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## Finding Ourselves on a *Lost Highway*: David Lynch's Lesson in Fantasy

by Todd McGowan

*The difficulties in watching David Lynch's Lost Highway stem from the unique way in which the film distinguishes between desire and fantasy. Whereas most films depict a seamless continuity between the two impulses, Lost Highway separates them, revealing how fantasy serves as a respite from the ambiguity of desire.*

David Lynch's *Lost Highway* (1997) is, admittedly, a difficult film to watch. On the level of our immediate cinematic interaction with the film, it presents us with images so bright that we close our eyes or look away and with voices so distorted that we wish we could close our ears. These difficulties, temporarily unpleasant though they may be, become minor bumps in the road when we contrast them with the interpretive difficulties established by the film's narrative incoherence—or seeming incoherence. On a first viewing, it is tempting to chalk up these difficulties to the obscurantist proclivities of the film's director and to conclude that the narrative is unconventional just for the sake of being unconventional or that the point is simply that there is no point.<sup>1</sup> If this is the case, then *Lost Highway* hardly seems worth the 135 minutes that a viewing requires, let alone any effort spent in making sense of it. This conclusion seems to have been that of audiences and critics alike, most of whom rejected *Lost Highway* as they did no other Lynch film (save *Dune* [1984], which had perhaps too much coherence, rather than too little, for the director's fans).<sup>2</sup> Even if the difficulties of the film serve to conceal something profound in the narrative, they are not necessarily worth the trouble. The film's obscurity, in that case, would still not clearly be necessary. The only serious justification for the difficulties of the film's narrative lies in their structural necessity—a necessity that, in fact, in the case of *Lost Highway*, is evident. Its difficulties are the result of the kind of revelations that the film makes about the interrelations between fantasy and desire; it makes evident an underlying logic of fantasy that is operative, though certainly not apparent, in the filmic experience itself. Because the narrative of *Lost Highway* brings the logic of fantasy out into the open, it necessarily strikes us as incongruous, as a film without any narrative at all.

**Fantasy Exposed.** *Lost Highway* reveals the operations of fantasy by separating what narrative usually holds together—desire and fantasy. Desire fuels the movement of narrative because it is the search for answers, a process of questioning, an opening to possibility. Fantasy, in contrast, provides an answer to this questioning,

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a solution to the enigma of desire (albeit an imaginary one). In our experience of most films (films that have an evident narrative coherence), the relationship between desire and fantasy appears seamless; we cannot readily delineate the precise moment at which we pass from desire to fantasy. Instead, fantasy is constantly there, clearing up the ambiguities of desire. We do not know exactly what will happen next, but we feel as if we are securely in a world replete with meaning—that the film's images are not completely arbitrary or mysterious. Such films have a certain phenomenological justification. We never have an initial experience of desire in its purity, prior to the onset of fantasy, just as we do not initially experience a question apart from some idea of an answer or doubt without some kind of certainty. In other words, fantasy exists alongside desire from the beginning, structuring its very path; it is not something added on to desire after the fact.

We can see this perhaps most clearly in the case of film noir. In the figure of the femme fatale, desire and fantasy operate simultaneously: on the one hand, she is mysterious and enigmatic (the hero is never quite sure what she really wants); on the other hand, she fits neatly into the male hero's fantasy frame insofar as she is a femme fatale, a representative of transgressive pleasure. For instance, in *Double Indemnity* (1944), when Phyllis Dietrichson (Barbara Stanwyck) makes her famous appearance at the top of the stairs wearing only a towel, Walter Neff (Fred MacMurray) and the spectator see her through the lens of fantasy—as the licentious femme fatale. When we see her as femme fatale, we have an initial phantasmic frame through which to make sense of her and her desire. In short, from the beginning we know that she means trouble. All the ambiguities in her desire that follow in the film—up to her inability to shoot Walter near the end—emerge against the background of this initial phantasmic frame. Our uncertainties about Phyllis and her desire do not exist apart from the phantasmic image of her as femme fatale. In *Double Indemnity*, as in most films and as in our everyday experiences, the worlds of desire and fantasy overlap and commingle. Lynch's *Lost Highway*, however, attempts to hold these worlds apart.

One effect of this separation is that the film does not seem to make sense, which indicates the extent to which meaning depends on the constant presence of fantasy. Fantasy, though it is opposed to “reality,” nonetheless provides an underlying support for our sense of reality. Without this support, we can no longer be sure of our bearing within the social reality—our sense of the meaningfulness of that reality. The separation of desire and fantasy also makes clear the way in which fantasy acts as a compensation for what the social reality—the world in which we can only desire—does not provide. Unlike the social reality, fantasy provides the illusion of delivering the goods; it offers a form of enjoyment for subjects that reality cannot—such as, for instance, the enjoyment that comes from watching a filmic narrative unfold. This becomes clearly visible in *Lost Highway*, however, only because Lynch maintains a separation between the world of social reality (i.e., the realm of desire) and that of fantasy, a separation as disconcerting as it is revealing.

When we think of it, the idea of a separation between social reality and fantasy should not be disconcerting at all. Such a separation is, in fact, the very definition of normalcy. The normal subject, theoretically, maintains an absolute divide between

reality and fantasy—what Freud calls the external and the internal—and knows how to distinguish between them. For the normal subject, as Freud puts it, “what is unreal, merely a presentation and subjective, is only internal; what is real is also there *outside*.”<sup>3</sup> “Normal” thus means there is no confusion of external and internal, reality and fantasy. Such normalcy, however, is impossible a priori: no one experiences reality without some phantasmic investment. This means that what we imagine that we see informs, to some extent at least, what we do see.<sup>4</sup> Nonetheless, according to the strict psychoanalytic definition, normalcy allows no such confusion, which is why psychoanalysis also recognizes that we never encounter a normal subject. There is always some slippage between normalcy, on the one hand, and neurosis and psychosis, on the other. Unlike the “normal” subject, neurotics and psychotics do not experience things so clearly. The psychotic confuses reality and fantasy and experiences them as equivalent, while the neurotic seeks in fantasy a substitute satisfaction for what she or he does not find in reality. Hence, for the psychotic, every experience seems real; and for the neurotic, every experience has at least a hint of the phantasmic. There is, in both cases, a blurring of the lines.<sup>5</sup>

**A Too Normal Film.** *Lost Highway*, in contrast to both psychosis and neurosis and in the manner of the (mythical) normal subject, allows no blurring of the lines between reality and fantasy. Ironically, despite the kinship between this separation and the separation effected by the normal subject, this is what makes the film so difficult to understand: it attempts to provide the perspective of normalcy to spectators who are completely unprepared to see from that perspective. As Freud points out again and again, even the most normal subject we encounter is to some degree neurotic; that is, she or he allows fantasy to shape her or his experience of reality.<sup>6</sup> *Lost Highway* disconcerts precisely because it confronts us with normalcy—and normalcy seems completely foreign. The difficulty of *Lost Highway*, then, does not lie so much in how subversive or radical it is but in the fact that it is far more normal than mainstream Hollywood film. As Michel Chion has pointed out, Lynch disturbs us not because he goes too far but because he does not go far enough. Chion himself goes so far as to suggest that this excessively normal perspective may be one of the keys to Lynch’s cinema.<sup>7</sup> It opens up a clear divide between fantasy and reality that we never actually experience and that the filmic experience usually obscures. It is in this way that the film disconcerts.

The separation between fantasy and social reality in *Lost Highway* manifests itself most apparently in the transformations that its protagonist undergoes. He first appears as Fred Madison (Bill Pullman), later becomes (while in prison awaiting execution for the murder of his wife) someone entirely different, Peter Dayton (Balthazar Getty), and then becomes Fred Madison again. In opting to have different actors play the characters of Fred Madison and Peter Dayton, Lynch establishes a readily visible distinction within the film between the experience of desire and the experience of fantasy.<sup>8</sup> The transformation between the two, which occurs without explanation, baffles characters within the film as well as audiences of it (and perhaps explains why the film has been largely *without* an audience). We can grasp what is happening in *Lost Highway*, however, if we see the

sudden transformation of Fred Madison into Peter Dayton as phantasmic: Peter Dayton *is* Fred Madison within Fred's fantasy. The entire scenario surrounding Peter Dayton that follows thus becomes the elaborated structure of this fantasy.<sup>9</sup>

Through the wide visual divergence between the world of Fred and the world of Peter, Lynch establishes them cinematically as worlds of desire and of fantasy, respectively. From the first shot of the film, Lynch gives Fred's world a sense of mystery, mystery consonant with desire. Rather than beginning with an establishing shot, the film opens with a close-up of Fred that inaugurates the mystery. None of the subsequent shots help to clarify things, and the entire depiction of Fred's world leaves the spectator without any sense of time or place. But the lack of a clear, rooted setting is only the beginning of the mystery. Fred's world lacks the visual fullness, the depth, of Peter's; there is a sense of emptiness here that Lynch establishes through the use of minimalist decor and subdued lighting in Fred and Renee's house. This emptiness provides the space for desire—something seems lacking, thus impelling the movements of desire. Furthermore, by minimizing the depth of field in the shots of Fred's world, Lynch creates a sense of flatness in that world. Everything seems to be taking place on the surface, without any depth. The use of color and sound adds to the feeling of depthlessness; the colors are drab (black, gray, taupe, dark orange), and there are long periods of silence without any background sound. This world is mysterious precisely because it is a world of surfaces, and where we would expect to find depth, we find only a void (silence or darkness). Although he lights all the main rooms of the house with low, albeit adequate lighting, Lynch leaves the hallways completely dark, indicating the void beneath the surface, the void from which desire emerges.

Such darkness is absent in Peter's world. From the moment Peter appears, the *mise-en-scène* is wholly different: bright lighting, more realistic furniture and decor, and a deeper depth of field. Lynch shoots Peter's world much more traditionally than Fred's, so that it is not pervaded by mystery. This absence of mystery—this sense of a turn toward realistic cinema—lets us know that Peter's world is wholly phantasmic.

**The Enigmatic Desire of the Other.** Rather than turning to fantasy to avoid contemplating his impending execution, as one might assume, Fred does so to gain respite from the desire of his wife, Renee (Patricia Arquette), which haunts him even though she seems to have died. This shows us the fundamental role of fantasy: to provide relief from desire. As Slavoj Žižek puts it in *The Sublime Object of Ideology*: "Fantasy functions as a construction, as an imaginary scenario filling out the void, the opening of the *desire of the Other*: by giving us a definite answer to the question 'What does the Other want?', it enables us to evade the unbearable deadlock in which the Other wants something from us, but we are at the same time incapable of translating this desire of the Other into a positive interpellation, into a mandate with which to identify."<sup>10</sup>

From the beginning of the film, Renee's desire is a source of unbearable anxiety for Fred, precisely because he has no idea what she wants, let alone how to give it to her. She seems to have some hidden kernel of excessive enjoyment somewhere



Figure 1. Fred Madison (Bill Pullman) confronts the mystery of Renee's (Patricia Arquette) desire in *Lost Highway* (1997). Courtesy Photofest.

within her that Fred cannot access. The placement of Fred within the frame and Bill Pullman's acting in the role help make it clear that Fred posits a secret, mysterious enjoyment in Renee. On two separate occasions when Fred approaches Renee, the shots depict him emerging from a completely darkened corridor in the house. In a sense, then, desiring is being in the dark about the desire of the Other—or feeling oneself in the dark. Bill Pullman's delivery of Fred's lines also makes it clear that Renee's desire mystifies Fred. When responding to Renee's questions or conversing with her, Pullman uses unusually long pauses and a puzzled expression to portray Fred's sense of bewilderment. The sum of these effects conveys that Fred feels confronted with a mystery that he cannot fathom—the mystery of what Renee wants.

Desire is a response to what seems mysterious, an attitude of questioning that mystery. At the beginning of *Lost Highway*, Fred's relationship with Renee shows all the characteristics of desire, uncomplicated by any phantasmic certainty. Renee is a mystery to Fred, and he interprets this sense of mystery that pervades her as a veil, beneath which lies her hidden treasure, her secret enjoyment. On the first evening depicted in *Lost Highway*, Fred asks Renee if she is going that night to the club where he plays the saxophone in a jazz band, but she decides not to go. This decision, ostensibly innocent, is for Fred filled with meaning (because he sees it as a veil hiding something), but he does not know what kind of meaning (because he cannot see beneath the veil). He then proceeds to interrogate her:

FRED: What are you going to do?

RENEE: Read.

FRED: . . . Read? . . . Read what?

(RENEE *laughs*)

Bill Pullman delivers his final line with two belabored pauses, suggesting that he is uncertain whether Renee is telling the truth. Renee's cryptic response and subsequent laughter do not help Fred solve the mystery of her desire; they only exacerbate his anxiety. The laughter seems to indicate that Renee has something up her sleeve, but whatever this might be, Fred feels himself completely barred from it. We can sense this feeling in Fred's voice when he tells Renee, after she laughs, "It's nice to know I can still make you laugh." Fred takes some degree of solace in the fact that he seems still to have some part of what she wants, but his overall feeling here is one of being alienated from her desire, an alienation that quickly turns into suspicion.

Fred calls home from the club that night, checking up on Renee, but she does not seem to be there to answer. Lynch cuts between a shot of Fred calling from the club and a shot of the phone ringing at their house, where no one answers it. The editing of this shot sequence extends the sense of mystery pervading Renee. By including the shot of the phone ringing in the seemingly vacant house, Lynch attempts to involve the spectator in Fred's suspicions about Renee. It is not clear that Renee is not there, but that is Fred's belief (and ours, if we follow the proddings of Lynch's camera), a belief premised on seeing Renee as veiled. When he gets home, however, Fred finds Renee sleeping in their bed by herself. This episode leaves Fred and the audience with a hint that Renee is desiring but with no idea about *what*. But in coming up against the mystery of Renee's desire, Fred reveals something further.

Through Fred's relationship with Renee, *Lost Highway* illustrates how we come into existence as desiring subjects. Fred's sense of bewilderment about Renee's desire, his constant efforts to interpret what she really wants, is actually the mark of his own emergence as a desiring subject. His constant efforts to interpret Renee's words (and even her silences and laughs) indicate that Fred himself desires. This is one meaning of Lacan's well-known dictum, "Our desire is the desire of the Other." In attempting to interpret Renee's desire, Fred constitutes himself as desiring. As Lacan puts it in *Seminar XI*: "Interpretation is directed towards desire, with which, in a certain sense, it is identical. Desire, in fact, is interpretation itself."<sup>11</sup> Desire is an effort to figure out what the Other wants from me. As such, it is a perpetual question that can never be answered, because it would have to be answered with words (i.e., with another veil or screen that necessarily gives the illusion of hiding desire). Thus, if Fred came right out and asked Renee what she wanted, whatever answer she gave would seem to Fred as if she were hiding something further—what she really wanted. This is why Lacan claims that desire "cannot be indicated anywhere in a signifier of any demand whatsoever, since it is not articulatable there even though it is articulated in it."<sup>12</sup> Desire is the result of our insertion into language, but, nonetheless, it cannot be named by that language. Thus, to the extent that Fred holds fast to his desire (i.e., insofar as he continues to

try to interpret Renee's desire), he is doomed to be stuck with a question that does not have an answer, no matter how far he pursues the question. The endlessness of desire and its perpetual question make it unbearable and therefore nearly impossible to sustain.

This unbearable quality is why we do not often experience desire without a correlative fantasy. On its own, desire requires that we persist in a radical uncertainty relative to the Other. As a result, most narratives dilute desire with a dose of fantasy, providing characters and situations that readily make sense. Even narratives replete with uncertainty, however, necessarily betray some investment in fantasy, or else they would cease to be narratives altogether. Narratives allow us the respite of knowledge, thereby delivering us from the horror of desire's complete uncertainty, even as they receive their energy from desire. We can see the unbearable quality of desire in Fred's response to Renee's desire and, by extension, to his own. It does not take long for Fred to begin to "give ground" relative to his desire and to view desire itself with suspicion. We should resist the temptation to blame this response on the ambiguity with which Renee presents Fred. As Martha Nochimson points out, "Fred is doomed by his relationship to Renee not because of *her* inconsistencies but because of *his* obsessions."<sup>13</sup> Fred retreats from desire itself—but not necessarily or particularly Renee's.

**The Entrance of the Superego.** One way to retreat from desire is to turn to the Law, to identify with the Law as a bulwark against desire. Whereas fantasy offers an imaginary answer to desire's question, the Law attempts to arrest the process of questioning, along with the disturbance it provokes. In its effort to keep desire in check, the Law takes up the position of an observer vis-à-vis desire. It observes desire in an effort to keep it to a minimum, to eliminate its disruptive effects on the functioning of the social order. To better observe desire, the Law has a representative within the psyche, the superego, that watches over the subject from the inside. The superego is the psychical agency of self-observation, and although it is a part of the psyche, its attachment to the Law makes it seem as if the superego comes from the outside. In *Lost Highway*, the videotape that appears on Fred and Renee's front porch indicates the presence of some observing agency. Like the superego, whoever is observing their house with a video camera seems to be an intruder, an alien figure.

In one sense, the superego is at the source of the feeling of being watched, though its ultimate source lies in our sacrifice of desire to the Law. Thus, the manifestation of the superego appears in the film, not coincidentally, just as Fred has begun to become more suspicious about Renee's desire. Feelings of suspicion and jealousy are a response to desire, a suspicion of desire itself—and thus indicative of an investment in the Law. Fred's suspicion indicates a failure on his part to sustain desire's question, and it is this failure that provides a burst of energy to the superego, resulting in the videotape at the door. In giving up his desire, Fred opens the door to the superego, "inviting" it into his psyche. The superego develops insofar as we give up desire; the more we give up desire, the stronger the superego's command that we give up more desire becomes.<sup>14</sup> In *The Metastases of Enjoyment*,



Slavoj Žižek offers an explanation of this relationship: “Superego draws the energy of the pressure it exerts upon the subject from the fact that the subject was not faithful to his desire, that he gave it up. Our sacrificing to the superego, our paying tribute to it, only corroborates our guilt.”<sup>15</sup> The presence of the videotape tells us that Fred’s abandonment of his desire has energized his superego, but its presence also spurs Fred’s suspicions, which, as we have seen, are themselves the form in which Fred retreats from desire. In other words, not only does the presence of the superego indicate that one has begun to abandon one’s desire, but its presence also plays a pivotal role in furthering that abandonment.

The evening after Fred and Renee receive the first tape, Fred manifests an increasingly greater desire to Renee, “seeing” her present at the club that night with another guy (Andy, as we learn later). Later that night, Fred tries to have sex with Renee but is unable to—to give her what he thinks she wants. And from Renee’s response, we can see that this is not the first time. Fred’s impotence—or simply his inability to satisfy Renee sexually—further empowers his superego, because it makes him feel even more estranged from her desire and even guiltier. We get confirmation of this when Fred, just after their failed sexual experience, recounts a dream to Renee. He tells her, “There you were lying in bed. It wasn’t you but it looked like you.” Instead of her face, in the dream image we see the face of the Mystery Man (Robert Blake), who turns out to be—we do not know this yet at this point in the film—the one responsible for the videotape.<sup>16</sup> The Mystery Man’s face appears suddenly in Fred’s dream sequence in the place of Renee’s face, an effect that adds to the horror it provokes, illustrating the way in which the superego represents the Father in his most ferocious form. So Fred sees the face that has been observing him (i.e., the superegoic face) in the place of his wife’s. The superego lodges itself between Fred and Renee, further cutting off Fred from Renee’s desire and his own. It blocks the path of Fred’s desire, keeping watch over any desire to transgress its prohibitions. Furthermore, the superego continues to make itself felt with greater and greater strength, as the next morning’s videotape shows. Unlike the tape of the previous morning, on this tape the observing camera enters Fred and Renee’s house and travels down the hall toward their bedroom, finally dissolving into static as the image of them sleeping in bed appears.

That evening at a party, the film reveals the significance of this increasing intrusion. Fred runs into the Mystery Man, who approaches Fred and tells him that he is at Fred’s house. Fred, of course, finds this “crazy,” but the Mystery Man is able to prove his claim by offering his cellular phone to Fred so that he can call home. Sure enough, the Mystery Man answers the phone in Fred’s house, even though he is also standing in front of Fred at the party. When Fred asks him why he is there, the Mystery Man replies, “You invited me. It is not my custom to go where I am not wanted.” This response provides another piece of evidence that the Mystery Man occupies the position of the superego.<sup>17</sup>

Just like the Mystery Man, the superego is an intruder from an external place into an internal one. As Freud points out, “The part which is later taken on by the superego is played to begin with by an external power, by parental authority.”<sup>18</sup> In

fact, the superego is the result of any internalization of the father (or, more specifically, of the Name of the Father) as an agency of prohibition. In the formation of the superego, “external restraint is internalized.”<sup>19</sup> The superego is, like the Mystery Man in the film, in two places at once—both external and internal.

The film makes even more evident this “extimate” quality of the Mystery Man through a manipulation of sound. Lynch’s work with sound is often the most inventive aspect of his filmmaking, as we can see in this instance. Lynch uses sound (or the lack of it) to make clear the bond between Fred and the Mystery Man. When the Mystery Man approaches Fred to speak with him, the background noise of the party dims to almost inaudible, as if, in the midst of this crowded party, the Mystery Man and Fred are having a private—intrapsychic—conversation. When the Mystery Man walks away after their conversation, the background noise returns again to normal, suggesting that we have moved back from the internal to the external.

The internalization of the Law through the agency of the superego reveals something important about the subject’s relation to desire. This internalization is not so much an imposition of authority as the result of a sacrifice made by the subject. The superego follows from the sacrifice of desire, which is why, in a sense, Fred *did* invite the Mystery Man into his home, as the latter claims. By giving up his desire, Fred offered an open invitation to the superego.<sup>20</sup>

On the drive home from the party, Fred gets, as it were, a last chance. He asks Renee about Andy (the host of the party and the guy with whom Renee had been flirting), and she tells him about a job that Andy once told her about. Beyond that, however, she cannot remember. Once again, Renee presents Fred with an enigma: the “job” remains a complete mystery, which sends Fred’s desire racing. But under the increasing pressure of the superego, Fred cannot continue in the uncertainty of this open question (i.e., what does Renee want?). The next morning’s videotape—the first one Fred watches without Renee—depicts the results: Fred hacking away at Renee’s body in their bedroom. Compelled by the pressure of the superego, Fred attempts to eradicate desire’s incessant and unbearable question. The murder is thus an obsessional act, rather than a psychotic one. Whereas the psychotic is motivated by certainty, the obsessive responds to a situation of unbearable *uncertainty*, as is the case with Fred here. The murder is the attempt to plug up the opening from which this uncertainty issues.

Even though the superego is, according to psychoanalysis, the advocate for morality within the psyche, it nonetheless demands Renee’s murder. How does this square with the idea of the superego as a “moral” agency? Morality always comes down to—and this is why Lacan contrasts it with an ethics of desire—the command to sacrifice the object, because the object’s ambiguity is what keeps pushing desire forward. In short, morality aims at arresting the disturbance that desire causes. This is why, at the close of *Seminar XI*, Lacan says of the moral law that it “culminates in the sacrifice, strictly speaking, of everything that is the object of love in one’s human tenderness—I would say, not only in the rejection of the pathological object, but also in its sacrifice and murder.”<sup>21</sup>

Just murdering Renee is not enough to sate the appetite of this morality, because she is not identical with the object-cause of desire. That object is a part

object—part of her, not the whole of her. Thus, we see Fred, after having killed her, dismembering Renee's body in an effort to find this object somewhere in her body. The object, however, is not simply in Renee (as Fred believes while he is mutilating her); it is, as Lacan would put it, "in her more than her." Consequently, the mutilation is doomed to fail, and, despite his destruction of Renee, the object remains just as ineffable as ever. Fred does not discover her "secret." Precisely because he cannot really kill her (or at least that part of her that is the object-cause of desire), killing Renee in no way makes things easier for Fred. As the film subsequently shows, the death sentence he receives is the least of his worries.<sup>22</sup>

**The Phantasmic Answer.** Despite her "death," the enigma of Renee's desire continues to haunt Fred with increasing vehemence while he is in prison. One does not just get rid of the trouble that desire stirs up, and the fact that we later see her alive again merely confirms this. The more one tries to destroy this object, the more it continues to haunt. That is why killing Renee only makes things worse for Fred. Finally, Fred falls apart in his prison cell, buckled by the desire that he could not destroy by murdering Renee. It is at this point that Fred attempts to quell desire in another way—he gives up desire for fantasy, thereby resulting in his transformation into Peter Dayton.

Most films, at some point in the narrative, depict a similar turn from desire to fantasy (when they enact some sort of resolution); *Lost Highway* actually enacts this turn within the formal structure of the film itself, replacing one character (Fred Madison) with another (Peter Dayton). At this point, the film fully immerses itself in fantasy, which has a paradoxical effect. Because the film becomes imbricated in Fred's fantasy, taking it so seriously as to effect a transformation in his character, it jolts the spectator out of viewing through the comfortable lens of fantasy; by highlighting the radicality of the transformation that fantasy occasions, Lynch returns us, as spectators, to the unbearableness of desire. It is this unbearableness of Renee's/his desire that in transforming himself Fred is trying to escape. In the fantasy that follows, Fred conceives an answer to the question about what Renee wants, and although it is not always pleasant for him (or for Peter Dayton), it allows him to get a handle on the enigmatic object. Fantasy provides an explicit staging of the Other's "secret." If desire is a perpetual question, fantasy is an answer, a solution to the problem that desire presents, which is why fantasy, even if it is masochistic, always provides a sense of relief.

The commonsensical definition of fantasy—escape from reality—cannot explain the unpleasant dimension of fantasy. In his explanation of Fred's transformation into Peter, Tim Lucas invokes this definition, claiming that "after realizing what he's done, Fred cannot face the overwhelming realities of the murder and his conviction, and his denial extends to the obliteration of his own identity."<sup>23</sup> This description posits a preexisting reality that fantasy seeks to deny. But Fred, as far as we can see in the film, does not seem all that troubled by reality. Rather, it is desire that troubles him. That is why there is a clear continuity between his anxiety before the murder and after; it is difficult to see how the murder has changed much, other than making Renee's desire even more obscure.

Furthermore, if fantasy is supposed to offer respite from the unpleasantness of reality, Fred should demand at least a partial refund. Renee's enigmatic desire may be disconcerting, but he *knows* that Alice is the mistress of Mr. Eddy—not exactly a pleasant alternative. The turn to fantasy can include such unpleasantness because it makes no promises of happiness. It does not provide happiness because fantasy is, in the final analysis, always illusory. But we do not turn to fantasy for happiness or for respite from reality; we turn to it for respite from the enigmatic torments of our desire.

Fantasy fills in the gap that haunts the social reality, but in doing so it reveals that there is something not encompassed by this reality—a traumatic Real. The very fact that we must have recourse to fantasy—that the social reality does not satisfy us—testifies to the existence of a Real that haunts our reality. If the social reality were without fissure, if it could account for everything, it would not have a phantasmic underside. And the turn to fantasy, the transition, makes the Real evident because it reveals, however briefly, the point of fissure within the social reality. Again, because *Lost Highway* holds social reality and fantasy apart, the transition between them—contact with the Real—becomes apparent, whereas our everyday life obscures it. In *Lost Highway* the moment of transition to fantasy is clearly a traumatic moment: the camera (from Fred's point of view) is moving down the middle of a highway and then swerves, heading straight for Peter, who is standing by the side of the road. In the background, Peter's parents and girlfriend, Sheila, come running and screaming in terror. Following this encounter between social reality and fantasy, we see Fred writhing in pain on his cell floor. This can clearly be seen as representing him enduring an experience of the void that haunts reality. This void then appears momentarily on the screen as a mysterious (vaginal) opening that expands and threatens to envelop the spectator—only to disappear almost instantaneously. Just as it seems to envelop us, the fantasy takes hold, and we find ourselves on seemingly solid ground. This traumatic Real does leave its mark, however: the oozing wound on Peter's head serves as a reminder of this encounter. Just as Fred's splitting headaches indicate the presence of the traumatic Real in the world of desire, Peter's head wound indicates its presence in the world of fantasy. In the former case, trauma is always in the future, about to happen; in the latter, it has always already occurred. In other words, trauma haunts the world of desire as the possibility that is right around the corner, while it haunts the world of fantasy as a past event that that world can never escape. We can also see the sign of the trauma's presence in Peter's parents' refusal to speak about "that night," revealing that the fantasy necessitates that certain things remain unspoken. Keeping the Real unspoken allows fantasy to create a world seemingly without fissure.

In fantasy, we produce; as the subject of the fantasy, an image of ourselves as we want to be—an ideal ego or imaginary identification. Peter Dayton fulfills this function for Fred Madison. Peter clearly gets to enjoy women in a way that Fred cannot. As the police tell us, Peter "gets more pussy than a toilet seat." In addition, in the figure of Peter, Fred can see himself as an innocent, a victim of dark and sinister forces and of a corrupted woman. And yet Peter is not an innocent naif: he has a criminal record, a large group of cool friends, and an active sexual relationship with

his girlfriend, Sheila. In other words, Peter represents both innocence *and* sophistication—an idealized, though contradictory, image. Like Peter, his parents have a double quality to them. They both wear leather jackets and dark sunglasses, suggesting that they are “hip,” but drive a wood-paneled station wagon and are fascinated by documentaries about strawberries, characteristics that suggest the seeming innocence and “squareness” of *Leave It to Beaver*. These oxymoronic characteristics in both Peter and his parents indicate emphatically that they are part of a fantasy construction. This fantasy cannot allow Fred to see himself as so innocent as to be a dupe, but neither can it allow him to see himself as in any way culpable. Only by walking this fine line can fantasy assist Fred in escaping from his desire.

Not only does fantasy offer us the image of ourselves as we want to be, it is also the basis for our sense of being situated in a “real world” rather than a mysterious one plagued by uncertainty. This is clear in the contrast between Fred and Peter. Whereas Fred seems to exist completely outside any personal history or social relations, Peter has what seems to be a “full” life: parents, friends, job, and a personal (albeit criminal) history. Mystery pervades Fred’s world. As Reni Celeste points out, “The first world encountered in this film is enveloped in the mood of suspicion, silence, clues that have no meaning and acts that have no agent.”<sup>24</sup>

In contrast to Fred, Peter does not live in a vacuum but within a rather clearly defined social setting. If Fred’s world is one of desire and Peter’s is one of fantasy, then this suggests that all the background elements that give our existence its sense of completeness are phantasmic. The ability to grasp oneself in a specific socio-historical setting is phantasmic because it makes us feel secure—rooted, connected to people, place, and time. Fred’s existence has no such stability; it is the free-floating existence indicative of a world of desire without fantasy. In Fred’s world we have no way of getting our bearings, no clear markers to latch onto, so that we should even hesitate to call it a “world” at all. Peter’s world, by contrast, offers us clear points of reference. In depicting this contrast, Lynch shows the extent to which a “sense of reality” actually has little to do with reality itself. It depends fundamentally on a well-developed “sense of fantasy.”<sup>25</sup>

This contrast is perhaps most apparent in the stylistic differences between the two worlds. Whereas Lynch shoots Fred’s world with minimal depth of field, monochromatic tones, low, yellow lighting, and long periods of silence, he shoots Peter’s world using the traditional conventions of Hollywood realism. The moment after the transformation from Fred to Peter, the style of the film undergoes a wholesale change. The prison, flat and drab when Fred occupied it, suddenly acquires depth and color. Peter’s cell has a light shining through the window that was not shining into Fred’s cell, and the first shot of the prison corridor has a deep depth of field that contrasts with the flatness of Fred’s world.

When Peter arrives at his parents’ home, the lighting, depth of field, and colors seem much more “normal” than in the shots of Fred and Renee’s home. The first shot of Peter at his home depicts him wearing bright colors (red and white) and sitting on a lawn chair in the brightly lit backyard. This *mise-en-scène* marks a complete departure from that of the first part of the film, a departure that indicates the evanescence of mystery. In Peter’s world, spectators have something to



Figure 2. Peter Dayton (Balthazar Getty) is able to enjoy Alice Wakefield (Patricia Arquette), a fantasized version of Renee. Courtesy Photofest.

hold onto, a sense of depth beneath the surface rather than just emptiness. The constant background music also helps provide this sense of depth, but it is the dialogue that makes it especially apparent. Here, unlike Fred's world, actors speak their lines without lengthy and awkward pauses in a manner that suggests "real" conversation. This realism helps to produce a world in which everything makes sense and in which we are not bombarded by a constant aura of mystery. In this way, the turn to Peter's world provides the same respite for spectators that the transformation to Peter provides for Fred. By shooting Peter's world—the world of fantasy—in a realistic style, Lynch makes evident the phantasmic underpinnings of our sense of reality. He shows, in other words, that it is precisely the fullness and depth—the feeling of "life"—of the filmic experience that are phantasmic. The depth we associate with reality is wholly a product of fantasy, an indication of a retreat from desire. Through the turn to fantasy, both Fred and the spectator escape from the unbearable mystery of desire.

This escape becomes most apparent in the transformation of Renee into Alice Wakefield (also Patricia Arquette). We know that a link exists between Fred Madison and Peter Dayton because after both transformations—Fred into Peter and Peter into Fred—the one occupies the same physical space that the other occupied. In the case of Renee and Alice, there are no such clues. Because Patricia Arquette plays both roles, however, there is at least an indication—which will get substantiated—that Alice is a fantasized version of Renee. The transformation of

Renee into Alice allows Fred (as Peter Dayton) to solve the deadlock of Renee's desire and to conceive, on the level of fantasy, a way of enjoying her.

Whereas Renee's past and her desire remained a mystery to Fred, Peter is able to enjoy Alice, because he knows what she wants. In Alice, desire finds its satisfaction, albeit only an imaginary satisfaction. Unlike Renee, Alice, as a fantasy object, is much more knowable. Thus, in fantasy one finds a solution to the desire of the Other. This difference is most apparent in Alice's association with Andy. Although Renee *seemed*—at least in Fred's mind—to have some illicit involvement with Andy, she provided Fred with no details, other than proclaiming that they were “friends” and that Andy once told her about a “job,” the specifics of which she cannot remember. With Alice, however, he gets answers to all his questions.

After Peter becomes aware of Alice's involvement with organized crime and pornography, he wants to know the reason for this involvement. While they are together at the Starlight Motel, he asks, “How did you get involved with these fucking people, Alice?” In response, Alice repeats, word for word, Renee's description about meeting Andy and learning about a job, except that Alice remembers the job and describes it to Peter. Whereas Renee's account is wholly ambiguous (and thus elicits Fred's desire), Alice provides the intimate details, allowing Peter a share of her enjoyment. The job consisted simply of taking her clothes off in front of Mr. Eddy (Robert Loggia) while one of Mr. Eddy's gangsters put a gun to her head. Alice's description horrifies—and arouses—Peter, who now has confirmation about what Alice wants. He asks her, “Why didn't you just leave? . . . You liked it, huh?” Although Alice's story upsets Peter, it also offers him a fantasized answer to the question “What does the Other want?”; it allows him to conceive of the Other enjoying. The answer, not surprisingly, is the phallus, represented most obviously by the gun held to Alice's head, but, more important, by Mr. Eddy, the site of power within this fantasy construction. The phallus, as Lacan says, is the signifier of the Other's desire.

**Fantasy Can Only Go So Far.** The phallus gets in the way of Peter's enjoyment of Alice. Whereas Fred could not enjoy Renee because he had no idea what she wanted, Peter cannot enjoy Alice because Mr. Eddy stands in the way and has expressly prohibited Peter from enjoying her. When he becomes suspicious of Peter and Alice's relationship, Mr. Eddy pays Peter a visit at Arnie's Garage, where he implicitly warns him about “making out” with Alice, telling him, “I'm sure you noticed that girl who was with me the other day—good-looking blonde, she stayed in the car? Her name is Alice. I swear I love that girl to death. If I ever found out somebody was making out with her, I'd take this [his gun], and I'd shove it so far up his ass it would come out his mouth. And then you know what I'd do? . . . I'd blow his fucking brains out.” Mr. Eddy's warning suggests that, as the symbolic Father, he will jealously guard his privilege of enjoying the woman.<sup>26</sup> He defends this privilege by brandishing his heavily phallicized gun and threatening castration for the wayward son. Although the Father prohibits Peter from enjoying Alice, his fantasized existence does at least allow for the possibility of Alice's enjoyment, the satisfaction of her desire, and, in this way, the presence of the Father (and the

phallus) provides respite from the desire of the Other. No matter how threatening the Father may be, he is always a relief, but only a fantasized relief, as the film makes clear. Because this Father figure emerges only in fantasy, *Lost Highway* suggests that the status of the phallus is necessarily phantasmic. Fred Madison fantasizes the existence of the phallus—embodied by the Father, Mr. Eddy—precisely because the phallus offers a way of structuring his enjoyment via fantasy and thus a respite from desire. When Mr. Eddy appears in the fantasy structure as the agent of prohibition, he signals—as the Father always does—that Fred has retreated from his desire.

Within the structure of fantasy, the Father provides the anchor on which we can ground meaning and get our bearings. Indeed, this is the function of the Father in the Lacanian schema. He is the point from which everything else can be made sensible. With the assistance of this paternal function, fantasy transforms what does not make sense into what does—questions turn into answers. But the answers it provides—the way it structures our enjoyment—are never pleasant, because the Father always structures enjoyment as something prohibited. It is not just that Fred has a self-destructive fantasy and should try to come up with a more “positive” one. The destructiveness lies in the very nature of fantasy itself. As Peter tries to enjoy Alice for himself, to violate Mr. Eddy’s prohibition, the limits of the kind of enjoyment possible through fantasy come clearly into view. Alice talks Peter into a plan, which involves robbing and killing Andy (Mr. Eddy’s hireling), that would allow him to enjoy her. When Peter enters Andy’s house to carry out that plan, he encounters enjoyment everywhere: a pornographic film featuring Alice plays on the far wall, and a loud voice chants nonsensically.<sup>27</sup> Getting so close to this enjoyment horrifies Peter, and, after Andy—a barrier to it—dies, Peter sees a photograph of Mr. Eddy, Andy, Renee, and Alice that indicates the breakdown of the barrier between fantasy and social reality. He wonders if Renee and Alice are the same person, and although Alice tells him that they are not, Peter begins to get a splitting headache, suggesting that he is not so sure.<sup>28</sup> As he gets too close to the possibility of enjoying his object through the fantasy, the real object (Renee) begins to intrude into the fantasy, thereby making the horror of enjoyment more and more evident.

After seeing the picture of Alice and Renee together, the fantasy starts to unravel with the intrusion of reality. His head aching, Peter goes upstairs looking for a bathroom, but he finds instead a hotel room. When Peter opens the door, he sees a wildly distorted image of Renee having sex. (Watching the film, it is difficult to determine whether it is Renee or Alice, although the screenplay indicates it is Renee. This ambiguity suggests the further breakdown of the fantasy.) Renee calls out to him in a distorted voice, “Did you want to talk to me? Did you want to ask me why?” As she says the word “why,” Renee’s voice becomes completely garbled, indicating that the sense of what Renee is saying here has become overwhelmed by the enjoyment of the voice itself—an enjoyment beyond the meaning of the word. The film indicates the overwhelming presence of enjoyment here not only through the distortion of Renee’s voice but through the distortion of the image and of the narrative itself.





Figure 3. The Mystery Man (Robert Blake) and Mr. Eddy (Robert Loggia) track down Peter Dayton in *Lost Highway* (1997). Courtesy Photofest.

Until this moment, Peter Dayton's phantasmic narrative has had a certain consistency, the semblance of order. But when Peter walks upstairs in Andy's house looking for a bathroom and opens the door of a motel room to find Renee having sex, enjoyment has broken free within the fantasy construction and the fantasy is starting to teeter. Horrified by this encounter with enjoyment, Peter quickly shuts the door, eager for some sort of respite. With Andy out of the way, nothing stands in the way of Peter enjoying the fantasy object. But because nothing stands in the way, Alice/Renee—the difference is evaporating—becomes unbearable for Peter, just as Renee was unbearable for Fred.

When Alice and Peter drive out to the desert to sell the jewels they have taken from Andy, the fantasy finally dissolves completely. While waiting for their buyer to arrive, Alice and Peter begin to have sex in front of their car's shining headlights. Peter gets as close as he can get to enjoying his fantasy object unencumbered by the threat of the Father. Lynch even communicates this proximity to enjoyment through the form of the film: the screen becomes so bright that the audience can barely continue watching.<sup>29</sup> Peter has gotten too close to the fantasy object and destroyed its ontological consistency. While they are having sex, Peter repeatedly tells Alice, "I want you, I want you." After a few minutes, Alice gets up, says to Peter, "You'll never have me," and walks into a nearby cabin. As she enters the cabin, Peter transforms back into Fred Madison. At the moment when Peter is about to "have" Alice, he loses her; the fantasy dissolves, and he falls back into his prefantasy identity. Getting too close to "having" the fantasy object triggers the

dissolution of the fantasy. Peter can only “have” Alice insofar as he does not, insofar as Mr. Eddy’s prohibition bars him from completely enjoying her himself.

This is a crucial scene because it reveals so clearly the limitations of fantasy. Here Lynch reveals that the enjoyment we derive from fantasy is always only an image of the Other enjoying the object. The moment at which we would actually enjoy the object directly in the fantasy, the object gets up and walks away, and the fantasy structure itself dissolves. Fantasy requires some distance. Even though it stages enjoyment for us, it never allows us direct or real enjoyment. Through fantasy, I can only vicariously experience what I imagine to be the Other’s enjoyment.

**Once Again.** After the dissolution of the fantasy, Fred once again encounters the Mystery Man as he goes into the cabin to look for Alice. Fred inquires about Alice, but the Mystery Man refuses to recognize Alice’s existence. As a superegoic force, he demands all of Fred’s enjoyment for himself and does not even allow him the small ration of enjoyment the fantasy provides in compensation for his sacrifice of desire. The Mystery Man tells Fred, “There is no Alice. Her name is Renee. If she told you her name was Alice, she was lying.” After forcing Fred to acknowledge the nonexistence of the fantasy object (the object of enjoyment), the Mystery Man begins to question Fred and pursues him with a video camera. He asks, “And your name? What the fuck is your name?” In chasing Fred with a camera and demanding that he pronounce his name, the Mystery Man attempts to compel Fred fully to reject fantasy for reality, a social reality in which one’s name indicates one’s place. Once Fred takes up this place, it signals a successful internalization of the Law and the installation of the superego as the internal agency of the Law. It also signals the disappearance of all enjoyment, even the enjoyment attached to the fantasy. The presence of this enjoyment blocks the identification with the Father that installs the superego within the psyche in that the superego sustains the Father as an external barrier to the enjoyment of the fantasy object. Only with the dissolution of the fantasy can the internalization of the Father as superego fully take place.<sup>30</sup>

After the fantasy has dissolved and Fred has accepted his symbolic mandate, he is able—with the help of the Mystery Man—to kill the Father (Mr. Eddy), who, by this point, is but a remnant of the fantasy. Once Fred has internalized the paternal authority, external authority is no longer necessary to control his behavior, and the Mystery Man can shoot Mr. Eddy in the head; Fred has thoroughly introjected external authority now in the form of the superego. When the Mystery Man shoots Mr. Eddy, the bearer of the Law, we see an enactment of what Lacan describes in *Seminar I*: “The super-ego is at one and the same time the Law and its destruction.”<sup>31</sup> The superego is the completion of the Father’s function and thus renders the Father unnecessary.

Not only is the Father unnecessary, he also offers a potential for subversion that the superego does not. As an external authority, it is far easier to transgress the Father’s authority than that of the superego. When the authority of the external Father becomes unnecessary and the authority of the superego becomes firmly entrenched, we can be sure that the subject (Fred, in this case) has completely given up his desire and sacrificed it to the Law. In making this sacrifice, Fred gains

access to the Father's secret, the secret of the Law, and this secret is what the Mystery Man whispers into Fred's ear after killing Mr. Eddy.

What *is* the Law's secret? That the Law is nothing *but* its secret, that the Father never really was alive with enjoyment, except in the fantasy of the son. This becomes evident when the Mystery Man, just before shooting Mr. Eddy, presents him with a video screen that displays him in obscene enjoyment. What we see on the screen, however, is not Mr. Eddy enjoying himself but him watching other people enjoy. The Father, the master of *jouissance*, turns out to be capable only of watching others enjoy, not of enjoying himself. In this sense, the fact that Mr. Eddy is a pornographer makes perfect sense. While we may imagine (i.e., fantasize) that the pornographer is constantly awash in enjoyment, he is actually constantly awash in enjoying the enjoyment of others, of merely observing enjoyment. The Mystery Man lets Fred know that the Father has never held the secret of enjoying women, as Fred had previously supposed, and that Mr. Eddy is an impotent pretender. As Lacan says in *Seminar VII*, "If for us God is dead, it is because he always has been dead, and that's what Freud says. He has never been the father except in the mythology of the son."<sup>32</sup> In other words, Mr. Eddy's enjoyment, his vitality, existed only within Fred's fantasy, insofar as Fred supposed its existence. Fred can now know this secret of the Law because he has already sacrificed his object, and, having made this sacrifice, he represents no threat to this Law. Thus, it is only after having sacrificed our enjoyment to the Law that we learn this is a sacrifice made in vain.

In practice, of course, such a completely successful interpellation—even if only temporary—never actually occurs. That is, we never get to the point where we no longer require the external representative of the Law. It takes place in *Lost Highway* because the film holds social reality and fantasy apart. Except for Lynch's excessively normal perspective, the process of accepting one's symbolic mandate never works in a pure form, completely unaccompanied by fantasy. Fantasy does not completely dissolve but continues to function as a supplement to this process. Because wholly accepting one's symbolic mandate requires forfeiting one's enjoyment, it tends to arouse discontent, as it did in Fred. At the moment of submission to the Law, the moment of the superego's complete introjection, Fred should be a perfectly docile subject, bereft even of imaginary, substitute enjoyment. Instead of being docile, however, Fred responds with a renewed effort to subvert the power of the Law. Without the supplemental, substitute enjoyment that fantasy provides, part of the control that the Law has over Fred evaporates. We thus see the way in which the imaginary enjoyment that fantasy provides assists in the process of creating contented, docile subjects. This becomes apparent in *Lost Highway* as we see what happens when there is an absence of fantasy.

Fred thinks that if he can communicate the secret of the Law to himself prior to the sacrifice of his desire, he will be able to act upon this recognition. In depicting Fred in an attempt to communicate with himself, Lynch is again separating what we usually experience as something seamless. Fred exists here at two different moments: one, after his successful integration into the social order, and one,

prior to it. The latter moment is, in actuality, inaccessible to us, although we constantly imagine that we are accessing it. That is why the opening scene of the film is repeated in which Fred tells himself through the intercom of his house, "Dick Laurent is dead." In telling himself this, Fred is trying to make clear to himself that the Father (Dick Laurent/Mr. Eddy)—whom he supposes to be enjoying women—is already dead, thereby saving himself the sacrifice of the object to a dead authority. The communication, however, misses the mark. Rather than allaying Fred's suspicions that someone else is enjoying Renee, this remark serves to multiply them (if not trigger them), launching Fred—again—on the path we have just witnessed for the last two hours.<sup>33</sup> Here, *Lost Highway* depicts the incipience of desire, as if we could pin down a precise moment when desire begins. We never actually experience such a moment, but we can see it in Lynch's film for the same reason we can see so much else—because of the separation that it enacts.

By bringing the film around again to the place where it begins, Lynch reveals something beyond the interaction of fantasy and desire—the repetition of the drive. The path of the drive is not the linear path of the classical Hollywood narrative but a constant repetition of the same movement. To move from fantasy and desire to the drive is to recognize this repetition, as *Lost Highway* is able to do. Though desire is constantly moving in a way that seems linear (metonymically from object to object in search of satisfaction), it is often, albeit unknowingly, retracing the same path again and again. Desire, insofar as it is activated in the circuit of the drive, is always coming back to the same place, constantly repeating its circuit in its attempt to find a satisfaction it always misses. It always begins with a mistake, a misrecognition, as Fred's does in *Lost Highway*. Fred cannot understand the simple statement "Dick Laurent is dead" because he senses that there is some hidden truth lurking behind it. It is this hint of something hidden—present in every communication—that always kick-starts desire, setting it out in search of the hidden desire of the Other. This search is always made in vain, which is not to say that we should not make it. In fact, when we recognize that we make the search in vain, when we recognize we are simply making the same search again and again and yet continue to make it without retreating from it into fantasy or the Law, we have achieved a certain ethical position. Although our initial experience of desire is not free from a phantasmic resolution, this is not to say that we cannot opt for a desire that is beyond fantasy, that we cannot "traverse the fantasy" and take up the drive (which is desire without a corresponding fantasy screen). When we traverse the fantasy, we desire without hope, because we realize that the Other's "mystery" is simply the expression of our own inescapable deadlock. This position is possible in the experience of any film, not just those directed by David Lynch. But Lynch's *Lost Highway* is nonetheless exemplary in that it suggests a way of experiencing film as such—by refusing the phantasmic illusion of depth that filmic narratives provide and, instead, comporting ourselves toward the void that fantasy obscures. *Lost Highway* suggests, in other words, that we should treat every film as if it were *Lost Highway*.

## Notes

1. David Foster Wallace, in his discussion of *Lost Highway*, considers this possibility: "The movie's plot could . . . simply be incoherent and make no rational sense and not be conventionally interpretable at all." *A Supposedly Fun Thing I'll Never Do Again: Essays and Ruminations* (New York: Little, Brown, 1997), 160. According to Wallace, this is not necessarily a problem with the film. As he says, "Lynch seems to run into trouble only when his movies seem to the viewer to want to have a point—i.e., when they set the viewer up to expect some kind of coherent connection between plot elements—and then fail to deliver any such point" (161).
2. The negative response to *Lost Highway* necessitated what will probably be remembered as one of the strangest advertising campaigns in the history of film advertising. Promoters of the film used *negative* comments from popular critics ("two thumbs down") in their advertisements in an effort to transform the film's lack of acceptance among popular critics into a reason for seeing it. The fact that such "reverse psychology" advertisements appeared only a month after *Lost Highway* opened suggests that they were not part of a preconceived advertising strategy but a response to a lukewarm and even hostile critical—and popular—reception.
3. Sigmund Freud, "Negation," in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, trans. James Strachey (London: Hogarth Press, 1961), 19:237.
4. This idea figures prominently in recent phenomenological film theory. As Frank P. Tomasulo has pointed out in his essay on the Rodney King videotape, "Human beings rarely enter a situation, historical or otherwise, with a fresh, untainted perspective. In other words, people generally do not come to believe things *after* seeing them; they see things only when they *already* believe them—based on their prior *Lebenswelt* and media exposure." "'I'll See It When I Believe It': Rodney King and the Prison-House of Video," in Vivian Sobchack, ed., *The Persistence of History: Cinema, Television, and the Modern Event* (New York: Routledge, 1996), 82.
5. As Freud puts it, "Both in neurosis and psychosis there comes into consideration the question not only of a *loss of reality* but also of a *substitute for reality*." "The Loss of Reality in Neurosis and Psychosis," in *The Standard Edition*, ed. Strachey, 19:187.
6. In the *Introductory Lectures*, Freud says, "Neurotics merely exhibit to us in a magnified and coarsened form what the analysis of dreams reveals to us in healthy people as well." *Introductory Lectures on Psycho-Analysis*, trans. James Strachey (New York: Norton, 1966), 420.
7. Michel Chion, *David Lynch*, trans. Robert Julian (London: BFI Publishing, 1995), 136.
8. In this way, Lynch's use of two actors playing the same role works to ends different from those in Luis Buñuel's *That Obscure Object of Desire* (1977). By having different actresses playing the same character, Buñuel emphasizes the ultimately ineffable quality of the object of desire, our inability to grasp it definitively, rather than the sharp distinction between desire and fantasy.
9. The obvious question here is, If Peter Dayton is constructed as a part of Fred Madison's fantasy, then why can everyone else see him? The easy answer would be that what follows simply occurs within Fred's fantasy until the second transformation near the end of the film. Such an answer misses Lynch's insight here. Lynch gives Fred's fantasy a seeming reality in order to emphasize the extent to which our everyday sense of reality is molded by fantasy. It even shapes the way one sees one's own body—and hence the way in which that body is presented to and perceived by others. This is why the other characters in the film see a different person when Madison enters into his own fantasy.

10. Slavoj Žižek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology* (New York: Verso, 1989), 114–15.
11. Jacques Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Norton, 1977), 176.
12. Lacan, “Kant with Sade,” trans. James B. Swenson, Jr., *October* 51 (winter 1989): 62.
13. Martha P. Nochimson, *The Passion of David Lynch: Wild at Heart in Hollywood* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1997), 209.
14. This is why giving in to the superego is always a no-win situation. The more you give, the more it wants. In this sense, the superego is insatiable: no sacrifice of desire is ever enough to quench its thirst. One can see this dynamic of the superego in someone like Jonathan Edwards, who never ceases upbraiding himself for the depths of his sinfulness, even though, to the outside observer, he is an exemplar of virtue and piety. This is not just a rhetorical flourish on his part. Edwards does feel more sinful than the average person, insofar as he has given in to the superego more than the average person.
15. Slavoj Žižek, *The Metastases of Enjoyment: Six Essays on Woman and Causality* (New York: Verso, 1994), 68.
16. It is only at the end of the film, when we see the Mystery Man armed with a video camera, that the association between him and the videotapes becomes completely clear. The scene at Andy’s party, in which the Mystery Man shows Fred that he is inside Fred’s house, is our first clue to the link.
17. The name “Mystery Man”—given only in the credits, not within the film itself—is certainly an appropriate name for the superego. It is mysterious because its prohibitions are excessive and irrational and can never be made to make sense. Something about the superego always remains irreducible to meaning. This kernel irreducible to meaning is the enjoyment that it receives from the renunciation of desire that it commands in the subject.
18. Sigmund Freud, *New Introductory Lectures on Psycho-Analysis*, trans. James Strachey (New York: Norton, 1965), 77.
19. *Ibid.* Like Lynch in *Lost Highway*, Freud gives this internalization a temporal dimension that it does not have in order to make it clear structurally. In fact, as soon as one enters into the social order and encounters the Law as an “external restraint,” there is always already an internalized counterpart to this external Law, the superego.
20. This is not to say that the erecting of the superego could somehow be avoided. It is the necessary accompaniment to our entrance into the domain of the social order and the symbolic Law. In *Lost Highway*, however, the superego seems avoidable because we can see its introjection as part of a process, rather than as something that has always already occurred.
21. Lacan, *Four Fundamental Concepts*, 275–76.
22. By quickly passing over the trial and sentencing, Lynch makes clear that the strength of the external powers-that-be pales in comparison with the intrapsychical voice of authority. Unlike external authorities, the superego never allows the subject a moment of respite; at no time does it relax its power.
23. Tim Lucas, “Kiss Me Doubly: Notes on David Lynch’s *Lost Highway*,” *Video Watchdog* 43 (1998): 31.
24. Reni Celeste, “*Lost Highway*: Unveiling Cinema’s Yellow Brick Road,” *Cineaction* 43 (summer 1997): 34.
25. If *Lost Highway* is a critique of fantasy, it is certainly *not* a panegyric to “reality.” Given the film’s grasp of the phantasmic basis of reality, this would be incongruous. This is the impression, however, that Marina Warner has of the film: “Lynch . . . certainly mounts an attack on film narrative’s mendacity, showing deep alarm at its hallucinatory

powers of creating alternative realities. Simultaneously, it also calls into question film's capacities to document and record: everything filmed is fabrication, but that fabrication has *the disturbing power to supplant reality*." "Voodoo Road," *Sight and Sound* 7, no. 8 (August 1997): 10, emphasis added. What Warner misses here is that *Lost Highway* is also a celebration of the way in which film supplants reality, because in doing so, as an effect of this doubling, it provides access to an otherwise obscured Real.

26. Although he is clearly an obscene, primal father, Mr. Eddy nonetheless also functions as a symbolic authority in the film. A multitude of other evidence suggests this: for instance, in one scene, he runs a motorist off the road for tailgating and then proceeds to lecture him on the danger of not maintaining proper distance between cars. After lecturing (and beating) the man, Mr. Eddy demands, "Tell me you're going to get a manual." Though clearly an underworld figure, Mr. Eddy functions here like an extreme version of the police. The behavior of the police in the film further reveals Mr. Eddy's status as a symbolic authority. Unlike Mr. Eddy, the police rarely display any of the characteristics of symbolic authority. They are, instead, parodies of that authority. At one point, the police even confess their haplessness. When two detectives come to the Madisons' home to investigate the appearance of the videotape, they show themselves to be incapable of discovering anything. As they leave, Fred thanks them (though they haven't done anything), and one detective responds, "It's what we do." Clearly, "what they do" is nothing much, in contrast to Mr. Eddy, who does the only effective police work in the film (when he warns the driver about tailgating). That an underworld figure is the symbolic authority is not merely a contingent aspect of *Lost Highway* but one related to the historical situation in which it appeared. In the 1990s symbolic authority went underground as the status of "legitimate" symbolic authorities—the police, political leaders, and so on—eroded. *Lost Highway* is an attempt to depict how this movement underground exacerbates paranoia about the Other's excessive enjoyment.
27. The nonsensical voice is a voice of pure enjoyment because it is completely stripped of meaning and thus resounds beyond the confines of the symbolic order. The voice is what remains of the signifier once meaning is subtracted from it. The type of voice Peter hears at Andy's place furthers his perception of enjoyment in it. It is no coincidence that Peter Dayton, a fairly typical white male American subject, would posit this enjoyment of the voice in the exotic and foreign chants he hears upon entering Andy's house. Peter wants this enjoyment for himself and yet posits himself culturally excluded from it. Fred Madison has a similar relation to this "exotic" enjoyment, which explains why he plays tenor saxophone in a jazz band. Through his playing, Fred tries to approach the enjoyment of the Other that he has posited in jazz (and specifically in the jazz solo) and from which he feels excluded. The night he calls home and Renee does not answer, he feels this exclusion from enjoyment most poignantly, and so he launches into a wild solo, attempting to capture in another direction, as it were, the enjoyment he feels he is missing with Renee.
28. This picture ends up providing additional support for the idea that Alice is a fantasy object: near the end of the film, when the police look at the picture, they see only Andy, Mr. Eddy, and Renee—not Alice.
29. Lynch quotes himself here: in *Eraserhead* (1978), Henry Spencer occasions a similar bright flash when he tries to touch his fantasy object, the Radiator Lady.
30. The relationship between Mr. Eddy/Dick Laurent (the Father) and the Mystery Man (the representative of the superego) is made apparent at two different points in the film. They jointly make a threatening phone call to Peter after he begins his relation-

ship with Alice, and when Fred Madison, at Andy's party, asks Andy the Mystery Man's identity, Andy tells Fred that he is a friend of Dick Laurent.

31. Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan*, book 1, *Freud's Papers on Technique, 1953–1954*, trans. John Forrester (New York: Norton, 1988), 102.
32. Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan*, book 7, *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis, 1959–1960*, trans. Dennis Porter (New York: Norton, 1992), 177.
33. The Fred Madison who knows the truth flees down the lost highway after informing his counterpart about Dick Laurent's death, and, as the film ends, he begins to have another breakdown, another flight into a new fantasy, which suggests that living as a fully interpellated subject without recourse to fantasy is just as difficult as facing the enigma of desire.