultimately, the threat of extinction, are always present.

The survival of the self depends on the adoption of a defensive position in which, continually troubled by these threats, their effacing allure can be counteracted and the imaginary distinction between I and not-I continually reinforced:

> A wound with blood and pus, or the sickly, acrid
> smell of sweat, of decay, does not signify death. In the

> presence of signified death – a flat encephalograph, for
> instance – I would understand, react, or accept. No, as
> in true theatre, without makeup or masks, refuse and
> corpses show me what I permanently thrust aside in
> order to live. These bodily fluids, these defilements, this
> shit, are what life withstands, hardly and with difficulty,
> on the part of death.
>
> (Kristeva 1982, p.2).

The importunate and perilous influence on the self, Kristeva explains, is the abject. The most literally abject things are vomit, shit, blood – that which permeates and emanates from the body, challenging the distinction between living/inside/I and dead/outside/not-I, that which flows across the supposed borders of I and not-I such as the skin, the mouth, the anus or the genitals. By exposing these borders as permeable, abjects debase the *corps propre*, the 'proper body', the individual physical unit 'owned' by the self and imagined to be 'clean' and separate. Consequently, notions of self-identity and individuality, which are dependent upon this unit, are also undermined. The only defence against the threatened disintegration of order is to reinforce these imaginary delimitations through the expulsion of the abject – to '[deposit them] on the other side of an imaginary border that separates the self from that which threatens the self.' (Creed 1993, p.2)

The influence of the abject is not limited to the corporeal, as 'corruption is the most common, most obvious appearance… the socialised appearance of the abject.' (Kristeva 1982, p.16). Characteristically, the abject contests law: 'abjection … is immoral, sinister, scheming and shady: a terror that dissembles, a hatred that smiles, a passion that uses the body for barter instead of inflaming it, a debtor who sells you up, a friend who stabs you…' (Kristeva 1982, p.4). Incest, adultery, treachery, cannibalism, poisoning; the cause of the abject is that which 'disturbs identity, system, order … does

not respect borders, positions, rules. [It is] the in-between, the ambiguous[13], the composite.' (Kristeva 1982, p.4).

In the example of the corpse, we can observe clear similarities between those things that Freud identifies as evoking the uncanny and those Kristeva identifies as belonging to the realm of abjection.

> The corpse is something that was living but now is dead. It is the very presentation of death, but what it presents is in fact something that we are familiar with as living. Our dead relative appears in the corpse, both as the living person we remember and can still identify with, and the death we cannot adequately signify. The physical reality of the corpse brings together life and death, presence and absence, love and repulsion, happiness and dismay in an endless, chaotic alternation and confusion.
>
> (Mansfield 2000, p.84)

For Freud, the corpse is also a chief source of the uncanny: 'Many people experience the feeling [of uncanniness] in the highest degree in relation to death and dead bodies' (1934, p.359), citing similar reasons. Death is both unfamiliar, hidden from us, surrounded by mystery, and yet so familiar; everyone has a finite life span and its end is unavoidable. The corpse presents us with this paradox, reminding us of life but confronting us with the inevitable yet unknowable experience of death. Kristeva argues that the corpse is 'the most sickening of wastes, is a border that has encroached upon everything. It is no longer I who expel, 'I' is expelled… [It] is the utmost in abjection. It is death infecting life...' (Kristeva 1982, p.4). The corpse presents us with the border between life and death, but unlike its uncanniness, the corpse is

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[13] Kristeva also writes that 'the abject is above all ambiguity' (p. 9), thereby making a similar distinction to Freud's on the uncanny in separating production from experience.

abject not because of its place in a dynamic between familiarity and unfamiliarity, not because it reminds us of our own mortality, but rather because it contaminates; to paraphrase Kristeva, it shows us the shit that life withstands.

Uniting the uncanny and the abject in a similar way, the maternal body is potentially more consequential than the corpse in the context of the abject within the films. The maternal body is abject because it represents the immemorial time when boundaries were inconceivable and self and m/other were indistinguishable, threatening to annihilate the place of the subject in the symbolic order:

> The abject is liminal, threatening the borders of bodies, states of being, "sacred" or "safe" as reflected in rituals of cleanliness and taboos designed to separate the self from what is "properly" other. The Mother, especially, is abject, representing the subject's origin in flesh other than itself and threatening to engulf the ego.
>
> (Badley 2005, p.4)

To become a subject in the symbolic order, it is necessary to reject the mother's body, to affirm the physical separation of birth and enter into the world of language, of structure and law. The maternal body is *unheimlich* when echoes of its repressed familiarity are perceived (Freud describes cases in which his male patients attributed intense feelings of uncanniness to female genitalia) (p. 398), but Freud explores only as far as the womb representing the 'former *heim* of all human beings'. As with the corpse, the mother's body is uncanny because of its former familiarity, rather than because it presents a direct challenge to our ability to identify ourselves as individual entities.

The abject is disturbing not just because it exposes the porous nature of the borders between self and other, life and death or conscious and unconscious, but because it is as enthralling as it is horrendous; as essential as it is insufferable. In providing the other that the self rejects in order to reaffirm its distinctiveness, its place

within systems of meaning, the abject constitutes a crucial part of the basis of the self in the symbolic order and is thus required for its maintenance and survival. This formulation, in which the abject is indispensable despite its awfulness, also becomes ambiguous. The abject offers freedom, a chance to escape from the rigidity, the rules, the structuring influences of the symbolic.

Heimlich and the *corps propre* are comparable to the extent that both inherently connote the subversion of false but deceptively neat, ostensibly sacrosanct boundaries. As *heimlich* carries the implication of what is familiar but concealed, the *corps propre* is inescapably linked to – we might almost say defined by – what will inevitably flow across and subvert its clean borders. Both concepts presuppose contamination, the inevitability of subversion. The same analogy cannot be made between *unheimlich* and *impropre*, however. *Unheimlich*, as we have seen, is not an appropriate opposite to *heimlich* at all; rather, the two are interdependent and occasionally even indistinguishable. Abjection defines the *impropre* by separation, enforcing the opposition and making it indubitable. There is no comparable enforcement of a distinction between *heimlich* and *unheimlich*.

Feelings of uncanniness, while affecting the subject, may not necessarily develop to a level of intensity that threatens to undermine the distinction between subject and object, but both the uncanny and the abject can be symptomatic of a particular kind of crisis. As with the conditions that generate uncanniness and are involved in the manifestation of the double, the abject allies with the dangerous and internecine relationship between narcissism and thanatophobia that plunges the self into an intractable crisis of instability. If the crisis, prefigured by those tremors of instability represented by the return of surmounted beliefs or especially of repressed complexes, is sufficiently intense and perilous, the imposition of a sense of propre/impropre is necessitated even though the distinction and the way it is made is often as artificial and arbitrary as it is involuntary. Abjection becomes inevitable – a desperate struggle to survive in the knowledge of certain annihilation:

> A massive and sudden emergence of
> uncanniness, which, familiar as it might have been in an

> opaque and forgotten life, now harries me as radically
> separate, loathsome. Not me. Not that. But not
> nothing, either. A 'something' that I do not recognize as
> a thing. A weight of meaninglessness, about which
> there is nothing insignificant, and which crushes me. On
> the edge of nonexistence and hallucination, of a reality
> that, if I acknowledge it, annihilates me. There abject
> and abjection are my safeguards. The primers of my
> culture.
>
> (Kristeva 1982, p.2)

Perhaps the impossibility of the uncanny in fairy tales (Freud 1934, p.400) is not only related to the deleterious action of Todorov's marvellous, but also to a lack of abjects; a lack of filth, gore, ooze, of anything that might encourage us to face the permeability of the boundary between I and not-I, the absence of anything that demands abjection. What might potentially strike us as uncanny (Freud suggests the reanimation of *Sleeping Beauty*) does not because we are not pressed by it; it has no resonance. There is no disturbing ambiguity (uncanny) and no genuine threat (abject).

Narrative Theory

Any text in which the ambiguity of the abject, or the intellectual uncertainty that accompanies the uncanny, are significant features represents a key obstacle for the analyst. The actions of the abject and the uncanny in obscuring comprehension can be observed with particular clarity in the narrative field. To refer back to the earlier discussion of *The Sandman*, in the context of the qualifications to what contributes to the generation of a sense of uncanniness and preserves it from being lost or dismissed, many potential options for rationalising inconsistent or unclear elements of the narrative are rendered meaningless. For example, a logical inconsistency or irresolvable ambiguity might be determined as evidence of an unreliable narrator, as with the relationship between Coppelius and Coppola or whether Olympia is human or

an automaton. The uncanniness of these ambiguities is not reduced by categorising them in this way, nor as dreams, nor in terms consistent with Todorov's conception of the marvellous.

The observation that the ambiguity is heightened in part by 'Hoffmann's ingenious use of different perspectives' (Scharpé 2003), in referring to narrative technique, indicates the importance of separating the means by which the uncanny and the abject are generated from the effects produced by them, or at least being clear about the distinction. This becomes increasingly important in considering Lynch's films as his narrative style becomes more complex, evolving from the relative temporal and causal unity of *Eraserhead* to foreground the uncanny, introducing the unsettling, irresolvable conflicts and textual gaps of *Lost Highway* or *Mulholland Drive*. On occasion, where it is necessary to distinguish between an objective, factual structure leading to the production of an uncanny or abject effect and the subjective, disconcerting effect itself, I will make reference to Russian Formalist narrative theories, clarifying the presentation of the causal, spatial and temporal elements that may prompt the spectator to assemble an understanding of the way in which a particular narrative is organised. The most important distinction, and the most illuminating in this context, is between *fabula* and *sjužet*:

> In applying to the text of narrative … perfectly reasonable assumptions about the world, we isolate a level of structure… *fabula*, which we treat as something given, a constant, a sequence of events, which the narrative presupposes and which it could describe… we make it possible to treat everything else in this text as ways of viewing, presenting, valuing, or ordering this non-textual sub-stratum.
>
> (Culler 1996, p.93)

Film synopses (the synopsis portions of the reviews in Sight and Sound illustrate this point particularly well) are usually a simplified representation of the *fabula*, the

imaginary construct inferred from any information that the spectator can recognise as useful in creating it. If there are no obstacles to this assembly, the spectator will be left with 'a chronological, cause-and-effect chain of events occurring within a given duration and spatial field' (Bordwell, 49), the essence of the *fabula*. 'Story' and 'plot', often suggested as English equivalents, do not adequately convey the meaning of the Russian terms:

> In the wake of the Russian Formalists, French structural analysts of narrative proposed their own pairs of terms, predominantly histoire (corresponding to *fabula*) and récit, or else discours (corresponding to *sjužet*). English usage has been more unsettled.
> (P. Brooks 1992, p.13).

As proposed by Shklovsky (1965) and, more directly, Tomashevsky (2000), the *sjužet* may be described as the organisation or arrangement of spatial, temporal and causal elements within a text that are capable of being perceived by the spectator and may be retrospectively construed, outside of the order in which they are recounted, in the chronological order of the *fabula*. '*Fabula* refers to the actuality and the chronological sequence of the events that make up the narrative; and *sjužet* to the order, manner and style in which they are presented' (Bradford 1997, p.52). The difficulty in discussing *sjužet* in relation to *fabula* – for example, presenting *fabula* as a chronological sequence of events and *sjužet* as the way that these events are represented and organised within the text – is that it implies that the *sjužet* is somehow subordinate to the *fabula*, as if the creation of the *fabula* were the essential purpose of the *sjužet* rather than a consequential function, simply because attempting to describe the *sjužet* evokes the activity of *fabula* construction. The nature of the *sjužet* is not determined by the nature of the *fabula*; the *sjužet* of any particular film, post-editing, is immutable. Even considering the penchant of Breton and Vaché for going between cinemas, watching random fragments of individual films and thus experiencing a aggregated *sjužet* by 'creating a collage of cinematic experiences'

(Powrie 1998, p.154), the spectator is incapable of affecting the *sjužet* of an individual film, although they may affect their experience of it – for example, by leaving the cinema. The *sjužet* is determined in the production of the text, whereas the *fabula* is dependent on how the *sjužet* is interpreted.

Conversely, the *fabula* itself is dependent on the *sjužet* – and the *sjužet* may not communicate perfectly or completely. If the spectator is unaware, for whatever reason, of the presentation of a particular item of *sjužet* information (for example, a scene offered as a flashback is mistakenly thought to be occurring contemporaneously, rather than in the past), then the process of *fabula* creation will be affected accordingly, as '[*sjužet*] builds up suspense through diverse strategies (retardation, distortion, and withholding of information) that postpone the completion of *fabula* construction and provoke the spectator's curiosity.' (Gateward 2007, p.119)

I have several intentions in employing formalist theory in considering Lynch's work. Firstly, I wish to show that the complications of *fabula* construction, which potentially exist in all narrative films, are exacerbated significantly by the disruptive potential of the uncanny and the abject. Secondly, to escape the imprecision of reality/fantasy, dream/wake or dream/film analyses by exposing the process through which such haziness is engendered.

Narrative Splitting

In Lynch's later work particularly, the *sjužet* is typically inconclusive, creating contradictions, impossibilities and conflicting double meanings. Consequently, the construction of a logical, ordered, rational *fabula* is frequently problematised. When the *sjužet* is privileged to excess, the 'prototype, template and procedural schemata' (Bordwell 1985, p.51) upon which the *fabula* is produced may be compromised; i.e. causal, spatial and temporal information may not be communicated in a way that *permits* a consistent or reliable construction of the *fabula*. Often, the issue is not that the *sjužet* does not inform sufficiently to allow a *fabula* to be assembled, but that the imparted information is overwhelming, nonsensical, incompatible or self-contradictory. The spectator may be faced with one or more irreconcilable elements

that the *sjužet* presents as equally valid; if so, the only way to claim one of these elements for the *fabula* is to arbitrarily dismiss the others, or to adopt them as part of a separate *fabula*. This latter option is naturally invalidated, however, if the spectator is encouraged to believe that a single *fabula* is possible – for example, if all of the elements can be feasibly employed in the continued construction of the *fabula*, if they contradict each other but not information that has already been integrated. It is then more convenient to simplify or assert a false impression of certainty upon those aspects that resist integration, perhaps terming them 'dreamlike', or 'weird', or ascribing them conventional qualities, than it is to accept that they cannot be reconstituted into a single, consistent unified *fabula*, and that the ambiguities and contradictions created cannot be bounded by an ordered system.

These narratives, consisting of irresolvable, irreconcilable and paradoxical *sjužet* elements, are indicative of, and characterised by, closely associated processes of splitting and doubling that may be observed on many different levels. In *Lost Highway* and *Mulholland Drive* particularly, the spectator is presented with a *sjužet* that encourages the perception of the protagonists, in addition to other characters, as discrete identities yet simultaneously places one identity in crisis by associating it with another to the extent that the possibility of distinguishing between the two is challenged. In this context, the phenomena of the double and the uncanny are significant obstacles to *fabula* construction.

The symptoms and processes of uncanniness and abjection that I will be examining in Lynch's work will, I propose, do more than illuminate what critics are referring to when they describe aspects of a particular film as 'weird'. The amalgamation of the uncanny and the abject that can be distinguished in the motif of the double suggests that the presence of uncanniness, abjection and doubling in the films function to draw our attention towards the ontological, the nature of identity and the structures that enable us to perceive ourselves as individuals – to exist.

Chapter 3: Eraserhead

> All the evidence that we have indicates that it is reasonable to assume … in almost every newborn baby, that there is an active will toward health, an impulse toward growth, or toward the actualization of human potentialities.
>
> (Maslow 1993, p.25)

Reception

Considering the abundance of commentary on *Blue Velvet* and *Mulholland Drive*, there is comparatively little contemporaneous material to demonstrate how *Eraserhead* was received upon release in 1977. Despite this relative scarcity, extant reviews demonstrate a critical pattern that remains largely consistent throughout Lynch's career; one of polarised acclaim and loathing, allied to a fascination with the elusive strangeness of his films. Accordingly, a dominant feature of many articles is the familiar observation of 'weirdness', with the synonym of choice barely varying between critics: 'a bizarre success' (Wapshott 1979) or 'an exercise in the bizarre that exists entirely in its own world and on its own terms' (Malcolm 1993). In qualifying the bizarre, critics describe the potential of the film to affect the viewer emotionally and even physically attracting and repulsing simultaneously. The palpability of this effect has been characterised as a combination of 'hermetic [and] emetic' (French 1979), with descriptions possessing sufficient consistency to indicate that something homogenous is being identified.

The selection by critics of unsettling feelings such as claustrophobia or nausea as prominent and significant features immediately indicates them as possible contributors to the generation of a strange (even perverse) enjoyment; despite the disagreeable impression that phrases describing repulsion might generate, they proliferate even in positive reception and, paradoxically, suggest the identification of a source of pleasure. Critical language, in pursuing the alluring strangeness of the film,

often goes beyond descriptions of unpleasantness to create an impression of something more complex but always vividly perceptible and often described in physical terms: 'shock, delight, nausea and giddy incomprehension' (N. Andrews 1979). Although few commentators chose to attempt an explanation of this intriguing repulsion, those that did described disgusting, organic things that invest (or infest) an ostensibly sterile, industrial landscape with uncanny animation and contribute to an unsettling ambience: 'odd, imaginative, eerie and ugly … surreal and grisly … a throbbing world of repulsive life – wormlike and crablike creatures wriggle, split and multiply…' (Dignam 1979). The fact that what might be termed this pleasurable unpleasantness is described in language that evokes physical reaction – nausea, repulsion – is a distinct and notable evocation of the abject (a point to which I shall return shortly).

More recently, *Eraserhead* has been re-examined in the context of Lynch's later work. Some analysts are attracted to the possibility that *Eraserhead* is the most deeply personal of Lynch's films, positing that the birth of his first child, Jennifer, provided inspiration: 'Lynch was a young father, and reading his apprehension into the film is irresistible' (1992, p.14). Perceived synchronicity with the film's conception (although Jennifer was born in 1968, when Lynch was working on *The Alphabet* and *The Grandmother*), juxtaposed with imagery of openings, foetuses and milk, have encouraged the highly questionable proposition that the film allegorises an autobiographical crisis. It has even been suggested that a minor abnormality that Jennifer was born with inspired the grotesque mutations of the baby in *Eraserhead* (Paiva 1997, p.4)

Despite the contention that the more intimate production of *Eraserhead* increases the attraction of regarding it as a very personal or even autobiographical film, especially in comparison to the more sophisticated and commercial productions of *Dune* or *Blue Velvet*, Kaleta later distances himself from the suggestion, arguing that 'film is not merely biographical record... analysis of *Eraserhead* lies not in isolating replication of biography but in criticising the creation as art.' (Kaleta 1992, p.15). While this is true, and inferred biographical associations are too speculative to be of

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theoretical value or even of direct relevance, the association of the fear and anxiety exhibited in and generated by the film with events in the director's life acknowledges a powerful sense of the *unheimlich* – as if something so affecting could have originated only from an authentic and personal trauma – as well as emphasising the abject in alluding to the significance of themes of reproduction; neither can be easily dismissed. While various theories have been proposed in the pursuit of an understanding of the nature of the film's unsettling power, until recently there was relatively little suggestion of the development of any meaningful agreement as to productive approaches, with criticism being marked more by diversity. This is illustrated by the comparison of two analyses, which select focal areas of such differing degrees that it is impossible to perceive even an intimation of consensus.

Although it concentrates on detailing the various blessings and misfortunes arising from the production from an autobiographical perspective, Chion's influential study considers *Eraserhead* as a sign of Lynch 'clearly moving towards a more traditional style of cinema.' (1995, p.42). Nevertheless, the discomforting nature of the film, he argues, may be attributable to the cinematography, at least in part. In keeping with more general descriptions of the effects generated, he argues that the cinematography possesses 'a genuine strangeness… Though plain as day, this strangeness is not easy to define and cannot be reduced to the use of individual techniques.' (ibid). While Chion's caution here (I take the term 'individual techniques' to refer to constituent elements such as shot length, etc.) is valid, theories have been developed to illuminate the phenomenon of this 'genuine strangeness' that encompass the stylistic concerns cited; I will discuss these shortly. In the second analysis, John Alexander's scrutiny of *Eraserhead* (1993) largely eschews issues of form and style. Instead, the substance is provided by a comparison of perceived spiritual/intellectual redemptive qualities with alchemical, Jungian structures. Considering the body of theory relating to Lynch's work, Jungian references are rare in the extreme, owing partly to the far greater dominance of Freudian themes; as a Jungian subset, alchemical allusions are unique to Alexander's analysis. Although distracted by unconstructive judgements on the film as autobiography, such as 'Henry

Spencer's ordeal is also the ordeal of David Lynch giving birth to his own creativity by delving into the blackness of his own psychosis' (1993, p.53), Alexander's most important assertion is that Henry is ultimately saved, in a quasi-religious sense, by the transformation of 'the *nigredo* of despair and melancholy into the substance of art … an eruption through the void, as the self frees itself from the darkness and emerges into light.' (1993, p.53). While this characterisation of Henry's journey of self appears idiosyncratic, being far removed in its emphases from that of almost every other analysis, the substance of his argument remains defensible even with consideration to more recent theoretical directions. The suggestion that attributing a redemptive quality to the film distracts from its uncanniness is worthy of discussion, but is ultimately inadequate reason to discard Alexander's central proposals – I will explore this as an indirect aspect of my qualifications to theoretical approaches in the course of this chapter.

A recurrent, although seldom dominant trait has been the perception that *Eraserhead* is thoroughly permeated by a fear of sex. In a brief but influential analysis, K George Godwin proposed that this 'becomes for Henry a parasitic disease in the form of foetuses; the longing for escape into a comfortable security becomes for Henry a strange, sterile Heaven.' (1985, p.49). Godwin's proposition has been developed; Chion dedicates a substantial paragraph to extrapolating a more overtly Freudian interpretation, beginning:

> the entire film is placed under the sign of the
> fear of sex. The baby is a phallic symbol, a penis which
> in growing independent of its owner, becomes a
> separate and demanding entity, free of the mind's
> conscious control. In destroying it, Henry performs a
> kind of self –castration…
> (1995, p.45).

This fear of sex has been emphasised not only by reinforcing the position recommended by Godwin, but also as a consequence of the strictly Freudian

interpretations that Lynch's films (especially *Blue Velvet*) encourage, in addition to an understandable but excessive and misplaced resistance to being seen to consider any themes perceived to relate to Lynch's own experiences (e.g. of fatherhood). This resistance is easily dismissed; inappropriate biographical associations – being extrinsic to the text – should not distract from productive analysis of the themes themselves. Regarding such associations as irrelevant does not preclude consideration of the text that suggested them. In the following sections, I will summarise and develop current theories of the generation of unease in *Eraserhead* and will explore the feasibility of alternative approaches, before proceeding to argue that the effects produced by the film can be better understood by a qualified characterisation of their origins.

Within the generation of the extreme, unsettling feelings frequently perceived by commentators, the contribution made by uncanniness exists in a subordinate role to the disturbing effects created by the frequency and variation with which borders, especially corporeal ones, are threatened, subverted and violated. Returning to the point made earlier about reception, this is suggested by the repeated reference to phenomena that are psychological in origin (encompassing the uncanny) but with physical manifestations (e.g. nausea).

Proceeding with this distinction, I will examine the depiction of the relationship between the abject and the *unheimlich* and will argue that the configuration of these two elements represents a nascent form of an important dynamic within Lynch's work. As a corollary, I will evaluate the supposition that the abject is present *manifestly*, rather than by implication or association – and therefore to a greater degree than in later work – particularly in the form of pus, slime, sickening food, oozing and bodily fluids. Proceeding from the greater emphasis on reproduction and biological generation as something related to but separable from sexuality[14], I will consolidate the assertion that *Eraserhead* invokes the horror of abjects overwhelmingly.

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[14] Especially as Mary appears to be able to auto-generate the deformed umbilical material that Henry hurls against the wall.

Abomination

The sinister seduction of Henry by the 'Beautiful Girl from Across the Hall' undoubtedly encourages the perception of the fear of sex as a theme. Henry is clearly apprehensive, stepping away from her as she advances into the room, although his motives are made somewhat ambiguous by his silencing of the baby.

Henry and the woman kiss and caress in a large, circular tub filled with a greyish-white, milk like liquid; the woman stares at the baby, which is crying for attention. She and Henry slip beneath the milk until only her hair is visible floating on the surface[15]. Ironically, the scene that seems to communicate a fear of sex in a direct and unambiguous manner more than adequately demonstrates why it represents a subordinate component in the generation of horror. The inference that the liquid the lovers are submerged in is milk is encouraged by the sustained allusions to the particularly female aspects of biological reproduction previously mentioned. In addition, an ensuing shot of two great waves of foaming white fluid parting provides the spectator enough of an impression of the consistency of the liquid to suggest milk. Milk is a highly significant liquid in the context of abjection, and one frequently mentioned by Kristeva (who describes her own milk related disgust and loathing), particularly in terms of biblical prohibitions:

> Abomination seems to proceed from [a] flow that mingles two identities and connotes the bond between the one and the other: milk. A medium that is common to mother and child, a food that does not separate but binds… what is implicated is not milk as food but milk considered in its symbolic value.
>
> (Kristeva 1982, p.105)

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[15] Schneider asks 'is there any doubt that the woman's hair has become detached from her scalp?' (2004a, p.16)

Kristeva's subjects in this passage are the abominations described in Leviticus and Deuteronomy, specifically the proscription upon cooking a young goat in its mother's milk. The root of this prohibition, the ultimate reason that it is considered abject and abominable is that it 'amounts to a metaphor of incest.' (Kristeva 1982, p.105). For Henry, milk is an *unheimlich* fluid that connotes uncleanliness, evoking his bewilderment and fear of the newly revealed and barely controlled productivity of Mary's body. It suggests not only the bond between mother and child, but also the growing control that the baby exerts, binding itself to him, and the liquid that spurts from the umbilical cords hurled against the wall or stomped by the Lady in the Radiator. In front of the baby, in a pool of this liquid, Henry engages in sexual activity with his neighbour (this unspecific language relating to the act is necessary because the nature of it is unclear, highlighting the fact that the significance is generated not from the sexual behaviour, but from its location in the milk-bath). The moral abject of Henry's betrayal of Mary in front of their child is less important than abomination created by the contaminating juxtaposition of sex and milk. The woman's face, picked out in a shard of light, can be seen staring fearfully at a rocky moon, recognisable from the opening sequence as a symbol of barrenness made fecund.

This is not the only instance in which the significance of sex is subordinated or overwhelmed. The opening sequence connotes conception (as the sperm-like mass is emitted from Henry's body and splashes into the round opening) and birth (the movement along the dark passage towards light) in combination. This actively displaces sex as a bodily act, with any suggestion of flesh or human interaction eschewed in favour of the quasi-astronomical, mechanical symbolism of infinite space, moons and levers. This displacement, naturally, could be symptomatic of repression and could therefore indicate the fear of sex to which Godwin and Chion refer, evoking or at least consolidating sustained uncanniness. Yet Henry's interaction with the Beautiful Girl from Across the Hall epitomises a process that recurs throughout the film. In this process, any distinct allusion to sex or sexual desire is instantly inundated by reproductive abjects, just as Henry and his lover are subsumed by the tide of milk. The dominant source of fascination, loathing and horror is not sex, but the presence of

these threats to the *corps propre*, which overwhelm considerations both visually and symbolically; the abject predominates over the uncanny.

Milk is also significant as a provider of sustenance – a context that is less important in the above scene than in a number of other instances. The X's home and Henry's bed-sit are, in consecutive scenes, thematically linked by food; this is the context in which the baby is introduced, as Mary unsuccessfully tries to feed it – maintaining and strengthening the dominance of the beguiling horror of abjection. The act of spitting out, expelling the food in refusing it, is an act of abjection that suggests – despite the rejection of sustenance – the strengthening self of the baby through disassociation with the mother (who abandons it twice), and the expulsion of the other, supporting an illusion of a unified self (in turn undermined by the baby's attempted usurpation of its father's body).

Contamination

A succession of abjects follows Mary's first departure, with a growing level of menace that continues after her inexplicable return. The baby, already oozing and slimy, develops a covering of dark pustules – making it appear even more putrefied and unclean, additionally implying contagion and the potential to infect. This precedes the appearance of the Lady in the Radiator, her face swollen by clusters of growths. She shuffles nervously across a circular stage. Umbilical cords fall from above her and writhe before she crushes them with a shoe, causing white liquid to spurt across the stage. Henry, asleep next to Mary, discovers one of these umbilical growths in the bed; he hurls it across the room and it splatters against a wall in slow motion. The first is followed by a second and a third, a shot of Mary's legs writhing open and closed emphasising the physical origin of the cords as Henry drags them out. A small piece of umbilical-like material (that Henry removed from a seed he discovered in his mailbox) escapes from a cupboard and disappears into a wall. The slug mutates into a funnel shaped tube through which the camera is drawn, revealing Henry brushing imaginary dirt from his pyjamas, as if trying to decontaminate himself. Understandably, *unheimlich* qualities can be observed in the generation of these rope-like pieces of

flesh in particular, which resemble the baby despite appearing less developed. In addition to their physical origins, and consequent evocation of the universal *heim*, their movement on the stage in the radiator, allied to the emphasised stop-motion movement of the slug-seed that escapes from Henry's cabinet, invests them with ambiguous and disturbing life.

Here, the uncanny does not, by itself, account for the dripping foulness of the images, nor does it adequately encompass the revulsion and discomfort they inspire; this is indicated by the auditory peculiarity of the scene, heightening the unpleasant performance with a crescendo of discordant sound that rises to a piercing whistle, reminiscent of the climactic death scene in *The Grandmother* in which the eponymous character undergoes a physical cataclysm replete with similar screeching, grating sounds. The sound is not merely strange or unsettling (like the rumbling, industrial noise that permeates the soundtrack), but jarring and almost intolerable. The malformed umbilical cords, dragged from between Mary's legs by a disgusted Henry (like a magician performing a trick with knotted handkerchiefs) present a tableau of uncleanliness and anomalous birth, a display of disgusting reproductive incontinence. The expelled material connotes those abjects associated with the soiling of a bed, but more horribly, the deformed cords destabilise the proper distinction between inside/outside. In addition to evoking the horror of the monstrous womb, the presence of this foul and horribly animated uterine spawn externalises the transgression of borders by realising the previously threatened infestation of Henry's barren, inhospitable room with abject female material – an infestation that then closes in on *him*.

The Monstrous Baby

Freeland asserts, justifiably, that '[the] horror … is centered upon the monstrous baby. It is uncanny, frightening, disgusting and yet pitiable.' (Freeland 2000, p.229). Although Freeland does not explore the associations, the second sentence suggests the value of considering the baby in the context of abjection. If *Eraserhead*'s powers of horror can be found in the reproductive more definitely than the sexual, it

follows that the baby, 'a monster with an indefinite, wrapped up body and the head of skinned animal' (Bert 1994) must be a key consideration. As I have argued, its appearance evokes the abject in numerous ways. Its skin appears slimy; its body has no certain borders, merely artificial ones created by bandages, and it develops pustules suggestive of contagion. Yet the baby does not only provoke abjection by lacking a clean and proper body – it actively challenges, subverts and befouls proper corporeal boundaries. The baby attempts its colonisation of Henry in a grotesque subversion of birth; the crowning of the baby from Henry's body generates uncanniness through its displacement of his head and consequent associations with castration. While this prefigures the greater emphasis on the uncanny present in Lynch's later work, here it alludes more powerfully, and more disturbingly, to fears of the female other, the abject female body and specifically the monstrous womb.

The birthing of the baby from Henry is a performance replete with blood and screaming, connoting, in Kristeva's terms, 'the image of birth as a violent act of expulsion through which the nascent body tears itself away from the matter of maternal insides' (Kristeva 1982, p.101). Visually and aurally, this is powerful culmination of the threat to the order and 'cleanliness' of Henry's body with contamination by the abject, particularly the other of maternal functions. This monstrous, violating birth invites parallels with the *Alien* series of films – especially with *Alien*[3] (David Fincher, 1992) in which Ripley is impregnated with an alien foetus and, 'unable finally to preserve her own flesh from contamination by the abject' (Creed 1993, p.53) chooses self-destruction, thus simultaneously destroying the foreign tissue. The terrible, gravid incursion dramatised by *Alien*[3] can help to illuminate the complicity of womb horrors in the nexus between uncanniness and abjection in *Eraserhead*. Strongly associated with the *unheimlich* – most notably due to its status as the universal former home 'from which the individual has become alienated through repression' (Creed 1993, p.54) but powerfully abject as a space of preindividuation and fecundity, the womb bridges two separate forms of destabilisation, of '[disturbing] identity and order' (ibid). Henry, longing for his 'strange, sterile Heaven' (Godwin 1985, p.49), suffers the defilement of his body by an alien gestation; the baby exposes the

permeability of the father's body by appropriating it, infesting and transforming it with otherness.

Unlike the ferocious alien queen in the *Alien* series, there is no suggestion in *Eraserhead* that Mary X is actively monstrous or that she controls her baby; on the contrary, she appears to be slightly gormless and is ineffectual in interacting with her child. Although represented as horrifying and monstrous, the womb itself is of less significance than the horrors projected onto it:

> The fact that the womb is still represented in cultural discourses as an object of horror tends to contradict the argument that the reason for this is ignorance. A more probable explanation is that woman's womb – as with her other reproductive organs – signifies sexual difference and as such has the power to horrify woman's sexual other… woman's ability to give birth clearly does constitute a major area of difference giving rise to a number of contradictory responses on the part of men, such as awe, jealousy and horror.
>
> (Creed 1993, p.57)

These contradictory responses are evident in Henry's interaction with the baby, and are epitomised in the scene when, following the trauma of the birth, Henry returns to his room to find the baby laughing to itself. He lies on the bed and ignores it, but it continues to cackle; other noise infiltrates the room – the organ music that evokes the Lady in the Radiator's song, a distant thumping, and the wind outside. Investigating the noise, he opens the door to find his neighbour (and former lover) with another man. Seizing a pair of scissors, he advances on the baby and, after a short deliberation, carefully cuts into its bandaging. The baby makes rapid, frightened sounds and shakes while Henry finishes cutting upwards, towards its head; the two halves of the bandage casing slowly unfold. Henry, initially gripped with fascination

and apprehension, turns his gaze away and stares guiltily downwards before returning his attention to the disintegrating baby. From inside the opened bandages, an indistinguishable mess of organs and glistening goo undulates. Henry apprehensively snips at a heaving organ before recoiling. An unfeasibly massive ocean of foul porridge spews from the baby's insides; the lights fuse, firing sparks, as the baby's neck extends to a grotesque length, its mouth spurting liquid.

The reason for Henry's actions here are, understandably, as ambiguous as his attitude towards the baby. Henry does not slash at it or, contrary to Alexander's assertion, stab it (Alexander 1993, p.52) – there is only one slow, tentative snip. While he has clearly damaged it, opening the bandages and cutting into its viscera, his actions are not suggestive of uncontrolled rage. In the context of the defilement of Henry's body, his betrayal by the Beautiful Girl from Across the Hall and the laughter of the baby, he is apparently more motivated by spite and jealousy; having lost control of the borders of his own body, he denies the baby its artificial borders by carefully destroying them with the scissors. The result is spectacular; what is particularly horrible about the baby's death is the impossible amount of material spontaneously produced. Its organs are uncannily generative, evoking the reproductive horrors mentioned by Creed. While the womb is, as the universal *heim*, most often implicated in the generation of the uncanny, in this case, the power of the horror engendered is not solely one of psychological threat but is powerfully physical and visual. The monstrous baby is something that has issued from a space that destabilises the borders of self and which threatens to enact a terrible, deindividuating power independently of it. In this terrible climax of abjects, the sexless baby acts as a metaphor for a womb that produces death instead of life; Henry's reaction is entirely consistent with the awe, jealousy and horror cited by Creed.

As often occurs in confrontations between self and double, Henry is no longer able to reassert his psychological and physical borders after the messy disintegration of the baby. Henry enters a formless, otherworldly realm of bright light, where the Lady in the Radiator is waiting. Looking pleased and relieved, she embraces Henry, whose expression is ambiguous and enigmatic. In the conclusion of *Alien³*,

Ripley's self-destruction is replete with quasi-religious overtones, generated from images suggestive of immolation and sainthood – as a culmination of a process of abjection there are strong similarities with Henry's absorption into this infinite field of blinding whiteness, which although indefinable, connotes not death but transfiguration and transformation. Through a different route to that pursued by Godwin and Alexander (as mentioned at the beginning of this chapter), this nevertheless suggests the redemptive qualities reaffirmed by them and contradicted by Schneider; in resigning himself to this deindividuation and effacement, Henry resolves the conflicts of doubling and frees himself from the oppression of abjects not merely through self destruction but by resigning himself to the fear of being dissolved into the whole, symbolised by the dissipation of the luminous dust into darkness.

Eraserhead as Horror Film

Two studies of *Eraserhead,* by Steven Schneider and Cynthia Freeland, identify specific qualities as *unheimlich* and contextualise them with reference to conventions of the horror genre. The most interesting and important contention of Steven Schneider's analysis is that *Eraserhead*'s 'pervasive uncanniness is most fruitfully explained, though never explained away, when situated within the context of the horror genre and its traditions' (Schneider 2004a, p.16). Evoking the intellectual uncertainty that often accompanies uncanniness in this case affirms a key aspect of the simultaneously repellent and fascinating qualities exhibited by the film. In referring to intellectual uncertainty, I refer not to the quoted statement (which attempts to define something indefinable) but to the impossibility it describes – of mitigating (or even denaturing) the uncanny by rendering the text wholly and transparently coherent.

As I have argued, the uncanny qualities of *Eraserhead* often exist as part of something more powerfully abject, especially so in evoking the reproductive body and its inherent threat to the discrete *corps propre.* The contention that the film can be best understood in the context of the horror film acknowledges this dominance, privileging the visual immediacy of the film's various abjects. Schneider's study relates the action of these abjects (and their associated uncanniness) to structure, asserting

'the primacy of the audio-visual image' (Schneider 2004a, p.7) and leading to the contention that narrative is consequently disrupted, dislocated and rendered subservient. In support of the primacy of visual and auditory manifestations of uncanniness, 'surrealistic set-pieces, apparently unmotivated behaviour and hyperbolic gross-out shots' (Schneider 2004a, p.9) are cited, with the proviso that they cannot be considered in isolation, or as the only factors responsible for the effects generated by the film. This primacy is illustrated by the reproduction of Chris Rodley's synopsis, demonstrating that 'no mere summation of *Eraserhead*'s narrative' (Schneider 2004a, p.7) can adequately communicate the impact of the visual and auditory material responsible for producing the immediacy and potency of abjects, or the extent to which the influence of this material outweighs that of other factors. As is evident from the earlier discussion of reception, the consensus and specificity that exists in terms of connecting the disturbing nature of the film to particular causes refers to the physical and the visual primarily, citing the oozing cooked birds or the writhing umbilical waste over, for example, the soundtrack of ambiguous industrial noise or the lack of dialogue.

In their relation to the physical through the threatened violation of the *corps propre*, it is unsurprising that abjects are often immediately and powerfully visual (especially so in the context of the medium of film). Under the subheading '*Eraserhead*'s Horror Effects' (2004a, p.9), Schneider refers to five scenes that he considers indicative of how unnerving effects are generated: the delay in opening the lift to Henry's apartment; Bill X's prolonged, inane stare at Henry during dinner; the revelation of the baby's sickness; Henry's 'dream' in which he enters the 'radiator stage', and the cutting and removal of the baby's bandages. While Schneider does not accentuate the point, it is worth stressing here that firstly, all five scenes are emphatically visual, or heighten the significance of looking, and secondly, the majority are distinctly and primarily abject. Extrapolating, this visuality can be separated into contributory parts; movement, such as the conspicuous immobility of the lift accentuating the sudden opening of its doors, or the spectacular foaming of the unwrapped baby's innards; luminosity, such as motif of electrical flickering or the

sequential illumination of the bulbs around the stage in the radiator, serving to intensify and draw attention to the general *chiaroscuro*; and eyes – staring, provoking the fear of the baby's gaze evinced by the 'woman from across the hall' with whom Henry stages a transgressive form of the primal scene – eyes that recall the particular *Unheimlichkeit* of Hoffmann's *Der Sandmann*. The greatest visual impact, however, comes from the abjects; the dark spots and sliminess, indicating the baby's pestilence; the cankered, diseased looking cheeks of the Lady in the Radiator, who stamps on oozing, fleshy cords, and the physical disintegration and explosive putrefaction that result from the slicing open of the baby's carapace.

In exploring uncanny material in *Eraserhead* and comparing it with 'formal and thematic techniques familiar within the horror genre' (2004a, p.5), Schneider's stated intention is to remove the film from perception in isolation, i.e. as a text resistant to consideration in a generic framework. This foregrounding of the image in the context of these conventions and traditions is intended to affirm and develop perceptions of 'the film's cynicism and nightmarish qualities', rather than to mitigate them (2004a, p.5). There is no intention to associate these qualities or associated images with the kind of gratuitous coarseness that, in horror films, elicits mocking laughter more often than unease (in the case of things which are not abject, just gross; not uncanny, just odd). In *Eraserhead*, 'disturbing effects [are engendered]… not through special effects … but through images which instil in viewers a palpable feeling of uncanniness.' (Schneider 2004a, p.10). The nature of this emphasis on the immediate and affecting visuality of uncanniness encourages comparison with the Barthesian *punctum*, as discussed in Chapter 2. Independent of the double context in which I have previously discussed it, the punctum importunes the spectator without being sought, or even necessarily acknowledged. The manner in which uncanniness arises from an image is often very similar in function; easily experienced but resistant to comprehension and explanation.

Perhaps the most productive assertion, although not the central one of Schneider's thesis, is that:

> The Lynchian uncanny is not – at least primarily – explicable in Freudian/psychoanalytical terms (that is, via a return to consciousness of some previously repressed ideational content, or else via a reconfirmation in depicted reality of some previously 'surmounted' belief or beliefs), so much as in the terms proffered by Noel Carrol, a contemporary philosopher of film who attributes feelings of horror and uncanniness to apparent transgressions or violations of existing cultural (in some cases, conceptual) categories. Examples … are the mutually exclusive dyads 'me / not me, inside / outside … living / dead' and human / machine…
>
> (Schneider 2004a, p.10)

This destabilisation and denaturing of borders is the essence of the abject. It should be possible to infer, from the discussion of these dyads in the previous chapter, the reasons that this passage might be considered important and how I intend to reinterpret the significance of these transgressed categories in juxtaposition with psychoanalytical perspectives on uncanniness. In the course of this chapter, these implications will be explored, establishing the nature of Freudian uncanniness within *Eraserhead* and demonstrating its relationship to the powerfully abject effects generated by subverting and violating the boundaries between me/not me, living/dead and inside/outside.

While the second piece of interest precedes Schneider's by two years, it is best discussed in the context of the later study. Describing *Eraserhead* as a film of exceptional and unrelenting uncanny horror, Cynthia Freeland affirms Schneider's position, associating this uncanniness with visual spectacles in particular. Specifically, she argues that the textures and images presented are rarely straightforward or immediately identifiable, but 'even if familiar, they are distorted and made strange.' (Freeland 2000, p.226). However, despite repeatedly emphasising that 'startling

visions… make this film truly uncanny' (Freeland 2000, pp.226-228), there is little attempt made to specify exactly what about these images makes them uncanny – certainly nothing approaching Schneider's endeavour to link them, with textual examples, to recognisable motifs within the horror genre. Without suggesting a definite connection to the uncanny, Freeland does explore oppositions such as contrasting musical and non-musical sound or the opposition of dark and light, the latter being described as 'the most significant duality in the movie; it pushes the boundaries of what can be represented.' (Freeland 2000, p.233).

The substance of the article is concerned with pursuing perceptions of sexuality, consistently with Godwin and Chion's emphasis on a fear of sex. Rather than simply endorsing their approach, however, Freeland suggests that sex is not consistently portrayed as unpleasant or something to be feared, describing Henry tryst with the woman who lives in the opposite apartment in positive and almost redemptive terms. Although there is an unwillingness to oppose the dominant attitude, she adds the proviso that 'to say that sexuality is threatening in *Eraserhead* is to state something so obvious that it is unilluminating.' (Freeland 2000, p.231). A key question in considering sexuality is why such observations are not illuminating. Aside from the assertion that blatancy obviates the usefulness of such approaches, there is the possibility that emphasising sexuality is unproductive because there are other, more consequential motifs and structures. Despite dedicating the majority of her discussion to sexuality, Freedland concludes that 'it may be not so much sexuality that is the issue or source of horror in *Eraserhead* as reproduction, considered not just as a consequence of sex but as a facet of life.' (Freeland 2000, p.232). Surprisingly, there is very little qualification or expansion of this valuable sentence, despite the fact that it hints at the possibility of an entirely new emphasis in analysis of *Eraserhead* – one that clearly evokes the dominant figure of the film, the misshapen baby, more intensely than does a focus on sexuality that fails to emphasise the importance of what might be termed 'reproductive terror'.

Freeland and Schneider's analyses are consistent in isolating aspects of particular approaches as unproductive; this reflects a wider and relatively recent trend

towards a more rigorous and consistent treatment of Lynch's work, possibly in response to a proliferation of 'fan material' attributable to the release and popular success of *Mulholland Drive*[16]. Ironically, this mutual insistence upon qualification of the validity of approaches leads to a marked disagreement. Presumably referring to interpretations such as the alchemical one proposed by Alexander, Schneider criticises attempts to elicit redemptive qualities from the text, arguing that doing so is counterproductive, serving only to obfuscate and confuse. This is inconsistent with Freeland's attitude to the conclusion of *Eraserhead*: 'It holds out the possibility of a kind of escape through the combination of romance and art. Henry must die in order to realize his sublime romantic escape…' (Freeland 2000, p.243). As will become clear, the balance of this argument is ultimately of importance in validating structures of abjection and uncanniness. Both analyses are distinct from earlier reception in discussing the disturbing qualities of *Eraserhead* in the context of the abject (at least by allusion) – notable not only for its specificity where others express an ambiguous unease but in illuminating the critical relationship between abject, uncanny and narrative in Lynch's films. In discussing Schneider and Freedland's articles further, I wish to draw out the interrelated nature of the abject and the uncanny in the film. The uncanny, while less apparent among the more obvious abjects that preponderate, exists in a way that supports and heightens their psychological effect. Considered in the context of the abject and the corollary uncanniness, the differences in Freedland's and Schneider's approaches no longer appear oppositional, instead cohering around the nature of double conflict and the effacing power of the abject as part of a process that must inevitably end with the destruction of the self, beyond the concepts of death or redemption.

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[16] for further discussion of these important methodological qualifications, see chapter 7, 'methodology and anti-intellectualism'.

Domestic Uncanniness

The paradigmatic importance of both articles merits a more sustained consideration of their accuracy and utility in particular. While Schneider and Freeland illuminate the nature of the uncanny in *Eraserhead* in different ways, in order to examine the generation of uncanniness it is important to develop and explore beyond the specific areas considered in the two articles; of chief interest are two dominant structures that span Lynch's work. In this section, I will proceed from the work of Schneider and Freeland to explore further the theoretical basis for the psychological and even physical effects described by critics, developing the characterisation of the uncanny in *Eraserhead* and proceeding towards a qualification of its generation. I will commence a discussion of the *unheimlich* by considering two elements frequently identified as being particularly involved in the generation of feelings of uncanniness, the first being domestic uncanniness. There are two locations of particular interest when considering the domestic as an originator of *Unheimlichkeit* in *Eraserhead*. Both are strongly associated with the motif of the dysfunctional family, itself a domestic issue. I will consider diegetic events within these two locations in the context of the uncanny, and describe how domesticity is central to its generation.

Henry's visit to the family home of Mary X at the beginning of the film is a tableau of specifically domestic uncanniness. Mary, whom Henry has not seen for some time, greets him at the door and responds to his concerns by quietly mumbling an irrelevant 'dinner's almost ready'. The mother greets him tersely and a stiff, awkwardly delivered exchange concludes with Henry sitting down next to Mary. On the carpet, puppies are suckling, writhing and making wet, amplified slurping sounds. Ironically, they are far less abject than the baby in being, unlike it, unambiguously non-human. The mother continues her questioning in a near monotone, running through the formalities of name and occupation, broken by awkward silences, until Mary begins to spasm, sobbing, wailing and rubbing her knees convulsively. The mother, reaching over to Mary, roughly brushes her hair while Henry apologises nervously and continues answering her questions. Mary recovers suddenly, and the mother sits back stiffly in her chair.

Freeland comments that 'even the most ordinary events seem strange in this movie' (2000, p.229). More pertinently, it is the most ordinary events *in particular* that are made to seem strange. The elevation of the ordinary and familiar into something unsettling is achieved in this scene predominantly through the juxtaposition of everyday domestic activities such as: the preparation of food and the brushing of hair; the mother's questioning of Henry while family members seem to be repressed, disguising unspeakable secrets; and the mysterious nature of the convulsions suffered by Mary X and her mother – which are abnormal but are reacted to as if they are perfectly commonplace, or as if they had not occurred at all. As such, uncanniness is continually sustained and developed; the convulsions in particular are associated with the generation of uncanny feelings, engendering 'confusion over the ontological status of an individual' (Schneider 2004a, p.11) due to the impossibility of assessing with any certainty the nature or degree of the apparent suspension or interruption of consciousness indicated by the fits.

The preparation of the family meal is the predominant factor in the production of a façade of everyday normality, around which insinuations of dysfunctional relationships and repressed desires are arranged. Henry is greeted warmly by Mary's father Bill, who eagerly explains that their dinner is chicken, 'strangest damn things. They're man made, little damn things, smaller than my fist – they're new!' The father discusses his thirty years as a plumber and changes in the neighbourhood, his increasing ire emphasised with a whooshing, rumbling sound like thunder[17] and the importunate barks of the dog. As Bill implores Henry to look at his knees, Mrs X strides towards him and he retreats, stooping and cowering, to the kitchen. Mrs X rips pieces of lettuce and throws them into a bowl, while Henry and Mary sit in silence, staring blankly. Mr X bastes the artificial mini chickens. Mrs. X balances the bowl of salad on the knees of a catatonic woman, whom we might assume to be Grandmother X, sitting on a wooden chair. She grasps the grandmother's hands to salad spoons and uses the

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[17] Whether it is diegetic or not is ambiguous. In theory, the weather or the plumbing could be possible sources of the sound, but it is not possible to determine where it originates with any confidence.

catatonic woman's arms to stir the salad. Mrs X lights a cigarette in the motionless grandmother's mouth. Bill retrieves the mini chickens and places them on the dining table before explaining about his numb left arm: 'I'm afraid to cut it, you know?' Henry agrees to carve the miniscule chickens. As he touches one with a carving fork, it makes squelching sounds and oozes a foul, thick liquid onto the plate. Its butchered legs begin to move. Henry looks across the table to see Mary and Mrs X watching intently. Mrs X is drooling; in a daze, she tips her head back, waggles her tongue and makes breathy sounds of pleasure. A close up emphasises the increasing intensity of the chicken's oozing, the bubbling and foaming of the leakage filling the frame. As the squishing reaches a crescendo, Mrs X's quasi-orgasmic moans change to wails of anguish and she hurries away from the table.

The squelching foulness of the mutant chickens is, on a sensory level, a dominant aspect of the scene and clearly abject. Beyond this, however, is the context in which the abject is present. Plainly sexual connotations can be discerned from the behaviour of Mrs. X. Yet in their contribution to the generation of uncanniness, these are related more closely to the domestic as a source of *Unheimlichkeit*, especially when the insinuations of incestuous desire are considered. Extraordinary domesticity, rather than fear of sexuality, is the overwhelmingly predominant characteristic. That the process functions as repression rather than a more general fear of sex is apparent following Mrs X's post-orgasmic escape from the table, when Bill attempts to distract attention by asking: 'So Henry, what do you know?' The question is so nebulous and prosaic, so obviously intended to avert rather than elicit a meaningful response, that in the context of the events that preceded it, it is invested with an edge of uncanniness – one that originates in repression and the domestic more than in Mrs. X's incestuous (and therefore abject) overtures to Henry.

Apparently recovered, Mrs X summons Henry into the adjoining room. Bill stares at Henry with an idiotic, rigid grin, while behind him, Mary peers from behind a door (positioned behind and above Bill's head in the frame) hiding her hand with her mouth and weeping. Static crackles as a lamp flickers – the bulb blows. Mrs X grabs Henry roughly, ushers him into a shadowy corner, and begins interrogating him, asking

'did you and Mary have sexual intercourse?' She leans in towards Henry, her breathing deepening, and sniffs, licks, nuzzles his neck. Henry is rescued by Mary. Mrs X tells Henry about the baby, to Mary's distress. Henry's nose begins to bleed; Mrs X is fascinated and stares intently. As she leaves to fetch ice, Bill tells her that the dinner is 'getting mighty cold'.

Despite the emphasis on sex in this sequence, the scene remains dominated by the meal as a routine, diversionary process, beginning with Mary's response to Henry's reference to their recent estrangement, and ending with Bill's almost comically irrelevant objection to the abandonment of the haemorrhaging, artificial mini-chickens. It can be seen, therefore, that the scene constructs its intense uncanniness primarily by denoting, in the context of banal domesticity, the existence of that which 'ought to have remained hidden and secret, and yet comes to light.' (Freud 1934, pp.376-377). Frequently, the surfacing or recognition of something uncomfortable is avoided, postponed or displaced – that is, repressed – by diversion via ordinary domestic events; hair is brushed, jobs are described, the neighbourhood lamented, dinner is ready, the dinner gets cold.

Introduced immediately after the conclusion of the opening sequence, the second location of interest is Henry's grimy room, which becomes the 'family home'. Ironically, confirmation of the *unheimlich* qualities of the location is provided not by general aspects of mise-en-scene (an expressive, chiaroscuro lighting scheme is particularly evident) but by the discovery of a photo of Mary that has been torn in half in a figurative decapitation. Henry replaces her head, prefiguring the image of Mary peering out from a window at her parent's house, visible only from the neck up.

Henry is joined upon his return to his bed-sit by his new family; the baby lies awkwardly across a desk, its head resting on a pillow, while Mary sits nearby, her body turned away from it in an uncomfortable, defensive pose. As Mary attempts to feed the baby, Henry lies across his bed, staring at the radiator. The baby will not accept the food, dribbling and spitting it out. Accompanied by a crackling hum, a light inexplicably brightens the interior of the radiator, prefiguring a cut to a stage lit by a spotlight. The spectator is likely to associate the two lights as a cue to associate the stage with the

interior of the radiator, suggesting that Henry's home – now his family's home – hides the public space of the stage, a space for performance, impossibly within it. As Henry and Mary lie awake, the baby's wailing continues, audible over the sound of the wind outside. Hysterical and upset, Mary collects her belongings and leaves, unable to bear the noise any longer.

Mary's abandonment of the baby complements and emphasises the discomforting bleakness of the mise-en-scene; every aspect that might imply domestic comfort is undermined to produce a clear sense of the room's unsuitability, reinforced by the presence next to the bed of a dead branch in place, presumably, of a houseplant. Not only is it withered, it is skewered into a pile of earth, as if any kind of container would be an extravagance. The bed itself looks inhospitable, a thick black metal frame peeling paint offset by rotten looking, disintegrating sheets and stained pillows. Wind and rain can be heard outside, rattling the window. Whereas in the X family home the ordinary and domestic is subverted by inexplicably suspended consciousnesses, dark secrets and revolting food, Henry's home appears extraordinary immediately and lacks the trappings of everyday domesticity; there are no curtains on the window, for example. In this inhospitable environment, commonplace domestic events occur; in addition to the abortive attempt to feed the baby, Henry joins Mary in bed and reaches over to touch her shoulder, only for her to shrug away. Her unsuccessful feeding of the baby can be compared with the meal at the X's home as an ordinary domestic activity tainted by dysfunctions conveyed through location.

By juxtaposing these two very different locations – one sparsely furnished and barren, one fertile with oozing and repression – a potential methodological drawback is exposed. Despite the importance of this domestic context, its value in isolation is limited. While considering the domestic as an originator of uncanniness does, in this case, confirm and illuminate the separate uncanniness of the two locations, the stark differences between them are not encompassed, and the uncanniness present throughout the film must be contextualised within a theoretical structure that can account for these differences – that of the abject.

The key difference between the two domestic spaces is the substantially greater abject qualities of the X's home, characterised by the slurping of the suckling puppies, the disclosure of the baby's existence and the seeping food – all of which contribute to the suggestion of foul, squelching fecundity. In Henry's room, it seems only consistent that nourishment should be spat out when a dead and desiccated branch is given pride of place next to the bed. Additionally, it is unsurprising that the conflicting qualities of the two defective domestic spaces results in Mary's departure, fleeing from the hissing radiator and harsh light of Henry's barren, industrial bed-sit to the wet sucking sounds and pregnant goo of her parents' home.

Doubly Uncanny

Proceeding from domestic issues, an additional aspect of the *unheimlich* that requires consideration is the influence of the double. The theorisation of uncanniness is indebted to work on doubling, as Freud's extensive reference to the *doppelganger* and Rank's work on the same subject attests. Furthermore, the assertion of the primacy of the audio-visual image in *Eraserhead* naturally evokes the double, which often provides the most compellingly visual demonstration of the dreadfulness of the uncanny (see chapter 2). This is not to suggest that the generation of uncanniness is *necessarily* dependent upon the presence of the double. From even a cursory consideration of the text, it is evident that there is no double motif apparent in *Eraserhead* to the same degree as *Lost Highway* or an archetypal double film such as *Dead Ringers* (David Cronenberg, 1998) or *The Student of Prague*; no visual duplicate steps from a mirror or is educed by supernatural influence and it seems difficult to justify the claim that there is any representation of a single psychological entity split into separate mental or physical parts. There are, however, sufficient similarities with some double narratives to suggest the value of further consideration. In particular, the relationship between Henry and the baby compares favourably to the inextricable but ominous associations between doubles. Like the majority of doublings, the relationship exists in a context of sexuality, mortality and the domestic. In order to validate the suggestion that the relationship between Henry and the baby does constitute a

doubling, it is necessary to define the degree to which the baby corresponds to characteristic double forms.

If we accept Schneider's speculative 'psycho' category (2004b, p.113) as embracing forms that, while not describing every trait and convention, possess enough similarity with the more general class of mental doubles to merit inclusion, there is a clear argument for regarding the baby as a constituent part of a double theme. Even so, as with the category of psycho, there are enough exceptions, imperfections and deficiencies to merit the addition of a strong proviso. While general conformity may be observed, it must be questioned whether doubling is described or merely strongly evoked. Although the baby attempts to control Henry's movements by crying out when he is about to leave the room, wails during his tryst with the Beautiful Girl from Across the Hall and ultimately attempts to usurp his body, its malevolence and controlling nature cannot be interpreted as confirmation of doubling simply because such conduct is often symptomatic of doubles. While the baby has many qualities that are consistent, it apparently lacks the most fundamental in that does not imply a relationship of self / other self with separate but strongly correlated consciousnesses[18]. Rather, it represents a discrete self, one that can be separated from Henry, no matter how much it challenges him. This separation is reinforced as Henry admits having sexual intercourse with Mary; in addition, the spectator is made aware that the baby was born in a hospital during Mary's pre-diegetic estrangement. It is apparent that the relationship between Henry and the baby has not arisen because of any unfathomable, illogical or supernatural cause (i.e. one likely to engender 'intellectual uncertainty') and, consequently, that they are two separate entities. In addition to reaffirming the notion of discrete selves, such explicability attenuates the uncanniness attributable to doubling, although this is more than compensated for, outside of double themes, by the universally *heimisch* nature of childhood.

Henry's attitude to the baby is ambiguous. Initially, he smiles across at it while Mary tries, unsuccessfully, to feed it. Symbolically trapped by the bars at the foot of

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[18] *Lost Highway,* by contrast, strongly connotes a correlation between the consciousnesses of Fred Madison and Pete Dayton.

the bed he is lying across, Henry gazes into the radiator and watches the light grow inside it, only for his reverie to be interrupted and aborted by the screeching of the baby. Later, as he and Mary lie awake in bed, the baby's wailing continues, prompting Mary to scream aggressively at it to stop (naturally, it waits until she has returned to bed before resuming, resulting in Mary storming back to her parents' house.) While the scenario of parents failing to get a suitable amount of sleep because of the noise made by a new baby is not unusual, a connection can be observed between the domestic uncanniness discussed in the previous section and a characteristic of the double. Just as the ordinariness of domestic practices such as food preparation are invested with a high degree of *Unheimlichkeit* in preceding scenes, the cries of the baby, although ordinary, function here as auditory indicators of the inescapability of doubling and the importunate nature of the double. These indicators are more usually visual ones – for example, the futility of Balduin's attempts to escape his double in *The Student of Prague* are verified by its repeated appearance before him, wherever he goes. In *Eraserhead*, the cues are often aural. After the baby develops pustules, Henry twice attempts to leave his room, only to be defeated by screaming as he begins to open the door. The baby repeatedly challenges his agency; after the first departure of Mary, it effectively prevents him from doing anything that might imply independence. Most notably, it sabotages Henry's tryst with the Beautiful Girl from Across the Hall by wailing pathetically, causing her to stare across at it in horror. This escalation of control consequently confirms the doubling by removing the difficulty of the perception of Henry and the baby as separate, in that it prefigures the full-scale appropriation of Henry's self.

This doubling represents the confluence of the abject and the uncanny in the film; the slimy, pestilent and ambiguously human baby, which is the antithesis of the *corps propre* and a corruptor of order and boundaries, takes on the action of the doppelganger in proportion to growing more abject – the more diseased it looks, the greater its threat to Henry's self. Consistently, Henry is both allured and repulsed by the baby. Like all cinematic doubles, which inherently threaten the destruction of the

self, the baby is powerfully abject and uncanny – although rarely is this relationship communicated as explicitly as in *Eraserhead*.

The Visuality of the Double and the Abject

Despite the aural cues of the baby's screaming, it remains that the double is a figure of *visual* compulsion; arguing that the double in *Eraserhead* somehow obviates this requirement, by substituting the aural for the visual, would be evasive at best. It is therefore significant that, in terms of the domestic sphere of the diegesis – i.e. excluding the amorphous and vast arena of quasi-astronomical blackness or the unique space of the stage within the radiator – Henry and the baby possess immediately perceptible visual distinctiveness that separates them from less distinctive, domestic characters like Mary X. Consequently, both are associated with similarly visually anomalous characters such as the Lady in the Radiator, notable primarily for the tumour like growths on her cheeks. Henry's unique feature is his enormous hair, reinforced by controlled, awkward movements; the baby's is its slimy and ill-defined body. Although these features are different, immediate and striking visual qualities are common to both. Yet in considering the disturbing or awful visual qualities typically possessed by the double, the baby is clearly of primary interest.

The misshapen baby is far more disturbing and visually arresting than Henry's hair or mannerisms, its deformities concealed by swaddling that alone delineates its formless body, artificially; in response to her mother's revelation to Henry that Mary has given birth, Mary replies 'they're not even sure it *is* a baby'. Its appearance is immediately distinguishable from that of a normal human baby. Its skin weeps continuously, slick with unknown fluids; instead of the distinctive, rounded shape of a baby's developing skull, the head is almost completely flat from above the mouth; it has no ears; no visible limbs; no nose, the place marked only by two small nostrils; its eyes are on the side of its head, like a chameleon; its neck appears to consist of nothing more than a thin, empty cord of skin. Given the unusual, often disrupted or erratic movements that contribute to the visual experience of *Eraserhead* (Henry's shuffling walk or the convulsions of the women in the X family, for example) the baby

is notable for its immobility. Only the slightest of movements are discernible, enough to indicate, (in addition to its screaming, of course) that it is not dead but, disturbingly, insufficient to dispel the impression that the baby is disconnected from its surroundings and somehow less than fully alive, at least in any conventional sense of the word. In its appearance and the inherent threats it poses to various categories such as human/not human and self/other, the baby is truly abject.

Apart from a very large mouth, proportionate to the amount of time it spends wailing, the most distinctive and easily noticeable feature of the baby are its large eyes – more precisely, eye, as only one is typically visible at any one time. The rest of the head is almost featureless, with only tiny nostrils and the intimation of faint ridges underneath the skin distinguishable. That the eyes (which seem overly large) are a dominant feature of the baby's head reaffirms the baby as a figure of visual compulsion. It passively attracts and repulses the gaze of others, with both Mary and the woman from across the hall finding themselves staring at it compulsively but with obvious trepidation, the former turning her body away from it apprehensively and the latter peering cautiously from behind Henry.

Although the baby possesses disturbing visual qualities, it is monstrous for more than the fact that 'it looks more like a turtle removed from its shell than like anything recognizably human.' (Palumbo 1986, p.229). The baby is physically associated with Henry, as part of him, in the sense that he is identified as the biological father. Ostensibly, Henry's child offers him a form of survival beyond his physical form, if only in the standard and ordinary sense of genetic preservation; yet the fact that the baby is not thriving, and has no will to live[19] suggests the protection of Henry's self less powerfully than it evokes his inevitable mortality, a harbinger of death packaged as new life. This relationship (seen purely as between father and child) is unremarkable when considered alongside other configurations within which doublings can be perceived, often having supernatural, extraterrestrial or simply inexplicable causes. The uncertainty that accompanies the uncanniness of the relationship may be

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[19] it rejects all efforts to care for it and frustrates Mary by spitting out its food. After an initial, abortive attempt to feed it, she has little further involvement with it.

observed less in its origins, however, than in its nature. The baby becomes increasingly reliant on Henry exclusively, repelling its mother, disrupting Henry's liaison with the mysterious woman and severely restricting his movement. The ambiguity lies in whether the baby's increasing control over and dependency upon Henry results from innocent and natural reasons, or whether there is a more sinister and manipulative intent.

This question is apparently resolved by one of the film's most remarkable and disturbing scenes. Henry appears on stage with the Lady in the Radiator, who has just finished her elegy about heaven; as they touch hands, the image fades to white with an electric hum, returning for a moment as Henry breaks contact. He outstretches his hands once more, but the Lady in the Radiator's apprehensive smile fades and she vanishes in an instant. Henry is left alone on the stage with a sound like air rushing along empty pipes. Looking down, he sees umbilical material blowing across the chequered floor, slowly becoming aware of the baby's wailing – faint, as if far off – amongst the sound of wind. The dead branch, like the one in a pile of earth next to his bed but much larger, is wheeled on from behind a curtain. Henry retreats behind an enclosure like the dock of a court, anxiously twisting the bar across the top with a 'repetitive, masturbatory hand motion … [increasing] the overall feeling of dread and fearsome anticipation' (Schneider 2004a, p.15). With a shrill, disembodied scream, Henry's head is ejected from his body and propelled onto the floor. While Henry's head is removed with barely any mess, the withered tree – sterile, and connoting the opposite of the fecund abjects among which it exists – begins to bleed, releasing impossibly large quantities of blood; its flow across the stage recalls the great washes of milk seen earlier. The blood is highly abject in the context of the withered tree's strong association with the barrenness of Henry's room, the impossibility of a bleeding tree serving to highlight the connoted violation of order. The bawling of the baby intensifies as it slowly and horribly begins to emerge from Henry's neck while his hands are still anxiously twisting at the bar. The baby's cries rise to one constant, echoing and apparently multiplying to become a chorus of wailing.

The various items presented in this scene possess elusive but intense symbolism. Their introduction onto the circular, chequered stage presents the conflicts depicted in preceding scenes in miniature and contextualises the usurpation of Henry's body as a performance, one that is characteristic of climatic double confrontations. The appropriation of Henry's body by the baby, accompanied by its constant howling, invokes something more ominous and disturbing than the dependence of a child upon a parent – the 'dénouement of madness' (Rank 2000, p.74) in which the self is finally subsumed in the culmination of the double process. Yet whereas the double portends the moment of inevitable annihilation, which the usurpation of Henry's head seemingly represents, Henry regains (temporarily) both his head and his identity – a recovery that is apparently inconsistent with fundamental characteristics of the double process described in Chapter 2. For a double to be produced, the conflict between narcissism and thanatophobia must already be sufficiently developed to prevent the return to a unitary identity; self-destruction (for example, suicide or the killing of the double) is the only means of escape. Henry's apparent resistance leads to an important question: is there any evidence of the doubling process being described in Henry? As a corollary, what implications are there for the notion of a narcissism-thanatophobia conflict and the inescapability of extinction, especially as Henry *does* subsequently cause the baby's death?

As I have described, reviews of the film are dominated by the observation of a hermetic world filled with 'repulsive life' (Dignam 1979); the emphasis given by critics to these visual abjects risks creating an impression of the film that mischaracterises it as littered with gratuitously unpleasant images when the unsettling effects it creates are more complex than superficial revulsion. In the doubling process that I will argue is associated with the protagonist exists the indication of an uncanniness underlying the more evident abject. To discover if it is possible to observe the fatal climax of the double process in Henry, it is necessary to proceed from the visual representation of the double (manifested particularly in the baby) to examine narcissistic and thanatophobic qualities in Henry.

Narcissism and Thanatophobia

After its grotesque emergence from Henry's neck, the baby's cries rise to one constant, echoing and apparently multiplying to become a chorus of wailing. Henry's head sinks into the blood with a splash and falls through the stage, landing with a messy squelch on a dusty street. From here, a boy snatches the head and takes it to a factory to be made into pencil erasers. A machine operator drills a sample from the head, tests a pencil, and brushes the rubbings from the edge of the desk, causing them to float, bright white against a background of blackness. They dissipate in the air and become lost.

The knowledge of the inevitable extinction of the self exacerbates and drives the double process as a combination of narcissistic and thanatophobic forces. This moment of annihilation is epitomised by the destruction of Henry's head, displaced by the baby and then used as a raw material for an industrial process. The employment of Henry's head, suggesting his creativity and individuality, in the manufacturing of items as trivial as pencil erasers connotes the terror of ego-destruction, 'the ultimate negation of the creativity proffered by the pencil.' (Alexander 1993, p.53) Additionally, it connotes the disintegration of the self, or, more specifically, the loss of the distinction of the self in a unitary body, the re-absorption into oblivion, into a de-individuating whole. The allure and horror of this nothingness underlies the film in a conflict played out between Henry and the baby. Initially, the baby reduces Henry's agency, first isolating him and then preventing him from leaving it alone. Illogically but perceptibly this process of control is related to (perhaps causally) the repeated appearances of the stage within the radiator and the strange woman within it, who wills Henry towards non-existence with her eerie song about heaven: 'In heaven / Everything is fine / You've got your good things and I've got mine.' The relationship between the baby's increasing control over Henry and the appearances and song of the Lady in the Radiator may be clarified by considering the predominant ideas represented, namely loss of agency and effacement in death.

For Rank, these anxieties are strongly equated. To fear loss of agency is to fear the loss of individuality; the maximal expression of this fear is thanatophobia, with

death representing effacement and de-individuation at its most final. In seeking to control him and usurp his body, the baby is pursuing the course of the double as a harbinger of death. Yet Henry's reaction to the Lady in the Radiator's song is not one of terror or defiance. Even after he touches her and is, for a moment, absorbed into nothingness, he breaks contact only briefly before reaching out again in nervous curiosity. Whereas death fear is dependent upon a fear of de-individuation, Rank argues that it has a reverse:

> 'The fear in birth, which we have designated as fear of life, seems to me actually the fear of having to live as an isolated individual, and not the reverse, the fear of loss of individuality (death fear). That would mean, however, that primary fear corresponds to a fear of separation from the whole, therefore a fear of individuation, on account of which I would like to call it fear of life, although it may appear later as fear of the loss of this dearly bought individuality as fear of death, of being dissolved again into the whole. Between these two fear possibilities, these poles of fear, the individual is thrown back and forth all his life....'
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> (Rank 1978, p.124)

The sequence between the appearance of the Lady in the Radiator and the disappearance of the eraser dust into the darkness dramatises the opposition between these poles of fear. The only escape from the fear of losing his individuality, epitomised by the baby's appropriation of his body, is insinuated by the song, extolling the virtues of embracing effacement. This combination of death fear and the allure of oblivion relates to the double process through the common pole of thanatophobia. Rank's 'fear in birth', which necessitates self-destruction as an obvious consequence, provides a more specific conclusion to the double narrative – not just self-destruction,

but de-individuation and re-absorption. The distinction is significant particularly in the case of *Eraserhead*, but has considerable relevance to a range of Lynch's films.

Freedland concludes that Henry 'dies as I understand it' (2000, p.227) following the opening of the baby's bandages. Although it would be convenient simply to agree due to the consistency with the destructive effect of the double, and the connotation of an inversion of the stylised symbolisation of birth (the death of the baby, the frantic actions of the lever-operator and the infinite, space like void all recount the opening sequence), there are additional reasons to suggest that Henry does not survive. The fate of Henry – not *dead*, precisely, not a corpse, but annihilated, effaced, erased – is similar to that of other Lynch protagonists affected by terminal double processes, altered by a highly visual transubstantiation, 'a kind of apotheosis' (Chion 1995, p.46) in which their physical states are subverted; Laura Palmer ascends via the *unheimlich*, eerily lit Red Room, Fred Madison convulses and visually disintegrates in a haze of light, and the ethereal image of Diane Selwyn, after she has shot herself, smiles over a Los Angeles cityscape. Nochimson describes Henry's end in *Eraserhead* accurately and appropriately, not as death, but 'a terminal moment that presents itself to the spectator's desire as a world of free matter, that is, not random chaos but the inherent form of the universe beyond what human beings have conceived and built.' (Nochimson 1997, p.162). Henry's final moment provides arguably the most memorable image of the film (not least because it was used on innumerable posters). Henry stands in awe as he is dissolved again into the whole, particles sparkling and fading away like eraser dust behind him. It is the culmination of a process of abjection that results in the effacement – erasure – of Henry's self.

Disintegrating Bodies

In this section, I will return to the connotations of the fear of sex (associated with conventional Freudian readings) and argue that they represent a nonessential, secondary component in the generation of uncanny horror. The fear of sex suggested by Godwin and Freeland may exist as a subsidiary consequence of uncanny processes, but it assumes only a minor role in a structure that cannot be adequately theorised

with reference to the uncanny alone. Accordingly, the term 'uncanny horror', used thus far in keeping with the paradigm qualified by Schneider and Freeland, is valid, but more accurately describes the abject.

Strong indications that this is true can be observed in the opening sequence. A rough, rocky sphere emerges from behind Henry's head and floats in space-like blackness. The camera draws towards the surface of the sphere, amplifying the ridges and pockmarks to valleys and craters. Like its surroundings, the scale of the sphere is indeterminable and immaterial. A man with diseased, peeling flesh ('The Man in the Planet', according to the credits) sits beside a window, an array of levers in front of him. A white, insubstantial sperm-like creature writhes out of Henry's open mouth. The man begins operating the levers. The creature is propelled away from Henry and splashes into a puckered, liquid filled rocky orifice on the sphere. The camera (from the point of view of the creature, the spectator might assume) races along a dark channel; an opening of light gapes with its approach, finally filling the frame. Considering the juxtaposition of void, sphere, sperm, liquid and passage, the conclusion that the sequence connotes the processes of creation (specifically conception and birth) is easily made and apparently unexceptional. The effect of the sequence in establishing themes and motifs, and its relationship to the scenes that immediately follow it, is of greater interest in the context of this emphasis on conception and birth. The process of biological reproduction connoted here is disconcerting and aberrant; particularly, there is a particular subversion of female symbols. The sphere, associated with the female aspect of procreation – especially considering the connotations of birth that follow – appears bleak and inhospitable. The dark passage appears rough and jagged. Initiated by The Man in the Planet operating levers, rather than because of direct interaction between Henry and something representing woman, the process itself abridges the seeping liquids and slimy mutated spawn that proliferates in the remainder of the film. The unsettling influence of this reproductive material, in the opening sequence and beyond, outweighs that of uncanniness derived from the sexual. While this influence can be strongly associated with the uncanny, its primeval and disgusting nature indicates the abject more strongly.

It is apparent that the unpleasant and disturbing effect produced during the scene in which Henry visits Mary's family is due to something more than the connotation of repression, or the juxtaposition of the ominously unusual with the activities of everyday domesticity. Neither quirkiness nor uncomfortable silences can be considered responsible for investing the sequence with genuinely disturbing qualities. In exploring these qualities, it is necessary to consider not only the fact that domestic normality is subverted, but also the manner in which this occurs.

The primary narrative purpose of the sequence is the revelation that Mary has given birth, preceding the introduction of the baby; in *fabula* terms, it begins with Henry discussing Mary's mysterious absence and approaches conclusion with the explanation for this absence – she has been in hospital. The secret of the baby is kept from Henry until Mrs X. chooses to take him aside shortly after her abandonment of the meal, an event preceded by her ambiguously sexual pleasure while watching its oozing. This sequence, which commences with Mary X and her mother gazing intently and desirously at the chicken and concludes with both fleeing the table in fear and disgust, illustrates the importance of distinguishing between the unqualified attribution of fear of sexuality, uncanny horror and abject horror. Mrs X's bizarre moaning at the dinner table certainly appears sexual in nature – quasi-orgasmic, as I previously described it – but in isolation, the animalistic tongue waggling is more ridiculous and absurd than it is frightening, a comically exaggerated expression of desire. What renders this segment truly disturbing is the squelching, haemorrhaging chicken.

Extreme close up shots of the dark, seeping cavity transform the tiny chicken in something of grotesque scale, strongly reminiscent of the enormous caverns and murky landscapes of the opening sequence. Great swells of thick, dark, bloodlike liquid spurt from the darkness of the cavity and fill the frame, bubbling and bursting. Considering in combination the strange behaviour of Mary's mother, the suckling puppies and especially the similarity of extreme close-ups in with compositions in the opening sequence, the thought that the oozing, generative, bloody cavity is grotesquely and horribly suggestive of a womb is irresistible; the impending exposure

of Mary's own motherhood and recently productive womb reinforces the association. As if this were not dreadful enough, the abject horror present here originates not only from the presence of foul, seeping liquids or the spectre of what Creed terms 'the monstrous womb', but also from the desire of the mother, poised to devour the mutant chicken and its attendant connotations, threatening an act that, figuratively, would be simultaneously cannibalistic, incestuous *and* defiling – and thus extremely abject, to a degree that overwhelms its uncanniness. As I have noted, the animation of the chicken's butchered legs is uncanny, creating ambiguity as to whether it is alive or dead. This is certainly unpleasant, but its influence is strongly subsumed by the abject. Similarly, the sexual overtones of the mother's panting cannot be described as of primary significance or, in isolation, as unsettling as the spurting chicken. Furthermore, the gaping, seeping hole in the chicken is a reminder of the allusions made in the scene to abjects – the loathsome, polluting food followed by Mrs X's question 'did you and Mary have sexual intercourse?' and the revelation of the existence of the baby, evokes in an instant blood, semen and afterbirth. The horror of this scene cannot therefore be characterised adequately as signifying a fear of sexuality, or as uncanny horror alone, despite the repeated suggestion of the universal *heim* - in addition, it is powerfully and overwhelmingly abject.

This is affirmed by the presence of a structure that becomes apparent if one accepts that the dominant motif of the scene as a whole is that of reproduction or maternity. The unpleasant slurping noises heard when Henry first enters the house originate, we are shown, from puppies suckling at their mother. If we accept, as seems reasonable, that the old woman in the kitchen is Mrs. X's mother, a hierarchy of motherhood is created from the dog to the grandmother (or, more precisely, great-grandmother), via Mary and Mrs. X. All three human mothers exhibit behaviour suggestive of mental disturbance or a medical condition; Mary has quiet convulsions, Mrs. X. shakes, drools and moans, and the old woman exists in an apparently permanent state of catatonia. Only Henry and Mary's father do not demonstrate aberrant behaviour. The suggestion that the convulsions are an exclusively female

curse, in association with the extreme reaction of Mary's mother to the chicken, invokes ancient fears and superstitions:

> Derived from the Greek ustera (uterus), hysteria once referred to a disorder of the womb. The condition was thought to occur when the uterus became detached or inflamed and roamed throughout the body looking for fulfilment, heating and violently compressing vital organs in a "fit" or "paroxysm." Some medical authorities denied uterine mobility, but blamed the symptoms nonetheless upon the uterus, which polluted the female body with putrid fumes.
>
> (Dixon 1993, p.28)

Earlier, I identified one aspect from Schneider's thesis and one from Freeland's as being worthy of particular attention: the first, the primacy of transgressed categories, or violated boundaries, over purely psychological uncanniness; the second, the primacy of dread elicited by reproduction over Freudian notions of penis substitutes and castration anxiety. The preceding reassessment of the dinner scene results in part from a synthesis of these positions, with wide-ranging implications for perceptions of *Eraserhead*'s uncanniness. The existence of what Schneider terms 'Freudian uncanniness' can be easily demonstrated (e.g. the return of repressed material, or the apparent confirmation of previously surmounted beliefs – those incidences of *Unheimlichkeit* that may be identified authoritatively without modifying Freud's definition excessively.) In his conclusion, Schneider criticises Freeland's statement that 'the uncanny in *Eraserhead* is what literally exceeds the limits of representation by disappearing from view' (Freeland 2000, p.234) as overstated, adding 'it is precisely what *can* be represented (despite its impossibility) that generates such powerful feelings of uncanniness, anxiety and disgust.' (Schneider 2004a, pp.16-17). Both positions unwittingly indicate that the genuine power of *Eraserhead* to enthral and disturb issues primarily from abjection, with uncanniness

perceptible in association, as reflections of the true source of the horror. It is significant that disgust, which belongs in the realm of the abject much more unequivocally than the realm of the uncanny, is the word that Schneider chooses to emphasise by placing it last in his trio of powerful feelings.

Having explored and confirmed the presence of processes of abjection and doubling, I will now propose a further validation of my argument. It is a reasonable conjecture, given the additional theoretical structures introduced in the consideration of *Eraserhead* in this chapter, and the conclusions drawn from them, that differences in approach may lead to the illumination of previously intractable critical conflicts. By demonstrating how the degeneration or subversion of boundaries involved in these processes of abjection and doubling correspond to the development of narrative structure, and by examining the disintegration of *corporeal* boundaries, a possible resolution to a specific disagreement is indicated – namely, whether a clear and definite narrative structure exists. This question is raised in the majority of scholarly studies of the film, and no consensus has yet emerged. At its simplest, the variance concerns whether *Eraserhead* remains within narrative structure or escapes from it. Ostensibly, the film is less narratively complex than much of Lynch's other work, lacking the contradictory *sjužet* and constant splitting of *Lost Highway*, for example. Accordingly, Chion remarks that '*Eraserhead* is a narrative film with dialogue, a hero and a linear story.' (1995, p.41) Freeland agrees, asserting that 'the movie can be read as the story of a man's birth, romance, marriage, fatherhood, desires, fears, suffering and eventual death.' (Freeland 2000, p.226).

While Chion's characterisation is indisputable, disagreement arises from whether or not the film eventually exceeds the bounds of narrative structure; without stating so directly, Freeland implies sympathy with the position that it does transcend or escape narrative representation. Despite an initial, misleading statement that 'the plot is straightforward' (2000, p.226), she argues that the infinite black and searing white of particular scenes 'puts an end to filmic representation by closing off the narrative and blocking our ability to see' (2000, p.234) and describes uncanny aspects as 'what literally exceeds the limits of representation by disappearing from view.'

(ibid). The strongest and most direct assertion of this disintegration is provided by Nochimson, who states 'the narrative in *Eraserhead* is itself the process of the creation of narrative … we have narrative closure, but only as a result of having broken free from narrative structure.' (Nochimson 1997, pp.157-162). Broadly, this is consistent with Freeland's position, although in proposing that such arguments are overstated, Schneider chooses to present parts of Freeland and Nochimson's arguments as conflicting without recognising the similarities (2004a, p.17). Like Freeland's concentration on the negation of (visual) filmic representation, Nochimson's suggestion that *Eraserhead* ultimately escapes the confinements of narrative refers to a specific part of the film – i.e., the conclusion, and not its entirety. It is a result, rather than a constant.

Despite the fact that all the critics mentioned in the context of this debate overtly disagree, their arguments are remarkably consistent. This can be demonstrated by considering the narrative influence exerted by the processes of uncanniness and abjection. Both, as Creed points out, disturb identity and order (Creed 1993, p.54). Henry undergoes a process of abjection that combines these disruptive qualities to produce an intensified disassembling and disintegrating power, surrounding him with a confusion of destabilised boundaries; for example, the baby exists somewhere between human and monster, never securely in either category, and Henry's *corps propre* is constantly under threat from slimy, fertile, leaking material. Like Freeland and Nochimson, Schneider asserts that, irrespective of initial straightforwardness, the integrity of narrative becomes weakened and disrupted as 'Lynch… renders plot and narrative subservient to what we have called "the primacy of the audio visual image"' (2004a, p.16). Considering the havoc that the uncanny – and more importantly, the abject – cause diegetically, tearing entire bodies (heavenly and human alike) apart, it is unsurprising to find that this capacity to disrupt and disintegrate can be observed in the decreasing cohesion of the narrative.The disturbing nature of *Eraserhead*, its power to affect and to make the ordinary not just extraordinary but abominable, is dependent upon the overt presence of abjects – as participants in a narrative of abjection that breaks down in parallel with the disintegration of Henry's self and his re-

absorption into effacing nothingness at the end of the film. The uncanny is utterly irremovable from this process of abjection, but only because uncanniness is created as a consequence of it. Womb horrors confuse the distinction between familiar and unfamiliar at the same time as they invoke fears of otherness, contamination and a return to a pre-individuated state – yet while the abject often conjures up the uncanny, the reverse is not true. If the dominant images of *Eraserhead* are considered, the uncanny is confirmed in a secondary position; whenever an image in the film can be said to be powerfully uncanny, it is *always* more powerfully abject.

The scarcity of critical reception of *Eraserhead* contemporary to its release provides limited but sufficient opportunity to assess how it has been affected by the abjection and uncanniness of the film. The similarity of language employed in relation to the near physical sensations engendered by the film, however, is closely associated with processes of abjection and most apparently in response to the numerous visual abjects surrounding the theme of reproductive horror. The uncanny is not immediately evident due to the predominance of the abject, a configuration reflected in the responses of critics. As I will describe, this primacy of the abject in this relationship disappears in later films in proportion to the ascendancy of the uncanny, a transition also indicated by the relative lack of primarily physical language in later reviews.

Chapter 4: Blue Velvet

> My father having conceived me when blind
> (absolutely blind), I cannot tear out my eyes like
> Oedipus.
>> Preface, Story of the Eye
>> (Bataille 1989, p. 99)

Reception

Blue Velvet cemented Lynch's reputation for weirdness: 'as far as *Blue Velvet* is concerned, of course, what I had heard — and what most of North America has also doubtless heard by now — is that the film is not only *weird* but extremely disturbing.' (Bawer 1992, p.26). Often regarded as Lynch's breakthrough film (Nochimson 1997, p.99), it has been extensively discussed and analysed. This body of writing presents a number of issues for anyone approaching a reconsideration. In this chapter, I will consider popular and academic responses to the film and consider why it has proved to be controversial, divisive and universally affecting. I will relate this to the structures explored in the preceding chapters, examining them particularly in the context of the Freudian constructs inferred by a majority of commentators. In reassessing the usefulness and application of the Freudian readings that are easily drawn from the text, I will go on to show how the film represents a continuation of the abject preoccupations explored in *Eraserhead* and adds subtle but significant overarching developments with the strengthened presence of a subtle but fundamental uncanniness.

Among the most immediate reasons for the extensive coverage of *Blue Velvet* in academic literature is its controversial representation of women. After receiving a formal complaint in 1993, the Broadcasting Standards Council published the following finding:

> Miss Hewitt of Hampshire complained of
> violent, explicit and horrific scenes in the film 'Blue

Velvet'… The [BSC] requested a statement from the broadcaster. In its statement, the BBC said that 'Blue Velvet' was one of the most widely acclaimed films of the 1980s and was considered by many critics to be the most influential. The BBC … considered that it was suitable only for a mature audience … likely to understand the more difficult scenes in relation to their dramatic context and the film's artistic intention… The Committee shared the view that the film might be distasteful to some members of the audience, but accepted that it was one which had a particular appeal to viewers with a serious interest in cinema.

(Broadcasting Standards Council 1993, p.27)

This reflects a sense of conflict discernible in reactions to the release of *Blue Velvet*, in part a struggle to reconcile the stylistic with the thematic. Most divisive were the scenes of sexual cruelty, which, we can safely assume, were the ones that offended the complainant (they are undeniably violent and horrific) and which I will argue are a critical component of the film's evocation of the abject. Academic interest grew parallel to the development of its reputation as an influential film, encouraged by resonances with horror and detective genres and allusions to film noir (prefiguring the neo-noir cycle of the nineties). Its distinctive visual style, combining vivid colour and low key lighting, also attracted attention. In the following section, I will consider briefly some of the existing theories, arguments and comparisons that have arisen around the film, and argue the benefit of drawing in the abject and uncanny to show how a reconsideration highlights consensus in areas of apparent disagreement. I will also argue that this approach provides greater insight into the distinctive psychological resonances that critics describe being engendered by the film.

In describing the diversity of approaches to the film, I will look at three examples of groups of studies. Representative of longer works on Lynch which deal

with *Blue Velvet* alongside other films, Michel Chion's chapter on the film summarises and develops many existing arguments and has a more intertextual focus than the remaining two groups, drawing in influences from throughout Lynch's career. This is epitomised by the 'Lynch Kit', which Chion describes as 'an attempt to reconstitute an impossible whole' (1995, p.161); it is a brilliant and persuasive general survey of Lynch's oeuvre that, because it tries to be all-embracing (unattainable, as he notes), is denied specificity. Despite this, some of the observations seem to cry out for greater consideration - the implications are important, but unexplored. For example, in his section 'insect', Chion describes an insect in an unfinished Lynch project as representing 'what circulates between the girl you are looking at and yourself' (1995, p.179). Despite mentioning the 'important part' of insects in *Blue Velvet* – beetles locked in struggle, swarming ants, the bug squirming in the robin's beak (ibid) – Chion does not explore what insects might suggest about the relationship between Jeffrey and Dorothy in light of the unfinished film project that Lynch refers to, and especially the implications this has for considerations of scopophilia. The motif of insects highlights the significance of the act of looking. Although the consequence of what is heard has been noted by a number of theorists, the references to insects indicate that the visual drives Jeffrey deeper into his explorations. More specifically, it is the act of looking, as he spies on both Dorothy and Frank as ways of entering further into the mystery first uncovered with the discovery of the ear. The association with insects also reinforces an impression of the nature of the gaze as something that crawls with uncanny vitality and possesses an elusive but perceptible organising, structural quality that exceeds the instant between the bearer and the subject. Readily associated with the unclean, insects are often found in areas that are dark, abandoned or contaminated with waste. The pest controller is required to reassert the border between what is clean and ordered and the writhing, lurking other that threatens the domestic space. In each case insects (for example, the bogus bug spray Jeffrey uses to gain access to Dorothy's apartment) precede his advancement into the dark, sinister Lumberton. The insect symbolises the violation of borders and forebodes the

disintegration of order represented by the family breakdown, dissolution of identity and police corruption that marks the protagonist's journey.

The second category does not engage Lynch's earlier (or later) films to the same extent, and comprises largely articles and reviews in contrast to longer works. Focussing predominantly on *Blue Velvet* alone, the group is heterogeneous in approach but coheres around the idea of the narrative as a journey. In this context, *The Wizard of Oz* (Victor Fleming, 1939) has been profitably juxtaposed with *Blue Velvet* as a text describing a psychological and physical journey. Lindroth examines some of the intertextual proximities as direct quotations. The most apparent is the name 'Dorothy'. He sees Lynch's Dorothy as a parodic version of Fleming's, in which 'Garland's innocent Dorothy transformed into a whore' (1990, p.161)[20]. *Blue Velvet* is, he argues, a journey in the form of a three stage Freudian dream, marked by Jeffrey's witnessing of the primal scene, his seduction by Dorothy and finally confrontation with the monstrous father. Other than emphasising Lynch's preoccupation with *The Wizard of Oz*, a film he has referenced repeatedly but most notably in *Wild at Heart*, the comparison is productively limited, and ultimately it is another journey, one with conspicuous Freudian associations, which offers more fruitful insight into the significance of the film's abjects.

The third and dominant group writing contemporaneously regarded the film as a Freudian parable, identifying Oedipal configurations and providing close analysis of Jeffrey's voyeuristic witnessing of Frank's 'abuse' of Dorothy. Largely, the interpretation of the film along definite Freudian lines, and the perception of it as using Freudian scenarios deliberately, is accepted. The majority of variations originate from differences over the significance of individual elements. Recognition of the 'Oedipal triangle' of Dorothy as mother, Frank as father and Jeffrey as child is universal although differing amounts of stress are placed upon it. Other major elements focussed on are the significance of the blue velvet fetish object, the severed ear, the

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[20] This is grossly inaccurate. As I will discuss later, Dorothy Vallens is not an innocent but neither is she a whore; her powers as a focus of uncanniness and the abject, which can be inferred from Lindroth's characterisation of her as a whore, stem almost entirely from her status as a *mother*.

mutability of Frank and Dorothy's roles in the triangle at any particular point, possession of the gaze (whether it is solely male) and its associations with fetishism and scopophilia. To briefly summarise the apparently undisguised Freudian allusions, the collapse of Jeffrey's father Tom in the opening sequence has been recognised as the origin of the oedipal conflicts that surround the protagonist; his removal effectively facilitates the creation of an oedipal triangle between Jeffrey, Frank and Dorothy. A common perception of *Blue Velvet* is that it describes a 'a bizarre rite of passage' for Jeffrey (Magid 1986, p.60); the idea of *Blue Velvet* as an allegory of male psychological development, a metaphorical transition from infancy to childhood to adulthood, can be found, at least as an allusion, in a majority of texts and is allied strongly with predominantly Freudian or Lacanian readings (e.g. (Layton 1994) or (Creed 1988)). There is broader consensus on the idea of the Oedipal journey than on any other aspect. Less common, but similarly uncontroversial, is the observation that the narrative has many similarities to the Oedipus myth, not just as a journey, but also due to the repeated appearances of motifs from that myth. Jeffrey is denied the comfortable safety suggested by images of an idyllic suburbia that precede his father's collapse and is unwittingly launched into the sinister, unexplored Lumberton that has hitherto been hidden from him. Accordingly, many theorists consider *Blue Velvet* as a 'qualified journey to authenticity' (Nochimson 1997, p.104), a 'quest for knowledge – both carnal and metaphysical' (Jaehne 1987, p.40), describing an Oedipal trajectory. Biga affirms Jeffrey's journey of self-discovery as the primary narrative thread, and agrees that part of this psychological development is Jeffrey's assertion of masculinity, freeing himself from Dorothy's importunate, smothering influence (1987, p.46).

The premise that *Blue Velvet* contains conspicuous, perhaps even purposeful, Oedipal and Freudian references is best illustrated by the intertextual propinquities described in two separate readings. Michael Moon, in considering E.T.A. Hoffmann's *The Sandman*, isolates two narrative trajectories shared by the texts; one 'conventional [and] Oedipal' and one 'circular and ritualistic' (1998, p.747). In considering Freud's commentary on *The Sandman* alongside *Blue Velvet*, he argues that the processes of sexual disorientation are closely related to those of the uncanny.

The central point of Moon's argument is that desire is disorientated by mimesis. Partly, this is due to the ritualisation of desire and fantasy, 'autoerotic, homoerotic, voyeuristic, exhibitionistic, incestuous, fetishistic, and sadomasochistic' (Moon 1998, p.745), all of which are present, to differing degrees. He mentions the lip-synched performance of 'In Dreams' and the beating Frank gives to Jeffrey as examples of an initiation ritual, as Frank forcing Jeffrey into accepting his own 'perverse' desires. Although Moon does not consider the abject explicitly, it is evident from his reading that the violence of the disorientation he describes alludes to its influence unambiguously – to a degree, I will argue, that outweighs that of the uncanny. This is a point to which I will return later in the chapter, in illustrating the relationship the film explores between the uncanny and the abject.

Mulvey's juxtaposition of *Blue Velvet* and the Oedipus myth (1996) strongly affirms perceptions of the narrative as a Freudian process of psychological development, through which Jeffrey attains a position of patriarchal authority. This approach, in choosing to focus on the myth rather than only the Freudian product of the myth, is ultimately more productive as it minimises the problems implied by 'knowing use' – that a narrower, strictly Freudian reading would be frustrated or complicated by the 'disturbingly' neat fit of such psychological keys. Jeffrey experiences a kind of exile with the hospitalisation of his father, and as a result encounters Frank, whom he is destined to kill, makes love to Dorothy and solves a riddle (the circumstances surrounding the detached ear). She points out the centrality of conflicts between the 'monstrous maternal' and 'monstrous paternal' in both texts, while recognising that 'psychoanalytic references are clearly marked' (Mulvey 1996, p.138).

The value of Freudian readings is not universally accepted. Chion uses the evident nature of the references to suggest that psychoanalytic theories of the film could be sapped of incisiveness, compromised by their seeming inability to penetrate beyond the surfaces (1995, p.93). Shattuc amplifies this by agreeing that 'the film is… self-conscious of its Freudian model', adding that Freudian readings are made nonsensical by a conflict of illogical meanings, providing Frank's apparently chemically

generated Oedipal fixation as an example (1992, p.79) and implicitly referring to Layton's consideration of the blue velvet as fetish object or umbilical cord, arguing it cannot be both in a consistent Freudian reading; the psychological origins of the Oedipus complex do not allow for the possibility that it might be spontaneously generated by a drug, and logically an object cannot stand in for both the phallus (as a fetish object) and an umbilical cord. While the orthodoxy of heavily Freudian readings has been challenged and qualified (Mulvey 1996), it remains imprudent and almost impossible to consider the film without reference to Freudian categories. While persevering with this interest in the Freudian, my aim in this chapter is to show, more specifically, how these structures relate to those of the abject and the uncanny.

Oedipus

Observations of intertextuality with *The Wizard of Oz* and *Oedipus Rex* return us to the familiar formulation of *Blue Velvet* as a journey. The process of development Jeffrey undergoes needs further exploration. It is undeniably oedipal in nature, even if pre-oedipal desires are causally significant. The 'self-consciously Freudian' narrative of *Blue Velvet* contains multiple echoes of *Oedipus Rex* and *Oedipus at Colonus*, especially themes of incest, 'mother-phobia' and patricide. Abjection is naturally closely related to the Freudian structures in *Blue Velvet*, but its overall importance in the film as a whole demands individual consideration. It is an important factor surrounding all three actors in the 'Oedipal triangle', as a force behind Jeffrey's development – the idea that by confronting the abject that surrounds his exploration of the 'hidden' he can reach the conclusion of his 'journey to the end of the night'. If the Oedipus myth can be fruitfully juxtaposed with *Blue Velvet*, as many critics attest, it is reasonable to suggest that Kristeva's consideration of the Oedipus myth as an example of abjection might also be productive.

The themes of defilement and purification draw parallels with the Oedipus myth, as does the ominous, disturbing Lumberton Jeffrey is drawn into after discovering the ear, a *miasma* like Thebes. The characterisation of Oedipus as ambiguous, involved in ambiguity, even when he is unaware, is analogous with

Jeffrey's character. He discovers the ear and he is discovered in Dorothy's closet – neither event is intended by him. If, as seems reasonable, Dorothy can be associated with Jocasta, and Frank likened to Laius, then Jeffrey, like Oedipus is surrounded by abjection and is forced to confront it, ultimately through his abject desires of incest and patricide. Abjection and desire appear to lie close to the heart of the film, as two sides of the same driving force. Chion suggests that a form of defilement is the key to Dorothy's behaviour. Rather than her behaviour being characterised by a plea for help – for herself or for her child or husband; 'it is about a woman collapsing, slipping into the void of a terminal depression' (Chion 1995, p.95). Perhaps, Chion implies, Frank's treatment of Dorothy is intended to prevent her from achieving *katharsos* from *agos* (to use Kristeva's terminology) – to keep her in defilement.

The Abject Female Body

Dorothy is indicated as a source of the abject, through her association with the 'monstrous maternal' and with the amorphous blue velvet we first see as a backdrop to the opening credits. It is Dorothy who seduces Jeffrey into transgressing social and moral laws, begging him to beat her and ultimately luring him into committing incest. Specifically, Dorothy's *body* is contextualised a source of the abject. This is demonstrated when Jeffrey finds her wandering, dazed and naked, in the street. Her appearance prevents Jeffrey from receiving another beating, this time at the hands of Mike, the football playing ex-boyfriend of Sandy. Mike's apparent discomfort, and unwillingness to reprise the male-male sadomasochistic scene played out earlier between Jeffrey and Frank, connotes the opposition between female abjection and male agency that is played out during the film. The confluence of two lines of dialogue highlights this sense of abjection. After Mike asks 'is that your mother, Jeffrey?', Jeffrey takes Dorothy to Sandy's house, where she states, to mother and daughter, 'he put his disease in me'. Earlier, before their discovery by Frank, she tells Jeffrey 'I still have you inside of me'. Not only does this reinforce the transgression of incest, it implies fluids, even that part of Jeffrey's body has been absorbed into Dorothy's and is being held there, a 'collapse of the border between inside and outside' (Kristeva 1982, p.53). This

is heightened as the recipients of the line, Sandy and her mother, exist within an area defined by order and the law, literally in the sense of Detective Williams' role, in which Dorothy is 'other', a contaminating influence. The notion of disease implies a spreading, amorphous organism, something dangerous and abnormal, exists within Dorothy. Considered with the repeated references to Dorothy's motherhood (little Donny and Frank's cries of 'mommy, mommy' for example) it highlights her fertilisable, mutable body. When Jeffrey watches Dorothy undressing, what he sees is less a disrobing than changing or disassembly – the disappearance of her manifestation as the Blue Lady of The Slow Club, particularly in the case of the removal of her wig.

While there is nothing inherently malicious or evil about her actions, Dorothy 'holds the key to male pleasure and happiness and she knows it' (Creed 1988, p.113); she also holds the key to male identity. While she does not represent the form of the monstrous maternal that Creed discusses in *The Brood* (David Cronenberg, 1979), she is similarly positioned largely because of male fear of her status as a mother, by being capable of reproduction. In patriarchal narratives, the womb may be associated with the monstrous, the abject and the uncanny as an impure, unclean space that threatens patriarchal symbolic order (Creed 1993, p.50) through its generative function, representing a sexual other and the mutability of the body. Her potential progeny, the inchoate result of Jeffrey 'putting his disease in her', is monstrous as a product of incest. Frank's bizarre rutting – stuffing blue velvet into his mouth, between Dorothy's legs and then violently humping himself into her – can be read as symptomatic of Frank's desire to force himself into this 'monstrous womb', to be effaced by the abjecting space inside of Dorothy. It can also be read as a travesty of birth, symbolically reinforcing the positioning of Frank as Dorothy's monstrous offspring, as if he was a manifestation of her forbidden desires.

The Sandman

The notion of the womb as both abject and uncanny, representing a familiar space 'from which the individual has become alienated through repression' (Creed 1993, p.54), necessitates a brief diversion from the abject to explain the uncanniness

that exists within it, in the context of Dorothy particularly. The figure of Dorothy is a reminder of the intertextuality of *Blue Velvet* and E.T.A. Hoffmann's short story *The Sandman* – the definitive uncanny text as determined by Freud and Rank – which share preoccupations with motifs of dreams, castration and the monstrous paternal. In *The Sandman*, Nathaniel's father is transformed and replaced with a terrible alternate. Hiding in a closet, he sees 'the sandman', a plucker of eyes, a denier of sight, a castrator. His voyeurism leads him to Olympia, a doll-like pianist, who is the object of a struggle between two men, Professor Spalanzani and Coppelius, the sandman. Spalanzani is mutilated by Coppelius, who takes possession of Olympia by abducting her. Ultimately, the protagonist is united in betrothal with Clara, a safe, nurturing woman. The similarities between the two texts are evident. Frank is a castrator, a denier of sight; he screams 'don't you fucking look at me', and makes homosexual, sado-masochistic threats to Jeffrey before beating him up. Dorothy, like Olympia, is a musician, garishly made up with bright red lipstick and a huge blue wig, made to look doll-like: 'The wigs and make-up … was because she wanted to look like a doll … to hide her madness' (Nochimson 1997, p.126). There is, of course, also Ben's lip-synching of 'In Dreams', which makes reference to 'a candy covered clown / they call The Sandman' as Frank looks on, taking in the tribute.

Lindroth sees 'the good father and the terrible father' (Lindroth 1990, p.164) as a doubling. Although Lynch provides us with no evidence that Jeffrey's father is necessarily good (as in benevolent and non-threatening) father, they are interconnected. Frank becomes a substitute, representing 'the dreaded father at whose hands castration is awaited', the aspect of *The Sandman* that Freud selects as the most uncanny (Freud 1934, p.384). This is threat is repeatedly alluded to; the severed ear (despite the observation that it has feminine attributes), the denial of sight, the silencing of Tom Beaumont and most straightforwardly, Dorothy's groin-height menacing of Jeffrey with a kitchen knife.

The implication of the uncanny in this reading originates partly from the perception of the narrative as Jeffrey's journey of development, 'the tale of the past from the imagined story of the future' (Kofman 1991, p.138). Chion states that 'in

between two frightening visions and two eerie jaunts in the night, the hero returns faithfully to his bed and to the good old house full of familiar objects' (1995, p.93). It is not a large step to develop this to suggest that the narrative defines a potent sense of the uncanny. The approaches of Lindroth and Maxfield (or, more specifically, those approaches that take an exceptional interest in dreams) yield interesting suggestions of the importance of this sense of the uncanny. Lindroth's comparison of *Blue Velvet* and *The Wizard of Oz* is especially interesting. It can be inferred that the sense of the uncanny in the former film is present partly because of Lynch's intertextual interest in the latter (in the sense that references are present in a number of his films, most notably *Wild at Heart*). Both films describe journeys of psychological development, marked by sexual threat and the manifestation of the fears and desires of childhood. Their narratives are delineated through the subjectivity of the protagonists, and there is a pre-occupation with dreams.

Dreams and Abjects

Lynch has stated that 'film has a great way of giving shape to the subconscious.' (Rodley 1997, p.140). This idea is particularly important in the opening sequence in the form of the subconscious manifested through dreams, which is partly how the uncanny is enabled. Gradually developing from a row of roses into more sinister and violent images, the sense that the spectator is witnessing a dreamlike state that begins to flicker into nightmare binds the sequence together. Reinforcing the dream quality are the dissolves between the shots, giving the impression of drifting between images. As mentioned in Chapter 2, using 'dreamlike' as convenient synonym for weird is flawed, but this does not necessitate ignoring any instances in which dreams have possible significance. These first few shots prefigure the references to dreams that occur frequently throughout the film, and often mark out important points in the narrative. Sandy and Jeffrey's dreams have important narrative functions. Sandy's dream signifies redemption:

> 'In the dream, there was our world, and the
> world was dark because there weren't any robins, and
> the robins represented love. And for the longest time,
> there was just darkness, and all of a sudden, thousands
> of robins were set free, and they flew down and
> brought this blinding light of love. And it seemed like
> that love would be the only thing that would make any
> difference, and it did. So I guess it means there is
> trouble 'til the robins come.'

Jeffrey's dream signifies his initiation into knowledge of abjection, a moment of perverse *jouissance* that makes it clear he cannot turn back. Dressed in black apart from a white tie, he slowly emerges from complete darkness. Initially, the single light only picks out areas of his face, but as he looks up, the light increases in intensity as the shot dissolves into another face (possibly that of his father), grotesquely distorted. This in turn dissolves into an image of Frank. Frank opens his mouth as if in a scream or roar. The sound is again greatly distorted, as if it is from an animal. This sound merges with the amplified sound of a candle flame as the shot dissolves. The candle flickers out and Dorothy's face fades in from the darkness, dimly lit. Jeffrey wakes up as Frank lashes out. The sequence begins with Jeffrey emerging from the shadows to re-witness Dorothy and Frank's violent sexual encounter, deliberately shot in close-up to obliterate any sense of location. This is an idea that Lynch has used elsewhere, in *Lost Highway* and in the 'red room' in *Twin Peaks: Fire Walk With Me*. It works to prevent any attempt at interpreting the sequence literally, in addition to disorientating the spectator. Frank, after a camp, mouthed rendition of Roy Orbison's 'In Dreams' by Ben, repeats the words to Jeffrey before beating him senseless: 'in dreams, I talk to you … in dreams, you are mine'. These dream forms indicate the general function of the dream as a narrative device, bridging the naïve world of Sandy and the disturbing world of Frank. Elements of these two worlds eventually leak into each other, just as the dream imagery of the opening sequence co-exists with later manifestations of the abjection and uncanny.

The conclusion to the film is important in this context, as an evaluation of whether Jeffrey's own journey to the end of the night has been concluded, or whether he is still trapped in the world of the 'other'; put another way, whether he has succeeded in confronting abjection. Sandy clearly has more in common with the 'picture-postcard' world that Jeffrey emerges from at the start of the film, yet Jeffrey is reconciled with her at the end. Moreover, the robin recalls her saccharine, child-like dream. Jeffrey sees the robin upon waking after he has killed Frank, and Kaleta concludes that '[the audience] are… directed by Sandy to this shot as she underscores that we have all entered her dream' (1992, p.128), suggesting that Jeffrey has simply been returned to the same world and state of mind he existed in before his 'journey'. Chion mentions, but does not develop, the significance of the robin itself (1995, p.86). It is eating a bug and looks stiff and mechanical. He argues that this may suggest Jeffrey's journey has been an ultimately negative one; in leaving the 'sickening dream' world, he has arrived in a *worse* one. The film ends with this sense of uncanniness, one that has been relentlessly developed and defined, but with the abject (connoted by the bug, in a reminder of the fighting insects depicted in the opening sequence) still prominent.

This concluding scene suggests conversely that the world has remained the same, but Jeffrey has developed knowledge he did not have before. The location depicted in this scene is a representation of his acceptance of this knowledge. Jeffrey's journey is ultimately an affirmation of self, during which he must acknowledge and confront abjection. In part it is an Oedipal quest 'to [expose] abjection by knowing it, and through that very act [purify] it' (Kristeva 1982, p.85). The other way he achieves this is by destroying Frank and returning Dorothy's child, solving the mystery sub-plot by assisting Detective Williams to reinforce patriarchal order. He replaces himself with little Donny and Dorothy with Sandy.

Body Parts

While the acts and threats of severing evoke castration and thereby encourage an uncomplicated Freudian reading, the proliferation of references to the body creates

powerful potential for the emergence of the abject. These references are not to whole, healthy bodies but to violated ones and to dislocated parts; like the astronomical objects that allude to human physiology in the opening sequence of *Eraserhead*, the severed ear that is discovered at the beginning of *Blue Velvet* introduces an immediate sense of the abject which will develop throughout the film.

Jeffrey's discovery is the ear is the second crucial narrative event, following the incapacitation/emasculation of his father. Clearly, the severed ear establishes an exploration of the real dark side of Lumberton, as opposed to the implied dark side of the beetles, but any other body part or a whole corpse would have achieved this. Lynch has said that 'it had to be an ear because it's an opening … it goes somewhere vast' (Bouzereau 1987, p.24). Symbolically, the severed ear leads into the mind, prefiguring the emphases on psychological tension, as a later close up of Jeffrey's ear as he is sleeping affirms. It is a symbolic entrance to the corrupt, decadent world under the perfect façade of Lumberton. The ear also forms a link to sound; in interviews, Lynch has spoken of the importance of both the music and 'noise' of the film. (Rodley 1997, p.130) The amplified scratching of the beetles foreshadows the harsh roaring of Frank's car and his screams at nothing whilst 'raping' Dorothy. In contrast, there are songs like 'Blue Velvet' and 'In Dreams' which have qualities of the lullaby, just as Frank violates the borders of identity in oscillating between 'demon father' and 'child'. The association twists these songs; Roy Orbison was initially unhappy about the way that 'In Dreams' had been used (Rodley 1997, p.128), changed from an innocent love song into a sinister metaphor, powerfully abject in its connotation of Frank's horrible violation of the distinction between dependent child and sexual predator.

The ear is distinctively human, is instantly recognisable as such, and has a number of associations that are significant in the context of the abject. Creed sees it both as a displaced symbol of castration and as indicative of the importance of hearing (1988, p.111). The latter relates to the representation of the primal scene, with Creed arguing that what is heard is as important as what is seen in Freud's discussions of primal fantasies; that the scene between Dorothy and Jeffrey is a representation of Freudian scenarios of seduction fantasy and castration threat. In the scene between

Frank and Dorothy, witnessed from the cupboard by Jeffrey, the associations differ depending on the changes in Frank's role as father / infant. Frank alternates from infant warning off an imaginary father, to the father himself; Jeffrey's voyeurism thus creates a representation of the primal scene when Frank is positioned in the father role. The changeable role of Frank within the oedipal triangle is reinforced with the suggestion that Dorothy's gaze 'endows both of them with identity' – or all three if we consider Jeffrey, 'Daddy' Frank and 'Baby' Frank as separate. Lynch, Creed argues convincingly, 'ultimately privileges the maternal over the paternal' (Creed 1988, p.111). The severed ear and the shot of Jeffrey's ear at the end of the film, suggesting the relationship between Frank and Dorothy, have been interpreted as indicative of Jeffrey's interpretation of a primal fantasy. Maxfield (1989) underlines this observation, suggesting that the space 'between the ears' is defined by fantasies of the primal scene, castration and maternal incest; a Freudian exploration of a child's dream or, put another way, a Freudian allegory of processes of the unconscious presented in dream form.

Blue Velvet

Appearing more as a metaphor for, rather than a literal indication of the divided body as with the severed ear, the motif of blue velvet shadows the abjects of the film. Blue velvet first appears under the opening credits as a material, then metamorphoses into the Bobby Vinton song that accompanies our first impressions of Lumberton. The next appearance of the song is diegetic, sung by 'the blue lady', Dorothy. As with 'In Dreams', the song takes on sinister associations, associations of the abject: Frank's attempts to possess Dorothy: 'love was ours'; his nocturnal abuse: 'bluer than velvet was the night' and her masochistic pleasure when Frank and Jeffrey hit her: 'warmer than May her tender sighs'. The emphasis on the idea of 'blue velvet' in various forms creates a locus for the film that many strands can be traced from; Dorothy, Frank, strength of colour, sound and Freudianism (as a fetish item, Frank's 'self-object'). If Frank and Sandy represent two extremes in the psychological space delineated by the narrative, then blue velvet is the central point between them and

the abject that engulfs them. Most notably, it connects Frank and Dorothy, but also links in with Lumberton as the music that accompanies the first images of the town. In various forms it is also, crucially, Frank's very personal obsession; most importantly as a self-object and an almost literal penis-substitute, as he stuffs it between Dorothy's legs. He fondles a piece of blue velvet while watching Dorothy singing the song in The Slow Club, and leaves a piece of it in her husband Don's mouth after killing him.

Blue velvet material, as a fetish object, ostensibly stands in for the penis. When Dorothy pushes the rope of material into 'baby' Frank's mouth, it also suggests an umbilical cord. This duality is problematic; Layton (1994) questions the compatibility of the two ideas, asserting that the velvet cannot be both a fetish (and thus a symbolic representation of the penis) and a symbolic representation of the umbilical cord. The pursuit of a very precise identification of the meaning of the blue velvet is less important than understanding its wider significance as symbolic of the abject; of the monstrous body and an allusion to the oedipal in representing the body of Jeffrey's metaphorical mother and father. The symbolic value of the cord is of central importance. Blue velvet, the material, is a fetish item for Frank that connects with his persona as the Freudian child. It signifies both extremes of child's security blanket and sexual substitute to the spectator. The child as represented here is indefinite in the sense that it is highly mutable, and applies to Jeffrey – e.g. witnessing the primal scene – as it does to Frank in his 'baby wants to fuck' form. Frank is trapped in this transition, destabilising the borders of identity; Jeffrey undergoes it, and emerges from it, under the tutelage of Dorothy. The rope of blue velvet suggests on one hand, an umbilical cord, Frank's desire to be consumed by the abject, to return to a state where he is devoid of self. As a stand in for the phallus it represents the impossibility of the consummation of this desire. Therefore, although the material symbolises something more abject than monstrous, the physical nature of blue velvet becomes monstrous through association with violence and defilement. Perhaps most importantly, the associations of blue velvet all refer, to some extent, to motherhood and the positioning of Jeffrey as mother. As a child's security blanket, it suggests a substitute for the mother. The blue velvet gown Dorothy often wears (that Frank demands she

wears) recalls images of quintessential mother figure the Virgin Mary, strongly associated with the colour blue and often depicted wearing the colour in the form of a loose fitting robe. The symbolic implications of blue velvet material and the severed ear seem to invite Freudian interpretation, but they are more powerfully abject. They are connected in representing dislocated body parts; the ear literally and the blue velvet fetish object, the sash from Dorothy's robe, symbolically. In their disembodiment, their purpose has been corrupted, compounding the abjection indicated in their status as separated from the *corps propre*. The ear is being explored by ants while the sash, in a transubstantiative sense, connotes the abjection of Dorothy's body as by Frank (especially when factoring in the maternal associations of the sash as umbilical cord).

Pre-Oedipal Qualification

Even given the challenges and qualifications to Freudian readings, psychoanalytic approaches are never rejected as entirely ineffectual, although they may be seen to describe surfaces first, or surfaces alone. Theorisation of the causal primacy of pre-oedipal desires complicates the approval of the oedipal triangle as a valid and recognisable structure. As the most apparent references are almost exclusively Oedipal, considering the pre-oedipal largely counters the issues raised by 'overt use' criticisms by widening the paradigm and avoiding many of the problems raised.

Layton characterises Jeffrey's development in *Blue Velvet* as seeking secrets, the 'knowledge of things that he knows are there but have always been hidden… male dependency, desire for the pre-oedipal, nurturing father, and female agency' (1994, p.277), arguing that the film provides a particular view of male development characterised by specifically pre-oedipal desires. This shifts the emphasis to male dependency, and the denial of female agency to assert masculinity. More significantly, the scene in which Jeffrey observes Frank 'fucking' Dorothy is no longer a representation of the primal scene, but 'a scene shot through with the cultural dynamics of pre-oedipally fixated male-female relationships' (Layton 1994, p.376).

Nochimson lends support to Layton by identifying the erosion of Jeffrey's sense of control as a causal force; Dorothy 'rapes' Jeffrey rather than submitting to him upon discovering him in her closet - invoking the 'monstrous maternal' mentioned by Mulvey (1996, p.142), threatening the image of stable masculine subjectivity with the fragmentation and flux represented by her paradoxical, abject status as both 'void and the only object capable of filling the subjective vacuum' (Gustafson 1993, p.1083)

In discussing male-male sadomasochism, concentrating on two scenes – Ben's mimed rendition of 'In Dreams', and Frank's beating of Jeffrey – Moon appears to question the notion of female agency and male dependency, although the two arguments are in effect closely interconnected. As the connection between Frank and Jeffrey originates in sadomasochism, he argues, the beating poses the possibility of association circumventing Dorothy's agency 'to become simply a male-male S-M relationship' (Moon 1998, p.750). As a speculative statement, it also implicitly recognises the female agency - male dependence configuration. An exclusive relationship does not develop, if we continue along the lines of Moon's argument, due to Jeffrey's inability to escape 'the suffocating, maternal love of Dorothy' (Biga 1987, p.46).

In contrast, Nochimson argues that the narrative examines 'the problem of cultural definitions of masculinity' (1997, p.102). The issue is not one of male dependency, but rather that Frank, in particular, is too far removed from the feminine. She sees this as being indicated by the severed ear. As an orifice, rather than being representative of castration, it is symbolic of an assault on the feminine. Rather than escaping Dorothy's controlling influence, Jeffrey becomes more receptive, more acceptant of the feminine, and thus creates a more rounded masculine identity for himself. There are a number of problems with this reading, which I will discuss at a later point.

Possession of the Gaze

Discussions of voyeurism and scopophilia have been greatly intensified by Dorothy's apparent pleasure in masochism, the suggestion that she is a consenting

partner in Frank's sadistic sex games. The premise that, for this reason, *Blue Velvet* is misogynistic has been adopted by a number of critics. The opposing position states that the film challenges conventional notions of visual pleasure, which depends firstly on showing that Dorothy is not entirely objectified, utterly subjugated by the male gaze, and secondly, on employing E. Ann Kaplan's reconsideration of scopophilic theory to contend that Dorothy herself appropriates the gaze. I will relate this argument to the abjection that surrounds Dorothy and the Oedipal triangle.

Bundtzen argues that Dorothy's body is first established as a fetishised object and then defetishised 'by the explicit nature of [and thorough exposure of] her naked body' (1988, p.101) stripped of the 'prettification' associated with Rossellini as a renowned model. The spectator is first persuaded to participate in the visual pleasure of Dorothy-as-object and then manoeuvred into an uncomfortable position by the removal of this visual pleasure. Like Bundtzen, Biga has been criticised for her assertion that Dorothy is not only the subject of the male gaze, but an appropriator of it, and for the corollary that the style of the film obviates accusations of misogyny. *Blue Velvet* offers 'a case study in how women watch men and how the relation of a person looking and a person looked at may depict formulations other than control and power' (1987, p.44). Kaleta agrees, describing the scene in which Dorothy discovers Jeffrey hiding in the cupboard as 'emphatically role reversal in an almost mirror image of the male gaze as labelled in scopophilic theory' (1992, p.103), the most intense presentation of this particular argument to date.

Motivated by an objection to these post modern feminist analyses and a desire to invalidate what she perceives as unchallenged critical acceptance of the sexual violence in *Blue Velvet*, Shattuc argues that Dorothy is an unwilling victim of male brutality, that, in this case, the gaze is an exclusively male possession. She supports this by asserting that the cinematography invades the 'personal space' of the female characters and shots of male characters are more 'distant and respectful'. The crux of her polemic is the assertion that post-modern feminist postulations of women as potential bearers of the gaze are undesirable: 'feminists need to ask… whether we do indeed want the model of the traditional male gaze and the violent control that

accompanies it' (Shattuc 1992, p.80). If accepted, this effectively invalidates the main argument contradicting the positioning of *Blue Velvet* as a misogynistic film. Michael Atkinson agrees that Dorothy's 'violence' in holding Jeffrey at knifepoint is an imitation of Frank's sadism, implying Dorothy is a victim even in her more aggressive actions (1997, p.44). In opposition, Chion hints at the possibility that Frank is acting out Dorothy's sexual fantasy, although he later describes this interpretation as unsatisfactory (1995, p.94). Although a cautious and quickly discarded proposition, it indicates the interrelation of the issues of female agency, specifically as Dorothy's ability to control, and the possession of the gaze.

Primal Fantasy

The challenge to Freudian categories requires further discussion, especially as there are a number of instances where the most satisfactory interpretation is Freudian in nature. Upon discovering Jeffrey in her closet, Dorothy forces him to undress, and after removing his underwear, kneels in front of him with her knife held at groin height – literally threatening him with castration. The references continue, resulting often from the triangle formed between Jeffrey, Dorothy and Frank. Shortly after Dorothy discovers Jeffrey, she forces him back into the closet upon Frank's arrival. Dorothy calls Frank 'baby', to which he replies 'It's daddy, you shit head.' This places Frank in the position of the metaphorical Freudian father, and Dorothy by association as the mother. The sequence that follows, often described as a rape, is a 'potpourri'[21] representation of the primal scene (Stern 1993, p.87). Mostly, the scene is shot from Jeffrey's point of view; the spectator sees what Jeffrey sees. He, we assume, understands it as violent abuse, yet there is a clear implication that Dorothy gains masochistic satisfaction from the encounter and this is subsequently reinforced as she twice implores Jeffrey to hit her. As with Freud's theorisation, what is important is that Frank and Dorothy's interaction is *perceived* to be sado-masochistic.

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[21] The selection of this term seems to imply Stern's opinion that there is an uncanny artifice to the scene, created from a conglomerate of Freudian allusions.

That 'the film's framework is overtly, manifestly Freudian' (Atkinson 1997, p.10), is conclusively indicated by this sequence. The disturbing ambiguity of Dorothy's pleasurable response to Frank's violence, and the subjectivity implied through point of view shots, invites us to question what we and Jeffrey have seen. The abject confluence of violence, voyeurism and figurative parental sex makes an irresistible parallel with the primal scene – which leaves the question of whether these allusions are too explicit for Freudian readings to be of value. Essentially, the result of this association with the primal scene is that we are reminded of the uncertainty of Dorothy's apparent pleasure, that the ambiguity is accentuated because of the implication that we, due to Jeffrey's subjectivity, may have misinterpreted the events as non-consensual violent abuse. Apparently, the comparison has not exposed anything concealed within the scene, only reaffirming the doubts that originally encouraged it.

A Freudian reading emphasises the centrality of voyeurism, and this is ultimately the key to understanding the abjection of the scene. Beyond the uncanny potential of the act of looking, the interaction he witnesses is characteristically abject as a rite of defilement, a sadistic violation played out between the symbolically paternal and maternal (Kristeva 1982, p.73). The positioning of the spectator with Jeffrey, observing the abuse from a hidden vantage point, reminds us of our pleasure in looking. This is disrupted by the ritual of abjection. We are made aware of the artificial nature of the interaction between Frank and Dorothy; they are role-playing, not only in the sense of their implicit, Oedipal characteristics, but in simulating an angry father's return to his wife, as suggested by Frank's demand for bourbon. Jeffrey is, it would seem, witnessing a performance – not just from Frank, but also Dorothy, who is aware Jeffrey is watching. Each time Frank screams 'don't you fucking look at me', we see a close up of Jeffrey, looking, shortly afterwards. This happens with greater urgency as the scene progresses; of Frank's final two commands, one is followed instantly by a cut to Jeffrey as we hear the sound of Frank's fist slamming into Dorothy. Usually these shots are preceded by a close up of Dorothy, and followed by a

return to Jeffrey's point of view. This functions not to glamorise the violence, but to discourage detachment and emphasise the complicity of the spectator.

Atkinson's contention that Dorothy appropriates the gaze when she forces Jeffrey to strip is complicated by the implication that her behaviour is an imitation of Frank's. Discovering Jeffrey in her closet, Dorothy bombards him with questions and cuts him. Upon learning that he saw her undress, she emphasises her wish to reverse the situation; essentially, she states her intention to appropriate the gaze. She first asks 'What did you see?' and then twice tells Jeffrey 'I want to see you' before ordering him to undress, as a direct response to his voyeurism. Her gaze in this sequence is more controlling than Jeffrey's was; it is more active as Dorothy continually emphasises the act of looking, deliberately and repeatedly making Jeffrey aware of her power as looking. Additionally, she specifically denies Jeffrey the power of the gaze by forbidding him to look at her. The issue of imitation, however, suggests this is not a woman appropriating the gaze for herself, but a woman engaging in mimicry of 'male gaze and sexuality, here clearly associated with violence' (Biga 1987, p.46).

A Journey of Masculinity

The journey of development Jeffrey undertakes is characterised by the act of looking, not simply in terms of what he sees, but as something that magnetises and empowers. Outside of the isolation and exclusion of Jeffrey's 'biological' family (especially the father) that begins in the opening sequence and continues beyond it, the main points of this journey of development are suggested by the psychological connotations of the camera moving into the ear (into the mind) and the parent/child/parent role-play of Frank and Dorothy. While there is consensus that a journey of discovery can be inferred without difficulty, the debate as to the precise form it takes, and how far it goes, is more contentious. This is especially recognisable if considered metaphorically within the oedipal triangle of Jeffrey – Dorothy – Frank. The meaning created by this triangle varies; Mulvey points out that Frank and Dorothy do not have stable roles. Frank assumes the role of 'the monstrous paternal' and infant

variously (although he is simultaneously both), while Dorothy can be the vulnerable mother and object of desire.

The problem of activity in the oedipal triangle is closely related to issues of visual pleasure. The suggestion that *Blue Velvet* depicts problematic masculinity, flawed because it is unreceptive and too rigidly separated from the feminine, is unsound, issuing from the definition of the ear as a 'feminine… channel of receptivity' (Nochimson 1997, p.102); extending it to argue that this signifies 'an assault on… the male's likeness to women' (Nochimson 1997, p.103) is too extreme. Blinding may correspond to castration, although the eye, considered as an organ, is minimally gendered, rather than phallic. The castrations of Jeffrey's father, in his loss of the power of speech, and Don Vallens, in the amputation of his ear, are necessary to ensure the primacy of Frank as the monstrous paternal, a vector of abjection; it is the metaphor of castration that is important.

Despite extensive discussion in feminist readings, many analyses consider Dorothy's relationship with Frank and Jeffrey primarily in terms of male agency. This has resulted in the proposition that she is a less active character than is ultimately justifiable. *Blue Velvet* does not consistently portray interactions of male agency and female abjection, or male dependence and female agency; an accumulation of action, control and abjection in various forms develops the nature of male – female agency. The suffering of her biological family, the torture and mutilation of her husband, and especially the kidnap of her child, strip Dorothy of her of societal roles as mother and wife and force her into a process of abjection; yet simultaneously she is continually importuned by abjects introduced by the subverted structures that replace those sustained by her biological family. In the context of her metaphorical family, i.e. the oedipal triangle, Dorothy actively seduces and controls Jeffrey – with the question of whether she is an abuser blurred by her imitation of Frank. These positions are not entirely exclusive, which prevents the reading of a simple active / passive binary.

The shifting patterns of male and female agency are indicated by the mutable nature of roles within the oedipal triangle and complicate the explicit positioning in some analyses of Dorothy, Frank and Jeffrey as oedipal mother, father and child

respectively. This is observable most directly in the 'primal scene'. While the velvet in this scene has been identified both as a fetish, and as simulating an umbilical cord, this distinction is overly restricted, limiting some promising lines of investigation because of obstacles that originate within a strictness of approach, rather than within the film itself. It fails to take into account that both, regardless of their suggested incompatibility, are perfectly valid interpretations if considered separately, and the significance of the material fits even more comfortably in the context of the abject. This is evident with reference to the character of Frank; during his molestation of Dorothy, he switches between 'father' (suggesting the penis in Freudian terms, and therefore enabling the penis-substitute) and 'baby' (suggesting the umbilical cord). He wavers between infant and father, just as Dorothy lures Jeffrey into abandoning the infant role and assuming Frank's place as sadistic sex partner. He leaves the closet, his vantage point for his observation of the sexual interaction between his 'mother and father', and is persuaded by Dorothy to replace Frank in an echo of the scene he has witnessed. Particularly where approaches have been discussed, many of the problems identified are, on closer inspection, not insurmountable. The same is true of the conflicts evident in the work on Blue Velvet. Although often, the conclusions appear to be diametrically opposed, the difference is often less than it appears, one example being the theories of agency developed by Layton and Moon. Although they approach the issue from different perspectives, they are essentially arguing a similar area, and one that is more satisfactorily explained by means of the abject.

The weirdness associated with Blue Velvet by critics, as mentioned at the start of this chapter, is described in different language and without the same concentration on the reproductive abjects of Eraserhead; I have shown that these abjects are present in Blue Velvet, particularly in association with Dorothy, but are not depicted in the same overt, visual manner as examples like the writhing, leaking cords of flesh stamped upon by the Lady in the Radiator. In a process that intensifies in later films, the abject in Blue Velvet is enveloped and qualified by what Mulvey describes as the 'mise-en-scene of the uncanny' (1996, p.150). The consideration given to the abject and uncanny also contextualises the preoccupation of critics with the film's

representation of women. If Blue Velvet is to be characterised as misogynistic, it is the nature of Dorothy as monstrous (or abject) maternal, rather than as a fetishised object, that is of most relevance. Regarding Dorothy as a submissive victim because of her actions is made more difficult by the insinuation that her desire – even her very nature – is made to seem abject and monstrous. The maternal is strongly privileged over the paternal; it is potentially so terrible, so dangerous to patriarchal order, that it threatens to suffocate, to efface male identity entirely. The narrative describes a journey of psychological development that is predicated by a form of abjection powerfully associated with the feminine, and specifically the maternal.

Chapter 5: Twin Peaks: Fire Walk with Me

'The entire body of a Kafir, including his hair and

nails, and all liquid substances of his body, [is] *najis*.' [22]

(Sayyid Ali al-Husayni al-Sistani 1994, p.18)

Reception

The series *Twin Peaks* received widespread critical acclaim and brought Lynch's 'weirdness' to a mass audience, running for two seasons on American channel ABC between 1990 and 1991. At its height, the series was not only a commercial success but a cultural phenomenon, discussed and puzzled over by press and public alike. A Newsweek article from the year the show was first broadcast includes George Stephanopoulos, the future Senior Adviser to President Clinton, quipping 'everyone at parties is talking about it... it's gauche to walk away with nothing to say' (Leerhsen 1990). The internet, in an embryonic form, helped to develop and preserve the show's cachet by allowing fans to trade ideas, speculate on plot lines and encourage mutual anticipation of the next episode. In particular, the Usenet group alt.tv.twinpeaks provided a community in which viewers from across the world could form an 'interactive audience' (Jenkins 1995, p.51).[23]

Some critics considered the scheduling of a show as obscure 'in a medium largely devoted to "delivering" demographic numbers to advertisers with formulaic programming' to be an act of near subversion' (Lovell 1998, p.50). In reality, the notion that *Twin Peaks* was radical and impenetrable, at least to the extreme degree that is often claimed, is questioned by its commercial success. Despite the common

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22 *Najis* is an Arabic word meaning 'ritually unclean'; it connotes impure, defiling and loathsome, closely corresponding to Kristeva's discussion of abjection in the context of Leviticus and biblical prohibitions (Kristeva 1982, pp.90-112).

23 The group is still active and can be found at http://groups.google.com/group/alt.tv.twin-peaks/, although the discussions have progressed beyond the text itself and tend to focus on upcoming reissues of material, such as the latest release of the series in blu-ray format.

perception of the series as having a cult following, (i.e., a dedicated but small audience) viewing figures were, at least for the first series, far healthier than such attitudes suggest (Woods 2000, p.110); according to one estimate, thirty million people watched the show in its first month (Charney 1991, p.53). Despite its obscurity, *Twin Peaks* was considered – at least initially, considering its ultimate cancellation – a major success for the network and is perceived by some critics as having changed attitudes towards mainstream television; an Entertainment Weekly article cited the rise of the video recorder and cable television as contributors to the decline of the network television's ratings, and Twin Peaks as a factor in ABC's resistance to the conditions affecting its competitors:

> NBC, though still in first place, will finish with ratings among the worst in its history [for the 1989-1990 season], and CBS will probably wind up with the lowest overall ratings for any network since 1954. ABC, widely credited with prime-time's most adventurous schedule, may stay even with its 1988-89 ratings or even increase its audience slightly.
> (Harris 1990)

Even making allowances for exaggeration in some of the claims for the influence and radical nature of the series, there is a consensus that *Twin Peaks* stretched conventions, challenged norms and changed the perception of possibilities in television. An indication of how different the series must have seemed is provided by the fact that it was placed in direct competition with NBC's *Cheers*. Then 'television's then number one show' (Lavery 1995, p.2), *Cheers* was very familiar to millions of Americans and millions more around the world. It was notable for its comfortable predictability, having run since 1982 with the majority of the central characters intact. While *Cheers* proudly claimed to be the place 'where everybody knows your name', *Twin Peaks* introduced characters with no names at all, obscuring identities through cryptic sequences and otherworldly locations. This oppositional scheduling, instead of

compounding the potential difficulties suggested by *Twin Peaks'* divergence from the mainstream, transpired as 'a major factor in the financial re-ascendance of ABC as a programming force.' (Caldwell 2002, p.286)

Although significant in terms of its commercial reception, the more interesting significance of *Twin Peaks* as a diversion from mainstream television programming is its popularising of an awareness of uncanny unique and affecting strangeness in Lynch's work. While *Twin Peaks* cannot be considered the origin or sole cause of the phenomenon, its popularity helped to propagate the synonymy of weird and Lynchian, providing several iconic examples – most notably the backwards-speaking, dancing 'Man from Another Place' (Michael J. Anderson). From the extended, ambiguous dream sequences to the fetishisation of cherry pie, coffee and Douglas firs, the unusual and perplexing qualities of *Twin Peaks* are conspicuous – yet they have proved difficult to qualify. While often regarded as a substantial flaw, they have also been considered as something unique and responsible for the overall appeal of the series:

> the sinister fluidity, the absurd detail, the shocking relief, the elegant gesture, the deadpan jokes, the painterly pointillism, the bad puns, the erotic violence, the lingering close-up camera, the rampaging of non-sequiturs, the underlining and italicizing of emotions, the warping of the light, the appetite for all that's grotesque and quirky, a sense of unconscious dreaming…
>
> (Leonard 1990, p.34)

Ostensibly offering viewers the opportunity to solve the series' central mystery – who was responsible for the killing of the eponymous town's homecoming queen, Laura Palmer – *Twin Peaks* was a complex blend of genres, combining crime drama with soap opera conventions. Throughout this chapter it will be necessary on occasion to distinguish between the television series and the film, although the focus will be on the latter. Caution is necessary given that the amount of influence that Lynch had over

the direction of the television series is difficult to assess; the consensus is that his creative input declined markedly after the first series (Hughes 2001, p.106). This is affirmed by the fact that, during the second series, 'a number of film makers were invited to try their hand at the *Twin Peaks* formula' (O'Connell 1995). While he remained an executive producer throughout, Lynch wrote or co-wrote only four and directed only six of the thirty episodes – the majority of which were at the beginning of the first series; the decline in Lynch's involvement during the second series (he was absent for the majority of the production run, filming *Wild at Heart*) is considered by many to be the major reason for the ultimate cancellation of the show (Rodley 1997, p.156). Due to the difficulty of discerning the extent of Lynch's involvement at specific points in the production of the series, and in order to maintain consistency of approach, I have sought to concentrate my attention on *Twin Peaks: Fire Walk With Me*, although it has also been necessary to discuss the film in the context of the television series and explore the relationship between the two texts. I will use *Twin Peaks* to refer to the television series exclusively and *Fire* or the full title, *Twin Peaks: Fire Walk with Me* to refer to the film.

In this chapter, I will argue that *Twin Peaks: Fire Walk with Me* represents a nexus in Lynch's career in which the uncanny and the abject are finely balanced, with both prevalent but neither predominant. I will seek to examine how *Fire* provides a basis for the generation of the uncanny by recontextualising and reconfiguring a confluence of familiar and unfamiliar, combining soap opera conventions with visual incongruity, for example. *Fire*, I will propose, exploits various processes of orientation and disorientation in establishing uncanniness, in particular exploiting representations of the domestic. Additionally, I will consider the significance of the abject, especially in the context of the incest and murder that is revealed to be the answer to the question "who killed Laura Palmer?"

The Misperception of the 'Late Prequel'

Critical reaction to *Twin Peaks: Fire Walk with Me* was overwhelmingly negative and is epitomised by an incident at the 1992 Cannes film festival in which the film was

loudly jeered during its screening. (Persons 1992, p.14). The several forms of this negative reaction can be summarised as follows. Firstly, the film is often referred to as a prequel; diegetically, the events depicted precede those of *Twin Peaks* (where temporal cues are discernible or relevant). This contributed to a belief that *Fire* was insufficiently divorced from the series to stand as a worthwhile film in its own right, as well as 'a lazy way of squeezing a theatrical release out of his television series' (Curran 1998, p.205). It is worth noting in this context that, despite the critical success of the first series, *Twin Peaks* had begun a sharp decline at the midpoint of the second series. Ultimate cancellation was preceded by a sharp drop in ratings, 'as it refused to resolve its central narrative conundrum and saw its broadcast slot shift across the schedules, to damaging effect.' (Hammond 2005, p.42). Secondly, and in contrast to perceptions of a failed prequel, *Fire* was also 'widely misconstrued as a botched continuation of the adventures of Dale Cooper despite Lynch's best efforts to preclude that error by situating the film in the time just before Cooper's arrival in Twin Peaks.' (Nochimson 1997, p.173). Critics questioned the rationale for a production apparently wedded to a concept that had already had its time. 'The film, which opened yesterday, was put together for hard-core fans of the *Twin Peaks* television series, that is, for people so crackers over the show that they will pretend they don't know who killed Laura Palmer. Most others, including those who don't care, won't go to see the movie anyway.' (Canby 1992). *Twin Peaks* was passé, a phenomenon that had ceased to attract headlines some two years earlier. Thirdly, and contrary to the first two positions, there was disappointment that *Fire* was unfaithful to its televisual incarnation by failing to feature many of the characters who had held important roles in the series, such as Sheriff Harry S. Truman (Michael Ontkean), Dr. Lawrence Jacoby (Russ Tamblyn) and Benjamin Horne (Richard Beymer). In 1992, Anthony Ferrante speculated:

> One of the reasons behind a few of these glaring
> omissions could be standard theatrical restrictions. As
> with all of his projects, Lynch shot so much footage on
> Fire Walk with Me that the first edit was nearly five

> hours long. When the film was released, it had been trimmed considerably, a process which has left out such key regulars as Harry Goaz, who played the slightly slow-witted Deputy Andy.
>
> (Ferrante 1992, p.56)

As a result, the validity of the film – as a meaningful development of or substantive prequel to the series – was questioned[24]. Finally, the most frequent and persistent accusation was that *Fire* was gratuitously peculiar. Apparently, where the series could be indulged for its moments of baffling oddity, the theatrical release could not. This undetermined weirdness was seen as affectation, something forced and artificial that encouraged and validated the perception that there was nothing positive to be achieved by continuing the tired quirks of *Twin Peaks* into a film, more than a year after the cancellation of the television series. These quirks – or one in particular – had already become a magnet for parody:

> Have you ever had a dream with a dwarf in it? Do you know anyone who's had a dream with a dwarf in it? No! I don't even have dreams with dwarves in them. The only place I've seen dwarves in dreams is in stupid movies like this! "Oh make it weird, put a dwarf in it!". Everyone will go "Woah, whoa, whoa, this must be a fuckin' dream, there's a fuckin' dwarf in it!". Well I'm sick of it! You can take this dream sequence and shove it up your ass!
>
> Tito (Peter Dinklage) in *Living in Oblivion* (1995)

Parallels can be drawn with *Dune* in assessing critical reaction. Both films have one common feature certain to have influenced opinion: a large, pre-existing fan base

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[24] Similarly, Lynch shot five hours of film for *Dune*, only to be met with a demand to reduce the running time to just over two hours (Sheen 2004, p.40)

with shared knowledge and defined expectations; in the majority of examples, the difficulty of separating *Fire* from its origins in television has conditioned attitudes to the film. Even in the case of bemoaning the *lack* of familiar characters, which is an implicit recognition of clear differences, *Fire* is judged in terms of the series almost without exception; rarely it is valued a film in its own right explicitly, or even as a development of the series substantive or significant enough to merit acclaim. Given the extent to which pre-existing opinions of the television series have influenced perceptions of *Fire*, it is reasonable to question how spectator response to the film might be affected considering this relationship (which does not exist in any of Lynch's other films, although a distantly related situation arises in the case of *Mulholland Drive*, which also originated in a television series in the sense that it was originally produced as a pilot episode).

Observing Uncanniness

Given the problematic nature of the reception and its inconsistent nature, I will now examine specific aspects of the film that can be seen to have influenced it. I will examine those that represent new developments in Lynch's formulation of the uncanny as well as those that allude to earlier films. First, I will discuss the relationship between *Twin Peaks* and *Fire* in the context of the uncanny, examining possible influences on reception stemming in part from the perception of *Fire* as a prequel.

If *Twin Peaks*' popularity and critically acclaimed status can be attributed in no small part to its innovation, to the perception that it was 'a phenomenon, a compelling, distressing, distracting inversion of prime time television' (Kalinak 1995, p.82), the fact that *Fire* lacks the novelty of *Twin Peaks* must be a consideration in exploring whether the weirdness of *Fire* can be said to be genuinely *unheimlich,* rather than just differently familiar. The sense of disorientation and even surprise engendered in viewers of the pilot episode of *Twin Peaks,* as they failed to encounter the conventional soap opera or tame miniseries they may have expected – an effect that could only have been augmented by the unearthly locations and reversed dialogue of later episodes – could not possibly have been produced, at least not in the

same way, in a cinema audience that had grown accustomed to the more unconventional characteristics of the series. While the uncanniness of *Fire* is not dependent upon it, familiarity with the series would understandably affect the experience of the spectator, irrespective of the notable differences between the two texts. Orr asserts that the transition from television to film can in itself be considered a form of defamiliarisation, resulting not only from the omission of memorable characters and concentration on events that precede those of the series, but predominantly from the re-emergence of something as characteristically televisual as *Twin Peaks* in a different medium:

> Usual processes of film-to-video and film-to-TV are reversed and challenge our cultural expectancies. The Twin Peaks familiar (i.e. the TV version) deemed by fans to be surreal and excitingly unfamiliar, really is made unfamiliar. Here the sporadic breakdown of the TV screen, a recurrent trope, echoes the breakdown of the projector in Persona as if this more visceral narrative of Laura is one with which the box in the corner cannot cope.
>
> (Orr 1998, p.151)

Nevertheless, it is important to note that the possibility of experiencing the uncanny in *Fire* is not dependent on intertextuality with *Twin Peaks*; nor is prior knowledge on behalf of the spectator demanded in other forms. Initially, at least, *Fire* appears uncomplicated and accessible; the opening sequence is notably straightforward in comparison to Lynch's previous films. Bluish static provides the background from the credits, the camera moving backwards to reveal a television, now exploding, as the source; a woman screams, reinforcing the connotations of violence. The next shot is of a body floating downstream; the corpse is identified as Teresa Banks in a subtitle. The simplicity of the sequence is complemented by indications of genre and the expectations likely to be generated as a result. It is clear that a woman

[118]

has been murdered, and the spectator may reasonably anticipate the narrative to progress to an investigation and the subsequent discovery of the perpetrator.

This uncomplicated accessibility of style contrasts with *Eraserhead*, where the spectator is only afforded the vaguest impression of exposition, connoted via moons and luminescent pools. *Blue Velvet* provides a series of idyllic, hyper-saturated but ultimately disengaged images from which little can be inferred immediately, apart from a sense of location. The surprisingly straightforward opening sequence in *Fire* is, however, followed by a succession of startling, incongruous and even incomprehensible tableaux (one of which – Lil's bizarre dance – is reprised, mercifully, for a diegetic explanation) loosely connected by a theme of peculiar methods of communication. Firstly, Gordon Cole (David Lynch), apparently unaware of the volume of his own voice, shouts consistently and unnecessarily. Two field agents body-search an assortment of scantily clad women next to a yellow school bus while the children wail and scream. Lastly, Cole introduces Lil, whom he describes as 'my mother's sister's gal'; her artificial, overly made up and bewigged appearance is surpassed in its potential to confuse only by her cryptic blinking-stomping-twirling dance.

The alternations of simplicity with obscurity, epitomised by the bewildering occurrences that follow the opening sequence, encapsulate and anticipate a process repeated throughout the film, in which the familiar is subverted:

> At least part of Twin Peaks' power derived from
> … its use of familiar conventions which are frequently
> distorted, often subtly, and sometimes not so subtly, in
> order to undercut expectation, leaving viewers …
> without conventional channels of response… a process
> of defamiliarization is effected on many levels.
>
> (Kalinak 1995, p.82)

Uncanniness and Domesticity in the Soap Opera

This alternation of simplicity and obscurity, a process of defamiliarisation, is strongly implicated in the generation of the uncanny. It can be demonstrated by considering how characteristics of that distinctively televisual genre, the soap opera, are affected by the transition from television to film of the Twin Peaks concept. While it is true that the *Fire* (commencing as it does with an exploding television set) implies a rejection of the televisual, any suggestion that this also implies a similarly emphatic rejection of soap opera conventions is not supportable, even with consideration to the transition to film. As well as featuring multiple story lines continuing over several episodes, the end of season cliff hanger (Cooper is shot in his hotel room by an unknown assailant) and the domestic settings, *Twin Peaks* made overt reference to the soap opera genre with its periodic 'Invitation to Love' inserts, the fictional and overblown show within the series[25]. Despite this, neither *Twin Peaks* nor *Fire* should be considered 'conventional soap opera [or] a parody of the genre' (Charney 1991, p.54). As Charney points out, the presence of the micro-soap within *Twin Peaks* serves a narrative function, allowing the exposition and development of relationships by evincing opinion on the show from characters with limited alternative means of interaction. Also, and more importantly, these micro-soap sequences highlight stylistic differences by imitating the preponderance of medium-close shots, high key lighting and synchronous sound typical of inexpensive and formulaic soap operas – traits that cannot be said to be preponderant elsewhere in the series. These stylistic differences are, naturally enough, accentuated with the abandonment of television as a medium in the case of *Fire* as opposed to *Twin Peaks* (where technical limitations – for example, the relative size of a television in comparison to a cinema screen – encourage the use of medium-close and close up shots).

It is clearly unreasonable to assume that televisual and cinematic texts are interchangeable solely because a high degree of intertextuality is observable. For one,

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[25] As an example, one plot line in *Invitation* concerns a love triangle involving identical twin sisters named Jade and Emerald.

Fire does not reproduce an important characteristic of the soap opera adopted by *Twin Peaks* – that of seriality, the creation and maintenance of narrative linkages between episodes. In one sense, *Fire* participates in this seriality by providing conclusions to some of the narratives developed; in another, its function in doing so is antithetical to the soap opera and seriality. To see stronger similarities between the televisual and cinematic versions, it is necessary to move ahead to the second segment, indicated by a subtitle stating that a year has passed. The beginning of this segment is notable chiefly for two things. Firstly, it signifies a significant narrative shift, abandoning Agent Cooper as he appeared to be consolidating a position as protagonist and introducing Laura Palmer (she has not yet been seen dead or alive). Secondly, Laura's first appearance is accompanied by the *Twin Peaks* theme tune (which opened every episode of the series). This music is not only a reminder of the television series, it also provides an evocative and familiar reminder of the soap opera – the majority of conventional soaps are identifiable by their theme tunes alone.

The transfer of narrative focus from the FBI investigation into the death of Teresa Banks to the life of Laura Palmer allows the introduction of domestic themes and a noticeable change in tone. While the preceding segment is more akin to the detective-mystery genre (I will return to this at a later point), the segment in which Laura first appears invokes the television series much less ambiguously. Special Agents Desmond (Chris Isaak) and Stanley (Kiefer Sutherland) did not feature in *Twin Peaks*, and would therefore not be familiar to the spectator. Conversely, a subtitled denotation of the ellipsis that follows Desmond's disappearance is superimposed onto the distinctive establishing shot; this shot, of trees, mountains and the town sign, is used repeatedly in the series. Immediately afterward, a number of familiar characters are seen; after Laura's first appearance, Bobby Briggs (Dana Ashbrook), and James Hurley (James Marshall) are presented in quick succession. To the spectator familiar with *Twin Peaks*, these factors are, in combination, likely to be orienting and comfortably recognisable. The recognition of typical, familiar *Twin Peaks* features would be unavoidable given the grouping of different kinds of aural and visual cues in a short time.

Impossible Spaces

The town of Twin Peaks, as represented in *Fire*, has enough generic familiarity, despite its obvious strangeness, to provide a fertile basis for the uncanny independently of the representations contained in the television series. In proceeding to a discussion of *Fire* in terms of space, I will argue that *Fire*, like *Twin Peaks*, evokes a familiar landscape and within it spaces (particularly domestic ones) which are highly uncanny.

One of the features of *Twin Peaks* and *Fire* most often cited by critics as particularly unusual is the 'Red Room', an indefinite and obscure location inhabited by beings that speak backwards and exercise control over arcane forces. In *Fire*, the Red Room materialises apparently within the Palmer household – although it is not located there in any normal, physical sense. The uncanny potential of the Red Room is suggested in its meta-spatial qualities, that is, its manifestation out of nothingness and its disruption of the established order of space and defiance of the laws of physics. Moreover, it is unique in these qualities – an exception that is at variance with the ordinary verisimilitude of locations such as Laura's school or the Palmer family home (although extraordinary events may take place within them, there is very little remarkable about the locations themselves). These ordinary spaces have permanence, definite physical locations and certainty of function; what goes on inside them is easily evoked. By contrast, the Red Room encapsulates qualities of the double. It is an ambiguous, physically ephemeral space in which obscure rituals of incomprehensible purpose are performed. Its propensity to manifest selectively, independently of conscious will, recalls Freud's anecdote concerning repetition compulsion and uncanny places:

> Once, as I was walking through the deserted
> streets of a provincial town in Italy which was strange
> to me, on a hot summer afternoon, I found myself in a
> quarter the character of which could not long remain in
> doubt. Nothing but painted women were to be seen at
> the windows of the small houses, and I hastened to

leave the narrow street at the next turning. But after having wandered about for a while without being directed, I suddenly found myself back in the same street, where my presence was now beginning to excite attention. I hurried away once more, but only to arrive yet a third time by devious paths in the same place. Other situations… also result in the same feelings of helplessness and of something uncanny. As for instance… when every endeavour to find the marked or familiar path ends again and again in a return to one and the same spot, recognisable by some particular landmark.

(Freud 1934, pp.389-390)

Although an anomalous, obscure location that Laura or Cooper find themselves in irrespective of conscious will, the uncanniness of the Red Room is not solely dependent on its ambiguities. The thick, red, almost flesh-like curtains that enclose the room have a uterine quality that evokes the *unheimlich* even more powerfully than the method of the room's appearance. The slightly undulating, slightly diaphanous appearance of the curtains is emphasised against the flat, artificial black and white patterning of the floor, arranged in diagonals that seem to twist and trick the eye. In some manifestations, furniture is visible in the room – most notably, a statue of a woman. These two elements suggest a hotel lobby and connote the red room as a transitional location – not a destination in its own right, but a waiting room on the way to somewhere unknowable.

The North American Suburb

While the Red Room is the most obscure and complex space in Twin Peaks, other, less obvious spaces play a more fundamental role in the generation of uncanniness. A key aspect of the generation of familiarity – the more sustained and

fundamental component of this effect – is the impression of location, of the town of Twin Peaks as visual space. Compared to those previously employed – predominantly places of transit (e.g. the trailer park) or of the law (e.g. the Sheriff's office or the FBI offices in Philadelphia) – the locations shown after Laura's first appearance are archetypal settings for suburban American family life, in keeping with this increased sense of domesticity: Laura's school, Twin Peaks High, the local diner, and Laura's home and bedroom.

Suburban ordinariness is crucial in consolidating domesticity as a central theme, facilitating the consequent development of a powerful uncanniness. Although *Fire* does not employ or parody them systematically, allusions to soap opera conventions are particularly evident in the construction of a deceptively unremarkable milieu of superficially idyllic small town America, a false but fertile homeliness ready for exploitation and subversion as the façade is demolished. As is particularly apparent in terms of representations of space, *Twin Peaks* approached a verisimilitude that had not existed previously, despite its frequent invocations of the otherworldly.

> 'the "new" rural-middle-landscape melodrama, exemplified by Twin Peaks (1990-91), is an intriguing amalgam of the rural middle-landscape comedy of Green Acres and the contemporary urban frontier melodrama of Hill Street Blues and St. Elsewhere. We are encouraged to enter a world where people are both strange and strangers, both protean and disconnected. It is a world filled with contradiction and ambivalence, humor, and extreme violence.'
>
> (Himmelstein 1984, p.235)

Highly reminiscent of Lumberton, the setting for *Blue Velvet*, Twin Peaks is depicted with a combination of urban and pastoral iconography. Unlike Lumberton, with its abject underside connoted visually – by the writhing beetles of the opening sequence for example – Twin Peaks is connoted more directly in terms of the uncanny,

most obviously in the allusion to doubling of the town's name. Although it has been 'mapped', (Lynch 1991) thus – at least in principle – fixing the size of the town of Twin Peaks and the location of its various buildings, spatial cues in *Fire* are sufficiently ambiguous to facilitate a sense that the town has familiar qualities, at times seeming like a quiet, rural area and at others busy and urbanised. It is this ambiguity that enables Twin Peaks to be universally (un)*heimlich*, relying on the viewer to construct an idea of the town that will naturally be drawn from previous experiences. The sense of space engendered transcends usual environmental categories; consequently Twin Peaks is simultaneously an isolated backwater and a modern suburban town. Further comparisons to Lumberton are supported by an observation of temporal cues; the mixture of references to and styles from different decades (most notably the fifties) in *Blue Velvet* can also be seen in *Fire*, although the effect is less significant than in the earlier film.

Renée Tobe has described how *Fire* 'offers insights into how and why that most prosaic of arenas, the North American suburb, can frighten and disturb.' (2003, p.241). The effect of these transgressive (and thus disorienting) representations adds to that generated by the production of an especially domestic uncanniness. Through the juxtaposition of the exploding TV set of the opening sequence, later allusions to its own televisual origins and the proliferation of predominantly suburban, domestic imagery, *Fire* creates an illusion that 'subverts the spectator's usual safe distance from the material by colonizing the iconography… of that complacency' (Tobe 2003, p.248). Key to this subversion is the situation of extraordinary and even supernatural events in this hermetic environment, resulting in a dissonant juxtaposition of ordinary and extraordinary.

Clearly, when discussing the domestic environment in the context of *Fire*, the most significant location is the Palmer family home; in addition to being an obvious, unambiguously domestic space, it is featured consistently as the location in which the majority of Laura's suffering is played out (although her murder takes place elsewhere). In considering which areas in the Palmer family home have uncanny potential, there are several possibilities, although one is clearly outstanding. The dining

room (the scene of a disturbing confrontation that I will discuss at a later point) is a location in which the pretence of unity and harmony is preserved through the ritual of the family meal, accompanied by repressed silences. Ordinarily, the parents' bedroom would be of prime consideration. In the case of the Palmer household, however, the most powerfully *unheimlich* room is undoubtedly Laura's bedroom. Repeatedly, the narrative returns to the secrets contained within this room – the diary at the back of the dresser, the pictures that become portals to other realities, and Killer Bob, the most terrible secret of all.

The manifestation of the horse in the bedroom of Laura's parents is paralleled by the earlier appearance of a bloodied woman in Laura's room. While the identity of the woman is not explained in *Fire*, it would be apparent to viewers of the series that she is Annie Blackburne (Woods 2000, p.153). Annie does not feature in the series until episode 25, and the event she refers to in describing Cooper's entrapment in the Lodge occurs in the final episode, number 30, chronologically more than a month after Laura is murdered (Lavery 1995, pp.205,246,258). Annie's appearance is both uncanny and abject on multiple levels. After manifesting from nowhere, she is motionless and stares blankly, seemingly dead. She delivers her cryptic warning to Laura before returning to the same lifeless state and disappearing. Her throat is cut and she is bleeding heavily from what appears to be a fatal wound – the essence of 'death infecting life', as Kristeva terms it (1982, p.4), and even more abject for the conspicuous violation of order not only at the borders of life and death but of time (the temporal impossibility of Annie being dead while Laura is alive) and space also. Laura's casual reaction, as if being instructed by the dead is a common occurrence, is more disturbing for the fact that the living corpse is addressing her not only from her bedroom, but from her *bed*. In addition to being the most *heimlich* space within the home, a place of familiarity where she can rest, Laura's bed is where she is at her most vulnerable (at times seeming very childlike) and also the scene of the nocturnal rapes perpetrated by her father. The importance of the domestic as an originator of *Unheimlichkeit* is amply demonstrated by the centrality of representations of these familial horrors to the generation of unsettling or disturbing effects. In representing something so clearly

horrific as unremarkable or customary, the scene epitomises the ability of *Fire* to recontextualise what is recognisable and reassuring about representations of the North American suburb, allowing 'viewers… familiar with the domestic soap-opera genre, safe at home in their own living rooms, [to] explore the deeper structure that lies in the gap between the space of the expected and the actual'. (Tobe 2003, p.241)

In summary, the Palmer family residence is seemingly a safe, typical middle class home; it is outwardly unremarkable, lacking distinctive features. To this extent it represents a world familiar to American and non-American viewers alike, that of the suburban, family oriented environment of countless soap operas; furthermore, the limitations implied by this type of generic setting are transcended because of *Fire*'s disregard for normative representations of space, as is amply illustrated by the Red Room and the Lodge. While the juxtaposition of ordinary domesticity and extreme, often violent otherness creates frequent instances of uncanniness and abjection, as with previous films of Lynch's, there are other structures which are also capable of generating the same effects. Although present in *Eraserhead* (the association of the baby and Henry, for example) and *Blue Velvet*, (e.g. Frank and the 'Well Dressed Man') the theme of doubling in *Fire* is, as with *Twin Peaks*, repeatedly invoked and of powerful significance throughout the narrative.

Doppelgangers and Other Doubles

Twin Peaks, like the town of Lumberton in *Blue Velvet*, is an ostensibly ordered and peaceful environment concealing corruption, criminality and perversion (whereas this takes the form of an abject layer in *Blue Velvet* of which Frank is the architect, in *Fire* the dark side of Twin Peaks is present mainly in discrete areas of domestic space) . The duality is exposed in a similar way – rather than the discovery of an ear, the dreadful secrets of Twin Peaks are exposed after Teresa Bank's body is found (or, in the case of the series, with the unwrapping of Laura's corpse). While not as critical to the narrative as it is in *Lost Highway* or *Mulholland Drive*, doubling features substantially in *Fire*: 'It should not be surprising that a series called 'Twin Peaks' should be filled with doubles. In fact, there are several dozen examples … typically serving as

mirror images of good and evil, original and imitation, appearance and reality.' (Ledwon 1993, p.262).

In *Twin Peaks*, the duality of Laura's own character is alluded to; in *Fire,* it is actively explored. The spectator witnesses Laura snorting cocaine, being aggressive and sexually provocative (although, crucially, *never* in front of her father) but also sees her vulnerable, frightened and confused, on occasions innocent and childlike. Laura herself is aware of this crisis of self, as we discover when she visits Harold Smith and temporarily loses control, baring her teeth and hissing before breaking down into hysterics (this brief and shocking transformation is, incidentally, prefiguring the scene in *Lost Highway* where Fred sees Renée as the Mystery Man.) The series evinces this doubling by resurrecting blonde Laura as brunette cousin Madeleine Ferguson, in an echo of *Vertigo*[26]. Often mistaken for Laura, Madeleine feels an increasing affinity to the dead girl until her own conflict of self is aborted in the same way and she is murdered by Leland.

The appearance of a doppelganger portending death represents a truly archetypal double motif, typical of the examples discussed by Otto Rank such as instances of the double in anthropology (Rank 2000, pp.49-50). In the final episodes of *Twin Peaks*, Cooper is lured into the Black Lodge by Windom Earle, an elusive, identity-shifting adversary and Cooper's former partner in the FBI. While the original Cooper is trapped in the Lodge, a malevolent doppelganger, a 'bad Cooper', assumes Cooper's place in the outside world. Although this example is of much greater diegetic significance in the series, references are made to Cooper's doppelganger in *Fire*. Firstly, the possibility of the splitting is referred to during early sequences at the FBI offices in Philadelphia. Although the employment of technology raises the possibility of a technical fault or similar electronic quirk, making the doubling more ambiguous, Cooper nevertheless appears to have become two separate but indistinguishable identities, inhabiting two bodies simultaneously. Secondly, the dead Annie Blackburn

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[26] The other echo of *Vertigo*, aside from the switch in hair colour, is provided by the cousin's name - a combination of Scotty's surname, Ferguson, and the first name of the subject of his obsession, Madeleine, the character played by Kim Novak.

alludes to Cooper's future doubling by telling Laura 'good Cooper is trapped in the Lodge. Write it in your diary.'

As mentioned earlier in this chapter, the 'quasi-location' of the Black Lodge is an important focus of doubling in the series and in *Fire*. Those that inhabit the Lodge (or, more accurately, maintain an ephemeral and indistinct presence within it) form double relationships with those outside. In addition to the fragmentation of Cooper's identity, the power of the lodge as a source of splitting is demonstrated by the characters of Mike, Philip Gerard (the One Armed Man) and the Man From Another Place. Specifically, these identities are not separate but are rather configured as constituent parts of a composite identity. This is apparent in the conclusion, when Leland/Killer Bob is confronted in the Red Room. Having previously told Cooper 'I am the arm', the Man From Another Place speaks in perfect unison with Mike, his own arm placed to indicate visual continuity between their bodies at the point of the missing limb. The doubling of Mike and the One Armed Man, the latter existing beyond the indistinct borders of the Red Room, parallels that of Killer Bob and Leland; both are configured in doubling relationships which are ambiguous as to whether the splitting of self is actual or imagined, in the same manner as the protagonist in Dostoyevsky's *The Double.*

The harsh black and white patterning on the floor of the Red Room further affirms its properties as a location of duality and a source of splitting; lacking physical dimensions and any definite location, the Black and White Lodges, along with the Red Room that appears to be indefinitely 'located' within, are enigmatic and transgressive spaces, epitomising qualities that I have suggested the town of Twin Peaks itself possesses in terms of geographical ambiguity (and therefore a versatile familiarity). The origin of the Lodges is contested; they may be linked to Native American culture, inspired by the 'sweat lodges' in which tribe members experienced visions from which they received their names. Alternatively, the concept may have been inspired by Talbot Mundy's 1926 novel *The Devil's Guard*, which features Black and White lodges

[129]

inspired by Tibetan dugpas[27]; whichever influence is predominant, the abnormal, quasi-mystical qualities of the locations are clear. The Lodges are doubled spaces in which covert meanings are imparted; their relationship to the Red Room is ambiguous and all three appear to be interchangeable. In the script (Lynch & Gifford 1997), the scene in which Leland and Killer Bob are disjoined after Laura's murder is marked 'Black Lodge/Red Room', suggesting the terms are synonymous rather than the hierarchical relationship that might be indicated by a dash or a comma. Stylistically, the three locations are often undifferentiated and only occasionally does mise-en-scene give an indication of which of the three is being represented. Any distinction is made largely through emotional impression – i.e. whether the inhabitants are aggressive and threatening or not separates the Black Lodge from its more benevolent counterpart. The effect that the events in the Black Lodge and Red Room have upon meaning maintains the enigma of Laura Palmer's killer by delivering abstruse and misleading clues and additionally disrupts *sjužet* cues, thus problematising the process of *fabula* construction. Often, these 'clues' have the potential to clarify and distort meaning by insinuating the relevance of elements not central to the unmasking of Laura's killer, this being the obvious destination of the narrative.

Arguably the most disturbing and significant doubling in *Fire*, the relationship between Leland and Killer Bob illustrates amply the porous nature of the subdivisions mentioned by Schneider (2004b, p.110) within the category of mental doubles. Both selves appear to occupy the same space (with an important exception, which I will discuss shortly), precluding the relationship from being considered one of projection. Neither can the selves be said to occupy separate points in time. The doubling is indicated through primarily visual means, with Leland's appearance shifting from self to other self repeatedly, although there is no clear trigger, and no process of change to suggest that a transformation is taking place. Whether one self or the other is predominant seems almost arbitrary. During the scene elongated and shocking scene depicting Laura's brutal murder, they interrogate her alternately, with Leland

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[27] http://www.twinpeaks.org/archives/references/allusions_list

occupying the right of the frame and Killer Bob the left; this emphasises both the doubling and, more disturbingly, the difficulty of distinguishing between the two selves in terms of behaviour and purpose. As was the case during the series (most notably in the seventh episode of the second season), a more rapid substitution of appearances is evident during scenes in which murders are committed. While there is a clear connotation of behavioural disassociation and of a mental doubling within a single body, none of Schneider's subdivisions, considered separately, accurately characterises the doubling – indicative of the ambiguity that precludes easy conclusions from being drawn about the relationship between Leland and Killer Bob and contradicts attempts to dismiss Leland's crimes as being the result of spiritual possession. Additionally, this uncertainty contributes to the uncanniness. Todorov's discussion of 'the marvellous' as distinct from the uncanny (Todorov 1975, p.41) highlights the need for texts to preserve uncertainty in order to remain uncanny and indicates why, in the case of many of the examples of doubling cited by Rank, the anti-self qualities of the double are potentially ascribable to madness, as in the case of Dostoyevsky's protagonist in *The Double,* although there is no unified explanation that satisfactorily clarifies the uncanny events. In the case of Leland / Bob in *Fire*, no consistent or dependable cues are provided in support of a supernatural interpretation (i.e. one involving spiritual possession), and therefore the ambiguity necessary for the generation of uncanniness is preserved from dismissal by the fantastic.

In this context, the nature of the doubling is significant, as these exculpatory arguments rely on the perception of Killer Bob as a supernatural entity with absolute and unequivocal control over Leland. If it is accepted that Leland's raping of his daughter is displaced by means of the fantastic (the unsupported explanation of spiritual possession), a displacement of Leland's culpability is also suggested; the incomprehensibility of the father's physical and sexual violence against his daughter is mitigated by the explanation that he has been 'possessed' by a malevolent spirit and is the powerless victim of a controlling force, compelled to commit horrific acts against his will. Support for this contention can be found to a limited degree in *Fire* but more extensively in *Twin Peaks.* In episode sixteen (the ninth of the second season), for

example, Leland is lured into a cell under false pretences following Cooper's realisation of the murderer's identity[28]. Apparently possessed by Killer Bob, Leland flies into an insane rage, prompting Sheriff Truman to comment that the prisoner is 'not Leland'. The occupant of the cell threatens (in a distorted voice barely recognisable as Leland's) to commit one more *murder*; Cooper and Truman open the cell to find Leland dying of a head injury sustained on the metal bars of the door. Later, as the characters ponder what has become of Killer Bob, it is suggested that he may have left Leland's body like a malevolent spirit, ready to take control of another 'host'.

While it has encouraged supernatural interpretations such as 'Laura's killer was revealed to be her own father, Leland … who was possessed by the evil entity Bob' (Olson 1993, p.43), this example, however, does not obviate any ambiguities, as sufficient doubt is cast over the nature of the doubling to oppose a paranormal interpretation. As Leland is dying, he relates having known Killer Bob as a child. His description of Killer Bob 'coming inside' him can be construed in multiple ways; while it does not obviate the spiritual possession interpretation, the implication that Leland is narrating being a victim of rape as a child is impossible to ignore. It invites the inference that Killer Bob, rather than being a demonic supernatural entity, represents Leland's transference of the crime committed against him to his daughter and a metaphor for his crisis of self. Crucially, *Fire* further complicates the ambiguity of the Leland/Killer Bob doubling. The periods between Leland's 'transformation' into Killer Bob (and subsequent return) decrease progressively, culminating in the climactic murder scene. The lighting in this scene is notable for featuring one of Lynch's favourite visual motifs, the flickering bulb, resulting in a strobe effect. This allows the connotation of a transition between selves to become indefinite; it is often difficult during this scene to discern who – Leland or Killer Bob – is being represented. The

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[28] Perversely, this episode (which 'solved' the MacGuffin and thus eliminated the primary device that had been employed since the inception of the series to connect the characters in a universal way) was broadcast 'eight hours into the show's second season' (Bianculli 2000, p.270), allegedly at the insistence of Mark Frost and against Lynch's wishes.

effect is to indicate duality with the added impression that the two selves are becoming *indistinguishable*.

Rather than being suggestive of a particular threat, or a familiar thing long forgotten, Leland's physical and sexual violence against his daughter is shockingly and controversially explicit – especially in the case of the murder of Laura itself. Possession can be considered a form of doubling with strongly uncanny qualities; but the notion of possession effectively dilutes the significance of the violence being *specifically* that of a father against a daughter. Consequently, it is important to question whether the unsettling nature of the film, particularly in terms of its representation of domestic violence and incest, is characterised *solely* by uncanniness. Although the uncanny is often generated by the domestic, the extreme violence and suffering depicted in *Fire* leads to the conclusion that the uncanny may not account satisfactorily for the horrifying nature of the claustrophobic and incestuous relationship between Leland and Laura.

Unclean Hands and Dead Bodies

Having assessed the prevalence of the uncanny in *Fire*, I will now progress to discuss the significance of the abject. As I have argued, the uncanny is brought more to the fore than was the case in previous films; yet while the abject may be less visible, its potential remains undiminished. Just as in the television series, in which Laura Palmer's dead body is found wrapped in plastic, *Fire* opens with the discovery of the corpse of a young woman. The image of Teresa Banks' dead body floating slowly downstream is, as I argued at the beginning of the chapter, brutally simple in comparison to the elusive and often contradictory nature of later scenes. Following an anguished 'no!' that we are compelled to assume is the powerless last word of the victim, we see the carefully wrapped body, incongruous and isolated in the middle of a river. Most immediately, the dumped body denotes the commission of a murder, and, as Kristeva asserts 'any crime, because it draws attention to the fragility of law, is abject, but premeditated crime [and] cunning murder … are even more so because they heighten the display of such fragility.' (Kristeva 1982, p.4). In the opening

sequence of *Fire* the visibility of this violation of law is emphasised by the location of the corpse, white against the greens and browns surrounding it. The neat packaging of the corpse suggests deliberation and almost certainly forethought; the appearance of the victim's name at the bottom of the frame emphasises that the package – the floating object – is a human being, counteracting the dehumanising effect of the wrapping. An additional consideration is that, while it denotes the abject crime of murder, the corpse is itself an abject: 'the corpse… represents fundamental pollution… is waste, transitional matter, mixture, it is above all the opposite of the spiritual, of the symbolic…' (Kristeva 1982, p.109). Although Teresa Banks' naked body is subsequently seen on a sterile metal autopsy table, the corpse is not the only or most prevalent manifestation of the abject. Associated with the domestic, the theme of food – and the contamination of food in particular – is a recurring one.

An early example is provided by a reminder of Cooper's paranormal abilities; questioned by Rosenfeld (Miguel Ferrer), Cooper replies that the next victim (i.e. Laura) is 'crying out for help… she's preparing a great abundance of food'. The prediction turns out to be correct; from the Double R diner, Laura carries a tray of cups and metal dishes to a car. Cooper's comment draws attention to Laura's actions in this scene, which unfolds like a fulfilment of his prophecy. This raises the significance of an ordinary domestic task, the preparation of food (for 'Meals on Wheels').

In this context, cryptic references to Laura's tormentor and her impending murder are introduced. As Cooper's prediction described the then unknown killer's next victim, the scene is therefore preceded and concluded by the discussion of Laura's defilement, juxtaposed with the theme of food. Following her encounter with the Chalfonts – the grandmother shows Laura the framed picture that she will later hang in her bedroom and use to access the Red Room – Laura returns home. The house is foreboding; although there is bright sunshine outside, the majority of the rooms are dim and shadowy, with patches of light only emphasising the gloom. As the camera tracks through the house from Laura's point of view, her obvious hesitancy builds up suspense, as does the ominous music and the amplified, repetitive sound of a ceiling fan. She enters her bedroom, opening the door tentatively. At the back of the

room she sees her abuser – Killer Bob. Killer Bob mimics her scream, the mockery emphasised with an extreme close up of Killer Bob's gaping mouth – an image of devouring. Fleeing and hiding, Laura sees Leland leave the house and drive away in his car, realising for the first time that her tormentor and rapist is her father.

The relevance of this realisation to the theme of *contaminated* food is made clear by the scene that follows. Laura once again returns to her family home. Leland is waiting for her and he begins questioning her about school as soon as she enters. He tells her to sit down, and asks if she is hungry. A close up of Laura's half of a 'broken heart' necklace emphasises that Leland has seen it; as if in response, he asks a question that initially appears to be a non sequitur: 'you didn't wash your hands before you sat down to dinner, did you?'. The accusation that Laura's hands are dirty clearly invokes the threat of contamination, and in the context of a family dinner, this insinuates the transgression of several boundaries. As waste such as urine, excrement and rotted food is carried away from the home to the outside, carrying filth from the outside into the home violates the distinction between the tended, delineated and clean domestic space and the unclean, indefinite, unknown exterior beyond these bounds. Similarly, the juxtaposition of food and dirt threatens the distinction of pure / impure on a physical, corporeal level. There may be good reason to be disgusted by unwashed hands, which may facilitate the spread of dirt, bacteria or the eggs of parasites into the body. Kristeva's organisation of bodily pollutants into two categories – menstrual and excremental – leads to the conclusion that dirt in this context cannot be separated from the excremental, being indistinguishable on a symbolic level; it is expelled waste that is returned to defile the clean and proper body.

Considering Leland's initial instructions, commanding Laura to sit, his demands of cleanliness are conspicuous in their pointlessness. Receiving a timid and wearied shake of the head in response to his hectoring, Leland ignores Laura's reluctance and examines her hands, pronouncing his disgust at how dirty they are; he uses the opportunity to seize the necklace, hissing: 'Is it from a lover? Did you get this from your lover?' Laura's evident terror panics the mother. In a display of emotional instability reminiscent of Mrs. X in *Eraserhead*, who also briefly loses control of herself

during a family meal, Mrs Palmer begins whimpering and moaning, finally screeching at Leland to stop intimidating Laura. He ignores her pointedly and then returns to his original position opposite Laura. Mrs Palmer's façade of calmness is restored; evenly and casually, she instructs Leland to sit down. The claustrophobic tone is an important part of the abjection in the scene, and although it is visually emphasised through Laura's cowering as her father stands over her, is best communicated by the rhythm of the dialogue. Other than a near silent whimpering, as Leland's interrogation jumps from Laura's sex life to the state of her hands, the lack of response contributes most to the oppressive and stifling atmosphere.

When Leland seizes Laura's hand, it is impossible to know whether her fingernails are genuinely dirty or not. If we assume they are not visibly dirty despite Leland's assertions, the literal matter of hygiene becomes secondary to the symbolic importance of the act itself. In demanding that his daughter wash her hands, Leland is asserting his power over her and warding off an external threat, represented by the abject, phantasmal excremental pollutant. In considering the nature of this external threat, the connection between the two lines of questioning – cleanliness and sex – is illuminated. Leland's sexual jealousy implies the threat to his dominant position in the Symbolic order, originating from outside the hermetically incestuous cluster of father – mother – daughter in the form of Laura's lover(s). Leland's motivation in seizing Laura's hand, however clean, can be attributed to the same thing; as opposed to menstrual pollutants, which represent a threat from within, excremental filth of this kind represents 'the danger to identity that comes from without: the ego threatened by the non-ego, society threatened by its outside, life by death.' (Kristeva 1982, p.71).

Leland's abjection fantasy represents one point in an escalating crisis revealed through food abjects and confirmed through incest, reaching a terrible denouement in death. Incest as abject is alluded to in this scene in father and daughter's uncomfortable physical closeness, particularly in Leland's control of Laura's body (seizing her hand, or emphasising his strength by standing over her in an intimidating way), in addition to the spectator's knowledge that Leland is raping his daughter. The complexity of the drama of abjection in this scene can be clarified with reference to

the preceding three scenes in particular. Cooper's premonition emphasises Laura's actions in preparing a large quantity of food (all food items have great potential as abjects, essentially because they are intended to pass across the borders of the *corps propre).* Any food becomes abject when it represents the division 'between two distinct entities or territories' (Kristeva 1982, p.75) – clean / unclean, for example.

Cooper's revelation is then followed by another, concerning the identity of Laura's abuser. The emphasis upon food is subsequently juxtaposed with the threat of rape and death as Laura is ambushed by the loathsome Killer Bob, her tormentor and future murderer. Finally, a synthesis of abjects is achieved when Laura is confronted by her rapist at the family dinner table; as food, home, family and defilement are combined as the 'dirtied' family meal. The abjects presented in the context of the Palmers' dinner collide with the central incest abject of *Twin Peaks* and prefigure the denouement of the film, in which Leland murders his daughter. The initial confrontation over the cleanliness of Laura's hands appears to be triggered by Leland's sighting of Laura's necklace. While questioning whether Laura has washed her hands, Leland intersperses his probing with sexual insinuations. The food on the Palmer family table becomes the subject of a conflict between several distinctions – inside / outside; familiar / unfamiliar; clean / unclean; self / other.

Leland Palmer is without parallel in Lynch's films as a vector of abjection (the only character who approaches him in this regard is Frank Booth), fulfilling everyone of Kristeva's categories: 'the traitor, the liar, the criminal with good conscience, the shameless rapist, the killer who claims he is a saviour…' (Kristeva 1982, p.4). His actions are unequivocally positioned as violations of the law and are explored in an explicit framework of justice and legal process; the presence of Agents Desmond and Chester, then replaced by Agent Cooper, ensures a continuous concentration on the progress of the investigation into the deaths of Teresa Banks and Laura Palmer. He disguises his crimes by drugging his wife and enters his daughter's room by creeping in through the window. He rapes Laura at night and then feigns innocence in the morning; he responds to her obvious dread and anger with bemusement, his half-smile hardening into a grimace when her back is turned.

Above all, Leland's capacity to abject exposes the fragility of the self. Both violated and violator (whether Killer Bob is regarded as a supernatural entity, or a former abuser transmuted into a metaphor for evil, is irrelevant in this context) evinces the ambiguity of physical boundaries and the difficulty of maintaining defences against the incursion of otherness: 'in *Fire* even more than in *Twin Peaks*, inside and outside are distinctions that no longer hold.' (Nochimson 1997, p.176)

Incest

My contention that *Fire* creates a nexus between the abject and the uncanny is supported by observations of themes of doubling, domesticity and the fragility of the self; these cohere in what Lynch has described as 'the centre' of *Twin Peaks*: 'the loneliness, shame, guilt and confusion of the victim of incest' (Rodley 1997, p.185). While the seriality of the television series provided many opportunities to divert the attention of the spectator away from Laura's suffering, *Fire* drags the spectator back to the Palmer family home repeatedly, to witness, and more often to imagine, the horror of incest.

> If *Twin Peaks* is 'about' the horrors of incest, it is
> equally about the horror of the secret life of the
> American family … The worst secrets of all … are the
> secret connections between culture and self that allow
> men to brutalize women. Laura Palmer in this context
> thus becomes a tormented female body emblematic of
> the post-modern age.
> (Davenport 1993, p.258)

The connections between the abjects of incest and murder and the more fundamental food abjects are apparent from the concluding scenes. Following his brutal murder of his daughter, Leland staggers away from the scene of the crime into the woods, where the Red Room appears in front of him. Once inside, the two selves separate. Killer Bob stands tensely, as if poised to strike, on the patterned floor;

Leland hangs suspended several feet from the ground next to him. Mike and the Man from Another Place speak in unison, demanding their 'garmonbosia' from Killer Bob. What 'garmonbosia' is has not been explored previously in the diegesis, although it is possible to infer from the imagery that follows that it is a form of sustenance, derived from the crimes committed by Killer Bob / Leland – a currency of abjection. In response to the request, Killer Bob reaches across, placing his hand over a bloodstain on Leland's abdomen. The blood is transferred from Leland to Killer Bob, who then splatters it onto the floor, where is disappears. This is juxtaposed with an extreme close up of creamed corn being regurgitated gradually, reversed so that it is sucked from the spoon into a mouth.

This scene, while not the final one, provides a highly Lynchian denouement, reminiscent of the conclusions of *Blue Velvet* and, to a lesser extent, *Lost Highway* and *Mulholland Drive* in depicting a culmination of abjection. Firstly, the process of doubling that characterises the earlier part of the film is made explicit so that, for the first time, both Killer Bob and Leland are separated spatially rather than temporally. Additionally, the scene reclaims the abject as food loathing. The creamed corn is symbolically tainted by the blood spattered onto the floor by Killer Bob, and therefore associated with Laura's murder (the stain on Leland's clothing, from which the blood is extracted, is clearly not present before the murder). The sucking in of this contaminated food connotes the consumption of the abjects characterised by Leland's crimes, the drawing in of that which has violated boundaries.

A final re-enactment of the unwrapping of Laura's corpse follows; while the footage is re-used, having been originally shot for the series pilot, in narrative terms the discovery is indicated to be occurring as the drama of abjection is unfolding in the Red Room. This is followed by a return to the Red Room, where Laura appears resurrected. Facilitated by the 'eating' of abjection represented in the preceding scene, Laura's liberation is signified by the appearance of an angel, recalling the figure that disappeared from the picture in her bedroom. With Dale Cooper standing over her supportively, Laura laughs as she and the angel are bathed in the same otherworldly,

flickering light that accompanies the *jouissance* of the conclusions of *Mulholland Drive* and *Lost Highway*.

The notion of *Fire* as a late prequel or unnecessary continuation of the television series fails to recognise that prior knowledge of *Twin Peaks* is not necessary to comprehend the film. While the objections motivated by this notion are evident in the reception of *Fire*, I have shown that the film's consistent uncanniness and culmination in abjection also exert a powerful influence.

Earlier in this chapter, I argued that a series of contrasts are established from the opening sequence, alternating what might be described broadly as the straightforward and the obscure. Predominantly, one of the categories configured in an oppositional arrangement is characterised by familiarity (tending toward easy comprehension), providing the opportunity for a process of defamiliarisation in conjunction with the otherness represented by the corresponding category (tending towards the obscure and the ambiguous). The effect of interaction between categories constituting these dualities is illustrated by the opposition of televisual and cinematic forms: 'assigned the task of inoculating network television with cinema, [*Twin Peaks*] ultimately contaminated cinema with television' (Ayers 2004, p.104).

Ultimately, the effect of these parallel and simultaneous processes of defamiliarisation is the genesis of the *unheimlich*, evident in the example of the establishment of domestic spaces in comparison to the quasi-space of the Lodges and the Red Room. While a more stable relationship between the Red Room and the physical world is intimated (but never defined) in the series, *Fire* refuses any clarification, with the room appearing to Laura Palmer not from the woods, but from within her bedroom. Within the coexistence of dualities, such as the manifestation of the Red Room in a definitively domestic space, the subversion of boundaries produces uncanniness by destabilisation, revealing what is concealed by the ordinary.

This uncanniness, while convergent with abjection, lacks the violence and severity evinced when dualities are thrown into bewildering and often appalling conflict, when boundaries are not only subverted but violated. Instead of the unsettling effect produced by what 'ought to have remained hidden and secret, and

yet comes to light' (Freud 1934, pp.376-377), Laura's suffering evokes the 'immoral, sinister, scheming and shady: a terror that dissembles, a hatred that smiles, a passion that uses the body for barter instead of inflaming it, a debtor who sells you up, a friend who stabs you' (Kristeva 1982, p.4). Although the film is consistently uncanny, its conclusion is powerfully abject. This abjection can be perceived in the transition of an illusion of suburban and domestic predictability to paternal, incestuous violence.

In concentrating fully on the final days of Laura Palmer, *Fire* emphasises the domestic and represents violence in the familiar context of the ordinary, suburban family home. More than this, however, the spectator is confronted with the incomprehensible horror of the violence committed against a daughter by her father. This intersection of sexual violence with the domestic, as depicted in *Fire*, represents the most even combination of uncanniness and abjection in any of Lynch's films. Indications of this within the critical reception are compromised by the popularity of the television series and the negativity surrounding the assumption that the film represented the 'botched continuation of the adventures of Dale Cooper' (Nochimson 1997, p.173) but in the observations of *Fire*'s subversion of convention and multiple processes of defamiliarisation (Kalinak 1995, p.82), (Orr 1998, p.151) hint at the development of the more extreme uncanny distortions of identity and narrative characteristic of subsequent films.

Chapter 6: Lost Highway

> Will all great Neptune's ocean wash this blood
>
> Clean from my hand? No, this my hand will rather
>
> The multitudinous seas incarnadine,
>
> Making the green one red.
>
> > Macbeth, Act II Scene 2

Reception

Lost Highway is enigmatic and unconventional, even by the standards of Lynch's previous work. It represents a movement in the balance between the abject, which I have argued is chiefly characteristic of earlier films, and the uncanny. In *Lost Highway*, while the abject is present, its existence is more subtle and concealed than in, for example, *Eraserhead* and *Blue Velvet.* It also represents intensification of the move towards non-linear narrative prefigured in *Twin Peaks: Fire Walk with Me.* That it was received by critics with caution and some confusion is therefore unsurprising.

The general tone of reviews was tentative and non-committal, with many finding great difficulty in digesting the film for public benefit in the conventional way, especially in the provision of a plot summary. The words 'perhaps', 'possibly' and 'maybe', or hesitant phrases like 'characters seem to die' were frequently used, approaching but ultimately holding back from attempts to reduce the film to a logical, definite whole. Generally, solid conclusions about most aspects of the film were avoided, especially whether Fred does in fact murder his wife. Similarly, few explored whether Renée Madison and Alice Wakefield (Patricia Arquette) are one person or two discrete individuals further than simply asking the question. The relationship between Fred Madison (Bill Pullman) and Pete Dayton (Balthazar Getty) proved most problematic, with efforts to provide a sense of how, or indeed if, one replaces the other. Theories rarely cited textual examples and were frequently so vague as to be almost meaningless: 'some weird metamorphosis' (MacNab, p. 206).

In the tone and language of these articles, it is possible to identify a sense of frustration at the difficulty of approaching a review of *Lost Highway* in the same way as one might review a more conventional film, a resistance to exploring this lack of conventionality and a consequent willingness to dismiss the film as pretentious and hollow. Resistance of this kind is not apparent in reviews of earlier films to nearly the same degree, although indications can be observed in the reception of *Twin Peaks: Fire Walk with Me* (see chapter 7 for a discussion of the reaction to Lynch's previous film)*.* While Lynch's films often encourage passionate and polarised reactions, the language used in reviews frequently indicates something more significant than an assumption of journalistic hyperbole can justify; a feeling of unease, of claustrophobia, dread, awe, even suffocation. One reviewer experienced it to such an extent that he was moved to write: 'intrigued … frustrated, briefly mesmerised … so insular… I came out gasping for even muggy air' (G. Brown 1997, p.31). Even the more dismissive acknowledge having been affected, taking as a negative trait the same feeling hailed by the more laudatory as evidence of the film's power. The 'unnerving, hallucinatory atmosphere' (Gilbey 1997, p.23) was almost universally mentioned, while particular emphasis was often placed upon the disturbing, disconcerting nature of the film: 'fill[ed] with dread and wonder' (Mars-Jones 1997, p.5) or 'run through with genuine dread… genuinely unsettling' (Shone 1997, p.7). Before discussing the significance of this effect, I will briefly illustrate the challenges of reading the film and provide examples from a range of critical responses.

A prominent criticism can be characterised as a paradox of familiarity and unfamiliarity, asserting that the unconventional and recondite aspects of the film are themselves all too typical of Lynch's work – predictable in their strangeness. Past works and even Lynch's future in filmmaking were called into question: 'mystery for mystery's sake… a pretentious and hollow puzzle picture… Lynch's mastery of mood has deserted him… if he were left alone for a bit, and not fawned over… it might improve him – at least jolt him back to his narrative senses' (Walker 1997, p.26). The observation of a narrative contribution to the problematic character of the film here is interesting and I will return to it shortly. The catalyst for this frustration, bordering on

contempt, is a sense that, at a crucial point, the film degenerates into irrelevance: 'we are bathed in fear. But unbelievably, Lynch then lets the plug out: the whole plot is allowed to gurgle away … a road that used to lead to a darkness infinite with suggestion… now leads to the darkness of an increasingly depopulated imagination'. (N. Andrews 1997, p.13)

What some critics perceived as ambiguity was regarded by others as incoherence and inconsistency, leading to the perception that the film was disappointingly fractured. Following the pivotal scene, it was argued, 'the film of this double life descends into a mix of violence, pornography, insanity and some seriously trendy camera shots.' (Oxenbury 1997, p.12). Other reviewers repeat the slight inherent in the final part of this sentence less subtly. The most negative reviews accused Lynch of degenerating into shameless pretension, of attempting to mask a lack of new ideas with a gratuitous farrago of the bizarre, of 'parading his oddities like a party trick'. (Shone 1997, p.6). The idea that there are qualities – such as these 'oddities' – which would be familiar to a viewer with knowledge of some of Lynch's previous work apparently conflicts with the notion that *Lost Highway* is particularly 'weird', since this concept necessitates unfamiliarity.

In previous chapters, I have demonstrated a connection between the kind of defensive but uncertain critical response evinced here with uncanny and abject qualities. *Lost Highway* represents a crucial point if this connection is to be reinforced; not just because it is particularly recondite causally (thus making it more difficult to determine in *sjužet* terms than *Blue Velvet* or *Eraserhead*), but because it actively frustrates *sjužet* construction and, as significantly, represents a significant departure in stylistic terms from the films that precede it. In comparison to *Twin Peaks: Fire Walk With Me*, which I have argued balances emphases on the abject with the uncanny, *Lost Highway* pushes forward the transition from predominant abject to predominant uncanny beyond the midpoint proposed in the previous chapter.

In this chapter, my aim is to better understand the paradox of the familiar and unfamiliar created in part by references to earlier diegetic occurrences in logically impossible contexts, and to explore the possibility that the effect of this paradox is

implicated in the extreme and polarised reaction evident in discussions such as the ones sited earlier. I wish to consider in greater depth the manner in which *Lost Highway* orients and disorients the viewer, destabilises conventions and undermines attempts to produce a logical, causally and temporally consistent reading. I will then examine the role of narrative form in achieving these effects and discuss them in a psychological context. It follows that this pattern of familiar / unfamiliar is of greater relevance in terms of the uncanny than the abject. I will propose that, for a variety of reasons, *Lost Highway* privileges the uncanny over the abject, and that this represents a continuation of the development away from obvious abjects evident in earlier films and towards a preoccupation with complex and less visual psychological constructs.

The Mediated Abject

The abject, while it exists within the text (and at times prominently), assumes a secondary role; this is partly due to the particular nature of the narrative's complexity and to a key yet misleading orienting feature of the film – genre. The film does not, however, suppress or exclude the abject to the extent that it is no longer implicated strongly in the generation of the distinctive psychological responses indicated by the reception. The driving force behind the splitting, the disintegration of the symbolic order and the dissolution of boundaries between physical forms and spaces that underpins the film is still the abject. Shortly before he is convicted of Renée's murder and sentenced to death, Fred watches the third video cassette to arrive at the Madison house. In the middle of the grainy, monochrome footage typical of the previous recordings are a few frames of colour. Fred is kneeling over the butchered, mangled corpse of Renée, splattered with gore. Renée's body has been severed at the navel and a shapeless, visceral mass is spilling onto the carpet. On the bed, a severed arm, hand and leg are scattered across the blood soaked sheets.

While the abject may be the precursor, its terrible potential is restricted, kept below the surface, by the action of the uncanny – repressed but ever present, lurking behind Fred's desire to remember things his own way, 'not necessarily the way they happened' and displaced by the eerily familiar events that punctuate Pete Dayton's

narrative space, establishing a pattern of splitting and doubling that contributes to the containment of the abject by the uncanny. While the murder is unambiguously abject on several levels – messy, vicious, apparently involving the severing of limbs, the killing of a lover, a murder that takes place in the particularly *heimlich* space of the bedroom, the product of the scene is remarkably different to comparable moments from an earlier film such as *Eraserhead*, with its oozing corporeality and steady gaze; here, the camera is moving constantly, with the low quality camcorder like footage interrupted by the brief moment of colour. When we see Fred kneeling over Renée's butchered corpse, the images are from one of the tapes delivered to the Madison's house: 'the interior images are so stippled by scan lines that they are no more than evocative, clear enough to startle and confused enough to be almost indecipherable – like a dream one is trying to remember' (Nochimson 1997, p.211) - although the sudden transition from monochrome to colour suggests that Fred is actively recalling the event, rather than passively watching the tape. We never see Fred actually *kill* Renée, and he has no memory of doing so. What the fragment connotes to the viewer is elusive, ambiguous and uncanny. Perhaps the most immediate assumption is that the black and white footage has triggered a recollection, alluded to by the colour frames – yet this is contradicted by the position of the camera high above Fred, as if from the point of view of an intruder (or, more precisely, very distinctly *not* from Fred's point of view).

The Real and the Symbolic

The mediation of the abject through ambiguity is supported by the echoes of *Blue Velvet* that can be discerned in the Freudian/Lacanian archetypes of Eddy/Laurent, Fred/Pete and the Mystery Man (I will discuss his significance shortly). These uncanny relationships are heightened by processes of splitting / doubling (precisely whether splitting or doubling is occurring is ambiguous). This is not to say that the ambiguity equates to incoherence. Despite the obscurity of the narrative, the film still imparts all of its meaning successfully. The structural necessities of *Lost Highway* – as the film in which the scrutiny of the interrelations of the conscious and

unconscious have been taken to their most extreme – both simultaneously engender and mitigate the obscurity of the narrative, achieved through the way the film is received. Despite the highly unconventional nature of the narrative, it pushes the spectator towards a point from which they can accept the discourse: 'it makes evident an underlying logic of fantasy that is operative, though certainly not apparent, in the filmic experience itself' (McGowan 2000, p.51).

The productive ambiguity of this uncanny logic is generated in numerous other ways; a notable example is Fred's mediation of the divide between the Real and the Symbolic. Mostly, Fred is not presented as a physically or emotionally dynamic character. There appear to be two important exceptions to this; his scene in the jazz club, and the murder of Renée. The murder, however, seems a product of his introversion and frustration, an implication that is developed through his future liaisons and the point / counterpoint dynamic of action and inaction; the product of his emotional stasis and sexual stagnation is the explosive murder. Even this, however, is marked by disconnection. Pete Dayton's character is an almost complete antithesis. That Pete is different in appearance – he wears leather jackets, his hair is darker, he looks younger – is of limited importance; it is the way he compensates for the faults Fred perceives in himself - the faults that are the causes of Fred's frustration – that are significant. Pete seems to represent a form of fantasised, idealised ego. Diegetically, Fred appears to have no friendships or family, and therefore no meaningful social interaction (this includes his virtually silent, emotionally strangled relationship with Renée). The host of the party Fred goes to is Renée's friend (Fred asks Renée: 'How did you meet that asshole anyway?'). Pete has a supportive family and girlfriend (Sheila, whom he later rejects for Alice); Fred's only emotional outlet is his music. Pete is dynamic, more capable of action. His recovery after 'appearing' in Fred's death row cell is as if he is growing strength in contrast to the almost moribund (literally and figuratively) Fred.

Multiple splitting / doubling processes in the film occur in the context of both meaning and identity. The swelling on Pete's head alludes to Fred's agonising migraines, while Renée and Alice are indicated as two discrete individuals but, played

by the same actress, have an indisputable physical parallel. These indications are intelligible enough for their analogous natures to be recognised easily, but not for this information to be rationalised, or for sufficient information to solve the mysteries of the film to be extrapolated. It cannot be established with any certainty, for example, that Renée and Alice are different people, not least because of the Mystery Man's insistence that 'her name is Renée. If she told you her name is Alice, she's lying'. We are denied an unequivocal sense of resolution when Fred utters the phrase 'Dick Laurent is dead' into his own intercom, seemingly to himself on the other side. The spectator cannot make dependable decisions about what is possible within the shifting narrative parameters and what is not; the looping, chronologically disordered narrative heightens the effect produced by the echoing characters, as elements are displaced and re-contextualised. The fevered jazz saxophone that drives Pete into near paroxysms in the auto-shop is strange and disconcerting because it is recognisable. These interpolative references organise an underlying structure that repeatedly confronts us with the unsettling confluence of the familiar and the unfamiliar, leaving us searching for direction.

Although the orthodox doppelganger – the most familiar form – is typified by an exact physical equivalence to the character from which it originates, Fred and Pete are atypical, connected by circumstances but possessing very different identities, something encapsulated by the ease with which they can be differentiated, not least visually. This is also true of the Renée / Alice doubling, although here the relationship is complicated by the high degree of resemblance between the two characters, emphasised by the insistence of the Mystery Man that Renée / Alice is one person.

The Freudian / Lacanian archetypes of Eddy/Laurent, Fred/Pete and the Mystery Man cohere beyond their double 'pairings' to allude to an uncanny whole. If Pete represents an idealised ego, a version of Fred that Fred wants to become, then Mr Eddy/Dick Laurent represents a stylisation of the id, driven by sex and aggression. Exaggerated and extreme forms of sex and aggression are implicit in Mr Eddy's roles as pornographer and gangster, and in two of his most notable scenes in the film. In the first, he forces a car following him too closely off the road and then 'pistol-whips' the

driver into insensibility, furiously screaming statistics as he does so. In Alice's account, narrated in flashback, Eddy/Laurent forces her to strip at gun-point. Also combining extreme sex and extreme violence is the snuff video we see him watching with Renée at Andy's house – the same one that runs on the Mystery Man's monitor, which he passes to Laurent before shooting him. Laurent is a force that Fred, aided by the Mystery Man, must gain control of before there is any solution to his problems. The way this is resolved in the narrative is through the death of Laurent. This does not imply the annihilation of the id, but rather Fred's release from the control it (as Laurent) has over Renée; her indifference to Fred is the catalyst for his self-searching.

Lost Highway can be interpreted as Fred's movement between orders of identity towards a final, annihilating confrontation with the Real, 'that which cannot fall into the signifying dimension' (Caldwell 1999, p.47). His transformation into Pete represents a regression into the Imaginary, precipitated by the deterioration of the Symbolic. The orders of identity move out of alignment and their usual associations are disrupted. Amongst many examples, the Real threatens the Symbolic when the Mystery Man confronts Fred at the party, and the Symbolic returns to disrupt the unstable Imaginary order when Pete hears the saxophone music. At points of interconnection - those points at which the separation breaks down or the orders seem to realign - we are temporarily more oriented because we recognise those elements that cross between orders, even though their consequential effect is uncanny and disconcerting. The disruption and disjunction of the Symbolic, the Real and the Imaginary orders of identity allow us to experience an awareness of the necessary process of disorientation. In order to experience this uncanniness distinctly: 'we must not feel quite sure of our new beliefs' (Kofman 1991, p.125).

Mystery Man and Mystery Space

The Mystery Man comprises an essential part of the complex network of double identities and double meanings. The question asked by some critics, namely: "who is the Mystery Man?" (G. Brown 1997, p.31) appears to be motivated by a need to establish him within a taxonomy of archetypes, but the film strongly resists an

answer (the Mystery Man himself breaks into a sinister laugh when asked this question by Fred). He exceeds time and space; he is omnipresent, apparently materialising and dematerialising at will. His first conversation with Fred, a demonstration of his independence from physical laws, irreparably contravenes any suggestion of conventionality and disrupts the framing of the possible. Attempting to extrapolate a non-diegetic existence for him is counter-productive, leading us away from the function of the character.

His unearthly abilities and bizarre appearance mean there is no certainty that he is a living, worldly, corporeal entity; he seems to originate from and exist within an entirely different order: "[he is] … that excess which undoes and exceeds any system of signification… to say him is to unsay him" (Celeste 1997, pp.32,39). After the Mystery Man approaches Fred at Andy's party, he demands that Fred phones him – as he is in Fred's house simultaneously. Fred complies, and the Mystery Man confirms on the phone that he is also there. Fred's angry interrogation meets with the reply: 'You invited me. It's not my custom to go where I'm not wanted'. The Mystery Man has been 'invited' due to the imbalance between trapped Fred and rampaging Laurent. Before his 'transformation', the house functions as a symbol of Fred's inertia and frustration. As is suggested in the gloomy and austere mise-en-scene, the house traps Fred, as he is trapped by his introversion. The Mystery Man is both uncanny in himself and a source of the uncanny; he annihilates the rational and creates disorientation. Herzogenrath goes further, seeing him as an agent of narrative distortion, as 'the twist in the Moebius strip' (Herzogenrath 1999). He acts to transform diegetic gaps – the irreconcilable, the impossible – and preserve uncanniness by resisting the fantastic. It is largely through the Mystery Man that 'that *reality* for the subject remains a *coherent illusion'* (Herzogenrath 1999).

These uncanny beings inhabit uncanny spaces. The unsettling domestic locations that dominate the opening of the film are characterised by a low key lighting scheme that accentuates their mystery and almost uterine qualities; the dominant colour is red, with relatively spacious but nevertheless oppressive rooms barely lit and connected via narrow passages. The Madison home establishes the uncanny potential

of the domestic visually, as if the interior is not a building but something organic. With a predictable and dependable generic structure and without the continual splitting, the action of the uncanny would be overwhelmed by the ordinary and the comfortably familiar. The observation of identifiably conventional elements is as important as the disorientating obscurity in *Lost Highway*, as is the creation of a frame of reality to be compromised by the impossible. While the uncanny can be experienced throughout, in 'literal and textual black holes' (Capp 1999, p.54), it has specific origins.

Uncanniness of Genre

A key contributor to the dynamic of orientation and disorientation can be found in the context of genre, with the observation that the film presents many of the elements of *film noir*, a point not missed (although rarely substantiated) by critics. Those that did try to illustrate the claim did so briefly through reference to the visual style, which was deemed to be eerily claustrophobic, often leading to condemnation that it was objectionably stifling, dismal and insular, but also positive comments that it was expressionistic, thus attracting the *noir* comparisons. Occasionally this was reinforced by references to Fred and Alice as examples of *noir* archetypes.

Both *film noir* and *neo-noir* are notoriously problematic terms, the latter considerably more so as it complicates an already contentious area. It is, however, not difficult to observe clear similarities between *Lost Highway* and a number of films that are very commonly considered as renowned examples of *noir*. Dick Laurent's porno ring alludes to *The Big Sleep* (Howard Hawks, 1946); the frantically snaking roads evoke *Detour* (Edgar G. Ulmer, 1945); and most significantly, the flaming, imploding cabin is strongly reminiscent of *Kiss Me Deadly* (Robert Aldrich, 1955). Superficially, the *noir* credentials of *Lost Highway* are quickly established. The opening sequence moves from the fast rolling road to darkness, broken by a dim glow as the unkempt and haggard looking Fred drags on his cigarette. A jazz saxophonist in a troubled, sexually dysfunctional relationship, he is almost immediately recognisable as the typically desperate and doomed male protagonist:

> Either [because] he is fated to do so or by
> chance, or because he has been hired for a job
> specifically associated with her, a man whose
> experience of life has left him sanguine and often bitter
> meets a not-innocent woman of similar outlook to
> whom he is sexually and fatally attracted. Through this
> attraction, either because the woman induces him to it
> or because it is the natural result of their relationship,
> the man comes to cheat, attempt murder, or actually
> murder a second man to whom the woman is unhappily
> or unwillingly attached (generally he is her husband or
> lover), an act which often leads to the woman's
> betrayal of the protagonist, but which in any event
> brings about the sometimes metaphoric, but usually
> literal destruction of the woman, the man to whom she
> is attached, and frequently the protagonist himself.
> (Damico 1996, p.103)

The lighting scheme is, in many scenes, an expressive *chiaroscuro* in which facial features and body parts are detached by extreme contrast. Alice's furtive phone calls to Pete are good examples, her face partly obscured by shadow. Scenes inside the Madison's house are also typified by stark areas of brightness enveloped by disconcerting fields of murky colour.

Immediately after making love to Renée, Fred recounts a dream that he had the previous night. The sequence is presented as a flashback, but starts with a cut, rather than a more conventional fade or dissolve. The camera follows Fred in a slow, circular motion, on a close up of his face. Interrupting this are two cuts. The first is to a fire; the sound of the fire is greatly amplified. The second is to a cloud of smoke that fills the room. Further on in the sequence, the camera moves with increasing speed towards a figure lying in bed; it appears to be Renée. Fred's voice over informs us that it is not Renée, but someone that looks like her. As the camera gets close, she screams

and Fred appears to wake up – yet when he turns over to Renée, it is the Mystery Man. The scene is very dark, using very few low-key lights, and is highly characteristic of *noir* style (it is notable here that this applies predominantly to the domestic space, a point I will return to later). Often, the light picks out only small areas of Fred's face or parts of bodies, with much of the location remaining hidden in near blackness.

The striking shots of the façade of the *Lost Highway* Hotel are stylistically similar; the building is concealed by the night except for two arches of light that merge into each other, only partially rescuing the hotel sign and the entrance from the darkness. Contrary to the opinion of McGowan (McGowan 2000, p.62) the introduction of Pete does not herald an abandonment of this lighting style for 'the traditional conventions of Hollywood realism', with scenes inside the Dayton house in particular exhibiting the same low key lighting (again, a domestic space). The introduction of Alice, who is visually indicated as an archetypal *femme fatale,* appears to authenticate the alignment – she is blonde, dressed in black, sexually predatory and fetishised through the use of slow-motion and the soundtrack. Non-diegetic music, Lou Reed's 'This Magic Moment', replaces the sounds of the auto-shop as Alice and Pete watch each other. Later, she proceeds to seduce Pete in the typical manner, emphasising the dangerous nature of their secret relationship and eventually persuading him to rob Andy the pornographer. The gradually intensifying atmosphere of seediness is also consistent, along with the malevolent sense of impending betrayal. Both Fred and Pete are antiheroic protagonists and both have sexual fixations; Fred largely on the inaccessibility – to him – of Renée's sexuality, which Pete compensates for, as one of the cops crudely notes: 'that fucker gets more pussy than a toilet seat'. The characteristic lack of redemption is intensified as the protagonist not only loses the object of his desire[29], but also returns to the scene of the crime only to find himself trapped, doomed to relive his earlier actions.

Given that the film exhibits so many of these traits, why is it that the analyses that have considered the relationship in depth have expressed serious doubts about the accuracy of positioning it as a *film noir*? As a method of opening the film up to

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[29] 'you'll never have me', Alice whispers in reply to Pete's breathless 'I want you'.

critical consideration, pushing the *noir* paradigm is unsuccessful: 'despite mobilising recognisable 'signifiers of noirness' – identifiable character types, scenarios of moral dissolution and fatal attraction, an extraordinarily expressive visual style – *Lost Highway* remains a remarkably recondite text'. (Capp 1999, p.54). In the following section, I will consider the possibility that this uncertainty is indicative of the action of the uncanny in the context of genre; a product of the confluence of the familiar and the unfamiliar. Although fundamental noir qualities such as isolation and alienation (Krutnik 1996, p.71) give it an affinity with the *unheimlich* that other genres lack, the degree to which *Lost Highway* both alludes to and yet subverts noir conventions indicates the action of the uncanny on, rather than within, genre.

Capp's contention that the film is 'remarkably recondite' verges on the euphemistic. At a pivotal point in the narrative, the protagonist effectively vanishes, a process that is subsequently repeated in reverse. Despite the strongly emphasised association that develops between Fred and Pete following the first disappearance, this, as many critics noted but declined to expand upon, brings an abrupt halt to the way we would, in all probability, have been expecting the narrative to develop, i.e. along typically *noir* lines. This is not to imply acceptance of the position that the film is disjointed and fractured, although this would be an understandable response to the startling transition from Fred to Pete, which we are: 'expected to accept on faith, without narrative justification' (Hirsch 1999, p.313) – at least no prior justification, as the event is subsequently explored. The murder of Renée, which we might have expected to be the key narrative event, occurs non-diegetically, as does the police investigation into her death; we hear the sentence passed down to Fred only as he is led to his cells, an acknowledgement for the benefit of clarity, but a cursory one that does not distract our attention unnecessarily. In this aspect there appears to be a particular resistance to indulging expectations based on *noir* familiarity.

The introduction of Alice appears to indicate a return to the well-trodden territory of *noir*, as she seduces Pete and eventually persuades him to assault (for which we can read 'murder') and rob her wealthy lover/pimp. There is no better suggestion of the direction the narrative intends to take than the appearance of a

black widow spider making its way up the wall, shortly after Pete envisions the image of Alice's head floating its way around his bedroom. Such a cliché comes as somewhat of a surprise in the midst of a film so riddled with obscurities, but it leaves no doubt as to Alice's status as *femme fatale* – conspicuously so, a flaunting of the convention. Equally predictable is Alice's insistence, immediately after Andy crashes fatally into his coffee table, that Pete's edgy: 'we killed him' is inaccurate: '*you* killed him'. Soon afterwards, she menaces Pete with a gun, mocking him: 'what's the matter? Don't you trust me Pete? Stick this in your pants', combining the connotations of deadliness and sex that typify the *femme fatale*. They drive 'to the desert', to the imploding cabin of Fred's visions, and fuck in the glare of the headlights. With a hissed 'you'll never have me', Alice is gone, and Pete gets to his feet as Fred. Has Alice completed her promised destruction of Pete? The change in direction is unmistakeable, with protagonist and antagonist suddenly expunged from the narrative. The possibility of deriving familiarity from genre is withdrawn and ambiguity is left in its place.

It is as if we are being baited with conventions, manoeuvred into expecting one set of eventualities as a distraction. Following Alice's *femme fatale* performance of the ritual ascription of blame and the feigning of betrayal at gunpoint, Alice throws a bunch of keys to Pete and tells him to drive. Pete pauses briefly and the camera lingers purposefully on the rear of the car parked in the driveway. The car is not only reminiscent of the similarly shaped black convertible he first sees Alice sitting in, but is more importantly recognisable as the red convertible in which Fred drives Renée home after the party at Andy's. The car has previously only been seen on screen in two approximately five second shots, giving us little time to register the connection, but prefigures the direction of the narrative and the reappearance of Fred more accurately than the distraction of the heavily emphasised recitals of *film noir* clichés. Although momentary, this epitomises the narrative action of the uncanny; a fugue-like (in the musical sense) overlapping of familiarity and unfamiliarity.

Noir conventions are not modified or inverted, which would imply their continued existence, intact, but in a different form; they would still be recognisable as conventional. Rather, they are subverted. They exist, but we are simultaneously

reminded of and forcibly denied the undemanding pleasure of their familiarity: '*Lost Highway* disconcerts precisely because it confronts us with normalcy – and normalcy seems completely foreign' (McGowan 2000, p.53) The murder of Renée and the introduction of Alice as *femme fatale* are *noir* MacGuffins that work by allowing us to be swept up in a growing sense of anticipation while the very basis for this anticipation is being eroded, eventually to abruptly vanish at the very moment it seems most likely to be confirmed.

Lost Highway is a *film noir* only in the loosest possible sense: 'the rules of *film noir* and conventional narrative are laid down and then enigmatically set aside' (Warner 1997, p.8) If it can be said to have any allegiance to *noir* at all, it is only as an extreme form of meta-noir. There are characteristic elements, but there is a greater amount that is inconsistent and cannot be absorbed; there is little evidence to suggest the existence of a sustained observance of *noir* conventions. Those that can be observed describe an outline, recognition of but not devotion to convention; a *noir* trajectory is not sustained, instead disengaging to a pronounced ontological interrogation, a prodigious manipulation of time and space, and a subversion of traditional narrative techniques far in excess of *noir* distortions. Essentially, *Lost Highway* stretches *film noir* to such extremes that the boundaries that have been established and gradually expanded during the *noir* tradition and its revived form disintegrate. The extraneous material spills out, unrestrained by affiliation to convention, and cannot be replaced within common confines.

The action of the uncanny in *Lost Highway* is observable not only within the conventions of *film noir* but on the level of genre itself; that is, the inherent uncanny potential of a genre predicated on alienation is not the primary origin of uncanniness – rather, it is the familiarising potential of genre which is manipulated and subverted, repeatedly orienting the viewer and establishing expectations that are then deviated from, contradicted, or simply abandoned without warning. In the following section, I will build on the references to narrative contained in the earlier discussions of reception and genre to further explore the origins of the familiarity-unfamiliarity paradox that lies at the heart of the uncanny and the film's unsettling qualities.

Uncanniness of Narrative Form

The efforts to position *Lost Highway* as a *film noir*, usually by simply categorising it as such without a significant amount of corroboration, represent an attempt to circumnavigate what are primarily narrative complexities. While the manipulation of generic borders is significant, in the conflict between the partially (but falsely) orienting conventions of genre and the destabilising, disorienting effect of the unconventional narrative form, it is the narrative that is predominantly responsible for perceptions of the film as recondite and complex. In an effort to outline the narrative structure, many writers seized upon comments made by Lynch and Gifford that they conceived the narrative form of *Lost Highway* as approximating a Möbius strip. It has been used most frequently as a convenient way to summarise complexities, paradoxes and ambiguities. The strip can be created by fashioning a length of paper into a twisted loop, so that it is possible to run a pencil along its length in a continuous, unbroken line. The line, having covered 'both sides' of the paper, will eventually join at the point one started, demonstrating that a loop with one surface has been created from a piece of paper with two surfaces. Adam Mars-Jones' references to the strip are typical of its employment as a model. After describing *Lost Highway* as 'a Möbius strip of mystifying narrative, a story with two sides but a single surface', he refers to: 'the crossover point of the plot, the irrational substitution of one person for another on Death Row' (Mars-Jones 1997). This seems to have been written with the strip and its central twist in mind, and serves to indicate the typical but inaccurate division of the film into two halves[30]. Due to the most common configuration of the Möbius strip being a loop with a single twist, the model has been used to reinforce the notion of a two part narrative, despite the inconsistencies with the more relevant properties of the strip - that it is a single unit with a single surface.

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[30] An example is 'the first time we watch *Lost Highway*, we are blind, thinking that everything is diegetically real, whereas the second "half" of the film is fantasized by the lead protagonist' (Gonsalves 2008, p. 79)

To be consistent (although not all proponents of the model are) it is necessary to conclude that the narrative returns to its origin when Fred utters 'Dick Laurent is dead' through his own intercom, and that the narrative is one cohesive unit. If we push the model to extremes, it should be possible, theoretically, to join the narrative at any point, and continue (return) to a corresponding connecting point. While, strictly, this is not possible, a common observation is that it is extremely difficult to absorb or fully appreciate the film on a single viewing. In a sense, as during subsequent viewings, as elements previously overlooked may be discerned, the spectator would be layering different points of narrative origin into a particular experience of the film.

The simplified concept of narrative form presented in these and other analyses is ultimately unhelpful, in the sense that the strip is being perceived primarily as a quasi-geometric model – essentially, as a figure of eight – rather than in terms of its topological characteristics and their relevance in Lacanian theory; that is, the 'looping' and 'twisting' aspects of the strip have been isolated and given prominence over the less obvious, unique properties that differentiate the Möbius strip from geometric figures – that it is a non-orientable surface with a single side and a single boundary. The main flaw with this application is that it imposes a different kind of linear narrative on the film, and suggests the possibility of a coherent and consistent interpretation that is repeatedly invited yet simultaneously denied by the text. Seen in such a limited way the model does no more than approximate inadequately some aspects of the narrative form. The relationship of the Möbius strip model to narrative uncanniness is constrained by the limited utility of the model, which serves to approximate the narrative form and indicate its complexity but cannot be used as a substitute for the actual narrative form. Although it is possible to discuss in general terms how the uncanny relates to the Möbius strip in terms of its complexity and tendency to refer back to earlier diegetic events in the manner of repressed material returning to consciousness, it is necessary to look outside of this specific model to approach a more comprehensive view of narrative uncanniness.

Another model employed for similar reasons to the Möbius strip is drawn from clinical psychology. As with the strip, the phrase 'psychogenic fugue' has been

employed as a convenient way of negotiating obscurities, leading reviewers to conclude, quite erroneously, that 'the solution is straightforward to the point of being simplistic' (Curtis 1997, p.16). The phrase has two main implications, the most immediate of which originates in psychology:

> Dissociative [this term has now replaced 'psychogenic' in clinical usage] fugue is characterized by sudden, unexpected travel away from home or one's customary place of work. It is accompanied by an inability to recall one's past, and also a confusion about personal identity. In some cases, a person moves away from home and assumes a new identity with no memory of his or her former self... During the fugue, a separate stream of consciousness takes over control of the body and personal identity. Thus, an individual acts as if he or she is a different person, or is unsure of his or her identity... a person in a fugue condition does not act in an overtly unusual fashion indicating psychopathology. Thus, they do not attract attention, and appear to be normal unless questioned carefully about their personal identity or personal history. (Tseng 1997, p.105)

Applying this to a reading is tempting due to the evident similarities between Fred's situation and the condition, implying that Fred is in a state of such mental extremis he is driven to fantasise Pete Dayton as an ideal other, and essentially that the 'second half' of the film is created entirely in Fred's imagination. The psychogenic fugue concept is ostensibly significant on a number of levels. It approximates a narrative technique as well as suggesting a medical rationalisation. It also emphasises the theme of fleeing, as exemplified in Fred's desperate attempt to escape the police that concludes the film. The motives behind the identification of the fugue as a

relevant concept are, however, highly suspect. Gifford stated: 'We had to create a scenario to make [*Lost Highway*] plausible. We discovered a clinical, psychological condition which fit our premise - a psychogenic fugue' (Biodrowski 1997a, p.34). The idea was an afterthought, 'discovered' to rationalise the Fred to Pete transition and draw the film towards a more conventional narrative model in which non-linear elements could be more easily dismissed. This is affirmed by Lynch, who commented: 'When Barry and I were working we didn't know the term' (*Lost Highway* Press Kit). He was subsequently careful to distance himself from his co-writer's interpretation: 'Barry may have his own idea of what the film means… it doesn't do any good for Barry to say 'This is what it means'' (Biodrowski 1997b, p.37)

While the psychogenic fugue may be flawed in this sense, it has additional implications of greater interest and relevance. Although separating the constituent parts of the phrase is deviating slightly from the original aim of introducing the phrase, the term fugue has a number of important connotations. The musical meaning of fugue may be summarised as:

> a polyphonic composition… the theme is first given out by one voice or part, and then, while that pursues its way, it is repeated by another at the interval of a fifth or fourth, and so on, until all the parts have answered one by one, continuing their several melodies and interweaving them in one complex progressive whole, in which the theme is often lost and reappears.
> (Klitgård 2007, p.212)

This is, however, a simplification; the structure that the term fugue implies is much more complicated, although the summary is satisfactory for illustration. Although the fugue model does not provide a satisfactory means of interpreting the narrative as a medical model, in that it does not properly elucidate any of the causal or temporal anomalies – does not provide any 'answers' – it is substantially more satisfactory as a metaphor for narrative form. Similarly to the idea of interweaved

melodies, *Lost Highway* traces a mutable and unstable transition between identities with a kind of seeping reflexivity; one part of the narrative leaks into another, sometimes almost imperceptibly and occasionally with evinced determination. That which appears to be distinctly separate is often an extension of the same narrative theme or a representation of a familiar narrative event. This, in combination with temporal disorder and distortion, greatly contributes to the unconventional character of the narrative – in which the theme may appear to be lost but never fails to reappear.

Ironically, the sequence that illustrates this best is the very one often frequently used to advance the argument that the narrative lacks unity. Arguably the most intriguing and consequential in the film, Fred's disappearance from his death row cell is subsequently echoed and restaged in a multitude of ways, from subtle references to frame by frame reiterations. The blue light that engulfs him shortly before he apparently vanishes is present not only at the end of the film, when Fred, desperately trying to escape from the police, convulses in his car and apparently begins to metamorphose; Pete hallucinates Alice's disembodied head whirling around his room, pulsing in the same electrically charged blue light, which reappears after Andy's death as Pete is looking for the bathroom. More decisive is the repetition of shots of human insides in spasm which immediately precede our first glimpse of Pete Dayton and follow our last, for a while, of Fred. Subsequently, Pete and his anxious father engage in a cryptic conversation about the events of 'that night'. 'What happened to me?', Pete asks, and as if by way of reply the same shots of viscera are briefly interposed like a flashback, followed by the image of Renée's dismembered corpse seen by Fred while watching the third video tape delivered to his house. Rather than being broken up into separate parts in which one identity is given absolute primacy over another (the narrative does not simply flip between them, as the strip model suggests) any illusion of stability and certainty surrounding Pete Dayton's identity is allowed to flicker and disintegrate.

It is apparent that the fugue proves a less reductive model for considering narrative form. Unlike the rigidly defined Möbius strip, the non geometric nature of

the fugue does not prescribe linearity; it is fluid, and allows for the impossibilities and ambiguities of the text. Most importantly, it does not exclude the destabilisation of borders and thus does not impose an artificial solution on the relationship between the various doubled identities. However, in being less restrictive, it is also less specific, and is of limited value as a means by which to approach a better understanding of how the narrative functions.

As the most enthusiastic advocate of the position that the resistance to traditional narrative constitutes the exceptional aspect of the film, Shaviro (1998) concludes that a linear reading would be counterproductive – a position supported by Herzogenrath (1999). While affirming the perception of a divided film, he argues that the irreconcilability of the two parts generates an effect that goes beyond a challenge to conventional filmic narrative, creating a new kind of narrative form, even 'a new sort of film' (Shaviro 1998, p.506). *Lost Highway*'s illusion of loyalty to classical narrative, paradoxically, contributes to its destabilising effect and resistance to conventional narrative interpretations. The notion of classical narrative is a controversial one: 'its very definition includes, it seems, virtually all possible deviations, so that every exception therefore proves the rule. The church is so broad that heresy is impossible' (Neale 1998, p.178). Yet a widely recognised characteristic of classical narratives is the propensity 'to lead the spectator through a carefully planned trajectory that reduces the viewer's freedom, but does not destroy it altogether' (Gaines 1992, p.30). While Gaines cautions that few narratives are restrictive enough to leave the viewer without options (1992, p.30), it is certainly true that, instead of reducing the possible outcomes of schema processing, *Lost Highway* complicates this construction to make the creation of cogent but logically exclusive conclusions perfectly feasible. Before proceeding to consider the narrative in greater depth, it is necessary to identify a means of analysis that mitigates the risk of introducing extrinsic, non-textual, or subjective material; at this point, I will reintroduce the concepts of *fabula* and *sjužet*, which I have used for this purpose in previous chapters.

The extent to which typical or familiar narrative models are challenged by the film can be indicated best with reference to causality, although this is not the only

means by which audience expectations of narrative progression are destabilised. Entirely gratuitously, (I will clarify why shortly) the *fabula* might be described as follows. Fred Madison's marriage is failing and he suspects his wife is cheating on him. She is not home when he phones her after playing his set at a jazz club, but he comes back from the club to find her in bed. After an abortive, emotionally stifled attempt at sexual intercourse, Renée humiliates him with an emasculating pat on the shoulder. Later, at a party, Fred meets Andy, and discovers that he is an old acquaintance of Renée's. After the party, Fred brutally murders Renée and disembowels her corpse. He is arrested, tried and sentenced to death. In a state of mental extremis in his cell, he fantasises an ideal other, a younger, more sexually powerful identity, Pete Dayton. He fantasises himself being seduced by Alice, a double of Renée, and murdering Andy and Dick Laurent.

This provides a coherent causal chain but one that cannot be reasonably justified with reference to the text; it is more invention than inference. What Shaviro (1998) and others are cautioning against, indirectly, is an excessive pursuit of the *fabula* at the expense of the *sjužet*, or, more specifically, failing to consider the relationship between the two. This is at the heart of the difficulties that many critics have had providing consistent interpretations, and clarifies why many have been tempted to simply ignore aspects of the narrative that will not integrate with their developing theories (as an extreme example of this tendency, internet discussions of *Lost Highway* tend towards a very rigid reconstituting of the film in terms of linear narrative, but always with provisos like 'just ignore the police finding Pete's fingerprints' or 'this bit doesn't quite fit, but…').

This description is gratuitous because it is not possible to reconstitute the *fabula* satisfactorily. The *sjužet* is privileged to the extent that it becomes almost impossible to extract anything but fragments of the *fabula* from the text. This is further complicated because these fragments are inconsistent and contradict each other impossibly. Fundamentally, there is not enough diegetic evidence to reach conclusions about some of the key narrative points, or to reconcile the conflicts. There is sufficient ambiguity to deny the spectator the opportunity of determining with any conviction

that a fantasy is being depicted, as might be the case if Fred Madison was an uncompromised protagonist, accompanied by key point of view shots implying that events are being depicted from his perspective. Instead, we are presented with domestic, mundane situations (epitomised by Fred and Renée's cold and perfunctory sex), juxtaposed with instances of extreme impossibility. Recalling discussions of *Casablanca* in which the question of whether or not there is an allusion to Rick and Ilsa having had sexual intercourse is raised, Žižek creates an important distinction between the indistinct and what Shaviro refers to as 'a new version of surrealist undecidabilty' (1998, p.503). The scene in question is not merely ambiguous: 'it rather generates two very clear, although mutually exclusive meanings' (Žižek 2000, p.4). Similarly, clear yet contradictory meanings are woven together to frustrate linear solutions in *Lost Highway*.

Shortly after his conviction for murder, Fred is taken to see the prison doctor. Giving him a number of pills to swallow; the doctor assures Fred: 'you'll sleep now'. In the following scene, Fred hallucinates, convulses, and, in a highly kinetic sequence suggesting electricity and rebirth, vanishes from his cell. The care taken by the doctor to ensure Fred has swallowed the medication, and his confidence in its effects, creates the clear indication that the subsequent scene is fantasised in a dream state, or at least affected or distorted by the medication. When the guard returns to check the cell, he recognises that the occupant is not Fred Madison. This is confirmed by prison officials, who identify the new occupant by checking records and finding Pete Dayton's five year old conviction for car theft. Pete's mother and father come to the prison to collect their son. Pete has parents, friends, a criminal record, a job and a girlfriend; the police, investigating Andy's murder, find Pete's fingerprints. Fred has a wife and a job, but no friends. There are no allusions to Fred's past. Of the two characters, Pete is better constructed in the diegesis, suggesting: 'Fred's own identity may be just as incomplete, just as much of a figment, as is Pete's identity, or that of anyone else in the film.' (Shaviro 1998, p.505). Another example appears after Andy has impaled himself on the corner of the coffee table. Pete scans over and sees a photograph, ostensibly of Alice and Renée together. He asks Alice: 'Is that you? Are both of them you?' She points to

the blonde: 'that's me' – explicitly indicating that Alice is not Renée, that they are separate. Later, the police examine the murder scene at Andy's house, and find a photograph: 'That's her alright; that's Fred Madison's wife, with Dick Laurent'. It appears it is the same photograph seen by Pete, except that now there is only Renée. Impossibilities of this kind have a key role in the narrative function of the uncanny. The narrative structure of *Lost Highway* not only provides continual, fugue like movement between the familiar and the unfamiliar; it also encompasses absences and impossibilities that guarantee the essential ambiguity within which the uncanny thrives. One result of this is the preservation of diegetic uncanniness, such as is created by the multiple doublings, from the oneiric or supernatural rationalisations that would denature it.

Uncanniness of Sound, Vision and Performance

The aural complexity that has become to be considered a highly characteristic aspect of Lynch's work is also implicated in the uncanny blurring of the distinction between familiarity and unfamiliarity. Despite the death in 1995 of Alan Splet, sound designer for Lynch since *The Grandmother* in 1970, *Lost Highway* brims with his characteristically ominous and evocative ambient sound (Splet's widow Ann, also a professional sound engineer, is credited with 'additional sound effects'). Industrial pulsing and ethereal bass tones create a powerful sense of malevolence and foreboding as the camera moves through the Madison's house, investing the voluminous shadows with uncanny potential; the mysterious video tapes crackle with staccato bursts of static that are then replaced with sinister, sonorous hums. Moments without dialogue and without significant amounts of diegetic sound are, as with the shadows, activated by this aspect of the sound design, providing them with an unsettling quality; silences are not silences at all. During Fred's first meeting with the Mystery Man, the diegetic sound of the party fades not to silence but to a pulsing hum, varying in tone and volume. Even in the quietest moments, this portentous, throbbing noise can be perceived, a mixture of unearthly, swirling wind and industrial rumbling.

While these sounds might conventionally be considered sound effects, their employment and effect – continuously and thematic – is more akin to a score.

From the white noise that accompanies the menacing video cassettes left on the Madison doorstep to screeching jazz saxophone and unidentifiable but notably alien and artificial rumbles, ominous and discordant ambient sound emerges from quietness, creating a: 'texture of noises swelling up and punctuating sites of action and reaction on screen' (Colman 2006). There is an ambiguity, also, about whether particular sounds are diegetic or non-diegetic, further complicating unreliable causal cues. Two notable instances are the intercom message that concludes and ends the film and Pete Dayton hearing Fred Madison's saxophone solo on the radio, which apparently destabilises his identity.

Produced by Trent Reznor, best known for being the main creative force behind industrial metal band Nine Inch Nails, the score in *Lost Highway* is the equal of the ambient sound in its ability to generate an atmosphere of indefinite malice. The film opens and closes with David Bowie's 'I'm Deranged', combining a detached, dissonant vocal style with lyrics that refer to secrets, blood and madness – prefiguring the abject and uncanny preoccupations of the narrative – while the rhythm of the percussion creates hypnotic, synchronous pulses with the movement of the road markings. In addition to Reznor and Nine Inch Nails, who contributed three tracks, Marilyn Manson and Rammstein provided music for the film (Manson and his colleague Twiggy Ramirez make cameo appearances in the film – Manson's acting debut – as participants in a snuff movie). Manson's contribution has additional significance in the context of his star persona. A controversial figure who was reputed to have influenced the Columbine High School killers[31], the juxtaposition of sex and death (a reiteration of the narcissism / thanatophobia binary at the heart of the uncanny) that characterises his

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[31] Marilyn Manson was interviewed by Michael Moore for the film *Bowling for Columbine* and rejected the association. The killers are also alleged to have been fans of Rammstein (Manson 1999, p.24)

appearance in the film is complemented by the sex symbol / serial killer derivation[32] of his and his fellow band members names, and the occult overtones with which he is associated.

Visually, *Lost Highway* contains a number of Lynchian motifs, starting with the camera racing along a snaking, open road during the opening credits, highly reminiscent of Frank Booth's 'joyride' with a bewildered Jeffrey trapped in the back of his car. Images relating to electricity feature prominently; the light bulb that fizzles out once Frank is dead and *Blue Velvet* is drawing to a conclusion reappears in very similar form in Fred's cell, dimming and burning out as he holds his head in torment and begins to convulse. The blue light in this and subsequent scenes is very similar to the light that heralds the appearance of 'Killer Bob' in Laura Palmer's bedroom in *Fire Walk with Me*, and in both films seems to signify a (perhaps psychological) transformation. The flickering of an electrical light also features in Lynch's later film, *Mulholland Drive*, heralding the appearances of The Cowboy.

Complementing this visuality is an emphasis on performance and exhibition that reflects similar themes in previous films. Fred's status as a musician is referenced repeatedly and juxtaposed with an uncanny layering of performance, particularly through Dick Laurent / Mr Eddy's production of snuff movies, recalling the (non-fatal) sexualised performances of Dorothy and Ben in *Blue Velvet*. Similarly to Dorothy, Alice is indicated as a source of visual pleasure, most prominently in her first appearance at the car yard where Pete works. More significant, however, is the scene in which she is forced to strip for Mr Eddy at gunpoint, bringing together the themes of sex, violence and voyeurism, again strongly reminiscent of *Blue Velvet*. This combination is later reprised following the reappearance of Fred Madison, who is then goaded and questioned by the Mystery Man, who is brandishing a video camera. While this is a reference to the video tapes originally delivered to the Madison house, it is more

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[32] The component parts of the compound names of the band members (e.g. Marilyn Manson, combining Marilyn Monroe and Charles Manson) are highly gendered, in keeping with the stereotypes from which they are drawn; one an invariably female object of sexual desire, the other an invariably male serial killer.

directly a reconfiguring of relationships within the scopic field; the perpetrator, the voyeur, becomes the watched victim.

Unlike *Twin Peaks: Fire Walk With Me*, which distributed the abject and the uncanny more evenly, *Lost Highway* represents a shift away from the overt abject and towards the predominance of the uncanny for the first time. This can be discerned from the critical reaction to the film, marked more by what Freud terms 'intellectual uncertainty' than the unambiguous, near physical disquiet engendered by *Eraserhead* or, to a slightly less pronounced degree, revulsion at the sexual violence of *Blue Velvet*. Where the abject in *Lost Highway* can be discerned in the context of the visual contamination of the *corps propre* through violence or sexual violation, these instances occur in a mediated way that complicates their effect, at times conveyed non-diegetically, by allusion or disrupted visually, through the mechanism of the grainy video camera used to make the uncanny recordings of the Madison home and later wielded by the Mystery Man in capturing the execution of Eddy / Laurent, for example.

The impossibility of determining the precise nature of the relationship between Fred and Pete, or the nature of the transition between the two of them, preserves the effect of the uncanny from being denatured by supernatural explanation and additionally facilitates the integrated but complex narrative. The recondite nature of the narrative is another clear indicator of a continuation of the transition towards the predominance of the uncanny. *Eraserhead*, *Blue Velvet* and *Twin Peaks: Fire Walk with Me* all conclude in the definite, destructive yet liberating resolution indicative of the action of the abject. Henry snips open the baby's carapace, preventing its further apprehension of his body by causing it to disintegrate; the baby disintegrates, Frank is killed, Laura is murdered. In *Lost Highway*, it is impossible to determine what has happened to Fred, other than to conclude that the allusions to occurrences at the beginning of the film (such as the message that 'Dick Laurent is dead') preclude us from inferring the same definite resolution. The film's culmination is more characteristic of the uncanny than the abject. As with the final scene of *Mulholland Drive* in which Diane apparently commits suicide, *Lost Highway* connotes the terrible

culmination of the doubling process in the destruction of the self through Fred's convulsions.

Chapter 7: Mulholland Drive

'An unfamiliar city is a fine thing. That's the time
when you can suppose that all of the people you meet
are nice. It's dream time.'
Journey to the End of the Night
(Céline 2006, p.329)

Reception

Originally intended as a television series, the troubled production history of *Mulholland Drive* recalls the abrupt end to Lynch's best-known work in television, *Twin Peaks*. ABC, the network that hosted (and cancelled) both *Twin Peaks* and Lynch's lesser known series *On The Air*, were enthused at the pitch but repeatedly questioned Lynch's judgement from then on. The network baulked in particular at the request to run the pilot in a two and a half hour slot, wanting it cut to fewer than forty-five minutes instead. Despite Lynch making compromises, including cutting slightly less than half the intended running time, ABC decided to drop the project (Hughes 2001, p.239). With the support of producer Alain Sarde, with whom he had worked with previously on *The Straight Story*, Lynch was able to 'reshoot and edit the footage into a feature film' (McGowan 2007, p.194).

Critics preoccupied themselves debating the significance of the fact that *Mulholland Drive* was written and produced for one medium and subsequently transplanted to another (thereby also inviting comparisons with *Twin Peaks: Fire Walk with Me*); shots created with domestic television sets in mind would be seen on cinema screens, and a narrative that might have been allowed to unfold over several years had to be communicated within a few hours. Surprisingly, critical attitudes in this context are largely consistent; instead of positing the finished film as a natural development of the rejected television project, the perception was of a slightly inconsistent, hybrid production. Specifically, consideration was given to the possibility that this transition between media had adversely affected the form and style of the

film, materially or simply by drawing attention to the 'composite' nature of the production. Even phrasing varied little: '[it] may be the most audacious salvage job in recent Hollywood history' (Fuller 2001, p.12) or 'a cinematic salvage act, combining parts of a failed 1999 ABC pilot with footage shot last year.' (Jensen & S. Brown 2001). Rodley mentions the tendency and cautions against it: 'Unpicking the film ... could lead to its being viewed as a salvage operation, and this is far from the truth.' (2005, p.266)

As with *Lost Highway*, the narrative again provided a focus for critical attention and there was similarly little agreement on issues of content, both in discussing cinematic merit and dominant themes. Ironically, given the emphasis on *Mulholland Drive*'s 'TV beginnings', many critics perceived a specifically cinematic allegory, depicting Los Angeles as a city of superficial but destructive forces: 'a scathing attack on the shallowness and decadence of Hollywood' (Clarke 2002, p.62). Clearly, this argument draws support from not only the title, but also references to *Sunset Boulevard* (Billy Wilder, 1950) and the nefarious occurrences that force Adam Kesher to cast Camilla Rhodes in his film. An alternative and frequently espoused view proposed that the theme of obsessive love was predominant, as suggested by this précis: 'Together [Rita] and Betty will reconsummate an idealized love affair as they stage (like a play within a play) the mystery story of Rita's lost identity.' (Sherwin 2005, p.114). Disagreement over the relative import of themes ultimately serves to indicate that they are intrinsically linked, internecine influences. I will demonstrate, in the context of the double, the inseparability and similarity of the two themes as evidential of the dynamic between narcissism and thanatophobia.

Broadly, specific developments in critical attitudes can be attributed to two factors. Firstly, the intervening time saw the release of *The Straight Story*, an atypical film without many of Lynch's signature themes. Compared with *Lost Highway*, it was accessible to a wider audience and was a much greater commercial success. Secondly, *Lost Highway* and *Mulholland Drive* are comparable enough in terms of obscurity and narrative complexity to engender a similar pattern of acclaim or disparagement, based on attitudes and qualities shared between the films. Accordingly, many reviews drew heavily from perceptions of *Lost Highway*, with themes and even review titles

reconstituted (something encouraged by the semantic link between 'highway' and 'road' and the non linear narratives, resulting in multiple variations on the phrase 'road to nowhere')[33]. Yet while critical attitudes tend to be less equivocal, negative attitudes towards the more obscure aspects of Lynch's work had hardened conspicuously. One critic (writing some time after the cinematic release) was moved to write: 'a load of moronic garbage… this bizzaro atrocity… nothing in this interminable (two and a half hours of agony) swill makes one lick of sense… I can think of no sane reason why any fool would finance this lurid gibberish… loathsome, incomprehensible and dismayingly amateurish.' (Reed 2003). These sentiments, although expressed in an unusually emphatic way, are not entirely atypical of negative attitudes.

The sustained emphasis in the article on the incomprehensible reinforces the point, made elsewhere in this thesis, that demands of total coherence may be frustrated by those textual spaces that accommodate mechanisms of uncanniness. If sustained, these demands may result in an extreme reading, one predisposed by natural resistance to the psychological threats explicitly and implicitly present. Therefore, attempts to produce a classical *fabula* from the text are likely to become exercises in subjectivity and speculation, although the implication that *Mulholland Drive* resists comprehension in such a complete way as Reed suggests is spurious and easily disproved, as I will detail with relation to temporal cues.

An associated criticism alleged a dependence upon gratuitous 'weirdness': 'The film takes limitless pride in its own clichés… and it marries them in an extremely boring way to David Lynch's stock troop of weirdos… no amount of knowing nods towards the weirdness of American daytime soaps can lift *Mulholland Drive* from the mire of its own rather snobby pretentiousness.' (O'Hagan 2002, p.19). Such positions drew from the knowledge that similar accusations had been levelled against *Lost Highway*, while examples from *Twin Peaks: Fire Walk With Me* were employed in illustration. In essence, this attitude differs little from those of critics who charge incomprehensibility; the elusive and inexpressible is dismissed, not for its resistance to

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[33] e.g. Sweet 1997 and O'Hagan 2002, or Quinn 2002

easy understanding, but rather because its pointlessness, they contend, is all too easily recognised.

Polarisation notwithstanding, the majority of critics accepted the apparent irrationality of the film. Their attitudes ranged from merely forbearing to enthusiastic, with most falling in between: 'one should never underestimate this director's perversity, or his mischievous love of bamboozlement… like *Lost Highway* … *Mulholland Drive* is a tease, a trip, a horrible dream, or a combination of all three – whatever it is, you will spend a good deal of time just trying to hold its pieces together in your head.' (Quinn 2002, p.10)'. These critics drew upon the same aspects that been considered negatively in more disparaging readings; comparisons with earlier films yielded observations not of stagnancy and affectation but of innovation and progress. Through the identification and qualification of intertextual traits, the uneasiness generated by *Mulholland Drive* was contextualised as a development and vindication of the perceived embryonic, malformed essence of *Lost Highway*: 'the very things that failed him in the bad-boy rockabilly debacle … the atmosphere of free floating menace, pointless transmigration of souls, provocatively dropped plot stitches … are here brilliantly rehabilitated.' (Hoberman 2001, p.113)

Methodology and 'Anti-Intellectualism'

In examining critical reactions to *Lost Highway*, I proposed that restrictive paradigms routinely obviate consideration of uncanniness and abjection, stifling meaningful debate. Through repetition, this can be observed in surveying the reception of *Mulholland Drive*. It is only due to wider recognition of the polarisation in criticism that the causes behind it have been properly considered. This has led to useful developments in the discussion of Lynch's work, resulting from the observation that certain approaches have been unproductive. This is not, in fact, a sudden occurrence. Comparing the notion of the Möbius strip and the narrative structure of *Lost Highway*, Bernd Herzogenrath (1999) acknowledged a developing methodology: 'I am perfectly aware of the fact that any attempt to 'explain' [the film] ultimately results

in a 'smoothening' of its complex structure into a linear narrative' (Herzogenrath 1999).

This alludes to the perception that analysis is potentially deleterious or counterproductive and that it must be justified to avoid oversimplification (see, for example, my analysis of the various models, such as the Möbius Strip, proposed for the narrative form of *Lost Highway*, as an example of an approach that risks such oversimplification by prescribing particular structures). An approach specifically designed to avoid denaturing complexities, paradoxes and deliberate ambiguities is necessary, it is suggested, where a general approach may be disadvantageous. The heart of the issue, one that critics began to discuss explicitly with the release of *Mulholland Drive*, is the validity and necessity of this specific methodology. What about Lynch's work, if anything, encourages or discourages the employment of particular critical approaches? In the terms in which I have referred to this issue previously: confronted with the indefinite or the contradictory, the uncertainty that facilitates the generation of uncanniness (partly by encouraging what Bresnick has termed 'prosopoetic compulsion' (1996, p.114)) should one dismiss it as 'incomprehensible' or 'meaningless'? Alternatively, should one – assuming it is desirable and possible – attempt to clarify, attempt to educe certainty from the ambiguous?

In an interesting overview of the debate and with reference to *Mulholland Drive* specifically, David Andrews describes a division between 'anti-interpretive' critics and those 'with a yen for exegesis'. He adds: 'I am of the latter camp, and reject the claims of the former'. (Bridge, p. 184). While not unique in refusing to discuss his work, Lynch consistently cultivates the perception of himself and his films as inscrutable: 'I don't like talking about things too much because, unless you're a poet, when you talk about it, a big thing becomes smaller... some things in life are not that understandable, but when things in films are that way, people become worried.' (Rodley 2005, p.227) This, Andrews asserts, encourages anti-intellectualism and a deferential resistance to 'violating the aesthetic mysteries inherent in the films' (p. 183).

Despite commencing with an illusorily discrete division between anti-intellectualism and interpretative carte-blanche, leading to the commonly made but ultimately unproductive statement (in isolation) that 'The Betty-Rita narrative is Diane's dream' (p. 186), Andrews recognises that the film, while continually implying narrative coherence: 'rejects all totalizing, monolithic interpretations' (p. 188). Drawing the discussion more towards the textual level, he argues that 'Lynch may not personally enjoy translating his compositional ideas, which are primarily visual and sonic, into verbal and intellectual equivalents, but there is no reason why the critic should resist doing so.' (p. 190). This is a reasonable point. Yet translation into verbal and intellectual equivalents does not demand reduction through the simplification of complex narratives into convenient but insupportable linear summaries, boldly pronounced solutions to minor diegetic ambiguities, or unconstructive speculation. While Andrews does not advocate any of these, his position does not recommend or allow for the necessity of their exclusion. There is a mass of fanciful and unproductive text on Lynch's work purporting to solve *Lost Highway* or, in the case of *Mulholland Drive*, asserting that 'the monster' behind Winkies is Diane, is Camilla, or any number of other permutations – without explanation or substantiation (for example, (Kusich 2006), which repeatedly distinguishes 'reality' and 'fantasy' in terms of the explicability of the segment.) A good instance of a reading that, while speculating, acknowledges the paradoxes of the film and their resistance to convenient interpretation is Allen Ruch's analysis, which states:

> While repeated viewing and careful analysis reveal a surprising amount of structure and cohesiveness to Mulholland Drive, parts of it remain paradoxical, and I'm content to let it remain so. As another many-layered and famously elusive work once concluded, "The rest is silence." (Ruch 2003)

It is both possible and necessary to maintain the integrity of a text and theoretical approach without either subtly adapting the text for the convenience of

the theory, or compromising the integrity and utility of the theory in deference to the text. Even considering the valid qualifications that Andrews supplies, the initial and predominant presentation of the problem in the article relies on a different emphasis to the one I have employed in considering the more recondite of Lynch's films such as *Lost Highway*, drawing on narrative theory, influenced by and accepting the definite terms of Russian Formalism. While returning to this approach might seem an odd choice in this context, given that one side of the issue positions such analysis as detrimental, the qualification provides, by obviating the objections of both sides, the means of escaping from the misleading and restrictive dichotomy (between the acceptance of ambiguity and the seeking of rationalisation) that presents a fundamental critical obstacle.

In analysing *Mulholland Drive,* as with other similarly *unheimlich* films, a reliable methodology is necessary to locate the uncanny constructs from within the unsettling effects and uncertainty they generate. Observations resulting from the examination of the *sjužet* are easily verified and, excepting a mistake on the part of the analyst, indisputable (although the conclusions drawn are certainly disputable). Consequently, the observation that aspects of the *fabula* are resistant to interpretation, as necessary *sjužet* information is lacking, can be made objectively. Those who concentrate on the freedom that Lynch's films provide for subjective experimentation and speculation are separated from the implication that their enquiries are necessarily detrimental or self-defeating, conditioned by the observation that absent *sjužet* material provides this space for inference and suggestion. In simpler terms, the *fabula* may be perceived in innumerable ways, but not at the expense of ignoring or conflicting with *sjužet* information. The important aspect of this narrative ambiguity is the facilitation of the uncanny, which is often generated by the comprehensible but inexplicable, which characterises much of *Mulholland Drive*; we are encouraged to interpret it – as suggested by Lynch's 'clues' mentioned previously – but also hindered in this interpretation by paradoxes or simply a lack of consistent information from which to draw conclusions.

From this perspective, Andrews' distinction requires the qualification he begins to give it subsequently; initially, it ascribes certainty to a division that cannot be justified through observation, implying that the uncertain result of the process of *fabula* construction derived from an unspecific *sjužet* can be returned to the textual level – whereas it is clear, as he later observes, that the product is extra-textual, and that 'narrative readings cannot account for the full range of the film's power and detail' (2003, p.188). The implication is not that narrative readings are invalid, but that their usefulness is finite; this is consistent with the notion that neither *sjužet* nor *fabula* analyses are particularly revealing in isolation, without considering their interrelation, and can be equated with the interpretive (*sjužet*) versus speculative (*fabula*) division with which Andrews opens his argument. The value of an approach that considers narrative structure appropriately is not that it produces, of itself, valuable insights. Rather, it facilitates and substantiates such insights by avoiding, not through ambiguousness but through objective observations, the undesirable extremes of a reductive dissection based on a sterile examination of the text – or a wildly speculative and fanciful interpretation based primarily on conjecture.

In support of this point, I will now consider the issue of what have been termed, rather vaguely, 'dreamlike' and 'real' sections of the narrative. During this discussion, I will compare different perceptions of the narrative structure and, from these, consolidate the argument that an approach based on formalist narrative theory provides the most satisfactory and productive means of escape from the problem highlighted by Andrews. In doing so, I will further explore the function of the narrative structure in preserving ambiguity and facilitating the generation of uncanniness, also examining the possibility that, unintentionally, the unjustifiably definite and speculative readings common in much of the literature actually serves to reinforce the importance of the narrative in producing a sense of uncanniness.

Critical Attitudes to Narrative

The narrative of *Mulholland Drive* has proved to be a source of fascination for critics, irrespective of the contention that such approaches have limited value. More

than *Lost Highway*, narrative complexity and persuasive yet elusive *sjužet* cues encourage the spectator to ask: 'Is there a right solution, which only David Lynch knows?' (Lopate 2001, p.49). From a narratological perspective, the origin of this question can be observed within a consensus in the body of criticism. There is agreement, on a rather general *sjužet* level, that the narrative is transformed in the latter part of the film (marked by a dishevelled looking Diane waking up to a knock at the door): 'a bifurcated, through-the-looking-glass narrative in which the second half turns the meaning of the first upside down while putting up its own impediments to our search for the truth.' (Taubin 2001, p.51). As this point in the narrative announces the 'introduction' of Diane and Camilla in place of Betty and Rita, the observation of an uncanny transition is no more difficult than in the case of *Lost Highway*. Yet critics have implied that an understanding of the narrative structure offers some elucidation of the enigma created by shifting identities and impossible events; consistently, however, their conclusions are rarely any more significant than being indicative of the oversimplified dream/reality binary that pervades the majority of writing: 'Part B provides the backstory (the facts and circumstances supporting the dream that comprises Part A in its entirety) for Part A.' (Tang 2001). The uncanniness of these sequences would be denatured if they were as readily explicable as these readings suggest.

Hayles and Gessler[34] have produced the broadest analysis of the narrative structure to date. According to their breakdown, the narrative describes a dream that gradually destabilises and disintegrates with the intrusion of flickers of reality; the majority of the narrative is 'encased entirely within Diane's dream' (Hayles & Gessler 2004, p.13). In support, they isolate a scene, 'the engagement party', that appears to contextualise aspects of and occurrences surrounding Rita and Betty's relationship: 'the dream recycles nearly all the characters that appear in the party but assigns them different roles … the same actors play both their dream characters and real-life

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[34] Hayles and Gessler also supply 'answers' for the ten questions supplied (ostensibly by David Lynch) to newspapers and in the packaging of the DVD version of the film, 'as evidence for the cogency of our reading'.

counterparts.' (Hayles & Gessler 2004, p.14). While there is recognition that perceiving the narrative in purely bipartite terms is simplistic (the article includes a detailed temporal/ontological diagram detailing these 'dream', 'real time' and 'flashback' segments), the consideration of the structure persists with the unconstructive dream/reality binary.

Illustrating the restrictive nature of this duality, Phillip Lopate suggests four possibilities for the way the narrative is configured. To two oneiric interpretations he adds the theory, quickly dismissed, that Diane and Betty exist in parallel universes: 'I can never understand what this increasingly employed explanation means, and regard it as the last refuge of sci-fi scoundrels.' (Lopate 2001, p.45). More interestingly, he adds a fourth possibility, that some scenes represent Diane's masturbatory fantasies; this theory is at least equally defensible as oneiric theories. Significantly, it underlines the flaws in oneiric readings by offering a valid alternative to interpretations of scenes that imply subjectivity.

In proceeding to consider the narrative on a structural level, I will consider how and why *Mulholland Drive* engenders binary and oneiric analyses, and, in doing so, describe a more specific explanation of the nature of doubling in the film. Furthermore, by examining doubling in the context in which it is frequently apparent, i.e. narratologically, I will trace the influence of processes of doubling from a narrative level to the production of uncertainty and *Unheimlichkeit*, and the representation of the abject. Although this may seem to be a relatively disparate group of considerations (that is, specifically in the case of *Mulholland Drive*), the connections between the narrative, the unsettling effects of the *unheimlich* and the terrible attraction of the abject, while difficult to qualify or elucidate, are more easily observed (or experienced):

> like a nightmare, the film's effect is twofold. It creates an extreme sense of unease, of dread even, which provokes, in turn, an investigative impulse – as if by using one's analytic skills to piece together its

> puzzling narrative, one could exert control over the
> anxiety the film generates. (Taubin 2001, p.52)

Discarding oneiric readings, and leaving, for the moment, the issue of whether the film can be validly divided into two parts, we are left with the observation of 'supporting' similarities between parts of the film explicitly described as dissimilar – a relationship described inadequately by the designation 'Part A' and 'Part B' or by the designation 'dream' and 'reality'. The concept behind these terms (in this case, it does not matter how this relationship is described) is doubling; in this context, the recognition that one part of the narrative has a related 'other', distinct from but dependent upon and possessing an inalienable affinity to the originating part. The inaccuracy of terms that imply binary structures, or separation between two or more parts of the film, can be demonstrated through an analysis of the way that temporal information is indicated on a *sjužet* level.

Return to the Fugue

In discussing *Lost Highway* I discussed the idea of the fugue, in a musical sense, as a metaphor for narrative form; a process of introducing, modifying and repeating distinctive elements to produce a gradual, flowing uncanniness by the continual orientation and disorientation of the spectator. While, in the earlier film, these distinctive elements (for example, the saxophone music which connotes Fred's occupation) are ambiguous in a temporal sense (in that they do not denote a definite 'before' and 'after'), in *Mulholland Drive*, temporal *sjužet* cues are presented unequivocally in some scenes. Acuity is required on the part of the spectator, as the presentation of cues means that their significance is not easily perceptible. In this section, I will describe these temporal cues and their function in creating uncanniness and explain their contribution to a system of doubling. The temporal information in question is of greatest significance towards the end of the film (after one hour and fifty seconds approximately). After the cowboy has 'woken' Diane and the woman Rita and

Betty spoke to, from number seventeen[35] comes to collect her possessions, various aspects of mise-en-scene indicate chronological order, potentially aiding *fabula* construction. Three items – Diane's robe, the coffee cup she is drinking from, and an ashtray in the shape of a piano, are of particular significance.

In sequential terms, the first two noteworthy events are as follows. When she answers the door to De Rosa, Diane is wearing a white robe (dressing gown). De Rosa then picks up various items that she had previously left in the apartment; before leaving, she sees the piano ashtray and takes it with her. Both the robe and the ashtray take on greater subsequent importance. Although Diane can be seen wearing the same robe a number of times following the departure of De Rosa, she is dressed differently on a number of occasions. We are impelled to accept these as interposed scenes because of the disruption to continuity caused and a lack of diegetic explication. Similarly, the piano ashtray, which we have already witnessed being removed from the apartment, can be seen on the coffee table while Camilla breaks off her relationship with Diane.

Given the example of the ashtray in particular, the interposed scenes can be identified as flashbacks (confirmation that the scenes in which Diane is out of the robe comes, in contrast to the ashtray, after its initial appearance). This is notable for two main reasons. Firstly, they are the only scenes that can be justifiably described as flashbacks. The jitterbug contest in the opening sequence has stylistic elements that could be considered to suggest that the depicted events had occurred in the past, specifically the luminous, semi-transparent images potentially connoting reminiscence, but as this scene appears before the one in which Betty arrives in Los Angeles, positioning it as a flashback would be speculative. In any case, it would still not be a flashback in the same sense as the scenes being considered here. Secondly, the interposed scenes are tightly integrated, which would appear to contradict the supposition that their primary functions are as temporal cues – their integration into

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[35] A shot of a board showing the list of residents identifies the occupant of number seventeen as 'L. J. De Rosa'.

the scenes that precede and follow them detracts attention from their distinctness and temporal dissimilarities.

This is best illustrated by deconstructing the scenes themselves and, more importantly, the transitions between them. After De Rosa leaves, Diane steps across to her kitchen sink. Her breathing deepens and, as if rehearsing a scene, she turns to 'see' Camilla smiling at her. Diane is facing to her left, but after a jump cut the camera moves to the other side and we see her standing in Camilla's place. This functions as preparation for similar techniques used over the course of these scenes. Diane returns to the sink and begins making coffee. A cut to a wide-angle shot, giving the spectator a view of the gloomy kitchen, is immediately followed by a close up of the coffee machine, which is beginning to filter the coffee through. The camera tracks away from the machine and we see Diane, dressed in her chewing-gum white robe, pour the coffee into a cup, turn, and walk towards a green sofa; the camera tracks behind her, at waist height, allowing the spectator to see very little of the surrounding room. As she reaches the sofa, the camera ceases following her and continues forward, rising over the back of the sofa before angling down to reveal Camilla. Diane bounds onto the sofa and places a half-full glass onto the coffee table, next to a piano shaped ashtray. The camera lingers on the ashtray for long enough to draw attention to it, and to suggest that something significant is being communicated in an otherwise unremarkable shot.

This is the least perceptible transition of the three examples, largely because it is characterised by absence, i.e. notable for lacking a cut where one might be expected. The remaining examples do involve cuts, but the openness of each cut is strongly mitigated. After Camilla breaks off the relationship, Diane angrily pushes her out. The camera pans across from the door, towards the kitchen, and settles on Diane's face. She is dressed in the denim shorts she was wearing when Camilla was made to leave, but an indeterminate amount of time must have elapsed, as we do not see Diane move towards the sofa. The phone rings, and the camera tilts down to reveal the now familiar red lampshade standing next to it. The answering machine activates. The camera angle changes to allow us to see Diane emerging from behind a

corner, with the red lampshade in shot; she picks up the receiver and speaks to Camilla, but she is not dressed in the same clothing she was wearing when Camilla left.

The final example is the most apparent and the most constructed in stylistic terms. Leading up to Camilla and Adam's announcement at the party, Diane becomes distraught. A sound bridge (breaking crockery) masks a cut to the location where Diane arranges for Camilla to be killed. Although the camera angle changes, appearing to alter the direction in which Diane is looking, her reaction to the sound creates a false continuity heightened by an uninterrupted movement: Diane begins to turn her head before the cut and finishes the motion after it.

Given the example of the sound bridge, does this function to clarify – as proponents of separateness, or the 'Part A / Part B' thesis, would assert – the temporal and spatial changes between the two scenes, or to complicate them? The apparent continuity of these scenes appears to work against their ostensible function in rationalising a binary structure. The initial tracking shot, which is continuous from the pouring of the coffee to the disclosure of Camilla lying naked on the sofa, disguises the temporal information that the ashtray later provides. The ringing of the phone and the subsequent activation of the answering machine obfuscates what, from Diane's change in position and clothing, we might assume to be a significant ellipsis (although the call from Camilla is later demonstrated to have occurred in the past). The stylistic integration of these scenes demonstrates the difference between a binary structure and one affected by doubling; both imply more than one element, but only in the case of doubling is there an implication of continuity, i.e. of a sustained and developed connection between separate parts of the structure, of a particular relationship.

As with the pattern of familiarisation and defamiliarisation discernible in *Lost Highway*, the processes by which uncanniness is generated here are similar yet more extreme, despite the apparent reduction in the ambiguity of some temporal cues. The desire to construct a *heimlich*, ordered *fabula* in both films, to make sense of them, is disrupted by an absence of clear and definite information. In *Mulholland Drive*, however, the ambiguity implicit in the uncanniness of the earlier film is peppered with a few unequivocal cues (most notably the ones noted above). There are too few to

allow the construction of a consistent, unified *fabula* but enough to make it appear irresistibly possible at first. The result is to heighten the degree to which the spectator is oriented by the familiarity of the unequivocal cues and then disoriented by the textual absences, strengthening the potential of the uncanny.

Split Identities and Uncanniness

At the start of this chapter, I indicated the difficulty of synthesising the two most significant scenes of the opening sequence, namely the jitterbug contest and the car accident. In one, the mise-en-scene connotes the fifties, while in the other this is excluded; one is characterised by soft, colourful light, the other by darkness and metal. Additional contrasts are formed by the music, frantic in one and subdued, even sorrowful, in the other. Reconciling the two scenes is further complicated by the perplexing interposition of the bed and the camera's descent towards a pillow. In their subsequent 'contextualisation' (although there is no suggestion that this doubling has any kind of rationalising effect) the spectator is presented with an unstable confluence of familiar and unfamiliar elements; that which was previously confusing is qualified with additional *sjužet* material that nevertheless fails to produce something incontrovertibly logical or even rationally interpretable.

A further example of the doubling of narrative elements is provided by the scene variously referred to as the 'dinner party' or 'engagement party'. This scene provides, subtly, a great deal of material that can be employed in *fabula* construction, placing a different emphasis on formerly obscure or confusing elements and situating them within temporal, spatial and causal contexts. The scene opens with a restaging of Rita's aborted journey from the opening sequence, with Diane taking Rita's place in the back of the limousine, announcing and highlighting the doubling. Portentously, the dialogue is the same: 'What are you doing? We don't stop here.' Later, she explains how she came to Los Angeles. She won 'this jitterbug contest'. Her Aunt died and left her some money. Diane met Camilla on the set of 'the Sylvia North Story', directed by Brooker, not Kesher.

The spectator is likely to regard this as useful information that can be put towards the construction of the *fabula*. Diane's brief history allows us to associate her with Betty more certainly than relying on the visual association of the two, although by this point several other elements – the blue key, the apartment in Sierra Bonita, the red lampshade – have implied connections between their otherwise dissimilar existences. When Diane describes a brief history of her life in Los Angeles since moving from Canada, the account is naturally chronological, and no requirement to reorganize it to fit the *fabula* is immediately apparent. The jitterbug contest, shown in the opening sequence, precedes Betty's arrival at the airport and her audition for Brooker, just as Diane describes. It mirrors material already imparted on a *sjužet* level that has not been as readily employable in the construction of the *fabula*.

The reappearance of characters we have previously seen in different guises consolidates the effect created by repeated dialogue and narrative doubling. It also invites associations with Lynch favourite *The Wizard of Oz* (Victor Fleming, 1939). As with Dorothy's return from Oz to find herself awake at home in Kansas, surrounded by the people she met during her journey, Diane scans the room and sees the people that Betty knew in different guises. Coco, the landlady, is introduced as Adam Kesher's mother. The espresso regurgitating 'Luigi Castigliane' glares at Diane from behind an array of wine glasses. The Cowboy passes across the room, on his way outside.

These repetitions divert attention from the more consequential details being imparted in the dialogue, which provide information that relates to, but is not dependent upon, previously communicated *sjužet* elements. Diane's statement that her aunt Ruth is dead gives us an alternative way of explaining her absence, which Betty had attributed to her working on a film production in Canada. More significantly, Diane's statement that her aunt left her money provides a causal connection to the money Rita finds after her accident and the money Diane – immediately after this scene – pays to the hit man in Winkies. Most notably, the descent into the pillow that follows the jitterbug contest is reiterated (we see the same pillow, the same sheets again) during the second appearance, of three in total, of The Cowboy, who wakes Diane up. This suggests a possible beginning and end for Diane's fantasy, in a

comparable manner to the descent into and emergence from the ear in *Blue Velvet* (see chapter 4).

The structure is similar, at least in its fugue like complexity, to *Lost Highway*. This is partly due to the influence that the central doublings in both films exert over the narrative. Yet in comparing the association between Fred and Pete with Betty and Diane, an important difference is apparent; whereas the earlier film does not provide enough dependable *sjužet* cues from which the spectator may justify the assertion that Fred and Pete are not separate entities with independent existences (although they are clearly doubled), here definite indicators are present that suggest that Betty and Diane are interlinked, allowing causal connections can be inferred. Unlike Pete Dayton, whose existence is not contained entirely within the experience of Fred Madison, reading Betty as a manifestation of Diane's desire is less problematic as fewer stubborn diegetic obstacles – the ones that often prompt the designation 'dreamlike' less as an observation but because of a lack of alternatives – remain as a result. Difficulties persist, however: during Adam Kesher's meeting with the Castiglianes, he is shown a photograph of the woman that the brothers are demanding he cast in the film. The photograph, marked 'Camilla Rhodes', is not a photo of Camilla-Rita, but of the blonde 'Camilla' (Melissa George) who Diane sees kissing Camilla-Rita at the party. A similar photograph, marked with the same name but this time depicting Camilla-Rita, is seen when Diane passes to the hit man in Winkies. Both photographs clearly identify different women, creating a conflict that is impossible to resolve on a *fabula* level unless one is dismissed as an oneiric irrationality.

The reappearance of characters in a different context in particular has encouraged the dream / reality binary that has drawn attention away from the more complex effects of doubling in the film. Despite this causal/spatial/temporal contextualisation, the spectator is denied the convenience of being able to situate or rationalise those elements most affected by doubling. While doubling creates an instantly recognisable correlation, distortion and displacement lead to the formation of imperfect and unreliable relationships between two or more associated elements. As an example, the presence of the espresso drinking Castigliane brother at the party

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naturally formulates an association with his earlier appearance in the meeting with Adam Kesher. Yet despite earlier implications, continuity of identity cannot be assumed, especially in juxtaposition with the doubling of Coco Lenoix and Mrs. Kesher.

This approach, by giving greater consideration to *sjužet* and *fabula*, exposes the invalidity of treating the narrative in a manner that conflates the subjective with the textual, and simultaneously regards objective material (e.g. those aspects that may reasonably be considered unequivocal) as dismissible. While explaining the relationship between Betty and Diane in dreamlike terms may seem reasonable, this does not provide justification for dismissing other characters and events simply because they seem to be more pertinent to one particular part of the narrative, or cannot be absorbed conveniently into this framework. Only a tangential, tenuous relevance to Diane's diegetic space is apparent in scenes such as the recollection of the fateful dream in Winkies or, particularly, Kesher's confrontation with his wife. An oneiric interpretation serves little purpose other than to reconfirm the dreamlike nature of many scenes – too numerous to be exceptional – and their resistance to simple exposition.

To develop the position further, it is necessary to identify the specific form the irrationality takes, by progressing from a broad narrative consideration to specifics and thereby eliminating the impediments created by 'oneiric vagueness'. In the example given above, the photograph can be seen in two ways. Imprecisely and unproductively, it is a dreamlike confusion we might consider a product of Diane's troubled state. In specific, functional terms, it splits an identity already surrounded and affected by doubling, introducing the name 'Camilla Rhodes' in the context of an ongoing *fabula* void – the uncertainty about Rita's real name. It therefore contributes to the generation of uncanniness by complicating the doubling process and further disrupting the rationality of *fabula* construction. The photograph encapsulates the uncanny potential of this process, epitomising the doubling of the protagonists or lesser but still significant characters like Coco/Mrs Kesher.

While splitting and doubling of selves is a critical aspect of the continual and ever-present uncanniness, it has a counterpart – as I have touched on previously – in

terms of the intertextual echoes of *Lost Highway* evident in *Mulholland Drive*. In *Mulholland Drive*, the spectator is presented with two unmistakeable doublings, in the form of split identities portrayed by single actors: firstly, Betty Elms and Diane Selwyn (Naomi Watts) and secondly, Rita and Camilla Rhodes (Laura Elena Harring). The blonde / brunette dyad evokes the characters of Renée Madison and Alice Wakefield in *Lost Highway*, but taken as individual doublings, little exists to separate Betty from Diane or Rita from Camilla on a purely visual level. The uncanny associations are more easily made than in *Lost Highway*, where, although the same actress portrays both Renée Madison and Alice Wakefield, the doubles differ substantially in their appearances. They are separately identifiable, for example, by hair colour. Although Betty is distinguishable from Diane, and Rita from Camilla, these differentiations are not made primarily by variations of physical appearance. Similarly, the intense, dysfunctional and highly sexualised context recalls the earlier film. In *Mulholland Drive* and *Lost Highway*, two different kinds of sexual relationship are described; one awkward, claustrophobic and hopeless, the other new, obsessive, equally flawed and equally, if less imminently, doomed. Additionally, parallels can be observed between the nature of the narrative doubling in each film; the reappearance of the blue key or the restaging of the limousine trip along Mulholland Drive can be equated with the reiterated saxophone music played by Fred and heard by Pete (see chapter 6).

More widely, a wealth of intertextuality could potentially be discerned by virtue of the Los Angeles setting; yet ironically, an intertextual approach encourages foremost consideration of a film set not in Los Angeles, but in San Francisco. *Vertigo* portrays the same key preoccupations with doubling, looking, performance and obsessive love. The most evident parallel is doubling; like Scottie, Betty falls in love with a woman whose identity is ambiguous and split, and whom she subsequently causes to change her appearance. An important difference, however, is that Betty remakes Rita in her own appearance (and, from an intertextual perspective, Madeleine). The incipient double process proceeds along a similar trajectory in both films, towards obsession and inevitable destruction. There are further similarities between *Mulholland Drive* and *Vertigo* which highlight the emergence of the abject

from its concealment within the uncanny, juxtaposing the act of looking with the fear of death:

> The famous shot of John's vertigo is the most crucial moment in the opening sequence… What happens to a person in this instant? It is widely acknowledged that one is subject to an immense fear of falling, while at the same time being tempted by the call of depth… the temptation to let go and surrender to the fall becomes almost indistinguishable from the fear of death. (Huntjens, p. 2)

In the next section, I will draw on the example of *Vertigo* to show the importance of the visual aspect of uncanniness in *Mulholland Drive*, considering the similarity between the two films in terms of the location of the uncanny within the scopic field and particularly in the vital role of the gaze in the enactment of the struggle of self, ultimately leading to destruction, inherent in the doubling process. The gaze has powerful potential as a catalyst for the uncanny, especially when associated with the double:

> in the mirror, one can see one's eyes, but not the gaze which is the part that is lost. But imagine that one could see one's mirror image close its eyes; that would make the object as gaze appear in the mirror. This is what happens with the double, and the anxiety that the double produces is the surest sign of the appearance of the object... What one loses with anxiety is precisely the loss - the loss that made it possible to deal with a coherent reality. "Anxiety is the lack of the support of the lack," says Lacan; the lack lacks, and this brings about the uncanny. (Dolar 1991, p.15)

The Gaze and the Visuality of the Uncanny

Given the importance of the visual aspect of the double (see chapter 2), the prominence of double motifs in both films suggests the value of evaluating scopic themes, and offers the potential to provide a specific and demonstrable source of uncanniness (of course, the importance of the visual in a context of uncanniness is also illustrated by Hoffman's Der Sandmann). In analysing *Vertigo*, Joyce Huntjens discusses the significance of the 'subjective perspective' (Huntjens 2003, p.2) of Scottie, arguing that this controlling visual aspect generates much of the uncanny potential of the film. The presentation of Madeleine as 'passive and an object of the male gaze' (Huntjens 2003, p.5) and the proliferation of shots from Scottie's point of view are emphasised; as Madeleine sits contemplating a portrait of Carlotta, the camera conveys Scottie's perception of the scene as it moves from Madeleine's bouquet to the one held by figure in the painting, simultaneously connoting a connection between the two objects of his gaze.

In *Vertigo*, the organisation of the scopic field is relatively straightforward; Scottie is the subject of the gaze and Madeleine the object (Huntjens 2003, p.7). Due to the high degree of intertextuality between the two films, it might be tempting to attempt a transfer of the scopic relationship of *Vertigo* to *Mulholland Drive*, perhaps resulting in Diane and Camilla being the subject and object of the gaze respectively. This would be simplistic as the doublings are more complexly uncanny than in *Vertigo*; the construction of gender identity, with overlapping homosexual and heterosexual desire, is more intricate, and, in many scenes, neither Betty/Diane nor Rita/Camilla are diegetically present. This is supported by the manner in which Betty and Rita seem to evaporate from the diegesis. As Diane/Betty, the Camilla/Rita doubling is most immediately identifiable because they are played by the same actress. This association is complicated as Camilla's identity is blurred with that of the woman whom Adam Kesher is forced to cast in his film. There is no appropriate parallel to Scottie in *Mulholland Drive* – certainly not Kesher, who, although manipulated and deceived, is never directly implicated in the doubling process or repeatedly confronted with his own fear of death, and whose relationship with Camilla is, diegetically, virtually

incidental. While the method of construction may be different, and the configuration of subject and object more ambiguous than in *Vertigo,* the 'tyranny of someone's gaze over another person [in which] we encounter the truly uncanny moment of *Vertigo*' (Huntjens 2003, p.8) is similarly present in *Mulholland Drive*.

After her absurd audition with Woody Katz, Betty is led to the set of The Sylvia North Story and a scopic relationship between Betty and Adam Kesher is established. Two consecutive shots, towards the end of the scene, affirm the association; the first, a close up of Betty looking slightly to her left, the second a close up of Kesher looking to his right, over his shoulder. Both are composed to emphasise their similarities; as the relative positions of both are established at the beginning of the scene, the spectator is required to conclude that they are looking intensely at each other. As the blonde (not Rita) Camilla Rhodes sings off camera, their eyes (which dominate the frame in the respective shots) contradict the romantic sentiments of the lyrics and emphasise an innate sorrow. Interpreting this look as one of uncomplicated desire is discouraged by the mutual uneasiness, an ephemeral sense that quickly intensifies into an almost palpable apprehension, even fear. When Betty breaks away and leaves the studio, explaining: 'I have to be somewhere', we are left to associate the sudden and puzzling departure with this intensely communicative act of looking, invoking once again the visuality of the double and the location of the uncanny within the scopic field.

The scene in which Betty visits the set of The Sylvia North Story opens with a framing device, exposed as such to the spectator when the camera tracks backward and enables a wider view of the fifties style studio mock-up, revealing the paraphernalia of film production and foregrounding the act of looking while envisaging the creation and dismissal of illusion epitomised in Club Silencio. Similar framing devices are used in *Vertigo*, and have a comparable effect in relation to the objects of the gaze. Consistently with previous observations, however, there is little contiguity between the subjects of the gaze. The solution to this incompatibility is suggested in scenes, in both films, in which the object of desire is compelled to alter her appearance (to create a visual double of herself, of another character or both). Putting distinctions

between the films aside for the moment, Betty, Rita, Madeleine and Judy represent, at particular diegetic moments, idealised and fantasised illusions of women, and the representation is particular enough for all four women to resemble each other. That they are idealised and fantasised is evident from their fragmentary and unstable identities, which are undermined or discredited in parallel with the deepening uncanniness of the narrative. Unlike Judy, who is compelled by Elster and Scottie to take on the appearance of Carlotta/Madeleine, Betty recreates Rita in her own image, reflecting her own illusory identity; this narcissism is strongly connoted by a shot of Betty and Rita standing, side by side, admiring their manufactured similarity in a mirror.

Additionally, the bizarrely conspiratorial figures on the periphery of this narcissistic scopic economy are emphatically voyeuristic, but restricted and distant. Mr Roque (Michael J. Anderson), the inscrutable powerbroker with a disproportionately small head, exists in an hermetically sealed room, orchestrating conspiracies with a few words. Reminiscent of the wizard in *The Wizard of Oz*, it is not only Roque's strange appearance that is unsettling; encased like an exhibit (the curtained room recalls *Twin Peaks*) he is apparently omniscient despite being physically isolated. Similarly, Adam Kesher is isolated and constrained, culminating in his exclusion from the film and the oblique instructions of The Cowboy. In the scene in which the Castiglianes confront Kesher, the sense of tension is constructed largely through looking, exemplified by a defiant and aggressive locking of stares between Kesher and Vincenzo Castigliane. Most disquieting than this, however, is the dirty tramp like figure seen brandishing the blue cube. Recounting his dream, the nervous looking man in Winkies describes a growing sense of fear associated with – and probably generated by – a terrible figure he can sense through the walls: 'I hope that I never see that face ever outside of a dream.' The prophecy is promptly fulfilled. Leaving the diner, he does see the face from his dreams, leering out at him from behind a wall. He collapses, and the figure disappears. This event invests the act of looking with an uncanny lethality, one that can be associated with the visual awfulness of the double and Rank's

description of uncanniness in relation to morbid, autoscopic superstitions, commonly juxtaposing fears of death and sight.

Nochimson (2004, p.172) confirms the power of the gaze in *Mulholland Drive*, adding that while the act of looking is of long standing significance in Lynch's films, *Lost Highway* represented a progression in which 'Lynch began to explore a situation in which its abundance of meaning is overwhelmed by the power of solipsistic emptiness. In *Mulholland Drive,* he continues travelling in that new direction' (2004, p.173). Although Nochimson's conducts her discussion without direct reference to the uncanny, the developments to which she refers reflect my own contention that *Lost Highway* and *Mulholland Drive* demonstrate the intensification of the uncanny. In *Mulholland Drive* especially, the change in emphasis in the construction of the gaze contributes greatly to this intensification, complemented by the visual aspect of the Diane/Betty and Camilla/Rita doublings, which similarly invests the scopic field with uncanniness.

Destabilising Performances

Discussing the gaze requires consideration of associated issues of performance, not only because the narrative continually returns to performance as a theme, for example, in Club Silencio, on the film set, or during Betty's rehearsals and auditions, or because Betty, Diane and Camilla are all performers by nature; but because performance as exhibition demands it (see chapter 2). There are three main areas of interest in discussing Betty/Diane as performer; the scopic field, continuing from previous discussion of the gaze; as a female performer; and as a cinematic performer, as exemplified by the Club Silencio scene. I will explore each of these in turn and demonstrate how they relate to doubling, before continuing to trace their significance to the *unheimlich*. .

Rita generates the same *Unheimlichkeit* as Betty, not least because, like Betty, her identity is subject to doubt, and she disappears in an instant. In a form of subverted deus ex machina, Rita opens the blue cube and her diegetic presence simply

ceases. Notably, she adopts her name from a poster of *Gilda*[36] (Charles Vidor, 1946). The illusory nature of this identity is reinforced further as the poster is initially reflected and distorted in a mirror, positioned directly to the left of her head in the frame. In exploring this doubling, the relationship between Betty/Diane and Rita/Camilla is of primary interest, rather the milieu of Hollywood – the stages, hills and casting photographs.

Considering her status as protagonist in much of the film, Betty is introduced at a relatively late point; only after the then unknown female limousine passenger (i.e. Rita) has survived a collision, escaped assassination and fled into Los Angeles, the diner in Winkies has collapsed at the sight of his nightmare incarnate and a bizarrely proportioned man in a suit has initiated a chain of cryptic phone calls. This combination of events results in Betty's first appearance seeming highly incongruous. During the opening sequence and beyond, the spectator is bombarded with cues that prompt the expectation that the narrative will progress towards resolving various unknown factors – for example, who is the woman in the limousine? What is the relevance of the dream in Winkies? What is the purpose of the phone calls? Instead, or rather, in spite of these questions, a scene follows that serves to establish Betty as an eager ingénue; in stark contrast to the deadly mystery of preceding scenes, she is shown to be 'absurdly naïve' (Taubin 2001, p.51). She forgets about her bags, but is almost comically relieved to see that they have been taken to a taxi for her; she says her farewells, brightly and enthusiastically, to an elderly couple. She arrives at her aunt's apartment building and greets the building supervisor with childlike eagerness. Her joy upon seeing the kitchen sink in her aunt's apartment, a rictus of innocent delight preserved as she wanders around, admiring doorways, is inexplicably effusive. The spectator could be forgiven for expecting Betty to break into song, accompanied by a jaunty tap routine from Mrs. Lenoix (Ann Miller). The exaggerated gestures and awkward dialogue lend the scene an unsettling falseness that recalls the idyll of

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[36] In addition to the allusion to Rita Hayworth, the star of the film, the shot of the poster serves another purpose. 'There NEVER was a woman like Gilda!' it exclaims, emphasising the unreliability of Rita/Camilla's hastily adopted identity.

Lumberton in *Blue Velvet*, and is uncanny in its representation of the familiar, imagined hopes of prospective movie stars like Betty in a manner so stylised it comes to seem parodic.

The significance and incongruity of Betty's introductory scene, subverting the indicators of genre provided by Rita's mysterious assassination-cum-accident and subsequent amnesia, is gradually reinforced. This is dependent on generating a clear implication of concealment and repression and is conveyed through juxtaposition and contrast. The elderly couple that Betty meets following her arrival in Los Angeles are later seen chuckling to each other in a knowing and unsettling way. Their laughter seems vaguely sinister, even grotesque, and is certainly disproportionate to the polite friendliness of the preceding moments. This communicates a sense of concealment through the implication that the couple possess knowledge that Betty and the spectator do not; the fact that the exchange seems less than benign strengthens the anticipation of the secret being exposed and its potential consequence. The implied pattern of concealment and revelation, so characteristic of the uncanny, continues in a more literal way. Rita's identity is hidden from them both, as are the contents of her handbag. The contents prove to be a key and a large amount of cash, which Betty re-conceals in a hatbox. At the centre of this dynamic is the blue cube, laden with mysterious meaning and symbolism. The key, connected to the cube through colour and shape, suggests that it contains a great secret. The contents of the cube seem to be of vital importance, like the real identity of George Kaplan in *North by Northwest* (Alfred Hitchcock, 1959).

Additionally, the transmutation of concentrated *Heimlichkeit* into *Unheimlichkeit*, as described through the character of Betty and her doubling, is undoubtedly intensified by the location, a representation of Los Angeles remarkable for being unnaturally ordinary – characteristically American and peculiarly familiar in the mode of the too-white picket fences of *Blue Velvet*. Lynch has identified *Sunset Boulevard* as having best captured the essence of the city – a film that resonates throughout *Mulholland Drive*. As one of the most filmed cities on earth (a dispute exists as to whether L.A. or New York is foremost in this respect), Los Angeles is

familiar to millions of cinemagoers who have never been to the United States. The significance of the city is emphasised not only in the title of *Mulholland Drive* but also in the opening sequence and consistently from then on, as the sweeping pans over cityscapes, aerial shots of skyscrapers and the iconic Hollywood sign attest. Cutting from extremely close, claustrophobic shots of bed sheets to the city sprawling out below *Mulholland Drive* juxtaposes familiar and unfamiliar spaces, connoting both 'home city' and urban jungle, the *heimlich* and *unheimlich* qualities that Los Angeles exemplifies particularly well. In the Los Angeles (and Hollywood in particular) of *Mulholland Drive*, the everyday is subverted ominously, as in the example of the banal Winkies diner, appropriately and knowingly a Sunset Boulevard branch, transformed by the recollection of a dream into a location of malevolence, redolent with supernatural danger.

Added to the distinctive imagery of Hollywood, repeated references to forms of performance in various contexts (e.g. acting, dancing or playing sleuth) foregrounds Betty as an actress and substantially contributes to the generation of a sense of uncanniness. The ability of the spectator to differentiate scenes of diegetic performance is consistently challenged, intensifying the uncertainty and air of speciousness that surrounds her. She is: 'deliberately unconvincing, bright and generous, sure of her predestined stardom and yet, while running over the lines for an audition, a woefully amateur actress' (Newman 2002, p.51). Significantly, the failure of Betty to convince us of her authenticity is not limited to scenes of overt performance; such scenes retrospectively draw attention to, for example, her unnecessarily demonstrative tour of her Aunt's house. A scene that illustrates this ambiguity of performance particularly well begins with Betty and Rita in confrontation – until it is revealed that they are rehearsing a script for Betty's audition. This is communicated through the disintegration of the credibility of the rehearsal, the flow of words disrupted by Betty's awkward, stuttering delivery.

While these initial symptoms of doubling can be discerned, a clearly identifiable doubling is not presented until the appearance of Diane when she is woken up in her apartment. Betty is energetic and enthusiastic where Diane is beleaguered and

fatigued; improbably naïve and thoughtful where Diane is cynical and bitter, a rising star where Diane is burned out, and meticulously presented where Diane is dishevelled. The spectator can only assume that Betty was the beaming winner accepting the adulation of the crown in the opening sequence, at least until the introduction of Diane, who, during the party scene, relates that she won a jitterbug contest and cites it as a reason for her move to Los Angeles. Betty, on the other hand, never mentions the dance competition.

The visual uncanniness so powerfully evident throughout the film is associated with a performance of subjectivity and desire between multiple selves that is constantly repeated and revised. While the uncanniness of this performance impresses upon the spectator, the multiple selves involved are mutable, denying any certainty in the relationship between them and heightening the unsettling effect. This effect, in combination with doubling and the nature of the gaze makes *Mulholland Drive* more intensely uncanny in a visual context than the films that precede it.

The Female Performer

In discussing *The Student of Prague* in Chapter 2, I considered the double in the context of performance, an aspect with a great deal of relevance to the relationship between Diane and Betty, which is configured in terms of performer and performed and represents a subverting of sense and order. This is, firstly, a consequence of the weakening of the borders between familiar and unfamiliar; the uncanny 'is often and easily produced by effacing the distinction between imagination and reality, such as when something we have hitherto regarded as imaginary appears before us in reality' (Freud 1934, p.398). The impression of concealment, when combined with scenes of diegetic performance, becomes coloured with deception. Consequently, Betty's rigid ordinariness contributes to an increasing sense of speciousness as her *Heimlichkeit* intensifies, leading to a destabilisation of identity allied with the work that she undertakes as an actress, i.e. as a female performer. The gender distinction is a significant one:

> Dominant ideology attempts to pose the association between woman and the notion of 'doubling' or duplicity as natural. This is at least partly because women are made to exist in a state of dissemblance, and are enduringly associated with the virgin/whore dichotomy. (Jermyn 1996, p.263)

The theme of performance provides an essential link between the constituent parts of Betty/Diane's arc of uncanniness and abjection, uniting, for example, visual lethality, narcissism and thanatophobia. Both identities are united by the desire to become highly successful actresses; Betty tells Rita: 'I'd rather be known as a great actress than a movie star, but sometimes people end up being both', while Diane tells Kesher's mother that 'I wanted that part [in The Sylvia North Story] so bad… but Camilla got it'. This desire for fame is strongly associated, even indistinguishable from, the compulsion that leads to the manifestation of the double as a substitute for the preservation of the ego. Both extend the possibility of a form of endurance, however ultimately flawed and futile, beyond the bounds of corporeal existence.

The enigmatic scene in Club Silencio foregrounds this intertwining of doubling and performance, while the emphasis on the combination of sound and image also suggests the scene is a comment on the nature of cinema itself, particularly as sound is so crucial to Lynch's style. Another aspect to the Club Silencio scene is suggested; the realisation that Camilla is dead, followed by intense remorse, leading to suicide. The mimed song invokes the legend of the crying woman – La Llorona[37]. Originating as a Mexican legend, it has been subject to numerous variations. A typical version is as follows: a princess meets a nobleman and they fall in love; they get married and have children. One morning the nobleman does not come home, so the princess looks for him and discovers him marrying another woman. In a fury, she drowns her children, but overwhelmed by remorse, she kills herself. The key elements of this story, those

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[37] 'La Llorona' is how the singer, played by Rebekah del Rio, is introduced onstage in Club Silencio.

that have mutated the least, are the impulsive fury of the mother and her agonising sorrow for what she has done, resulting in her suicide.

Most immediately, the performances in Silencio serve to undermine Betty's existence. This is where an unravelling of Diane's fantasy is suggested; she shakes as the compere summons thunder and lightning, and cries as Del Rio sings 'Llorando'[38], creating the impression that she is as much part of the performance as those on stage. More importantly, the events of Club Silencio juxtapose performance and death, literalising the futility of desiring an 'immortalising' gaze. In the culmination of the scene, Betty reaches into a handbag (whether it is hers or Rita's is not clear) and produces the cube – as if it has been created by the uncanny rituals acted out on stage. It is clear from the triangular opening in one of the faces of the cube that Rita's key, which she shows to Betty when they discover the money, unlocks it. Before vanishing, Betty leaves the cube on the bed in her aunt's apartment so that Rita will find it. The cube reinforces the connection between performance and death confirmed by the repetition (after Rita's mumbling that precedes the journey to the club) of 'silencio', the only word spoken after Diane's suicide.

The blue cube invites but frustrates interpretation, strongly indicating a hidden, possibly revelatory significance but providing few indications with which to work. Considering the preponderance of allusions to *The Wizard of Oz*, it is tempting to draw parallels between the shiny, brightly coloured ruby slippers found by Dorothy, and the similarly chance discovery of the blue cube. While the ruby slippers are conventionally interpreted as being associated with Dorothy's sexuality, it is difficult to justify any such relationship between sexuality and the blue cube. The orderly, geometric shape of the box suggests clarity and order in the confusion of the earlier part of the film, and would thus seem to confute associations with the abject. Yet the mathematically exact, ordered exterior of the cube is incongruous when its power to disrupt and destroy is considered; its uncanniness comes from the disparity between its nature and potential, i.e. it is a ordinary geometric solid which embodies an unknowable power and mystery. The contents of the cube are everything and nothing; the spectator may

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[38] A Spanish language cover of Roy Orbison's 'Crying'.

project an unlimited number of possibilities, but the unavoidable fact is that there is no information with which to qualify the speculation.

The only indications of what the cube contains are, firstly, that the key (metaphorically, and literally, through a disrupting and disassociating process in which two different blue keys are presented) to open it represents the commission of murder, and secondly, that the homunculi that pressure Diane into suicide are released from it. Combined with Rita's disappearance, apparently into the cube's unknowable interior, the cube, as a device, can be associated with processes of abjection in other Lynch films; it is a space that destroys self – its contents are the nothingness of oblivion and the infinite everything of the deindividuated whole. Uncanny, abject and transformative, the cube is most interesting when considered as a space, and can be equated with the prison cell in *Lost Highway* or the lodge in *Twin Peaks.*

Transition to the Abject

While it is my argument throughout this thesis that the uncanny comes to predominate over the abject in Lynch's later films, it is by no means true that the abject becomes insignificant. While many critics have chosen either love or Hollywood power as the dominant theme of *Mulholland Drive*, the preceding discussion of doubling and performance indicates the intertwinement of the two themes via the a mutual, narcissistic element, and demonstrates the potential of doubling to extend beyond the simply uncanny into the role of the abject (considering especially the capacity of the double as a portent of self-effacement and death). Ostensibly, the 'obsessive love affair' (Gargett 2002) between Betty and Rita develops innocently, even timidly, and through a series of apparent coincidences. Camilla has none of Rita's sexual vulnerability; in contrast, she is assertive, verging on predatory. Leading up to and during the party scene, she flirts with and then abandons Diane, kisses the blonde woman who, in Diane's fantasy, auditioned for The Sylvia North Story as Camilla Rhodes, and, giggling, kisses Kesher as they prepare to make their announcement. The calculated disinterest with which she rejects Diane contrasts sharply with the

disorientated, needy Rita, who searches and calls out for the vanished Betty before opening the blue cube. Consistent with the uncanny processes of doubling that result in self destruction, Diane's narcissism and defective ability to love are repeatedly suggested, underlying Betty's narrative and reaching a terrible, abject conclusion with Diane's suicide.

While Freud associates lesbianism with narcissism as a response to castration complex, explicit instances of narcissism in the context of doubling render this reading unnecessary; two occasions when the doubling process is evident coincide with shots of Betty standing in front of a mirror. On the first occasion, she is looking around her aunt's house for the first time, and looks into the mirror in which Rita will later catch sight of the film poster from which she adopts her name. On the second occasion, the autoscopic, and by extension, narcissistic implications of this doubling are reaffirmed as Betty dresses Rita in a blonde wig, the same length as Betty's own hair. They stand in front of the mirror, emphasising their manufactured visual similarity. Following this ritual, Betty and Rita make love for the first time.

> The prime symptom of the slippage from fantasy into insanity is the visual perception of the self as other--the Doppelganger. The fantasy-self appears to realize the real self's desires by proxy; as long as the alter ego remains subservient, vicarious satisfaction is guaranteed. Yet the relationship between self and double is a dialectically driven one, projecting a master-slave relation within the subject. The double threatens to assert its autonomy, to do the bidding, ultimately to usurp the mantle of selfhood and project the host into the role of Doppelganger. The conflict is most graphically fought in the scopic field. (Webber 1996, p.119)

The destructive self-love indicative of abjection is restaged more manifestly when Diane, alone in her apartment, masturbates tearfully. The association of this destructive self-love with the scopic field is emphasised as, shot as from her point of view, Diane's vision seems to flicker, to struggle for focus[39]. The connection between performance and narcissism reinforces the alliance of the uncanny and the double, with its unavoidably abject destination. The elaborate conspiracy that excludes both Betty and Kesher from The Sylvia North Story in favour of Camilla Rhodes – from the shadowy, isolated mastermind Mr. Roque and the belligerent Castigliane to the bungling Brooker – is associated, through doubling, with the Camilla's assassination. 'This is the girl', the words repeated with such sinister emphasis to Kesher by the conspirators, are the same words with which Diane orders Camilla's execution, uttering them as she passes Camilla's casting photo across the table to the hit man.

The abjection of an inexorable decline towards death, prefigured by uncanniness and propelled by doubling, gradually encroaches upon and shapes the narrative. The cadaver discovered by Betty and Rita during their visit to the Sierra Bonita apartments already represents, in Kristeva's terms, the 'utmost of abjection' (Kristeva 1982, p.4) – yet in a terrible intensification, the corpse is later connoted as Diane's own. When she is woken in the same apartment, she is lying on her side, with her right leg tucked up slightly, over her left. The next shot briefly shows a figure in the same position, dead and in a state of decay. In this example, we can observe the coalescence of the uncanny and the abject; in discovering the corpse at the Sierra Bonita apartments, Diane is confronted with not only the dreadfulness of the double, the prophet of annihilation, but the direct, unconcealed and undeniable reality of her own death.

The intrusion of the abject is increasingly noticeable as the typically destabilising and disorienting influence of doubling process grows. Betty's *Heimlichkeit* beings to flicker like the wraithlike images of the opening and closing sequences,

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[39] This particular visual technique is also used in Rabbits, Lynch's eight-part internet mini-series. Some sequences from Rabbits, which was available on the davidlynch.com website, were used in *Inland Empire*.

coming to seem increasingly *unheimlich* and finally converging as Diane (as opposed to Betty) is consolidated as protagonist. The frustration and despair evident in the masturbation scene have been seen in terms of Diane's inability to reach climax. The point of view shots that punctuate the act, with their unusual and incongruous defocusing effects, and the aggression with which it is carried out suggest a bleaker explanation. The violence with which Diane masturbates – for which we might substitute the term 'self-abuses' – confutes the idea that this is primarily an attempt to reach orgasm and suggests a more poignant and terrible purpose; Diane is not seeking physical or even emotional release, but is instead trying to recover something indefinite. Juxtaposed with Camilla's rejection, reiterated in the preceding scenes, we might consider this indefinite thing to be love; but, as I have established, this is a distraction, and in any case makes no sense from Diane's perspective.

This scene confirms the inevitability of Diane's decline and the irrevocable course of the march towards death symbolised by doubling. It represents, directly, Diane's narcissism combined with the impotent rage that stems from her failure to achieve the immortality held out by Hollywood stardom and, by extension, her many doublings; it is her attempt to crudely and violently impose the control over the rapidly decomposing borders of her self. Perhaps most horribly of all, the parental figures, seen smirking in a taxi after Betty arrives in Los Angeles, return at the peak of Diane's crisis of self in abject form; the product of this self-abuse can be equally, and more dreadfully, equated with the return of these figures as homunculi, as if her masturbation has brought them into existence. Their small stature makes them hideously reminiscent of children, suggesting the act of masturbation as the culmination of Diane's failed struggle to stay the doubling process and to exert control over her self-borders.

The similarity with critical reactions to *Lost Highway*, particularly in relation to the narrative, reflects the development in *Mulholland Drive* of the fugue-like complexity of the earlier film in the suffusion of uncanny patterns of familiarisation and defamiliarisation. The observation of the 'salvaging' of the film from the abortive television production is rendered a tangential issue by the parallels; that critics note

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similarities in complexity and ambiguity in the two films (even if only in a dismissive sense) suggests that the narrative structure of *Mulholland Drive* cannot be explained by its origin in television. Perceptions of a disjointed narrative are common to both films and are better ascribed to their uncanniness than to their very different production histories (in that *Lost Highway* did not originate as a television production.)

Doubling is the most immediately perceptible manifestation of this intensification of the uncanny. The doubles of *Twin Peaks: Fire Walk with Me* (e.g. Laura/Madeleine or Leland/Bob) dominate the diegesis less than the doubles of *Lost Highway*. In *Mulholland Drive*, the doubling process is pushed to an extreme of uncanniness, with characters doubled and redoubled (there are two manifestations of Camilla Rhodes, for example, one of whom is also doubled as Rita). Despite the comparisons and implications of similarity, *Mulholland Drive* represents, as acknowledged by Nochimson (2004, p.173), a significant progression from *Lost Highway*, one that I have argued can be located in the transition from the predominance of the abject to the predominance of the uncanny. The visual abjects more evident in earlier films are not absent from *Mulholland Drive,* as the mouldering corpse discovered in Diane's flat attests, but while the destructive, self effacing power of the abject that exists in all of Lynch's films retains its significance, it is subsumed in the uncanny constructs generated in the multiple ways I have discussed, particularly in the narrative, the scopic field and the representation of identity.

Chapter 8: Conclusion

I have argued that a fresh approach to Lynch's films is necessary in order to address the problematic nature of the reception and a lack of consensus in the fragmentary literature. In doing so, I have proposed a cohesive theoretical framework that encompasses many of the varied themes of existing work. From this, I have demonstrated that the films can be placed chronologically on a trajectory from the primacy of the abject to the primacy of the uncanny, characterising a consistent and gradual development of Lynch as a film maker, as well as an explanation for the increasing difficulty of rationalising the films.

In Chapter 2, I outlined the development of the concepts of the abject and the uncanny and their relevance to the films. Although distinct, they are related and compatible with existing interpretations, especially those which are constructed in Freudian and Lacanian terms. It cannot be argued that this is because they are vague or general; the detail with which Kristeva and Freud (with the support of theorists who followed them) describe the abject and the uncanny leads to a definition, reinforced by their precision about what the concepts exclude, i.e. what is not abject or uncanny, that correlates with the content of the films. Potential theoretical obstacles, amongst them the question of whether dreamlike qualities can be said to be significant or are inherent to the medium of film, are obviated by this approach. The fact that it is possible to substantiate aspects of the films as abject or uncanny, and separate them from those that may be unpleasant or strange without being specifically abject or uncanny, avoids the vagueness of readings that interpret 'weirdness' as related to the oneiric or characteristic of surrealism.

The significance of the uncanny is, in the first instance, suggested by Rodley's undeveloped contention (Rodley 1997, p.ix) that it lies at the core of Lynch's work and supported by occasional and largely indirect references in analyses of specific films. To my knowledge, no comparably detailed evaluation of the relevance of the uncanny has been conducted previously; Allistair MacTaggart discusses the uncanny in the context of *Blue Velvet* predominantly (2010, pp.115-137), but there are no studies that

examine its relevance across several of the films. Existing literature on Lynch is nearly devoid of direct mentions of the abject, although Alexander does touch upon the subject (1993, pp.30, 206). The full relevance of the abject has gone unexplored, even in the context of *Eraserhead* and despite the abundance of psychoanalytical analyses.

The films have the potential to affect audiences in a manner distinct enough to merit the term 'Lynchian' and to prompt a search for language that describes adequately the psychological or even physical phenomena associated with the experience, whether this manifests as the cognitive dissonance generated by *Mulholland Drive* or the sensation of nausea felt by critics during screenings of *Eraserhead*. I have shown that there is a consistency to this experience by juxtaposing common features from critical responses to the films and have also argued that the same evidence indicates a gradual progression, not just in how the experience is related by critics but, more importantly, in how it is engendered by the films. While similarities can be inferred from within numerous reviews and analyses, they exist mainly as unwitting testimony; the concentration of the articles is rarely on the characterisation of the experience itself but rather on the production of cogent readings, giving the same treatment to the mainstream, conventional productions alongside which Lynch's films are reviewed.

The critical reception is polarised and often flawed. Polarisation is evident both in terms of the extreme positivity and negativity of reviews of the same film, and also in the disparity between negative critical opinion and multiple indicators of professional esteem such as awards. As with the similarities between critics' characterisations of the experience of individual films, the response to each of the five films discussed has been consistent in terms of polarisation. That the reception is flawed is increasingly apparent with the growing narrative complexity of the films. Whereas critics had difficulty accounting for some of the incongruous, disturbing imagery of *Eraserhead* or *Blue Velvet*, it was nevertheless possible to apply the standard review model of an evaluated synopsis and produce a cogent article. *Twin Peaks: Fire Walk with Me* weakened the value of this model, in part due to its relationship to the television series but also due to the inherent complexities and

ambiguity of doubling, inconsistent temporal cues, and impossible spaces. With *Lost Highway*, Lynch's approach to narrative and expansion of the uncanny devices of earlier films left reviewers preoccupied with finding methods of manufacturing a synopsis that artificially, unjustified by textual ambiguities and absences, allowed their model to be applied again. Although the polarised reaction to *Eraserhead* is largely aesthetic, in response to the visual abjects, the main differences over *Mulholland Drive* concern the intuited *fabula* and its multiply uncanny qualities.

The contention that the existing literature on Lynch is fragmented is supported by a brief survey of the conclusions in monographs such as those by Chion, Nochimson or Wilson. Chion completes his survey with a fascinating 'Lynch Kit', 'an attempt to reconstitute an impossible whole' (1995, p.161) describing associated and interconnected elements of the films. Nochimson argues that Lynch's work is constantly in transition, 'balancing bold leaps ahead of his time with two steps in place' (1997, p.204), while Wilson concludes that the films release us from 'those alleged sureties that shut down seeking, that result in complacency, in rigidity.' (2007, p.163). While none of these positions are in conflict, they do not appear to correlate either; this is consistent with the wider body, which is diverse in approach but often declines to evaluate or synthesise previous work. Considering these conclusions in the context of the theoretical framework set out in this thesis indicates how it encompasses a wide range of positions without being unspecific. Chion's 'Lynch Kit' cannot be brought wholly under the aegis of the abject and the uncanny, but the majority of his headings have evident associations with either or both; body, cord and scissors, dream, ear, erasure (effacement), flow, inside, open mouth, void and whole. Nochimson's metaphor of Lynch's artistic evolution as a journey is paralleled by my contention that this progression is characterised by the shifting balance between the abject and the uncanny. Wilson's idea of films that 'shut down seeking' is consistent with the premise that, as Lynch's films shift towards the predominance of the uncanny, they become more ambiguous and recondite, denying easy explanations.

Lynch's work begins in the abject. The early films exhibit a fascination with the permeability of the human body and the violation of the *corps propre*, represented

visibly*.* The vomiting and exposed viscera of *Six Men Getting Sick* are followed by the reminder at the beginning of *The Alphabet* that we are 'dealing with the human form' and its profusion of images connoting ejaculation, birth and bleeding. *The Grandmother* features similar animated, organic movement, leaking fluids and the messy, squelching 'birth' of the old woman. *Eraserhead* epitomises these early preoccupations, manifesting the abject in a way that is almost palpable. Corporeal borders are continually threatened by strange fluids, sickening food and, of course, the malevolent baby. *Blue Velvet* maintains an emphasis on abjection, originating largely in the sexual violence and simulated incest that surround the Oedipal triangle. While visual instances such as the oozing liquids of *Eraserhead* are less apparent, Dorothy is, amongst her many complex associations, a powerfully abject figure who metaphorically subverts the borders of Jeffrey's body and destabilises his identity. *Twin Peaks: Fire Walk with Me* reveals the secret of Laura Palmer's death to be the abjects of incest and murder, with Leland rivalling Frank Booth as a vector of abjection. While the terrible culmination of the process of abjection, in the killing of Laura and the revealing of her murderer, provides the conclusion, the process is not played out in the narrative to the same degree as in *Blue Velvet*; the abject is not as prevalent, although this is not to imply that its significance or potential to disturb is diminished.

While the abject predominates until the mid-point of *Twin Peaks: Fire Walk with Me,* the uncanny can be discerned in both of the earlier films. While the uncanny cannot, in isolation, account for the seeping, fecund imagery of *Eraserhead*, it exists amongst these abjects (in the Henry's visit to the X's home, or the catatonic grandmother, for example) and heightens their psychological effect. Here, the abject is overwhelming, the power of uncanny effects present as a corollary rather than the primary force. The pre-eminence of the abject is brought closer to a balance with the uncanny in *Blue Velvet*, largely due to the reduction in the instances of clear, visual abjects. While mitigated by the dominant presence of the abject Oedipal triangle, the uncanny is immediately evoked by reference to the figure of Dorothy as mother or the parallels with Hoffmann's *The Sandman*. *Twin Peaks: Fire Walk with Me*, which is closest to representing a nexus of the abject and the uncanny, contains nascent forms

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of diegetic and meta-diegetic uncanniness (i.e., those that relate not only to fictional constructs but to the structure of the films themselves). While earlier films have doublings, cinematic doubling of the kind described by Schneider – in which multiple selves within a single body are connoted – is introduced in *Twin Peaks*, most directly as Leland / Killer Bob. Uncanniness of narrative is evident in temporal and spatial distortions (such as the appearance of Annie Blackburne or the ambiguous, ephemeral Red Room).

Both *Lost Highway* and *Mulholland Drive* continue the progression towards the primacy of the uncanny. The destabilisation of the unity of the self through doubling is a central feature of both films; whereas there are implied doublings in *Eraserhead* or *Twin Peaks: Fire Walk with Me*, for example, here the doublings are unmistakable even as the ambiguity of identities they configure becomes more complex. The destabilising effect of uncanniness of narrative, reinforced by temporal, causal and spatial impossibilities, ambiguities or distortions, problematises reception; the evident difficulties of critics in interpreting these films in a conventional manner reflects the challenges of attempting to construct a consistent *fabula* from an uncannily inconsistent *sjužet*. A similarly uncanny dissonance also exists between familiar, generic aspects (such as the apparent noir affiliations of *Lost Highway*) and the radical departures from this illusion of convention in the narrative of both films. As with the qualification of the abject in the early films, noting the strengthening influence of the uncanny in later films should not be taken to imply that the abject is excluded. The themes of sexual exploitation and murder in *Lost Highway*, and the intimations of Renée's gory murder, indicate abjection that underlies the uncanny and is confirmed by Fred's ambiguous self destruction in the final scene. *Mulholland Drive* likewise concludes with self destruction in the form of Diane's apparent suicide, the inevitable terminus of abjection.

Wilson ends his conclusion by mentioning *Inland Empire* (which was in production at the time he was writing) and speculating that it would signify a continuation of 'the task of sounding the abysmal interiors of the heart' (2007, p.165). While my proposal of a continuum in Lynch's work from the overtly abject to the

ascendancy of the uncanny does not predict the future direction his films might take, *Inland Empire* is at least as complex and full of doublings and distortions as *Mulholland Drive,* featuring multiple narrative layers complicated by the uncanniness of a diegetic film production; it is impossible to determine whether the protagonist Nikki's murder occurs in the street or on a movie set, as both possibilities are connoted equally. Lynch certainly shows no sign of abandoning his quest to test the boundaries of representation and narrative, losing interest in the potential of the uncanny or, in his own words, making films for 'a certain kind of mind... that can enjoy and relish abstractions and strangeness.' (Rodley 1997, p.231).

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