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Cinema and Identity in David Lynch's *Mulholland Drive*

Mulholland Drive appears as a puzzling film, in which the characters' identities remain mysterious and incomprehensible until the end and the succession of events is confused through a peculiar cinematic editing and the fact that actors play more than one role. The film is divided into two parts: one is constructed around the story of talented actress Betty Elms and her fatal encounter with the amnesiac Rita, whom Betty falls in love with. This part is characterised by a realistic narration in which events are narrated according to their temporal development, while in the other part, characterised by flashbacks and shifts in time, Betty returns as Diane Selwyn, a depressed, psychotic former actress, lost between her hallucinations and memories.

This paper tries to trace a link between the two sections composing *Mulholland Drive*, considering the first as a dream, and the second as the consequent psychotic state of mind of the protagonist Betty/Diane. Simultaneously, it will focus on the way *Mulholland Drive* connects issues related to subjectivity with a general reflection on cinema, so that while revealing the most common tricks of cinematic narration, it also unveils the protagonist's unspeakable secret.

The Dream

When released, *Mulholland Drive* aroused a variety of contrasting critical comments. At length recognised as a high-quality 'product' and awarded with prestigious prises (Cannes Film Festival and National Society of Film Critic 2001), the film was also criticised for its complicated plot.[1] According to James Berardinelli, for instance, "Lynch cheats his audience […] he throws everything into the mix with the lone goal of confusing us. Nothing makes any sense because it's not supposed to make any sense. There's no purpose or logic to events".[2] In my view, on the contrary, the obscure construction of the film, with its structure of dreams, responds to a precise logic and intent, as suggested in many reviews and articles.[3]

The first part of *Mulholland Drive* basically develops around the love affair between the two protagonists: a mysterious dark-haired woman (Laura Harring) – who escapes a murder attempt and not remembering her true identity names herself Rita, after a picture of Rita Hayworth – and the blonde Betty (Naomi Watts), who arrives at Hollywood to find success as an actress. The following events suggest that Rita is probably an actress

[1] Lynch's production has always raised critiques and attacks for the non-conventional style and content of his movies. From *Eraserhead* (1977) to *Inland Empire* (2006), the red line connecting Lynch's films is his capacity to investigate the American 'heart of darkness', aesthetically and ethically deconstructing the traditional Hollywood conception of cinema as well as the values of the white, middle-class, Puritan America. Released in 2001, *Mulholland Drive* follows *Lost Highway* (1996) and *The Straight Story* (1999), and the three movies have in common references to roads, symbols of the interior path or detour fatally affecting the characters' destiny. At the same time, together with *Lost Highway* and *Inland Empire*, it suggests a reflection on the relationship between dream/illusion and reality, which in all these cases involve cinematic language.

[2] James Berardinelli, "Mulholland Drive. A Film Review" http://www.reelviews.net/movies/m/mulholland_drive.html.

[3] See, for example, Claude Lalumière, "Mulholland Drive" http://www.locusmag.com/2001/Reviews/Lalumiere11_MDrive.html.

too and that her life is threatened by an awkward hit man and a criminal organisation. While the hit man's motives remain unknown, the criminal organisation, led by the sinister "Cowboy", seems to be interested in replacing Rita with an unknown girl, Camilla Rhodes, in a movie directed by a talented film director, Adam Kesher (Justin Theroux).

Rita and Betty come to a turning point when, in search of traces of the brunette's past, they discover the corpse of a woman, Diane Selwyn, a supposed friend of Rita's. This tragic discovery represents a negative climax which leads to two important scenes – that of the wig and of the Club Silencio – which disclose and prepare the deconstruction of identity and cinema that characterises the second part of the story. In fact, in order to avoid possible aggressions to Rita – who feels in danger after the discovery of her friend Diane's death – Betty suggests the use of a blonde wig as a camouflage, a device which makes Rita the double of Betty and unfolds a variety of reflections on the real relationship occurring between the two women, emphasising their vicinity as well as a possible confusion of their identity.

The first section ends with the scene set at the Club Silencio, a cabaret theatre, where Rita and Betty watch an uncanny show, in which a host on stage repeats: "No hay banda. There is no band! … This is all … a tape-recording. No hay banda! And yet we hear a band. … It's all recorded … It's all a tape … It is an … illusion".[4] In the meantime, a musician appears on stage playing a trumpet, but when he stops playing (or pretending to do so) the music goes on, revealing that, as the presenter says, everything is recorded. The climax of this revelatory spectacle is however represented by "la Llorona de Los Angeles Rebeka del Rio" who sings a yearning version of Roy Orbison's "Crying". While performing, she falls dead on the floor (or pretends to), but yet her voice is still resonating in the air, making clear that what the audience is looking at is just an illusion.

Rita and Betty's astonished reaction to this uncanny show resembles that of *Mulholland Drive* spectators when, just after the Club Silencio scene, the two women disappear; dissolving and confusing images follow and the camera, snaking from Betty and Rita's place to Diane's apartment, finally stops over the corpse, which turns into an awakening girl (Naomi Watts again). Thus the second part of the movie begins, suggesting that the first part is a dream.

[4] All the quotations referring to *Mulholland Drive* are taken directly from the film script.

The Awakening

Though much shorter than the first one, this part is more intense and pressing. Diane appears to be a disappointed woman on the edge of a psychic collapse. Fragmented memories and images of her past reveal that she was in love with Camilla Rhodes (Laura Harrings), and that they

were both actresses in Hollywood. Thus, this part presents a very different reality, in which the same persons return with a different name. Rita is now Camilla Rhodes while Betty is Diane Selwyn.

Their love affair ends when Camilla meets director Adam Kesher (Justin Theroux), who not only chooses Camilla as the protagonist of his film, but also falls in love with her. Abandoned by her lover and envious of her talent and success, Diane gets more and more depressed. Her sadness grows into aggressive hatred when, at a party at Adam's house in Mulholland Drive, she comes face to face with Camilla's triumphs and her own failure, while remembering her origins and dismal success in Hollywood:

> I'm from Deep River, Ontario, a small town. … I've always wanted to come here. I won this ballet Jitterbug contest … that sort of led to acting … you know, wanting to act. When my aunt died … anyway, she left me some money … she worked here [in the movies].

When Diane is questioned about her encounter with Camilla she answers: "On a *Sylvia North Story* [set] … I wanted the lead so bad. Anyway, Camilla got the part. The director … hadn't so much of me … anyway, that's when we became friends. She helped me getting some parts in some of her films". At the same time, Diane is informed of Camilla and Adam's wedding plans, which however do not prevent Camilla from having another lover, a blonde girl she openly kisses in Diane's presence (and who in the dream 'plays' Camilla Rhodes).

Hence, rage and thirst of vengeance drive Diane to desire Camilla's death. In fact, another flashback shows Diane and a hit man – the same who appeared in the dream – at a diner called Winkie's, arranging Camilla's murder:

> Diane: This is the girl.
> Hit man: Don't show me this photo thing here.
> Diane: It's just an actress's photo, everybody's got one.
> Hit man: You got the money.
> Diane: Sure do.
> Hit man: Ok, once you hand that over to me, it's a done deal. Are you sure you want this?
> Diane: More than anything in this world.
> Hit man: When it's finished, you'll find this [a blue key] where I told you.
> Diane: What's it open?

The hit man answers with a ghastly laugh, when Diane notices the key on her table. This is the proof that the murder has taken place, reminding Diane of her guilt which she can no longer bear. In fact, chased by two mysterious ghosts towards her bedroom, she finally shoots herself on the bed. The last scene goes back to the Club Silencio, where an enigmatic blue-haired woman, completely alone in the dark, desolate theatre, pronounces the last cue: "Silencio".

Freudian Displacements

The presence of uncanny characters and Diane's tragic end render *Mulholland Drive* a psychological thriller, which offers no solution to the audience. Indeed, everybody is left to wonder about Betty/Diane's identity and the unexplained relations between the first and the second part. What has probably proved confusing for detractors of *Mulholland Drive* is the displacement of the characters' identities. The film proposes a sort of uncanny repetition as, in the second part, Betty and Rita are still the protagonists but with different stories and personalities; similarly, other characters too reappear in different roles.[5]

These repetitions are not unusual in Lynch's cinema, but in *Mulholland Drive* they acquire a special meaning when related to the articulation of the movie into dream and after-dream. In this respect, it is useful to underline that to consider the first part of *Mulholland Drive* as Diane's dream and the second part as the hours following her awakening is the most common interpretation of the film though not the only possible one. Many critics, such as Gabriele Biotti for instance, insist on the instability of sense in a film not meant to tell a 'story' with a comprehensible plot.[6] This is undeniably true, as its complexity and richness not only inspire a variety of possible interpretations, but also paradoxically induce the audience to suspend any attempt at deciphering the meaning of what is narrated. Yet, this is the point; a narration *exists* in this film and the accuracy in presenting repetitions and projections reveals a precise design, which in my view is fully expressed by what may be by now called 'the dream/awakening interpretation'. In fact, the sense of suspension between the two parts is not denied but even intensified by opposing dream to reality. The dream/reality opposition does not obliterate the richness of the movie; on the contrary, it increases its ambiguity. The dream serves to explore the inner state of mind of the protagonist, but it also encourages the spectator's identification with Betty and Rita, which is however shattered in the second part. Furthermore, the dream offers interesting references and considerations on Hollywood (the dream-factory par excellence), which are completed in the second part, in which Lynch explores a different cinematic language from the one used in the dream. To read *Mulholland Drive* as composed of Diane's dream and of her tragic awakening is functional to the kind of deconstruction Lynch applies to identity (of the character and the spectator) and to cinema.

Part of the meaning of the repetitions, projections and displacements can be read through a psychoanalytic analysis of the two sections, considering the film as inspired (whether consciously or not) by Sigmund Freud's *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1900). In this work, Freud interprets the dream as a significant expression of the unconscious and its repressed

[5] Diane takes her dream-name from a waitress at Winkie's where she plans Camilla's murder, while Camilla is associated with Rita Hayworth (*Gilda*). Simultaneously, the name of Camilla Rhodes is projected onto the young blonde actress, linked to the criminal system, and looks like the girl who, in the second part of the movie, is seen by Diane while kissing Camilla. Only Adam Kesher keeps his name, but he too is 'displaced', as in the dream he never meets Rita but only her blonde alter ego, the 'girl' Camilla Rhodes.

[6] See Gabriele Biotti, "L'indicibile e l'immaginario", *Pensieri del cinema* (Milano, Mimesis, 2006), 89-90.

desires: "The dream is the (disguised) fulfilment of a (suppressed, repressed) wish".[7] The dream cannot openly express those wishes which could prove too disturbing and which therefore come to be censored by conscience. Consequently, Freud distinguishes a manifest dream (distorted by censorship) and a latent dream:

> We should then assume that in every human being there exist, as the primary cause of dream formation, two psychic forces (tendencies or systems), one of which forms the wish expressed by the dream, while the other exercises a censorship over this dream-wish, thereby enforcing on it a distortion.[8]

Later, in the chapter entitled "The Dream-Work", Freud singles out two common distortions enacted on the latent dream: condensation, which is the compression of several unconscious thoughts into a single one, so as to make it unrecognisable, and displacement, by which a situation directly connected with the repressed wish is 'placed' into a different context.

These two operations are evidently implied in the way *Mulholland Drive* is constructed. Indeed, as all the characters appearing in the dream are also present in Diane's memories, it is possible to conjecture that Diane's dream-work has shifted them in different contexts in order to hide the latent dream meaning. These shifts are the strongest proof that the first part of the movie is actually a dream; furthermore, through the comparison between the dream and the hours following Diane's awakening, and by analysing the dream according to Freud's theories, it is possible to trace back to the desires behind the dream and so to reveal its hidden meaning.

The starting point can be a comparison between the characters of Betty and Diane. Taking for granted that Diane is feeling guilty for Camilla's death, her self-projection on Betty appears very clear: Betty is strong, talented, well-mannered and her feelings for Camilla's *alter ego*, Rita, are of friendship, love and above all protection. Indeed, she helps Rita and defends her from a plot which she has actually arranged. In this respect, by displacing the real motives for the murder onto two different subplots (those related respectively to the Cowboy and to the hit man), the dreamer denies her own responsibility for the murder. The words "This is the girl", which Diane says to the hit man at Winkie's, showing a photo of Camilla, are repeated in the dream by a man, Castiglione, who belongs to the Cowboy's organisation, when he recommends the 'other' Camilla Rhodes to Adam. Displacement also involves objects, like the money paid for the murder, and the blue key signalling that the murder has taken place, which in the dream are both contained in Rita's bag, and therefore indicate that the murder has been neither arranged, nor put into practice.[9] Interestingly, Camilla is transformed into Rita, a weak, vulnerable woman, deprived of the dangerous erotic power characterising Camilla in the second part. At the same time, Camilla is also doubled into the young blond

[7] Sigmund Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams*, trans. A.A. Brill (Hertfordshire: Wordsworth Edition, 1997), 68.

[8] Ibid., 53.

[9] In fact, after the murder attempt, Rita finds a great amount of money and a mysterious blue key in her bag.

actress who is at the centre of the Cowboy's plot. This means that Camilla is displaced in two figures: one (Rita) is 'saved' by Diane and accepted because no longer dangerous; the other (the 'girl' Camilla Rhodes) is condemned through the allusion that she earns her fame through a criminal 'male' system, an oneiric 'translation' of Camilla's sexual power. From Diane's memories, indeed, we learn that Adam and Camilla had fallen in love on the set of a film, where they blatantly showed their physical attraction before Diane's eyes. In the dream, Diane punishes Camilla, representing her sex appeal as a subterranean criminal organisation, insinuating that this, and not her talent, is the authentic source of her success. The sensuality that had wounded Diane with Adam's complicity, then, in the dream becomes a threat to Adam too.

It is also important to notice that Freud is very explicit in highlighting that "dreams are quite incapable of expressing the alternative 'either-or'; it is their custom to take both members of this alternative into the same context, as though they had an equal right to be there".[10] Consequently, the coexistence of alternatives about Camilla's identities means that the dreamer expresses a variety of contrasting feelings towards her but also towards herself. In particular, if on the one hand Diane creates her idealised version through Betty, on the other she also appears as a corpse, manifesting the desire to suppress the guilty part of herself, or to be punished for her crime.

[10] Ibid., 200.

Furthermore, the dream interestingly starts and ends with two impressive scenes. The first one is directly connected with the act of dreaming and its main characters are two figures not belonging to Diane's everyday life, nor to Camilla and Adam's entourage. The two men are presumably a psychoanalyst and his patient, Dan, talking in the same Winkie's, which is the scene of Camilla's murder arrangement:

> Dan: I just wanted to come here …
> Dr: Why this Winkie's? …
> Dan: I had a dream about this place … Well…it's the second one I've had … but they are both the same … they start out that I'm in here but … it's not day or night. It's kinda half night, you know? … but it looks like just like this … except for the light. And I'm scared like I can't tell you. Of all people, you're standing right over there … by that counter. You're in both dreams and you're scared. I get even more frightened when I see how afraid you are and … then I realise what it is. There's a man … in the back of this place. He's the one who's doing it. I can see him through the wall. I can see his face … I hope that I never see that face ever … outside of my dream.
> Dr: So, you came to see if it's out there
> Dan: To get rid of this god-awful feeling.

The two men at this point walk towards the wall, behind which the terrible face is supposed to hide. The face, scarred and uncannily 'painted' in black, appears and soon vanishes, causing such a strong shock in the

dreamer, that he falls dead on the floor, probably killed by a heart attack. This episode shows a fundamental relevance for the following events. It provides a key to interpret the film, opening a door between dream and reality and introducing an element of absolute mystery.

The dreamer and the awful man in black also return in the second part of *Mulholland Drive*. The dreamer appears at Winkie's when Diane is talking with the hit man, and it is evident that he stares at Diane, as if understanding her words to the hit man. Hence, she may imagine her guilt mirrored in the eyes of that stranger: the dream transposes this episode as Diane has unconsciously registered it; the dreamer is frightened because he has seen a horrible creature, Diane, who turns into the man in black, "the one who's doing it", the only responsible for the murder. At the same time, Dan's death, consequent to the monster's appearance, is a way of eliminating the only witness of Diane's involvement in the murder. Needless to say, Diane identifies with Dan too, when he says he wants "to get rid of this god-awful feeling". So, the encounter between dreamer and 'monster' stages the encounter between Diane and her unconscious, which is now speaking for her ("He's the one who's doing it"). Indeed, despite the oneiric work on the latent dream-content, Diane is fixed on the traumatic events surrounding Camilla's murder, and the fear of meeting the awful face outside the dream – which is made explicit by Dan's words – testifies Diane's fear of revealing her secret and facing her guilt. Significantly, in the second part, what Diane had feared most is finally realised: the monster, who appears *outside* Diane's dream, sets her ghosts free, leading her to suicide. So, like Dan, Diane cannot survive her encounter with horror.

If this episode reveals the protagonist's most hidden state of mind about herself and the murder, the scene at the Club Silencio shows how, at a certain point, the illusion of the dream is disturbed by another strange figure, the presenter/magician. The revelation that everything is an illusion interrupts the oneiric stream, avoiding the repression enacted by the censorship of the dream. Betty begins to tremble and a few moments later Diane wakes up. Thus, if altogether coherent, protected by the powerful mechanism of repression, the dream nonetheless presents obscure points and interruptions which break the cohesiveness of the narration and open the door onto another secret reality, another level of signification unfolding in the second part and breaking the thick net of expectations cherished by the audience.

Hollywood (De)Constructions

The use of the dream in *Mulholland Drive* allows for a connection between an investigation into the protagonist's identity and into cinematic

mechanisms. Hollywood, in particular, is called into question by the numerous quotes and references to famous films.

Apart from those which are explicitly recalled, such as Charles Vidor's *Gilda* (1946), *Mulholland Drive* presents characters and situations which ironically reinterpret, for instance, 1940s noirs, or Quentin Tarantino's films. One of the most striking cinematic elements, however, is the blonde/brunette binary, which, on the one hand, serves the purpose of symbolising identity condensations and displacements, underlining antagonism or vicinity between Diane and Camilla's several projections; on the other hand, it evokes two typical female constructions framed in two classic Hollywood genres and often present in Lynch's films too. The brunette recalls the *femme fatale* the 1940-50s noirs, connected with icons such as Rita Hayworth, while the blonde is reminiscent of the teenager of the1950s romance, often interpreted by Sandra Dee. As Le Cain writes,

> The dream factory atmosphere of *Mulholland Drive* is compounded by an element common to all Lynch's neo-*noirs* but never more appropriate than here: the retro '50s imagery. While not quoting any particular film, Lynch uses this look to evoke media-memories of an 'innocent' America. It is the ideal pop culture iconography for his characters' dreams of purity and fulfilment, and thus equally ideal for subversion. This is definitely the case in *Mulholland Drive* – Betty/Diane was brought to Hollywood after winning a jitterbug contest and, from what we see of the film she wants to star in, it appears to be a '50s set romance with musical scenes. But the '50s was also the classic decade of *film noir*, which like Lynch, embraced such themes as paranoia and conspiracy, the constant questioning and subversion of accepted identity…. [11]

[11] Maximilian Le Cain, "In Dreams: A Review of *Mulholland Drive*", *Senses of Cinema* 19 (March-April 2002), http:www.senseofcinema.com/contents/01/19/mulholland_dreams.html

If, as Le Cain points out, the blonde and the brunette evoke the two sides of American society as registered and filtered by 1950s cinema, the continuous blurring of their opposition in *Mulholland Drive* shortens the distance between innocence and perversion, entailing a more controversial cinematic language, in which "the questioning and subversion of accepted identity" are transversal to genre and become a way to criticise cinema itself from within, by reinterpreting cinematic *clichés*.

The blonde/brunette opposition acquires another meaning in *Mulholland Drive*, then, when referring to Alfred Hitchcock's cinema, specifically considering the moment in which Rita is driven by Betty to become from dark- to blonde-haired, by wearing a wig. Hitchcock's movies are often marked by the presence of opposite female characters, whose differences are signalled by hair colour. At the same time, there are female characters whose transformations are analogously rendered by their hair colour changes, as happens in *Marnie* (1964) or in *Vertigo* (1958). In particular, *Vertigo* seems to present a slight analogy with *Mulholland Drive*, though with a different aim. In *Vertigo*, Scottie (James Stuart) manipulates Judy (Kim Novak), in order to turn her into the

revenant of his dead beloved Madeleine, and the first step of this fatal transformation is hair colour change. In *Mulholland Drive*, Betty too induces Rita to change her hair colour by wearing a blonde wig, which, unlike what happens to Judy, makes her different from the original. The scene in which Betty attracts Rita (with the blonde wig on) to the mirror, in order to look at their reflected image, is highly significant; complacently smiling at their resemblance, she says with satisfaction: "You look like someone else". In other words, instead of evoking the image of the dead, whom she had killed, Diane wants to remark that Rita is different from Camilla and controlled by Betty. Hence, both movies enact an identity construction on Judy/Madeleine and Camilla/Rita, but with different purposes.

In analysing *Vertigo* in respect to the mechanism of repetition, Elisabeth Bronfen points out: "repetition articulates loss not only by virtue of enacting a lost object in the midst of difference, but also in the sense that the first repeated term refers to something that is not only a presence but also an absence".[12] The absence refers not simply to the fact that a copy is *not* the original, but to the fact that, in *Vertigo* as well as in *Mulholland Drive*, the original female figure inspiring the repetition/construction is itself a replica, so that the authentic model is not recoverable. In *Vertigo*, indeed, Scottie imposes a change on Judy, in order to resuscitate Madeleine, in a cruel game of identity projection, in which the original model has been absent the whole time, since Judy *is* also the Madeleine Scottie had known; besides, Madeleine's 'imitation' interpreted by Judy is further constructed on her being possessed by her great-grandmother, Carlotta Valdes, appearing only in a painting. In the same way, *Mulholland Drive* offers Diane's subjective vision of the facts in which Camilla comes to be filtered through dream and psychosis, so that the original Camilla remains absent, behind a construction originated by the picture of Rita Hayworth and remarked by the blonde wig; she is identified with the cruel dark lady also in the second part, where she is seen through Diane's rage and instable personality.[13]

The identity construction enacted upon Camilla is further emphasised by her association to Rita Hayworth. Before becoming a movie star, Rita, who had Spanish origins and looks, with her thick black hair and low forehead, was forced by her studio head Harry Cohn to raise her hairline through electrolysis, in order to Americanise her image.[14] Therefore, the fact that Rita/Camilla is associated to Rita Hayworth/Gilda, on the one hand entraps her within a fixed 'negative' role; on the other, by recalling a famous *femme fatale* who had been notably manipulated by the Hollywood system, it also signals how the *femme fatale* was exploited inside and outside the set (and in Rita/Camilla's case, inside and outside the dream).

[12] Elisabeth Bronfen, *Over her Dead Body* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1992), 326.

[13] The *femme fatale* or dark lady is represented in classical noirs as a mysterious beauty manipulating and leading male characters into trouble. At the same time, the *femme fatale* is recognised by now as the scapegoat of the male conservative system of classical Hollywood cinema, in which she functioned as 'female other', marking the limits of morality with her final death. Camilla embodies both aspects, figuring in any case as the *object* (of desire) in Diane/Betty's hands.

[14] William Anthony Nericcio and Guillermo Nericcio Garcia, "When Electrolysis Proxies for the Existential", in Arturo J. Aldama, ed., *Violence and the Body* (Indiana: Indiana University Press, 2003), 266-274.

Dis/solutions

The deconstruction of Hollywood *clichés* is not the only way *Mulholland Drive* questions cinema mechanisms. The way the first part is harshly interrupted displaces the spectator; the discovery that what has been narrated until this point is the relative vision of one character, demands a revision of the audience's viewpoint. What is even more displacing is the fact that while underlining a *subjective* vision of facts, *Mulholland Drive* simultaneously deconstructs the subject. According to Gabriele Biotti, *Mulholland Drive* is marked by a continuous search and loss of identity on the part of Betty/Diane and Rita/Camilla. For both, Hollywood is, in the beginning, the place where they can have the chance to become different people: Betty looks for the opportunity to become a star, Rita acquires a new identity (related to *Gilda*) after having lost her memory.[15] In my view, however, as discussed in the previous section, identities are actually influenced and fixed by cinematic stereotypes, with a considerable difference between the two women's positions: it is Diane who 'speaks', and while she finds the chance to become someone else in her Hollywood dream through Betty – a change which she deeply desires in order to avoid her sense of guilt – Rita/Camilla cannot choose her role. Her identity is denied both in the dream and in the second part, where she is still remembered (and thus filtered) by Diane.

[15] Biotti, "L'indicibile e l'immaginario", 92-93.

But what about Diane? She is the subject who speaks, but at the same time, her subjectivity is attacked from within her own mind. She appears as multiple and extremely multifaceted: she is Diane but also Betty, and all the characters of her dream are somehow expressions of her personality, which contradicts the possibility of a unitary subject with a unitary viewpoint. This is further underlined by the fact that she is an actress. Besides, her final suicide tragically dramatises the dissolution of identity, which seems to be one of the main focuses of the film.

Parallel to Diane's identity dissolution, the movie also insists on the dissolution of that kind of cinema, which tends to construct an illusion and create characters, with whom the audience easily identifies – and this is initially presented in *Mulholland Drive* through Diane's dream. Christian Metz has pointed out that cinema is a 'strange mirror', where the spectator somehow repeats the Lacanian mirror stage:

> A strange mirror, then, very like that of childhood, and very different. Very like … because during the showing we are, like the child, in a sub-motor and hyper-perceptive state; because, like the child again, we are pray to the imaginary, the double, and are so paradoxically through a real perception. Very different, because we are wholly outside it, whereas the child is both in it and in front of it.[16]

[16] Christian Metz, *The Imaginary Signifier. Psychoanalysis and the Cinema*, trans. Celia Britton, Annwyl Williams, Ben Brewster, and Alfred Guzzetti (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1977), 49.

Though the onlooker does not perceive his/her own image in the cinematic screen, the film reinforces his/her sense of being a unitary subject. For Lacan, then, the subject's illusion of being unitary and coherent is maintained by a series of sutures, keeping together the different components of subjectivity. Kaja Silverman calls 'suturing' a cinematic process, which produces the illusion of coherence through cinematic devices. In "Dis-Embodying the Female Voice", Silverman refers to 'synchronisation' as one such suturing device:

> Synchronization functions as a virtual imperative within fiction film. … Since within dominant cinema the image track is cut to the measure of the human form, and the sound track to the measure of human voice, the rule of synchronization must be understood as referring both above all to the smooth alignment of the human form with the human voice – i.e., to the representation of a homogeneous thinking subject whose exteriority is congruent with its interiority. The 'marriage' of sound and image is thus performed in the name of homo-centricity, and under Cartesian auspices. … By deepening the diegesis and concealing the apparatus, synchronization also maintains the viewing/listening subject in a protective darkness and silence.[17]

[17] Kaja Silverman, "Dis-Embodying the Female Voice", *Re-Vision. Essays in Feminist Film Criticism* (Los Angeles: The American Film Institute, 1984), 132-133.

Silverman suggests that the subject emerging from this kind of cinema is "a homogeneous thinking subject" whose exteriority and interiority are perfectly balanced. The cinematic tricks, the sutures, producing this effect, then, are accurately hidden, allowing the audience to be completely absorbed in the illusion.

Mulholland Drive, instead, functions through an opposite mechanism, that is the de-suturation of narrative elements and of the film devices. This does not mean that Lynch eliminates the sutures, but that he makes them visible. Instead of creating the illusion of something real, he insists that everything is fiction, or, as the presenter/magician says, "it's all recorded".

The fictitious nature of cinema is in this sentence clearly revealed, but the reflection on cinema starts with the two auditions proposed in the first part. The first is Betty's audition for Bob Brooker, in which she shows her talent and charisma as an actress, by playing a sensual scene whose effect is strikingly realistic. This proves to be surprising because Betty's rehearsal with Rita had not been so accurate and Betty's comment on the script – "Such a lame scene" – did not prelude to such a magnetic moment. This audition, however, though revealing Betty's high quality and ability, is an example of how some cinematic device can produce a realistic effect. When the audition begins, in fact, the camera focuses only on the two actors, cutting the staff out of the shot, and this device – more than the actors' ability – is what gives us the illusion that what we are seeing is 'real'. The director's advice, "don't play it for real, until it gets real" and his later comment "it was forced maybe … but still humanistic", may refer to the necessity for this kind of cinema of projecting the illusion of realism,

centred on the subject; Bob Brooker gives altogether a positive opinion of the audition not thanks to the actors' ability, but just because the scene was "still *humanistic*". The choice of this word is too peculiar not to allude to the centricity of a human subject "under Cartesian auspices", as Silverman ironically writes.

The second audition shown in the movie is for a film directed by Adam Kesher, who, instead, has a different vision of cinema: he is probably going to direct a musical, and his recasting implies the use of playback. This is a step towards the complete fracture between voice and image, which is central at the Club Silencio and which deconstruct 'humanistic' acting in favour of a different idea of spectacle, aiming at exploring the potential of cinema, rather than offering something which seems to be real. In this respect, the show at the Club Silencio is highly evocative of George Méliès's experimentalism at the dawning of cinema, and the passage from realistic performances to the 'magic' of the Club Silencio recalls the difference between the Lumière brothers' and Méliès's ways of conceiving cinema. Indeed, while the former intended cinema as a source of representation of reality, the latter experimented a more creative cinematic language.[18]

In *Mulholland Drive*, Lynch too experiments the potential of cinema, interrupting the linear narration of the first part and with it also the audience's expectations. The fracture between sound and image reverberates itself on the fracture between the first and the second section of the movie, which proves shocking because it is enacted before giving satisfying solutions to the mysteries (Rita's identity, the identity of the corpse) and before answering to the expectations towards the characters' destinies. Suddenly, other characters and other stories are presented and this induces spectators to assume a more critical attitude towards what they are seeing and listening to. In the scenes which follows, Lynch's experimentalism is extreme. Diane's descent into hell is depicted with a cinematic language that confuses the audience: past memories and hallucinations suddenly intrude in the present, in a puzzling continuity. The use of point-of-view shots relativises also this part of the movie, even in the few scenes set in the present, where it is evident that Diane is no longer the speaking subject, but is narrated through and by the camera. In declining any pretense of objectivity, *Mulholland Drive* also directly questions the audience, by presenting two characters who directly look into the camera: the 'creature' in black and the enigmatic blue-haired woman at the Club Silencio. Their gaze opens a breach in the cinematic screen, in order to reach *us*, so that the sutures of narration, so astutely emerging from Lynch's language, also function as a bridge uniting spectacle and spectators. Significantly, the last cue – "Silencio" – clearly addressed to the audience, is pronounced by a woman who is a spectator herself.

[18] For a further discussion on this topic see Edgar Morin, *The Cinema, or The Imaginary Man*, trans. Lorraine Mortimer (Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 1978).

In conclusion, if the first part of *Mulholland Drive* resembled the Lacanian mirror in which Diane could silence her anguish and dream of a new identity, from the scene at the Club Silencio on, the mirror is broken. Sutures, as the rifts produced by the mirror rupture, emerge, interrupting the continuity with the expected world, and inaugurating a continuity with an unexpected elsewhere. This 'detour' lets Diane's secret about the murder come out. But, playing with words, it is possible to say that, rather than appearing as the solution of the mystery, it appears as a dis/solution of ('humanist') identity and (classic) cinema.