
DAVID LYNCH – THE ART OF THE REAL

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— ANDREAS CREMONINI —

THE UNCANNY OTHER. DAVID LYNCH AS SOCIAL PHILOSOPHER

In this piece I wish to discuss the uncanny in David Lynch. I will concentrate in particular on the uncanny in the lives of couples. This will involve overlooking many other uncanny effects (concerning *sound design*, masks, camera work, special effects, and so forth) that are also found in Lynch. This approach stems from a particular epistemic interest which, in short, rests on the assumption that the figure of the uncanny other offers an insight into the pitfalls and entanglements of a couple's life in general, and the hope that we might find in Lynch's films a few clues as to overcoming this uncanny "crisis of misunderstanding" that often afflicts our romantic lives. At the conclusion of these reflections I will suggest replacing the Lacanian concept of the real with the concept of "the ordinary", as developed by Stanley Cavell.

Let us cast a brief glance at the couples portrayed in the films of David Lynch. It is noteworthy that couples are at the center of Lynch's major features at all, a point easily overlooked. These are, in *Blue Velvet*, Sandy Williams (Laura Dern) and Jeffrey Beaumont (Kyle MacLachlan), in *Wild at Heart*, Sailor Ripley (Nicolas Cage) and Lula Pace (Laura Dern), and Fred (Bill Pullmann) and Renee Madison (Patricia Arquette) in *Lost Highway*. A more melancholy interpretation might read the chronology of the films as a progression from couple formation (*Blue Velvet*) to the development of the family (*Wild at Heart*) to the internal and external break-up of the marriage (*Lost Highway*). It is equally striking that, in each case, the couples are flanked by numerous antagonists and/or complementary counterparts — figures that are not unessential to the development of the couples' narrative. What happens between the two partners will be inhibited, intensified, enabled and explained through various external relations (the reality status of which often remains unclear). From this standpoint, let us turn to the film, *Blue Velvet*.

1. BLUE VELVET: MISRECOGNITION AND RECOGNITION

The timid attraction between Jeffrey and Sandy is at first accompanied, then frustrated, but in a certain sense also enabled, by the bizarre and highly sexually charged affair between Jeffrey and the secretive night-club singer, Dorothy Vallens (Isabella Rossellini). If we follow the imaginary topography of the film, which divides the space of action between day and night, the blond Sandy and the brunette Dorothy operate as opposing yet complementary female figures. A comparable polarity is echoed on the masculine side, between Det. John Williams, Sandy's father, and the violent and unpredictable Frank Booth. These are the two figures in whom the powers of clarity and enlightenment as well as the forces of darkness are embodied — a polarity we find repeated in many of Lynch's films. Jeffrey is the one who transgresses the imaginary boundary — known in the

film as “Lincoln Street” — that separates the two realms from one other. His fascination for the depraved side of life, which culminates in his predilection for investigation, is the very quality Sandy finds attractive. In other words, he is an enigma to her. Or should we say that here he is “uncanny”? She expresses her fascination as part-wonder and part-alarm with the words: “I don’t know if you are a detective or a pervert”. The question implied here is whether he is on the side of her father or on that of Frank Booth. In the first case the fascination is related to “the ordinary,” “the familiar”: Sandy’s bedroom is directly over her father’s office, from which she can follow his private conversations. Jeffrey’s reply provokes Sandy’s desire: “It’s for me to know and for you to find out”.

But Jeffrey too is drawn into Sandy’s own “mystery”. Indeed, there is a mystery within these mysteries, relating to the shady Dorothy Vallens. In their first unintentional encounter in her apartment, she forces Jeffrey from his secret hiding place and exposes him to her lustful gaze. We might say that Jeffrey has left the protective shadow of the audience at the *Slow Club* and now finds himself standing weak and vulnerable — in the middle of the stage. As he expresses it, “I’m in the middle of a mystery”. This step out of the impotence of fascination in turn allows Jeffrey to desire, to act. And he does this by approaching Sandy. Sandy is also an enigma to him. She too has something uncanny in her. The intrepidity with which she accompanies him on his ventures, and the disregard for her reputation in High School, reveal a powerful desire within her. Perhaps we could say: Jeffrey’s desire for Sandy is aroused through Sandy’s oedipal desire to see him as a detective (or a pervert) — just like her father. Sandy is therefore right when she says: “I got you into this”. [Fig 1].



Fig. 1: Lynch, David: Blue Velvet, USA 1986, De Laurentiis Entertainment Group, Paramount Pictures.

The transformation that Jeffrey undergoes in the course of this film is one that transforms him from a handsome ‘boy-next-door’ to something else: a being that harbors within itself a darker element. This opaque element is the mark left by the confrontation between his own impulses and the transparent and reliable character of the polite young man. Towards the end of the film, Jeffrey has assumed the sinister look of a “bad boy”, as Dorothy puts it. The expression “bad boy” is a subtle echo of a seemingly inconspicuous scene in which Jeffrey proclaims Sandy to be a “neat girl”. At first, she answers, “So are you...”, and then corrects herself: “You are a neat *guy*”. This is by no means an irrelevant slip of the tongue. Sandy infers that his gender identity is exchangeable. This alters the moment that Jeffrey, after some initial hesitation, obliges Dorothy’s request and strikes her while having sex, injuring her. Although this injury symbolically matches the harm that Dorothy does to him with the knife, it also indicates the transgressive dimension of the drive. By hitting Dorothy, Jeffrey has also assumed something of Frank’s behavioral repertoire [Fig. 2].

What at first appears as a rather stereotypical gender-model — as in the roaring lion on the soundtrack — is on closer inspection a much more complicated matter, because, on the dark side of Lynchville, everything reigns *but* clarity and unambiguity. Both Dorothy and Frank waver back and forth between contradictory and

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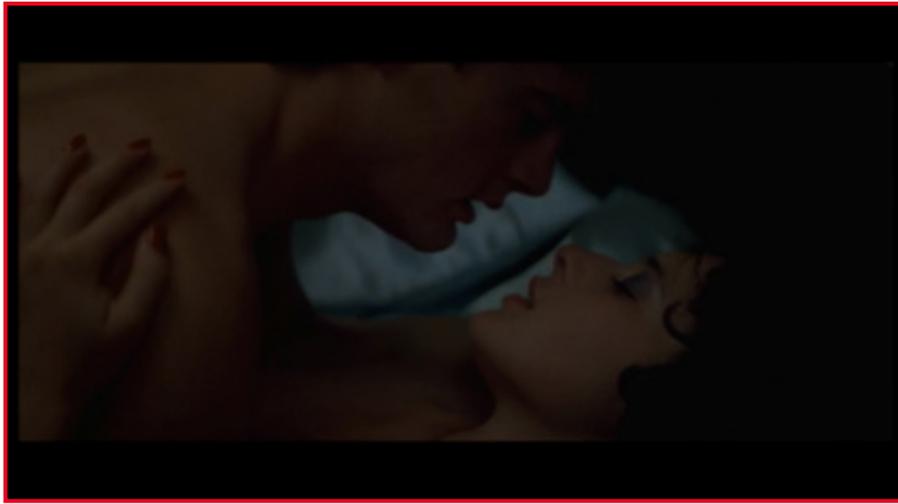


Fig. 2: Lynch, David: Blue Velvet, USA 1986, De Laurentiis Entertainment Group, Paramount Pictures.

incompatible dispositions. Amidst this instability, the figure of Frank is by far the most excessive. In the famous sex scene that Jeffrey observes from the closet, Frank plays the role of violent pimp, of little boy to the mother “Baby, wanna fuck?”— and of obscene father — “Daddy’s coming home”. In another memorable scene at the end of the “joyride,” Frank paints himself with lipstick, kisses Jeffrey and offers him a “love letter” from his pistol. He then sings “candy colored clown” for Jeffrey, a bathetic 1960s love song [Fig. 3].



Fig. 3: Lynch, David: Lost Highway, USA/France 1997, October Films.

Between the dazzling scenes of burlesque comedy, excessive violence, and erotic ambiguity it becomes clear that, on the dark side of Lynchville, nothing is clear, not even gender roles.¹ The other night scene on the other side of Lincoln Street is an abyss of ambiguity. Here again we find evidence of the fundamental ambivalence of the drive. Freud often speaks of an active and a passive drive,² but this opposition should not be understood to mean two distinct functions. As Lacan makes clear, the drive is a circular path on which active and passive cannot be clearly distinguished.³ Even where two people are involved, the drive describes a circle in which both participate, albeit in different ways. This does not mean, however, that the drive cannot arrange itself in different constellations. It is not bound to any specific established role. The activity of the drive is essentially medial: it is not always clear who is acting and who is acted upon. As Lacan expresses it, the drive is a “se faire...” (chier, sucer, voir).⁴

To understand what kind of role the drive plays, one must distinguish it from the Lacanian sense of “desire”. Desire is a defense mechanism, an exercise in deferral and compression intended to determine the uncanny undetermined desire of the other. Desire uses discursive (symbolic) and pictorial (imaginative) means

to negate the real core of the desire of the other. The drive, on the other hand, is in a certain sense always positive. It orients itself on the real response in others, it closes its circular path based on a real impulse, its aim is always the return of the impulse to its own body. So, for example, Jeffrey's voyeurism remains an imaginary "mise en scène" as long as he can imagine himself invisible. The instant Dorothy discovers Jeffrey in the closet, tears him from his concealment, and sets him naked before the gaze of her knife, a change takes place within him. Like Aktaion, who observes the naked goddess bathing, Jeffrey transforms from the hunter to the hunted. And, as in the myth of Aktaion, who is torn apart by his own hounds, Jeffrey also experiences a strange metamorphosis.⁵ He is made aware of his own vulnerability, his own nakedness — the object side of his voyeuristic drive. The gaze of the other — Dorothy's knife — cuts into his skin. Jeffrey is now marked by the desire of the other.

Nor, however, is Dorothy the same after their encounter. She says repeatedly: "You put your disease in me". At the level of the drive, objects, bodily fluids, gazes, and voices circulate between bodies in continually shifting constellations. When Sandy realizes that Dorothy and Jeffrey "have something with each other", she strikes Jeffrey (who had struck earlier Dorothy). Dorothy is then taken by ambulance, and she wears the same bizarre oxygen mask as Frank. Finally, Jeffrey shoots Frank between the eyes. One is tempted to say: the "love letter" — the parallel with Poe's *Purloined Letter* is not far-fetched here — always finds its destination.⁶

Lynch even stages this final shot as a physical, bodily event. The bullet enters Frank's forehead, and exits the back of his head, scattering pieces of brain, blood and hair throughout the room. This, and similar scenes, are by no means rare in Lynch. In his films, the body is portrayed as a body violently penetrated, a body decomposing and putrefied, a body the boundaries of which are unclear. Thus it is made to appear as a bleeding, oozing, deformed body; but also as a body subjected to internal and external forces, as a wounded and fragmented body or as lifeless flesh. I am inclined to read these scenes — apart from their function in the specific narrative — as events in a reality that demonstrate a genuine transformation of the individuals involved.

It is nevertheless typical for *Blue Velvet* that these nocturnal events are re-translated to an everyday context in which they are present as irritating dark spots, but which are in some way sublated. The domestic, spousal relations established between Jeffrey and Sandy at the end of the film appropriately illustrate Stanley Cavell's remark in *Cities of Words* that "Marriage is a form of life that allows the partners to transition from night conditions to day conditions, and vice versa".⁷ However unbelievable and contrived the end of *Blue Velvet* may appear, the fact remains that once again Lynch has ultimately foregrounded the narrative of the couple.

If we consider this narrative from the endpoint, it reads as a progression through the course of which the protagonists are made unintelligible, both individually and mutually, because of the intrusion of foreign and disruptive ("uncanny") drives. They overcome these crises of alienation, however, through a series of metamorphoses that disrupt their everyday self-understanding and their embedded — one might say, sterile — image of fortune, and prepare them for a form of the good life in which the experience of the other scene is represented. "It's a strange world" — this phrase, often expressed in the film, is a key to the whole film. To become worldly — that is, to take up a place in the world — implies becoming alien to oneself and to others. From this uncanny foreignness to being "at home" [heimlich] in the everyday: this is what it means to lead an ordinary life.

EXCURSUS: THE UNCANNINESS OF THE EVERYDAY (CAVELL)

I have so far offered several reflections stemming from the American philosopher Stanley Cavell. I find Cavell's engagement with Freud's text on the uncanny interesting for several reasons. On the one hand, Cavell considers psychoanalysis in relation to a broader history of philosophy, which allows him to investigate psychoanalysis beyond its own set of concerns. The overarching connection is that of skepticism. Cavell advances the view that skepticism, and confronting skepticism, belong to the basic challenges of modern life. Therefore questions such as the doubt concerning the ensoulment of the other, the certainty of being dreaming

or awake, and the knowability of the world, should not be confined to academic philosophy, but permeate the everyday of modern life. This transfer of skeptical concern from the world of philosophy to the modern everyday, however, did not take place within philosophy, but in the realm of literature. The tragedies of Shakespeare are, as Cavell has shown in various studies, “a projection or an enactment of a skeptical problematic”.⁸ And his recent work on the “Comedies of Remarriage” attempts to show the same for the so-called ‘screwball’ comedies produced between the 1930s and the 1950s.⁹

In this treatment of skeptical doubt in the popular culture of modernity, Cavell does not see mere trivialization at work. It carries critical potential. Romanticism, which Cavell regards as exemplary in this respect, is “in struggle against skepticism, and at the same time in struggle with philosophy’s responses to skepticism”.¹⁰ In the literary treatment, the discussion of skepticism does not take place in the wasteland of conceptual abstraction, but on the horizon of the ordinary, the everyday. According to Cavell, this indicates a blind spot in philosophy. For the overcoming or dissolution of skeptical disquiet cannot be brought about by means or philosophical construction. Skepticism will be overcome, if at all, not on the battlefield of arguments but in our daily praxis. It is here that skepticism loses its sting. Traditionally, philosophy has displayed little interest in our everyday surroundings with words, things, and other human beings. In a certain sense, it is that which philosophy has “always already” overlooked when it establishes itself as philosophy. (Exempted from this critique, of course, are Cavell’s “heroes”: Austin and Wittgenstein.)

This is the perspective from which Cavell reads Freud. Psychoanalysis too is seen as a reaction to the modern challenge of skepticism. The other sense in which Cavell approaches the Freudian text, however, seems to me equally important. He takes psychoanalysis seriously in that he applies its instruments to itself. That is, Cavell is just as good a reader as Freud is a listener. There are two peculiarities of Freud’s text to which Cavell’s lectures draw attention: a form of uncanny repetition or denial and a slip of the tongue by Freud in remembering E.T.A. Hoffman’s text. Taken together, these allow Cavell to re-situate the uncanny in psychoanalysis. Freud’s pointed rhetorical opposition between an interpretation of the uncanny along the lines of the uncanny doll and an interpretation along the lines of castration anxiety does not convince. Contrary to what Freud suggests, these are not real theoretical alternatives we would have to choose between, since the doubt concerning the ensoulment of the other is closely connected with Freud’s idea of castration. Thus we can read E. T. A. Hoffman’s text as a story as to how the doubt concerning the other (Olympia or Clara) relates to the Oedipal drama. Overcoming the Oedipus complex is a condition for recognizing a clear distinction between the animate/inanimate — in other words a condition for the normalization of intimacy. The doubt concerning the ensoulment/unensoulment of the other would consequently be an infantile, neurotic relic that prevents recognizing the other as an independent human existence. This recognition demands, however, “bearing [...] separateness”¹¹) and the angst that accompanies it. Freud himself has numerous examples of this enduring separation: there is the game with the spool of thread, as described in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, in which the aim is to overcome the presence or absence of the mother,¹² or the fetishistic denial of the mother’s castration, which Freud identifies as perversion.¹³ Frank’s preference for blue velvet must be mentioned in this context.

THE LOSS OF THE ORDINARY: LOST HIGHWAY

I would like now to use these few considerations to return to Lynch and articulate a certain unease. This unease relates to *Lost Highway*. The married couple, Fred and Renee Madison, certainly belong to the series of Lynch’s uncanny couples which I briefly described at the beginning. Lynch has captured one of the most depressive and oppressive couple scenes that exist. The first part of the film is a meticulously crafted account of a disintegrating marriage and of a disintegrating mind. And there are scenes that depict the uncanniness of a decaying married life in most agonizing ways. On the other hand, there is something amiss in this film. By that I do not mean difficulties that stand in the way of interpreting the film. *Lost Highway* certainly does not make it easy for the viewer to reconstruct the transformation from Fred to Pete and back; but it seems to me that an interpretation in terms of Lacan, as Žižek suggests, presents a plausible interpretive strategy.¹⁴ That, then, is not the problem. On the contrary:

Lost Highway is a Lacanian film. Or, let us put it this way: it corresponds to Lacanian theory. Yet this should be a critique of the film with some qualification. Rather, let me tentatively formulate the problem in this way: something is lost in *Lost Highway* — the horizon of the ordinary. *Lost Highway* is a vicious cycle from which there appears no escape. Neither the depressing vision of a couple's life suffocating in the everyday, nor the megalomaniacal vision of an Oedipal release, present viable alternatives. Instead, each of these extremes plays into the hands of the other. In both cases, the unfathomability, but also the constancy and familiarity of the ordinary is overlooked.

The recognition of the ordinary in the other, the recognition that Renee is an ordinary woman “of flesh and bloodness,”¹⁵ as Cavell puts it, is represented in *Lost Highway* only as a gross failure. Just as Nathaniel in *Sandmann* loses his mind over the disembodied limbs of Olympia, Lynch shows us an ostensibly deranged Fred for a brief moment standing over the mangled corpse of his “Olympia” [Fig. 3] [Fig. 4]. Has Fred discovered the incontrovertible proof of Renee's vitality? Was he successful in his desperate quest for certainty of her sexual availability? That seems doubtful. Thus the entire narrative repeats itself, albeit in the form of an Oedipally charged film noir version in the second half between Pete and Alice. However, this reconstructive fantasy — Peter works in *Arnie's* garage — fails miserably. Even if Alice's jouissance is evident to us on the big screen, she evades Pete's desperate advances. “You'll never have me”, she whispers in his ear, whereupon Pete re-transforms into Fred.



Fig. 3: Lynch, David: *Lost Highway*, USA/France 1997, October Films.



Fig. 4: Lynch, David: *Lost Highway*, USA/France 1997, October Films.

As I mentioned before: a film is quite different from its interpretation. That *Lost Highway* so easily accommodates a Lacanian interpretation should, however, give pause for consideration. It is perhaps a skeptically resigned intellectual world that moves undisturbed through theory and film. Lacan's reworking of Freud is a skeptical reworking of psychoanalysis, or rather a reworking of Freud's skeptical motive. Biological solipsism in Freud gives way to a linguistic or, perhaps, structural skepticism in Lacan. This holds true of all three epochs of Lacan's theoretical development.¹⁶ But this is particularly true of the late Lacan. With expressions such as “*La femme n'existe pas*” or “*il n'y pas de relation sexuelle*”, Lacan places great emphasis on the paradox that every relationship is inherently impossible.¹⁷ However plausibly this development in Lacan can be represented in its details, it does appear to be a symptom of what Nietzsche terms the temptation of nihilism.

Thus something is lost in *Lost Highway*. It is the horizon of the ordinary, the horizon of a pre-conceptual praxis that is heterogeneous and diverse, such that it cannot withstand rigid skeptical claims, but which, on the other hand, is sufficiently reliable on praxis that we need not despair. In *Lost Highway* this horizon of the ordinary appears symbolically only in a single scene. Clearly marked by his transformation, Pete Dayton still tries to catch a momentary glimpse of his garden as he peers over the garden fence: but it is an idealized, and thus fleeting, garden that he sees, some lost paradise [Fig. 5]. We might say in response to Cavell, however, that the ordinary is by no means the lost paradise of security and immediacy. This is already a skeptically informed vision. Our everyday language games, in which we distinguish between soulfulness/



Fig. 5: Lynch, David: *Lost Highway*, USA/France 1997, October Films.

unsoulfulness, masculine/feminine, reality/dream, are susceptible to all forms of uncertainty. The differences, however, are not arbitrary. What skepticism overlooks is that, even if the differences cannot be guaranteed by criteria, it is nevertheless not the case that we are unaware of them. But it is an awareness that rests on recognition, not on knowledge. The difference between soulfulness and unsoulfulness can thus be determined on the basis of social consent, yet not grasped independently of it. The uncanny, then, is to a certain extent situated at the heart of social philosophy, since such pre-conceptual differences are what structure the realm of the everyday. According to Cavell, however, the idea of such a difference is “uncanny”.¹⁸

THE REAL AS THE ORDINARY: WILD AT HEART

Allow me to revisit a few of the ideas outlined in another film from David Lynch. A couple is also at the center of the action in *Wild at Heart*: Lula Pace (Laura Dern) and Sailor Ripley (Nicolas Cage). The film is presented as a road-movie, the story of a couple on the run. Here Lynch draws a couple that must face the whole world, and must also asserts itself at the end of the film — as an extended nuclear family. The story recounts how Lula and Sailor find their way to one other in spite of virtually insurmountable obstacles. At the same time, however, each of them is also self-concerned. Lula is under the control of a wickedly domineering mother and is traumatized by her father’s death in a fire (for which her mother seems responsible) and by being raped by her Uncle Pooch. Sailor was raised without parents and stumbles from one catastrophe to the next, leading to two spells in prison. Lynch artistically integrates these two levels of external and internal obstacles, resulting in some rather bizarre consequences. For when the two speak with one other, the reference of their dialogue is somewhat unclear. As spectators, we see the memories and fantasies that the protagonists have exposed but often appear not to notice. Thus we are dealing with unconscious fantasies.

Lula, for example, is regularly being pursued by a figure she calls “wicky witch”. As the film makes clear, these witch fantasies have an obvious reference to her mother — Lula, however, appears oblivious to this. Nevertheless, these fantasies have an effect, and indeed, an effect on Sailor, which Lula perceives as secretive. [Fig 6]. Does Lula lie when Sailor asks her what she’s thinking about? This strikes me as implausible, since the question does not seem to Lula the least bit jarring. She simply seems to have forgotten what she was thinking about, something by no means is uncommon for her. Yet it is readily apparent to the viewer. At the same time, however, Lula also sticks to the topic, as the comment about her mother’s cigarette brand is directed to the same person. With the discussion of the cigarettes, she gradually brings the theme of fire into play, which is directly related to her trauma. This form of indirect communication is typical for Lula. The incoherence that she evokes does not bother either of them; they understand one another perfectly in spite of it.

Cavell describes marriage as a “mutual satisfaction without a concept”.¹⁹ We find a great deal of this concept-less pleasure in *Wild at Heart*. Lula and Sailor are occupied talking or fleeing, or they are having sex. The following scene very beautifully depicts this concept-less side of pleasure [Fig. 7]. The obvious pleasure that each has for the other seems “concept-less” in the sense that it can be articulated by different means. Lula



Fig. 6: Lynch, David: *Wild at Heart*, USA 1990, The Samuel Goldwyn Company.



Fig. 7: Lynch, David: *Wild at Heart*, USA 1990, The Samuel Goldwyn Company.

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describes the place of her ecstasy with reference to the popular hit from the 1930s, “Over the Rainbow”. She then draws an unusual comparison when she says that Sailor’s “dick” speaks to her and has a “sweet voice.” This is by no means untypical for intimate communication. However, this scene of fulfilled intimacy also has a certain reference to the surreal. The mechanical mermaid that carries forth the movements of Sailor and Lula is a reference to the mechanistic, instinctual nature of what occurs. It is also entirely possible that what happens between them can be seen as the effect of an animalistic hard-wiring that responds to certain mechanical stimuli—even if, in the context of this scene, that seems implausible. Thus again there is that uncanny difference which, as Cavell states, “is so perfect that there is no way or feature in which the difference consists”.²⁰ However, it stands in the background. The question between love or instinct is decided, at any rate, for them at this moment.

At the same time, however, the uncanny affords the possibility of alienation. Several scenes later we see the same couple in slightly different circumstances, at an absolute low-point in their break-up. Here one of the key lines of the film occurs. Lula has become pregnant and is in the hotel room vomiting. Sailor comments on this. Earlier in the same day, meanwhile, she experiences the most crass sexual advances from Bobby Peru, to which she consents with guilty feelings toward Sailor; while Bobby persuades Sailor to commit a robbery. It is a mix of need, boredom and perhaps a vague sense of paternal responsibility that drives him to break his promise to Lula. Each of them, Lula and Sailor, feels guilty toward the other, and both conceal their feelings. The concept-less pleasure has become a concept-less discomfort. They experience each other as inaccessible.

This is the moment of the skeptic who claims that we cannot directly perceive the thoughts of others. Cavell would agree, but insist on the fact that that a “failure to acknowledge” is not a “failure to know”: it is “the

presence of something, a confusion, an indifference, a callousness, an exhaustion, a coldness”.²¹

The failure of acknowledgment is not based on some fact about the other, it is something we do, it's a kind of attitude we adopt. This attitude has two voices, an active and a passive one. Whereas the active voice is the usual way skepticism is understood in philosophy, the passive voice is equally important. It consists of the inability or the unwillingness to make myself understood by the other.²² It is obvious that Lula and Sailor, both of them preoccupied with their private desires and expectations, *make themselves unreadable to the other*.

With Cavell we could say that Lula and Sailor have become familiar, inconspicuous to one other. This implies that they must both experience and endure their separation. Sailor must come to terms with the fact that Lula is unhappy with him and not “Somewhere over the Rainbow.” Lula must come to terms with the fact that Sailor is not the ideal father of her unborn child and that he has not — at least, not yet — sung “Love me Tender” for her. At the same time, it is clear from this constellation that overcoming the skeptical impasse cannot be achieved through philosophical construction but rather through a “reconstruction and reorganization of the everyday”²³. This is to say that it requires a transformation — Cavell speaks of a “conversion”²⁴ — of their respective self-understandings. Lula must remove herself from the spell of her domineering mother; Sailor must escape the self-loathing within which social ascriptions have entrapped him. The solution that the film offers us for this dilemma is perhaps a fairy-tale. Lula initiates by choosing Sailor over her mother. Sailor, by contrast, requires more of a detour. Having initially fled responsibility for their son, he returns after a solid crack on the nose by the “good witch” from the *Wizard of Oz* [Fig. 8].



Fig. 8: Lynch, David: *Wild at Heart*, USA 1990, The Samuel Goldwyn Company.

If, like Žižek, we take seriously not only the sublime, but also the humiliating and the ridiculous in Lynch's films, then this scene provides a demanding exercise. It is an example of saccharine pop-kitsch that is hardly tolerable. All the same, in the dialogue of the good witch, one can hear, if one seeks a reference to *Lost Highway*: “Don't be afraid/a Fred, Sailor. Don't turn away from love”²⁵.

- 1 I'm overlooking here Oedipal scenery developed by Chion (Chion, Michel: David Lynch, London: British Film Institute 1995, chap. 3, 83.) that is certainly at work in *Blue Velvet*, and limiting myself to its drive aspect [Triebaspekt].
- 2 See for example *Triebe und Triebchicksale* (Freud, Sigmund: *Gesammelte Werke*, London: Imago 1952, Bd. X, 210 – 232; Strachey, James: *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, London: Hogarth Press 1957, Volume XIV (1914 – 1916), 117 – 140).
- 3 Lacan insists on the distinction between drive (fr. la pulsion) and instinct which in Strachey's translation of *Trieb* as instinct in the Standard Edition is made invisible. The aim of the drive according to Lacan is not the satisfaction of a biological need but to follow its own circuit. “Thus the real pupose of the drive is not some mythical goal of full satisfaction, but to return to its circular path, and the real source of enjoyment ist the repetitive movement of this closed circuit.” (Evans, Dylan: *An Introductory Dictionary of Lacanian Psychoanalysis*, Routledge: London, New York 1996, 46 – 47.)

- 4 Lacan, Jacques: *Le Séminaire. Livre XI. Les quatre concepts de la psychanalyse*, Paris: Editions du Seuil 1973, 177 – 178.
- 5 The Ovidian myth of Aktaion is clearly present in Lacans analysis of the drive but never directly addressed. For a further exploration of this motive see Cremonini, Andreas: „Vom Realen des Mythos zum Mythos des Realen. Lacans Theorie des Triebs als mythische Aufhebung des Begehrens“, in: Kupke, Christian (Ed.): *Lacan – Trieb und Begehren*, Berlin: Parodos Verlag 2007, 101 – 130.
- 6 The formulation is alluding to Lacans famous dictum in the opening essay of the *Écrits* (Lacan, Jacques: *Écrits*, Paris: Editions du Seuil 1966, 41). Its context is Lacans theory of desire which is the dominating point of view in the earlier work. In the context of the drive theory the emphasis should be layed on the real, i.e. material or bodily aspect of the circulating matter.
- 7 Cavell, Stanley: *Cities of Words. Pedagogical Letters on a Register of the Moral Life*, Harvard University Press 2004, 44.
- 8 Cavell, Stanley: „The Uncanniness of the Ordinary“, in: McMurrin, Sterling (Ed.): *The Tanner Lectures on Human Values*, vol. VIII, Cambridge University Press 1988: 83 – 117, esp. 111 (also available over the website of the Tanner Lectures: http://tannerlectures.utah.edu/_documents/a-to-z/c/cavell88.pdf)
- 9 Cavell: *Cities of Words*: 10.
- 10 Cavell: „The Uncanniness of the Ordinary“: 113.
- 11 Cavell: *Cities of Words*: 10.
- 12 Freud GW XIII, 11 – 15; S.E. XVIII, 14 – 17.
- 13 Freud, GW XVII, 133 – 135; S.E. XXIII, 203 – 204.
- 14 Zizek, Slavoj: *The Art of the Ridiculous Sublime. On David Lynch's Lost Highway*, The Walter Chapin Simpson Center for the Humanities 2000.
- 15 Zizek, Slavoj: *The Art of the Ridiculous Sublime. On David Lynch's Lost Highway*, The Walter Chapin Simpson Center for the Humanities 2000.
- 16 Zizek, Slavoj: *Der erhabenste aller Hysteriker*, Wien: Turia & Kant 1991: 130.
- 17 See „sexual relationship“ in: Dylan, Evan: *An Introductory Dictionary of Lacanian Psychoanalysis*: 181 – 182.
- 18 Cavell: „The Uncanniness of the Ordinary“: 100 – 101.
- 19 Cavell: „The Uncanniness of the Ordinary“: 117.
- 20 Cavell: „The Uncanniness of the Ordinary“: 100.
- 21 Cavell, Stanley: „Knowing and Acknowledging“, in: *Must we mean what we say? A Book of Essays*, Cambridge University Press 1976: 238 – 266, esp. 264.
- 22 Cavell, Stanley: *The Claim of Reason. Wittgenstein, Skepticism, Moralität and Tragedy*, Oxford University Press 1979, 442.
- 23 Cavell: „The Uncanniness of the Ordinary“: 114.
- 24 Cavell: „The Uncanniness of the Ordinary“: 96.
- 25 And, of course, a reference to Cavell's discussion of tragedy: „The Avoidance of Love“, in: *Must we mean what we say? A Book of Essays*: Cambridge University Press 1976: 267 – 353.

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