

**¶We Don=t Stop Here@:**

**David Lynch=s *Mulholland Drive* and the Death of the Subject**

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## Introduction

It isn't that *Mulholland Drive* (MD) is a difficult film, if by difficult one means it is impossible or nearly impossible to construe. Any charges of incoherence are aimed more at its coda, the last 20 minutes of the film, than it is at the dream narrative comprising its first two hours. Yet the film has puzzled many viewers and critics who clearly grasp its narrative drift & that the first two hours are a dream, the wish-fulfillment fantasy of a middling actress jilted by her more famous and successful celebrity lover. Why, then, does the film's second part, the much briefer depiction of protagonist Diane Selwyn's waking reality, present such an enigma even for those who otherwise admire it?<sup>1</sup>

Perhaps the answer to that question lies in MD's inherently subversive structure. Much has already been written concerning its dream narrative, and most of that written from a psychoanalytic point of view. The film certainly plays into the hands of Freudians, inasmuch as Selwyn's resentment of the success of others around her, coupled with her desire for Camilla Rhodes, leads her to manufacture a dream in which its manifest content (Rhodes's helplessness as amnesiac, Adam Kesher's helplessness as a director) reflects an inversion of value when seen from the vantage point of its latent content (Selwyn's unconscious wish to see successful individuals around her failing).<sup>2</sup>

However, MD's coda is more than just an index for interpreting the rebus of images comprising the dream narrative. If it were merely that, and nothing else, then it wouldn't be considered the abstruse & even incomprehensible & film many viewers and critics take it to be. The source of the puzzlement concerning the meaning of the film lies in the structure of the coda compared to the structure of the dream narrative. It is the discrepancy between the film's two

narrative structures that appears to bewilder viewers. But it is precisely this narrative dissonance, this structural variance with itself, that makes the film unique; its greatness as a film depends on the cumulative effect of its overarching structure, and not simply its success at fooling its audience into buying into the reality of a dream; its structure *in toto* provides a much deeper interpretation of its meaning than a mere dream analysis can provide.

The coda, which does not conform to a *sequentially* linear structure, is revealing more than Selwyn=s waking diegetic reality B it is depicting the failure of the modern enterprise of founding the being of subjectivity on self-identity. The film achieves this by showing the viewer a glimpse of the true nature of temporal experience as non-chronological in the case of a certain breakdown situation (Selwyn=s madness), revealing as illusory the pretense of an *inherently* self-identical subject, the subject as substrate of time; it openly critiques Hollywood=s tradition of the classical narrative wedded to a conception of time as an orderly series of Anows@ terminating in a final sign signifying the closure of the series.<sup>3</sup>

### **AI=m Betty Elms@; Linear Narrative, Genre and Modernity**

MD self-consciously appeals to the tradition of Hollywood *noir* produced in the 1940s and 50s and therefore qualifies as an example of the *neo-noir* genre.<sup>4</sup> The references abound to *Gilda* (including the Latin heritage of both Rita Hayworth and Laura Elena Harring) and to *Sunset Boulevard* (site of Winkie=s restaurant). In line with traditional *noir* stylistics, the film charts a somber course with its use of color, imagery, music and extra-diegetic sound effects; the dominant motif in the dream narrative=s *mis-en-scene* are images of sharply vertical composition, heavily weighted on either the left or the right, indicative of fractured identity and imbalance.<sup>5</sup>

The attempt to produce psychological disorientation through devices of distortion is common to the stylistics of *noir* and *neo-noir*. In *MD*, Lynch puts his past apprenticeship in surrealism (*Eraserhead*, 1977) to good use, accentuating *noir*'s sense of psychological disorientation by interpolating within the dream narrative events which, even from within its own diegesis, appear absurd: the death of the man at Winkie's by the beholding of some horrific figure; the finding of a strange blue key; the peculiar Louise Bonner (Lee Grant), a woman who stumbles to the front door of Aunt Ruth's apartment speaking ominously about the amnesiac Rita (Laura Elena Harring); the conspiracy of bizarre men to find the girl; and the even more bizarre machinations by two very strange gangsters (the Castigliare brothers: Dan Hedaya, Angelo Badalamenti) to arrange the casting of a certain blond ingenue (by the name of Camilla Rhodes) in Kesher's movie, whether he wants her there or not. It is only later, after the viewer is made aware that the previous two hours of film were the manifest content of a dream by an individual named Diane Selwyn (Naomi Watts) that its latent content comes to light; but there is no lessening of the film's sense of disorientation once the viewer is shown Selwyn's waking reality. The dream disorients through its strangeness of content, the coda disorients through its temporal structure (its narrative form).<sup>6</sup>

The salient feature of the structure of the dream narrative concerns the ordering of its scenes and sequences according to strict lineages of cause and effect, even if it is not clear at the time why events are transpiring the way they do. This strictly linear sequencing of cause and effect follows time's arrow: the objective march of time itself inasmuch as the story unfolds according to an order in which the past is forever behind us and the future forever in front of us. The temporal procession of the scenes in the dream are sequentially linear in that

time appears to be proceeding from a beginning to an end; even the cross-cutting of the seemingly inexplicable scenes (such as the death of the man at Winkie=s) do not interrupt this sense of linear flow, this feeling that the film is taking place according to a time of its own making B what I call a film=s *diegetic chronology*.<sup>7</sup>

A diegetic chronology is the time=s arrow of the narrative, the unfolding of time within the world of the film according to a logically coherent series of scenes and sequences moving toward closure. Hollywood films tend to be dominated by the sequentially linear narrative: all stories have beginnings, middles and endings, in that order only, culminating in closure. Such linearity, coupled with smooth and seamless editing, provides a film with a sense of pace whereby sequences appear to obey the laws of cause and effect, in an orderly fashion, adding up to a revelation at the end. This last part is crucial B it is the *expectation* of closure that pulls the viewer along in the narrative of a film, who seeks to make a unity out of its disparate images. A film appears to the viewer to be Arealistic@ not because its events unfold according to the Areal@ duration of the film B which in most cases would be impossible anyway B but because the procession of images logically cohere according to a central idea or theme; for a sense of diegetic chronology to be established, the viewer=s expectations of what should or could happen next according to the logic of the narrative are not thwarted during its viewing: the shots, scenes and sequences proceed smoothly according to well defined lineages of cause and effect. In a chronologically ordered linear narrative, the viewer is not baffled as to why one scene follows another because of the *expectation that all scenes will be explained somewhere near the end of the film*. The diegetic chronology of a sequentially linear narrative in a film produces the viewer=s experience of being absorbed into a world with a time of its own.

Bear in mind, it isn't necessary that an expectation of closure by viewers actually be fulfilled, only that the *expectation itself during the unfolding of the narrative is not shaken*. That viewers expect the killer to be revealed in a murder mystery doesn't necessarily mean that he or she will be B it only implies that the killer *ought* to be, because films of this genre generally end with the apprehension of the killer; it is the mere expectation of closure that grounds the viewer=s understanding of the course of the narrative. Expectations, then, do not *determine* the course the film will take in the viewer=s mind, they merely determine an ideal notion of the type of closure typically provided by the film=s genre that functions as the epistemological ground for understanding the procession of images in the film.

The sense of impending closure provides the frame within which the logical coherence of the pacing of the film proceeds. It is the expectation of closure in a film structured according to strictly ordered chains of cause and effect (the traditional Hollywood Astory@) that produces a film=s diegetic chronology. The sequentially linear narrative, in its logical procession of images, appears to mimic the non-diegetic flow of time itself by proceeding coherently according to time=s arrow, and it is this mimicking effect that produces the viewer=s illusory perception of Areal time@ passing within the confines of the film narrative.

### **AWon=t That Be The Day!@: Modernity and Closure**

Hollywood=s reliance on the sequential flow of the classical narrative resembles modernity=s repeated attempts to ground time in a self-identical subject, in that both sequentially linear film narratives and the narratives of selfhood in modernity were structured according to closure. For modernity, closure amounted to an attempt to come to terms with the inexorability of time by enclosing it within the subject, by installing within the ephemerality of temporal

experience something escaping time=s grasp, the permanence of the subject.<sup>8</sup> This move became necessary, because modernity sought in subjectivity the foundation for the truth of all statements about nature, God, society and the self.<sup>9</sup> But the subject could not perform the task of properly adjudicating truth if there were any doubt about its own substantiality B its own reality. Time, thus, eventually became an entirely internalized phenomenon B like everything else.<sup>10</sup>

To accomplish this feat, the moderns installed in the subject the God-like, re-creative power of remaining self-identical through time B of always being *present* to itself by virtue of an eternal present. By virtue of this ever-present Anow@ set against the movement of the present into past and the future into the present, the subject could be in a position to chart the course of time B to see the present as present by situating it between the past and the future. The three great moderns B Descartes, Kant and Hegel B each sought to do this in his own way: Descartes by rendering thought a substance in its own right B a *res cogitans* B a persistent thinking Athing@ apart from the mutable world of *res extensa*, with both dependent on God for temporal sustenance; Kant by rendering time a subjective form of Aintuition@ apart from which the noumenal self (the seat of the transcendental ego) can stand secure; and Hegel by rendering all of history in the form of a *Bildungsroman* within which each individual character (historical individual) has his or her role to play, despite the fact the characters, in themselves, are given very few lines.<sup>11</sup> Edmund Husserl=s philosophy of inner time consciousness, perhaps modernity=s last stand, also is telling in the way it sought to incorporate the past, present and future in a unity that makes subjectivity possible; it is Husserl=s phenomenology of time that revealed a subject as self-identical through the objective temporal flux because it structures time for itself in the form of an eternal present simultaneously in touch with its past and its

future. (*Cartesian Meditations* #37, 75; *Inner Time Consciousness* #36, 100)

The subject according to the moderns was inherently *closed* B Husserl=s attempt to ground subjectivity in self-identical persistence through time was just the last example in a long line of attempts, beginning with Descartes, that trapped the subject within itself: experience became the experience of the self, not the world.<sup>12</sup> In essence, the moderns believed subjectivity can know only what it alone is responsible for putting into experience to render it logically coherent B i.e. *knowable*. A subject, so conceived, construes experience according to linear narratives, as *stories of cause and effect* complete with beginnings, middles and endings. The subject becomes the master story teller because it can understand only its own stories. The chronologically ordered linear narrative is thus the *dream* of modernity, its tale of the stalwart, decisive, never-wavering protagonist (the self-identical subject) bearing all against the ravages of Chronos.

I=m Betty Elms.

We will see exactly how modernity=s dream of the self-identical subject is exposed as deficient to account for actual temporal experience when we discuss the coda, but first we need to examine the structural sequencing of the dream narrative a bit more. Lynch brilliantly prefigures the inability of sequentially-ordered linear narratives to capture the nature of temporal experience by incorporating destabilizing elements within dream B elements which, while not interrupting its linear flow, nevertheless point the way out of it.

### **A Time to Wake Up@: Symbols of Narrative Instability Within the Dream**

The dream narrative of MD exhibits seamless transitions from one scene to the next, each scene introducing newer, deeper aspects of the mystery, all of it held together by the sense

viewers have of the narrative adding up to something, a pay-off of some kind typical of its genre. B the revelation of the identity of the mystery woman, a revelation which will explain other tangential scenes (the death of the man at Winkie=s, the identity of the conspirators looking for her, what Adam Kesher had to do with it all).

A final sign.

But the expectation of closure in the dream is not fulfilled. The film hints at the failure of the dream narrative to provide closure through its use of omens and premonitions. Omens B signs foretelling future events B and the prescient statements of seers are devices used often in the Ahard-boiled@ school of literature of the 1930s and 40s, a style of literature many critics take to be one of the primary sources of inspiration of classic Hollywood *noir*. Those writers, like James M. Cain (*The Postman Always Rings Twice*, *Double Indemnity*) and Horace McCoy (*They Shoot Horses, Don=t They?*), use premonitions and omens to foreshadow plot developments, devices which succeed in creating an atmosphere of impending dread within the narrative (Tellotte 5-9; Porfirio 81-84). In MD, omens and premonitions *trace the parameters of the dream narrative*, hinting that it is indeed a dream and foretelling the identity of the dreamer. Examples of omens and premonitions abound in the dream: the discovery of the money and the blue key in Rita=s handbag; the prophetic words of Louise Bonner that Betty Elms is not who she says she is and that there is Asomeone else@ other than Rita in trouble in Ruth=s apartment; the odd cowboy and his command that he would appear once if Kesher did good, and twice if he did bad; the discovery of the dead woman in bed in an apartment where ADiane Selwyn@ is said to live. Each of these omens and premonitory visions are fulfilled later, in the waking reality of the dreamer, where we see the material for Selwyn=s dream-work: the blue key of the assassin,

the sign he has completed the job of killing Camilla Rhodes; the discovery that Bonner was right after all, that the real quest for identity concerned not the identity of Rita in the dream but the identity of the dreamer; the reappearance of the Cowboy just as the dream comes to an end, a prophecy fulfilled not through Kesher but through the dreamer, Selwyn<sup>13</sup>; Selwyn shooting herself in bed, disclosing as prophetic the discovery of the corpse shown in A Selwyn=s@ apartment in her dream.

These omens and premonitions point the way out of the dream as such, exposing the inverted world of value revealed within it, not only with regard to its content (the discovery of the identity of the dreamer) but also with regard to its *form*. By pointing toward an unsettling *future*, the premonitions function to highlight the instability of the *present* B that eventually the dream will be discovered *as* a dream, as the wish-fulfillment of a jealous lover. The way out of the dream is accomplished through the shattering of its stability from within, depicted through the dissolution of Rita=s mental state after she and Elms discover the corpse in bed B an omen ultimately fulfilled with the death of Selwyn. Rita=s anguish after having seen the corpse is shown through multiple over-exposures dissolving over one another, images which give way to a scene of her sobbing and ripping with a pair of scissors at her long black hair over a sink. The foreshadowing of Selwyn=s death destabilizes the very source of conflict motivating the narrative (a quest for Rita=s true identity through the agency of Elms) in the structure of the dream. To rescue the dream means to rescue Rhodes-dreamt-as-Rita (R/R).

To restore stability to the framework of the dream narrative, Selwyn-dreamt-as-Elms (S/E) provides R/R with a ready-made identity B her own. The fantasy version of Camilla Rhodes becomes a mirror image of S/E and when the two make love, the dreamer=s true selfish

narcissism is revealed B R/R is mine forever because she has become another version of me B Rhodes-dreamt-as-Rita-turned-Elms (R/R/E). But this stabilization of R/R=s identity through the assimilation of the other B and hence the stability of the dream itself B proves fleeting: there is no Aother@ in a dream.

R/R/E lies in bed with S/E after the two have consummated their love. R/R/E mutters *ANo hay banda@* repeatedly. She urges S/E to take her *Asomewhere.@* The two ride in a cab to Club Silencio, where a magician reveals stage secrets to a (very scant) audience in what resembles a small but sumptuously baroque opera house with high, vaulted ceilings: *ANo hay banda* B and yet we hear a band@ and *AThis is all a tape recording.@* As he causes thunder and lighting to occur, S/E reacts strongly, as if she is the one directly affected by the events on stage. S/E and R/R/E weep in each other=s arms to a lip-synched Spanish-language version of Roy Orbison=s Crying (Llorando), at which point S/E finds a blue box in her purse. The color of the box as well as the triangular key-hole in its side appear to be features corresponding to the highly-stylized blue key found in the black bag of money Rita had with her when she stumbled into Aunt Ruth=s apartment. The two rush back to Aunt Ruth=s apartment to retrieve the blue key they had hidden in a hat box and had put on a shelf in the bedroom closet. Once the two walk into the bedroom, Elms disappears and Rita, after a brief period of wondering where she could be, goes ahead and opens the box with the key B which we later discover symbolizes the key the hit man said he would leave at Selwyn=s apartment as a sign that Rhodes is dead and their contract fulfilled. The camera zooms into the darkness of the box and from the blackness within we see it fall away to the floor. Rhodes is dead B but so are R/R/E and S/E. The stars of the show have left the stage. The story is over. The transition to reality has begun.

Wake up pretty girl.

The entire foundation of the dream narrative erodes as the viewer begins to realize the entire preceding two hours (approximately) of film (with the exclusion of the opening montage) was the dream of a jealous lover, envious of the success of those around her. One mystery has been solved. Another is just beginning.

The diegetic chronology of the dream narrative B its inner logical coherence, dependent on expectations embedded in its narrative type, suddenly has been shifted into new territory entirely, the story of a dreamer now awake. The final sign expected in the dream narrative becomes simply another sign heralding another narrative: a woman getting out of bed to answer a knock at the door. The film then begins to stagger into the past via flashbacks and flashforwards-within-flashbacks B one woman=s history crashing in on her, out of order, out of control.

### **Alt=s Not Easy for Me@: The Temporal Logic of Selwyn=s Waking Reality**

The dream narrative ends with Diane Selwyn waking up to the sound of an ex-roommate (ex-lover?) knocking at the door. She has come to get her belongings, one of which is a piano-shaped ashtray; as the camera pans to the ashtray on the coffee table we see a blue key beside it. The roommate gets the ashtray and leaves, but not before she tells Selwyn two detectives have been looking for her Aagain.@ Selwyn, dressed in a tattered white robe, goes to the kitchen to make coffee. While bent over the counter fixing the coffee, she *fantasizes herself fantasizing* that ACamilla@ has come back to her, weeping while gazing at her image, seeking to objectify herself as the adored in another Astory@ B but the fantasy abruptly ends and we see Selwyn, no longer weeping, standing in a slightly different position than she was while entertaining her

fantasy. She then turns toward the sink and resumes making her coffee.

A quick cut to a pot of freshly brewed coffee. Selwyn pours herself a cup and walks to the living room; suddenly, the camera pans over the back of the couch revealing Camilla Rhodes lying nude. Selwyn is shown crawling over the couch, topless, holding not coffee but a glass of liquor, smiling. She sets her drink on the coffee table; we see the piano-shaped ash tray, but no blue key. Selwyn strokes Rhodes' breast, but Rhodes warns her 'Awe can't do this anymore,' to which Selwyn replies by attempting violently to force her hand into Rhodes' crotch. Selwyn, rebuffed, says 'It's him, isn't it?'

A quick cut to Selwyn, who walks in front of a (very phony) painted rendition of an urban landscape serving as a background for the set of Adam Keshner's film, *The Sylvia North Story*. Selwyn gazes intently at Keshner as he directs Rhodes, who is sitting in a car on the set. Keshner moves an actor aside and gets in the car with her to demonstrate to him how she should be kissed in the scene. Selwyn watches jealously as the two kiss, after which Keshner yells 'Lights out!' and the film fades to black, fades in briefly to show Selwyn's face, then fades to black again. In the blackness, a door is heard to open.

A quick cut to Selwyn (wearing a tank-top T-shirt) throwing Rhodes out of her apartment, Rhodes emphatically telling Selwyn (with a stronger Hispanic accent in her voice than she had in the dream) not to be angry and not to make matters difficult. Selwyn screams in reply that she's not going to make it easy (the break-up), because it is not easy for her. She slams the door.

A quick cut to Selwyn, simultaneously sobbing and masturbating on her couch, wearing the same old tank top she had on when she threw Rhodes out of her apartment. Her vision blurs

and fades as the tempo of her strokes reach a violent climax. Suddenly, her attention is shifted to a telephone ringing on a table in a dark hallway next to a lit red lamp and an ashtray (this phone, lamp and ashtray composition had been shown in the dream narrative during the series of calls between the conspirators; in the dream, the person on the other end of the line was the hit man). Selwyn then enters from a dark hallway wearing a black evening dress and answers the phone; Rhodes instructs her to meet a car to take her to an address on Mulholland Drive. We see Selwyn hang up the phone and look away, trepidation on her face. Fade to black.

A signpost bearing *Mulholland Dr.* lights up in the darkness, repeating the beginning of the film (just past the opening montage). Tracking shots of a white limousine in the dark, winding its way down the twisting path that is Mulholland Drive, repeat the opening credit sequence; again, exactly like the opening sequence, the limousine stops. Selwyn, concerned, asks the two men driving the limousine "What are you doing? We don't stop here." The driver tells her it's a surprise (the driver appeared in her dream as one of the corporate lackeys trying to arrange a deal between the studio and the gangster financiers of Kesher's latest project). Selwyn watches Rhodes appear from the darkness alongside the road and walk to the car; taking her hand, she leads her down to Kesher's house, where he is hosting a party. At the party, we meet many of the faces who populate the dream narrative as well as learning information about Selwyn's background. When Kesher and Rhodes kiss (after Rhodes has kissed another woman, seemingly with the explicit purpose of humiliating Selwyn) and happily attempt to state their wedding plans, Selwyn is shown briefly turning violently away, enraged.

A quick cut to dishes crashing to the floor of Winkie's, where Selwyn is shown turning around in a booth, after apparently having been distracted by the breaking glass. She faces the

hit man (who in her dream she devalues as inept). In a repetition of the truly bizarre meeting between Kesher and the espresso-spitting Castigliare brothers, she slides a picture of Rhodes toward him and says "This is the girl." The hit man asks if she can afford to pay him, and she shows him the black bag full of money, the same bag that in her dream had been carried by Rita out of the crashed limousine (we learn at the party Selwyn's Aunt Ruth B who had been an actress B had died and left her some money). Selwyn looks over and sees a man by the counter who in her dream is killed by the strange figure haunting the back of the restaurant (her fantasy murder of the only witness to the transaction). The hit man tells Selwyn that when the deed is done, he will leave a blue key at a place they had previously agreed to. Selwyn asks what the key opens, and the hit man sits back and has a good laugh at her expense.

Over the laughter of the hit man the film dissolves to a shot of the strange figure behind Winkie's, back-lit by a fire glowing through plumes of smoke. The figure, looking very much like a badly burnt replica of the figure of death in Ingmar Bergman's *The Seventh Seal* (1957), is inspecting the blue box Rita opened, signaling the end of the dream (and the end of Rhodes, as well). Unable to open it, or no longer interested in it, the shrouded figure puts the box in a sack of refuse by his feet. The camera pans to the opening of the sack, and from the side of the box two little people walk out, gibbering maniacally B smaller representations of the elderly couple shown with Selwyn during the opening montage (probably the grandparents she speaks about in her dream).

A quick cut to the blue key sitting on the coffee table (absent the piano-shaped ashtray). It is night. The camera pans past Selwyn's cup of coffee; she is shown sitting on the couch in her tattered white robe, staring at the key. There is a knock at the door; an extreme close up of

Selwyn=s eyes glancing at it. A quick cut to the Liliputian elderly couple, still gibbering and laughing, crawling under the door into the apartment. A quick cut to an extreme close-up of her eyes as they drift down again to the key; an eye closes. Suddenly, she bolts up from the couch and dashes away. A quick cut to the faces of the elderly couple, now grown to full-size, marching toward Selwyn who backs away from them down the hallway, screaming; she falls across her bed, gets a gun from a night stand and shoots herself in the mouth. Clouds of thick smoke fill the room. Fade to black.

At this point, Selwyn=s waking reality ends and the closing montage begins. Yet in order to discover what all these flashbacks and flashforwards-within-flashbacks might be trying to tell us, we need to construe their Aobjective@ temporal order. It is clear from the way the coda is edited that certain images are used to identify the temporal order of the scenes with regard to a before and an after. Consider:

1) Keshher=s and Rhodes= kiss on the set of *The Sylvia North Story* (an assistant can be heard shouting the title). According to Selwyn (at the party), she met Rhodes while on the set of this film; she said her acquaintance with Rhodes led to parts in other films.

2) Selwyn and Rhodes cuddling on the couch, coupled with Rhodes= news of a break-up, followed by Selwyn throwing Rhodes out of her apartment. This scene is split in two, as in between is inserted the scene mentioned above, Keshher on the set. The piano-ashtray is shown on the coffee table during this scene, placing it before the dream narrative; the emotional logic of the characters would put the scene in which Rhodes tells Selwyn the two must break up and their door-slamming scene together as one.

3) Diane weeping and masturbating on the couch. In this scene she is shown wearing the

same ragged tank-top she had on when throwing Rhodes out of her apartment.

4) The party at Kesher=s house. The purpose of the party appears to be to let the viewer know the depth of Selwyn=s humiliation. Kesher, in reality, is revealed to be extremely successful, not the castrated, inept cuckold Selwyn portrayed him in her dream (AShe got the pool man, I got the pool!@ he exclaims about his divorce settlement). Coco Linoix (Kesher=s mother) comforts Selwyn after she has heard her tell the story of how she met Rhodes; this seems to suggest that Linoix knows all about Rhodes= penchant for using and abusing starlets in her films. This suspicion is confirmed by the blonde ingenue who kisses Rhodes and giggles while looking directly at Selwyn. To top it all off, there is the humiliation of a wedding announcement which is never completed, as the scene is abruptly cut short. However, it is clear at the end that Selwyn=s sense of shame and rage has reached the boiling point.

5) The hiring of the hit man at Winkie=s.

6) The dream.

7) Selwyn awakened by her ex-roommate/ex-lover, who tells her detectives have been looking for her again (Selwyn puts two detectives in her dream in the aftermath of the limousine accident, but how this could possibly connect to two detectives actually looking for her Aagain@ is not clear B perhaps another example of the exigencies affecting the production of the film and the need to wrap everything up as one story). It is day. Selwyn makes coffee and walks to the couch.

8) Selwyn sits frozen on the couch into the night staring at the blue key on the coffee table, the sign that Rhodes has been murdered and her contract with the hit man fulfilled. Her cup of coffee is still on the table; there is no piano-shaped ashtray.

9) Selwyn=s suicide.

It is the dream that maintains a linear perspective, experienced by the viewer as unfolding toward a resolution of its central conflict B the true identity of Rita. The diegetic chronology of the scenes and sequences appear to logically cohere with the type of film it appears to be B a *neo-noir* mystery in the form of an identity quest. But the dream ends, the expectations of the genre thwarted B once and for all. And once Selwyn is faced with the grim task of owning up to the reality of her situation, the sequential linearity of the narrative comes to an end as well. If the sequential ordering of Hollywood=s classical narrative tradition feign a sense of objective time by simulating time=s arrow by displaying a logically coherent tradition of images, a diegetic chronology, then Selwyn=s waking reality should have been presented as sequentially linear, and her dream as temporally convoluted. Why does this narrative inversion take place? What is Lynch doing with this turning of the sequentially linear narrative on its head by making it the basis of an orderly dream set in opposition to a depiction of a temporally chaotic reality?

### **AWe Don=t Stop Here@; The Temporal Logic of the Post-Modern Subject**

One conclusion to be drawn from the coda is that its point of view is entirely Selwyn=s; every shot is calculated to depict her emotional states, her reactions to events, documenting her descent into madness in the form of the figures of her grandparents B icons dredged from her super-ego B arriving to punish her, hallucinations motivated by her guilt for having succeeded in arranging the death of her former lover. It is her flashbacks we see she while she sits on that couch, staring at that key, flashbacks proceeding haphazardly, one memory intruding on the next. The interruptedness of her experience, her sheer inability to even conceive of her past *in a straight line backwards*, as it were, displays a different notion of the experience of time than that

depicted in Descartes=, Kant=s, Hegel=s or Husserl=s idealism B after all, if these modernist attempts to ground time in the subject were true, then the experience of time never could be the *task* MD shows it to be.<sup>14</sup>

Time is a task for Selwyn because, when she wakes up, she ceases to be situated in a genre; Selwyn no longer is part of a story with a linear expectation of closure. Absent an ordering principle, a protocol for assigning values to the past *such that the past can be construed meaningfully*, she cannot comprehend her present. Sequentially structured linear narratives function as protocols ordering the past in meaningful ways according to some type of genre (political? religious? social?) providing closure. Selwyn cannot go forward if she cannot use the past to situate the present, if events in the past cannot be ordered *coherently enough* according to some unity of sense (some narrative account) to illuminate the present, if the meaning of all that has past dissipates; the past has all come back to her at once, *all equally relevant*, colliding with other fragments of the past, combining and recombining according to no sense of any one event having been responsible for another because no one event is more meaningful than another.

When that blue key is shown, the entire film is with the viewer B the jealousy, the rage, the thirst for revenge and the love and the hopes and dreams as well. All of it. Haunting the image of the key like a ghostly reflection of itself. The film=s past clings to that image the way Deleuze describes the past clinging to certain images in other temporally disjointed films B as the Avirtual@ (past) image necessarily accompanying the Aactual@ (present) image B a Acystal@ of time.<sup>15</sup> If Deleuze can capitalize on Bergson=s theory of time to explain the phenomenon of post-war European films toward temporal chaos, then let us capitalize on Deleuze=s notion of

the crystallization of time into Avirtual@ and Aactual@ temporal aspects of single images within films into a more general notion of experience as such.

Let us also follow Deleuze and define a Asubject@ as an assemblage, a social and biological machine composed of layers and layers of machined surfaces, all of them loosely interacting to produce a *machine that has been machined to machine*<sup>16</sup>; but let us also go further and describe the purpose of the assemblage as reproduction B the assemblage has been machined to replicate its origins in the greater social machine. The assemblage, like any other machine in good working order, must be Atimed@ in order to function, i.e., must operate according to a general rhythm with regard to the future.<sup>17</sup> This it does by constructing a notion of time comprised of an image of the meaning of its time B a narrative account of its purpose with regard to the future. In other words, in order to face the only true unknowable unknown the assemblage can confront B the future B *it must possess a linear narrative of what should be happening next.*

The assemblage thus must situate itself in a genre.<sup>18</sup> That is its task with regard to time. But the assemblage that is tagged ADiane Selwyn@ cannot perform this necessary function. Her guilt and feelings of failure have driven her to abandon any criterion of meaning according to which the past can matter to her now: the past became displaced from its moorings in a linear tale and rushed to greet her in fragments, intruding in on her helter-skelter: the past experienced virtually by her at every moment.

In contemporary society, tradition is hard to come by. The images according to which a societies= assemblages could Atime@ themselves (history as genre B the story of how things once were) are gone, their pretense to objectivity punctured, or at best, suspect; *there is no longer any agreed-upon objective cue, no blueprint, as it were, according to which the past*

*should be uniformly constructed to face a future that, absent delineation in a genre, may never arrive.* The twisting and turning of the narrative in the coda (told from Selwyn=s point of view) replicates the reality of the assemblage who finds in time *a task without instructions for completion*, not a passive given (as described in the Enlightenment and its heir, German idealism); a subject who experiences time in virtual fragments haunting the present *without any meaning in themselves*. And yet, the machine must machine and must therefore construct a linear image of time to prepare itself for the coming of the next moment so that it can continue to machine, to replicate its origins, reproduce its reproducer. Move on.

The assemblage tagged as ADiane Selwyn@ failed the task of machining an image of time for herself, and the result was madness. That the past cannot come back to us or that we cannot reach out and touch the future are exactly the factors of time=s arrow the assemblage must conceive according to an image B any image that brings the two in such a relation that some sense of identity is preserved, an image which becomes the ordering principle producing the virtual past which adheres to every moment.

Let us now be clear at this point B *MD is a linear narrative, but it is not a sequentially-ordered linear narrative*. All narratives are Alinear@ in the sense that they provide closure; to *think* closure requires a retrospective sequential ordering of the telling of its sense. Thus, the notion of Aclosure@ requires the notion of Alogical sequencing@ according to a narrative=s final sign. That a film narrative does not obey time=s arrow *in the telling* does not mean that it lacks closure (see Note 6).

The assemblage prepares to greet the future armed with the only two pieces of knowledge it possesses about time B that the past has happened and the present currently is. But that the

past has happened is no indication that what has happened bears any relation to *what might happen*. For the past to bear a relation to the future, the future must be enveloped in the past B the linear image of time=s arrow must become instead the circular image of a ring. The image of time as circular is precisely the structure of a linear narrative ending in closure. To enclose time in on itself B to situate the present with regard to the past and the future B means to tell a sequentially linear tale providing each passing moment with a meaning assigned by a final sign bringing the series of signs preceding it under itself. A sequentially-ordered linear narrative does this, despite the fact that objective time provides no closure; time=s arrow is metaphor indicating a direction, not a meaning, because the arrow never lands.

Selwyn failed her task: the assemblage no longer could machine because it could not face its past, and unable to construct a past, it could not bear the future. To be the past all at once, to be the bearer of all times past, to see every horror and humiliation cling to every present as equally vital and yet meaningless at the same time B all that can only lead to madness.

Diane Selwyn. Sitting there on that couch. Staring at that blue key. Paralyzed. All day. A machine stuck on idle. Not knowing what to do. Next. Without the organizing principle of tradition, or some other tale in its place, the human machine operates at chaotic speeds, cannot focus, cannot concentrate, repeats itself to keep track of itself, its memory becomes a jumble because it lacks the condition with which to temporally regulate itself B a story of what has happened explaining what to expect next.<sup>19</sup>

There is no little piece of God in us exempt from the objective temporal flow and from whose standpoint we make sense of the present moment. There is only ever another present moment, from whose standpoint every assemblage experiences an image of the past, an image of

its own making. We do not experience the future. We do not experience the past. We do not have the miraculous ability to be in actual contact with all aspects of time all at once. Yet, in order to function as the assemblages we are machined to be, we are faced with the task of situating the present with regard to the past and the past with regard to the present so that the future can be met; so we do what assemblages are left to do: we make it up. We must construct a virtual image of the past (which is always the mirror image of the actual present) that's useful enough to carry us through to the next moment. The image of the virtual past becoming actualized in the present B that's the goal of the assemblage, that's how it must continue to function: the manufacture of a smooth transition from the present to the future by machining the future to resemble an image of the past, an image of the past typically created by the assemblage according to ordering principles inherent in the stories telling the tale of its traditions.

We waste our creativity on repetition.<sup>20</sup> The future encountered as an old friend.

Temporality without surprises. A machine hitting on all cylinders.

All sequentially linear narratives are false in that they depend upon the closure of a final sign to produce meaning B yet, however false they may be, they do mimic the direction of time's arrow; in the viewing of a film, this structure produces the experience of a diegetic chronology, a logical succession of events according to a sense of impending closure, producing the illusion of a film with a world of its own; this willing suspension of disbelief in the very nature of objective time as meaningless in itself is based on the assemblage's *need* to have the time of its life amount to something.

In order to go on.

The assemblage is event B it is process, it is machining. It is in and of the temporal flux,

not outside it or beyond it. The assemblage has no substance, if by this is meant a self-identical something persisting through the temporal flux. Time, objectively, is mere succession without purpose, without end. The assemblage, however, will end. Linear narratives end too, but they appear to make the time spent in the telling and hearing of the tale worth it, as meaning something over and above themselves; they have well-defined beginnings, middles and endings (births, lives, deaths), mimicking the direction of time's arrow and terminating in a final sign making all previous shots, scenes and sequences seem to have purpose. The assemblage must machine itself to face its always immanent end by constructing a virtual past to cling to the present, *in order (typically) to continue the process of turning the future into the past by making the past repeat itself*. To persist amid the temporal flux is merely to construct a virtual image of the past so as to prepare the way for the experience of the next actual present accomplished through the construction of a (linear) narrative about itself.

The future and the past are stabilized in the present in terms of a story in which the beginning becomes the end and the end becomes the beginning, accomplished by the assemblage through machining the future for the present by replicating the past in terms of its role in its narrative. The assemblage's narrative about itself makes *that which it determines as its past virtually cling to the present according to its importance for what's coming next*. The assemblage constructs its image of time according to the protocol demanded by the story it has made for itself, whether that story is based on its social traditions or is taken from the unique history of the assemblage itself. Or neither.

The construction of stories is necessary, the belief in them is not. The assemblage is self-identical to the degree to which it believes its own stories: to *be* is to assume the role of a

character in a narrative of a particular genre.

But, being false, narratives are inherently unstable & closure (ultimately) never arrives. We are always in danger of Awakening up@ from our dreams, as it were; our immersion in our stories proves futile, leading to a desperate rescue of the current narrative or the search for another. And another.

### ***No Hay Banda@: Conclusion***

MD is a commentary on the failure of narratives ultimately to provide closure by depicting the failure of its own dream to do likewise. The nothingness into which we are plunged inside the blue box signals the death of not just Camilla Rhodes, but the emptiness of an entire tradition founded on the Hollywood convention of sequentially-ordered linear narrative. With its point/counterpoint structure of a film at (formal) narrative odds with itself, it ultimately discloses the vacuous but necessary nature of narratives as such in the assemblage=s construction of its experience of time.

The coda thus becomes a way of conceiving the relation between past, present and future from the standpoint of a broken social machine for which the past has become meaningless absent the sequential linearity of her dream. The *silencio* uttered at the end of the film is the emptiness of subjectivity, the lack of any inner, hidden, invisible structural support for the subject. No *deus ex machina* for the assemblage faced with the project of making time run smoothly for itself in order to continue to machine. No final sign, no closure. Only the task.

Or it can=t go on.

MD successfully calls into question the sources of its own inspiration; it synthesizes stylistic distortions typical of the *noir/neo-noir* genres (in lighting, temporal displacement and

framing) with inversions of its themes (the revenge of a jealous lover, the identity quest) by means of a dream narrative disguised as a mystery B all of it giving way to a jarring conception of reality leading to madness and suicide. It is a meta-critique (as in Lynch=s *Blue Velvet* (1986) and *Lost Highway* (1997)) of the falsity of the gloss on reality provided by Hollywood=s traditional linear narrative. Lynch has, in essence, succeeded in summarizing and commenting on the *noir* tradition while surpassing it in terms of a broader disclosure on the structural role of narratives in the experience of time; the disclosure that the assemblage has no substance, merely a task to produce a diegetic chronology for itself in order to continue to operate properly.

*No hay banda.* Yet it must play on. Even as a tape recording.

### Endnotes

<sup>1</sup>Roger Ebert, reviewing the film for the *Chicago Sun Times*, observes after summarizing (or attempting to summarize) the plot: AI=ve basically explained nothing. The movie is hypnotic; we=re drawn along as if one thing leads to another B but nothing leads anywhere . . . There is no explanation. There may not even be a mystery . . . There is nothing that is intended to be a waking moment@ (Ebert). Stephen Holden, reviewing the film for the *Los Angeles Times*, states that Aby surrendering any semblance of rationality to create a post-Freudian, pulp-fiction fever dream of a movie, Mr. Lynch ends up shooting the moon@ and Aits frenzied, final 45 minutes, in which the story circles back on itself in a succession of kaleidoscopic Chinese boxes, conveys the maniacal thrill of an imagistic brainstorm@ (Holden). Similar references in many reviews to the film=s supposed Airrationality@ abound; the best source online for almost all important reviews of contemporary films is *Metacritic.com* at <<http://www.metacritic.com>>; specifically for its archive on MD go to <<http://www.metacritic.com/video/titles/mulhollanddrive/>>.

<sup>2</sup>Freud 260-261; AThe dream content is, as it were, presented in picture writing, whose signs are to be translated one by one into the language of the dream thoughts@ (260).

<sup>3</sup>Lytard on narrative and genre: ANarrative is perhaps the genre of discourse within which the heterogeneity of phrase regimens, and even the heterogeneity of genres of discourse, have the easiest time passing unnoticed. On the one hand, narrative recounts a *differend* or *differends* and imposes an end on it or them, a completion which is also its final term. It=s finality is to come to an end. Wherever in diegetic time it stops, its term makes sense and retroactively organizes the recounted events. The narrative function is redeeming in itself. It

acts as if the occurrence, with its potentiality of *differends*, could come to completion, or as if there were a last word. Felicitous or infelicitous of its meaning, the last word is always a good one [*un bon mot*] by virtue of its place . . . On the other hand, the unleashing [*dechainement*] of the now is domesticated by the recurrence of before/after. The diachronic operator or operator of successivity is not called into question, even when it is modulated@ (*Differend* #218-219, 151-152). In other words, in narrative closure, synchrony wins out over diachrony B history effectively ends.

I take issue, however, with Lyotard=s position that narratives are a genre unto themselves: isn=t it the case, rather, that all narratives are told from within genres, that the narrative is the form of all genres? Lyotard goes astray in the *Differend*; he begins by saying Agenres of discourse determine stakes, they submit phrases from different phrase regimens (the cognitive, the prescriptive, the command, the exclamation, wishes)to a finality,@ and then goes on to list the narrative as one genre among many (#40, 29; #221-234, 155-161). Narratives are the form of all possible genres because only genres prescribe the regimens, procedures or protocols under which questions can be answered and conflicts resolved in a discourse B which only can be done through the pretense of closure narratives provide (#228-232). Isn=t this what is implied by the statement above that Agenres of discourse . . . submit phrases . . . to a finality@? (On the function of the Atranscendental signified@ as a final sign assigning meaning in history, see Derrida 65.)

Hollywood has always relied on linear narratives in all its genres; what is interesting is the way in which *noir*, in the hands of its auteurs, felt free to experiment with narrative: AThe conventional voice is characterized by a seemingly objective point of view, adherence to a cause-effect logic, use of goal-oriented characters to direct our attention and elicit our sympathies, and a progression toward narrative closure. . . . *film noir* . . . popularized the voice-over and flashback devices which implicitly challenge conventional linear narratives . . .@ (Telotte 3; see also Klinger 82-83). I would add that because a voice is not Aconventional@ in a narrative does not imply its non-linearity; in any case, most *noir* films were told in linear fashion.

<sup>4</sup>It would be futile to recap the continuing dialogue on the proper categorization of *film noir* as a style (Schrader, notably) or a genre (Erickson, for example), but it seems clear to me that it is indeed a genre: ABy the time films such as *Kiss Me Deadly* (1955) and *Touch of Evil* (1958) were produced near the end of the movement, it was evident a new genre had been created, based on the stylistic and narrative conventions filmmakers had self-consciously absorbed from the overall *noir* movement@ (Erickson 311); Erickson makes the best case possible that *noir* was a movement that became a genre; *neo-noir* is the contemporary version of classical *noir*, which among its other unique elements (notably being in photographed in color) calls attention to its own place in a tradition B *neo-noir* is self-consciously aware of itself as *noir*. For a superior overview of recent *neo-noir* films, see Silver and Ward 398-443.

Among the more interesting recent discussions of the definition of genre are Schatz= article on the role of genres to transmit myths attempting to reconcile social contradictions (Schatz 93-95); Klinger=s article on progressive genres resisting closure: AWhereas closure usually signals the ultimate containment of matters brought out in the narrative . . . progressive films end in such a way as to refuse closure@ (Klinger 83); and Altman=s piece on the dialectic

between film syntax and semantics (form/content) appropriate to understanding a genre: ALike language and myth, the film genre as a textual system represents a set of rules of construction that are utilized to accomplish a specific communicative function@ (Altman 34-35).

<sup>5</sup>For an excellent discussion of the visual elements which make up *noir* as a genre, see Place and Peterson 65-69: AComplementary to the *noir* photographic style . . . is a *mis-en-scene* designed to unsettle, jar, and disorient the viewer in correlation with the disorientation felt by the *noir* heroes.@ Schrader=s classic piece on *noir* stylistics point out some of the genre=s pertinent thematic elements, including its penchant for tampering with time: AA complex chronological order is frequently used to reinforce the feelings of hopelessness and lost time@ (Schrader 58). Porfirio=s article on the latent existentialism of film *noir* delineates several tropes typical of the genre, among them the vulnerability and alienation of the hero (Porfirio 85-87).

<sup>6</sup>Telotte argues that *noir* had always played with the linear narrative with voice-over narration, flashbacks and the denial of closure (Telotte 4-6, 70-72). But in MD, there is no voice-over narration; the film, however, is Atold@ from her viewpoint. Also, the flashback structure in the coda does not obey the normal Acues@ associated with the device B there is no voice-over narration, no fog rolling over the screen or extra-diegetic music or sound effects announcing the movement into the past; Lynch relies on quick-cuts that lurch temporally to and fro, with visual icons to help situate the course of events (such as the piano-shaped ashtray). It can=t be denied that some films resist or refuse closure B but then, wouldn=t they *belong to the genre of films that provide closure by not doing so*? All narratives *aim* at closure; that this does not happen in some cases does not damage the view that the viewer, at least, *expects all stories to be linear in the end because only linear stories can be closed*. That a story is Aopen-ended@ does not mean it does not provide closure (see also Note 7 below) B if your story was meant to convey the meaning that there is no meaning, then *that* was the meaning stamped as final on your narrative; also, that a film contains a flashback or two does not mean it is not a linear narrative, a point stressed by Deleuze in his *Cinema 2: The Time Image*: ABut we know very well that the flashback is a conventional, extrinsic device: it is generally indicated by a dissolve link, and the images that it introduces are often superimposed or meshed. It is like a sign that announces >Watch out! recollection=. It can, therefore, indicate, by convention, a causality which is psychological, but still analogous to a sensory-motor determinism, and, despite its circuits, only confirms the progression of a linear narration@ (48-49).

However, the coda in MD seems to conform to the way Deleuze explains that Adestiny@ must be intertwined in the flashback structure of a film in order to escape linearity: (with regard to the films of Joseph J. Mankiewicz B AThere is no longer any question of an explanation, a causality or a linearity which ought to go beyond themselves in destiny. On the contrary it is a matter of an inexplicable secret, a fragmentation of all linearity, perpetual forks like so many breaks in causality@ (*Cinema 2* 49). But even this description contains a closure of sorts B destiny implies a possibility to be achieved given the givenness of the present situation, a pointing beyond the present that makes the present seem to have a place, no matter how many Acircuits@ of flashbacks are established in a narrative.

Let us be clear on this point: time itself does not flashback. Hence, the necessity of stories that *do*; *all narratives end up being linear, in the end, even those out of sequence, because to understand the meaning of a series of events is to embed it in a narrative with the*

*pretense of a final sign.*

<sup>7</sup>A diegetic chronology is the production of a certain sense of time from within the viewing of a film displaying a linear narrative; it is loosely dependent on a narrative's plot: A plot has unity of action (that is, it is an artistic whole) if it is a single, complete, and ordered structure of actions, all directed toward the intended effect, in which none of its component parts, or incidents, is unnecessary, and as Aristotle said (*Poetics*, sec. 8), all the parts are >so closely connected that the transposal or withdrawal of any one of them will disjoint and dislocate the whole=@ (Abrams 129).

What is crucial in the viewing of a film is not that it actually provides closure B only that it is expected to (in the sense of unity described above), and if these expectations are consistently met during the unfolding of the events within a linear narrative, then it will produce the experience of diegetic chronology, and this despite a flashback or two (a plot out of sequence); in other words, a filmmaker can be coy with a plot, leave it unresolved, tease the viewer with an Aopen end@ when the film is over, mix up the scenes as he or she will B nevertheless, the Astory@ being told is expected by the viewer (or listener) to make sense in the end, and this expectation is what guides the viewer during the act of viewing (or listening).

<sup>8</sup>Nietzsche saw through this pretension of modernity and proposed an alternative form of closure B the eternal return (*Zarathustra* 158-160, 220): ATime itself is a circle@ said the dwarf, to which Zarathustra replies AMust whatever can happen have happened, have been done, have passed by before?@ (158). Nietzsche sought to exempt from time any sense of closure (completion) with a notion of infinite repetition B even if history can be given a meaning, a final sign, as it were, the final sign itself would iterate forever.

<sup>9</sup>AModern philosophy is generally said to have begun with Descartes (1596-1650) or with Francis Bacon (1561-1626) in England@ (Copleston, Book 2 ; on modern philosophy in general 1-62); modern philosophy is generally agreed to end with the dissolution of Hegelianism (see Adorno=s thesis that the Holocaust ended modernity once and for all: *Negative Dialectics* 300-350). As such, Amodernity,@ as a term, expresses the notion of the Enlightenment=s break with previous (medieval) tradition, emphasizing rational solutions to all problems because reason is an infallible, indubitable adjudicator of truth, accessed from within each discretely defined individual (Grenze, quod. in Miller 212-215); Heidegger on modernity: AModern philosophy made a total turnabout of philosophical inquiry and started out from the subject, the ego@ (*Fundamental Concepts* 123).

<sup>10</sup>AIndeed, the grasp of an object consists in nothing else but that an I (*Ich*) will make the object its own, will penetrate it, and will bring it into its own form . . .@ (Hegel, quod. in *Negative Dialectics* 174).

<sup>11</sup>For Descartes= view of God as sustaining being through Acontinuous creation@ see Descartes 33; For Kant=s view of time as the form of all intuition see Kant B46-73, 74-91; for Hegel on *das Absolut* see Hegel 479-493.

<sup>12</sup>Adorno makes modernity=s (conservative) denial of time a central concept in his critique of Western metaphysics (particularly Enlightenment claims to totality) in his *Negative Dialectics*: ABecause entity is not immediate, because it *is* only through the concept, we should begin with the concept, not with the mere datum . . . The concept=s immanent claim is its order-creating invariance as against the change in what it covers. The form of the concept B Afalse@ in

this respect also B would deny change@ (153).

<sup>13</sup>The making of MD is an interesting story in itself. Planned originally as a television pilot for an open-ended mystery series, the pilot was rejected by ABC in 1999, despite the fact they had approved the script (and given Lynch \$8 million); Lynch had shot approximately 94 minutes of footage, which he kept until he had figured out how to wrap it all up as a complete story one year after its rejection by ABC, shooting about 27 extra minutes of footage with \$7 million in French funding from *CanalPlus* (Klein).

AI=m a sucker for a continuing story,@ Lynch said in an interview with Salon.com. AI was very fortunate. I sat down one night, and these ideas came into me, showing me how to do it. Up until that point I didn=t know what I was gonna do. And so the ideas that came in were only possible because it was open ended. It=s strange how what went before was necessary to the final form. And I don=t think it would have been the same at all if it had started out being a feature. So it=s an interesting trick of the mind@ (Klein).

As Klein points out, MD was not the first time Lynch had to wrap up an open-ended television series. For *Twin Peaks* (1990, ABC), Lynch had to add a few extra minutes to the pilot episode so that it could be released theatrically in Europe to satisfy the wishes of a studio partially funding the project (the rights to the pilot have never been straightened out; there has yet to be an American DVD or VHS release). The extra footage added to the pilot was essentially the classic Ared room@ dream sequence later incorporated into Episode Two. Also, the entire series had to be wrapped up in one hour after ABC canceled the series; ABC aired Episode 28 and 29 together as a two-hour movie in June, 1990 (Episode 29 was the wrap-up episode, written and directed by Lynch).

MD also is not the first time Lynch has tinkered with the connection between reality and chronology: in *Twin Peaks*, the Ared room@ turns out to be the waiting room for the Black Lodge, the dimension where evil spirits dwell, including the evil sides of our nature in the form of doppelgangers; those who gain access to the power of the Black Lodge are said to be able to Aorder time@ to his or her own liking (Episode 26). The final episode (29) in which FBI Special Agent Dale Cooper (Kyle MacLachlan) makes it into the Black Lodge displays much temporal disorder.

<sup>14</sup>Kierkegaard conceives of time as a task: AA self is a relation that relates itself to itself in the relation; the self is not the relation but the relation=s relating itself to itself . . . A human being is a synthesis of the temporal and the eternal . . .@ (*Sickness Unto Death* 14). Kierkegaard is essentially saying that the individual must take a stand on itself in order to be a self B the self is what it freely understands or interprets itself to be: AThis means that infinite and finite, possibility and necessity, and the eternal and the temporal have no existence independently of my defining them by making a commitment . . . Kierkegaard=s argument that commitments are eternal is an argument that they are not subject to retroactive reinterpretation and that they therefore establish a continuity between my present, my past and my future@ (Dreyfus 285-286).

<sup>15</sup>Following Bergson, Deleuze in his *Cinema 2; The Time Image* describes images in films upon which the past clings as if reflecting a Avirtual@ image of the actual image presented; he calls such images Acrystals@: AThe present is the actual image, and its contemporaneous past is the virtual image, the image in a mirror . . . As pure virtuality, it (the past) does not have to be actualized, since it is strictly correlative with the actual image . . . It is the virtual image which

corresponds to a particular actual image, instead of being actualized . . . It is an actual-virtual image on the spot, and not an actualization of the virtual in accordance with a shifting actual. It is a crystal-image, and not an organic image@ (80-81); also ATime has to unroll as it splits itself out or unrolls itself: it splits into two dissymmetrical jets, one of which makes all the present pass on, while the other preserves all the past. Time consists of this split, and it is this, it is time, that we *see in the crystal* . . . We see in the crystal the perpetual foundation of time, non-chronological time, Cronos and not Chronos . . .@ (81). The crystal image of time is a perpetual to and fro between the actual present and its virtual past, arrested in transit, as it were. It is said by Deleuze to be Anon-chronological@ because it is not passing on to a next image, nor does it have to. I have taken this notion of an Aimage of time@ to found a view that the assemblage must create some Aimage,@ some unity of meaning schematizing the past such that the present can meet the future. This, as I explain, is done with the use of narratives whose meaning is always linear.

<sup>16</sup>AThe minimum real unit is not the word, the idea, the concept or the signifier, but the assemblage . . . The utterance is the product of an assemblage B which is always collective, which brings into play within us and outside us populations, multiplicities, territories, becomings, affects, events. The proper name does not designate a subject, but something which happens, at least between two terms which are not subjects, but agents, elements. Proper names are not the names of persons, but of peoples, tribes, flora and fauna, military operations or typhoons, collectives, limited companies and production studios@ (*Dialogues* 51).

<sup>17</sup>Deleuze hints at the existential task confronting the assemblage with regard to time. On the (transcendental) Aplane of Consistence,@ where the assemblage confronts itself (even Deleuze waffles when describing the assemblage B in *Dialogues* he frequently lapses into speaking of Asubjects@) as opposed to the plane of AOrganization@ which formed it: AThis other plane (Consistence) knows only relations of movement and rest, of speed and slowness, between unformed, or relatively unformed, elements, molecules or particles born away by fluxes. It knows nothing of subjects, but rather what are called >hecceities=. In fact, no individuation takes place in the manner of a subject or even a thing. An hour, a day, a season, a climate, one or several years . . . have a perfect individuality which should not be confused with that of a thing or a formed subject . . . A hecceity can last as long as, and even longer than, the time required for the development of a form and the evolution of a subject. But it is not the same kind of time: floating times, the floating lines of Aion as distinct from Chronos . . . A thing, an animal, a person are now only definable by movements and rests, speeds and slownesses (longitude) and by affects, intensities (latitude). There are no more forms but cinematic relations between unformed elements; there are no more subjects but dynamic individuations without subjects, which constitute collective assemblages@ (92-93); It is my contention that the notion of hecceity (a medieval concept indicating the Athisness@ of a thing, its unique being) as Aevent@ must be construed according to some image regulating the assemblage=s Aspeed@ of operation B an image according to which time can be machined by it so that it can function smoothly: time, for the assemblage, must *mean* something to it.

<sup>18</sup>Don DeLillo is one author whose post-modern literature captures the random nature of an Aassemblage@ absent images schematizing the past in terms of meaning. His Acharacters@ B if indeed that title fits B are always on the prowl for identity, often resorting to objectifying

themselves in terms of narratives: AAs they spoke, Moll had a distant sense of a Memorable Event Taking Place, and could hear herself describing it to friends . . .@ (*Running Dog* 31); the most disturbing example of this in DeLillo is his portrait of Lee Harvey Oswald in *Libra*, a man constantly trying to find meaning in time: AMaybe what has to happen is that the individual must allow himself to be swept along, must find himself in the stream of no-choice, the single direction. This is what makes things inevitable . . . History means to merge. The purpose of history is to climb out of your own skin@ (*Libra* 101); however, *Libra* offers up a nihilistic vision of the assemblage=s attempt to come to terms with time by means of narratives: APlots carry their own logic. There is a tendency of plots to move toward death. He (Win Everett, chief conspirator) believed that the idea of death is woven into every plot. A narrative plot no less than a conspiracy of armed men . . . A plot in fiction, he believed, is the way we localize the force of death outside the book, play it off, contain it . . . He worried about the deathward logic of his plot@ (*Libra* 221); AThe memory was a series of still images, a film broken down to components. He couldn=t quite make it continuous@ (*Libra* 72).

Plots, however, do not march deathward. Life marches deathward. The plots of narratives unify time in the service of life: AWe have need of lies in order to conquer this reality, this >truth,= that is, in order to *live* B That lies are necessary in order to live is itself part of the terrifying character of existence . . . Metaphysics, morality, religion, science B in this book these things merit consideration only as various forms of lies: with their help, one can have *faith* in life. >Life ought to inspire confidence=: the task thus imposed is tremendous. To solve it, man must be a liar by nature, he must be above all an artist. And he is one: metaphysics, religion, morality, science B all of them only products of his will to art, to lie, to flight from the >truth,= to *negation* of >truth=@ (*Will to Power* sec. 853, part one, 451-452).

Jean Paul Sartre was more pessimistic than Nietzsche, believing the literal falsehood of stories speaks against their utility: A. . . a man is always a teller of stories, he lives surrounded by his stories and the stories of others, he sees everything which happens to him through these stories; and he tries to live his life as if it were a story he was telling. But you have to choose: live or tell. (*Nausea* 56-59). I side with Nietzsche B the assemblage can=t *live* unless one *tells* a story assigning a purpose to its time; the primary choice, pre-eminent to all others, is *which* story an assemblage decides to believe in to order its past to confront the future.

<sup>19</sup>The best work I have seen on the topic of time and meaning in the post-modern world is Emmanuel Levinas= AThe Old and the New@ (1980); in it, Levinas critiques notions of time which are structured so that subjects never experience surprise, where the Aold@ is always found in the Anew@: AThe >new= sinks into the >old and older.= But already a point of view open to the content of what is lived intervenes in this experience of the old and the new, which believes or wants itself to be chronological . . . A certain ordering is outlined in the lived contents B or in the experience of these contents. It dominates that of simple succession. >Histories= are superimposed on it. A finality or a system of elements that are not integrated by chronology is affirmed between things or between dispositions . . .@ (Levinas 123). It is this that the assemblage needs B an ordering of the past, the story of its history. That these stories are contingent and Amany@ (as he admits: 124) does not speak against their efficacy, or their need.

<sup>20</sup>The movement of return (repetition) is analyzed by Lyotard in his article ACinema@: AAnd the order of the whole has its sole object in the functioning of the cinema: that there be

order in the movements, that the movements be made in order, that they make order. ... every movement put forward *sends back* to something else, is inscribed as a plus or minus on the ledger book which is the film, *is valuable* because it *returns* to something else . . . @ (170); AAll so-called good form implies the return of sameness, the folding back of diversity upon an identical unity . . . Cinematic movements generally follow the figure of return, that is, of the repetition and propagation of sameness . . . In this regard, all endings are happy endings, just by being endings, for even if a film finishes in a murder, this too can serve as a final resolution of dissonance@ (171). Lyotard sees an oppressive nihilism in the notion of closure as repetition, ultimately disclosed as founded on the notion of a Areturn of profit@ (170-173).

I think he overstates the case for a necessary linkage between repetition and nihilism. If all assemblages have the task of manufacturing their own narratives, then wouldn't that imply a *surplus* of meaning in the world, rather than a lack thereof?

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