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# Invisible Culture

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## Funny How Secrets Travel: David Lynch's Lost Highway

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The direct time-image is the phantom which has always haunted the cinema, but it took modern cinema to give a body to this phantom. Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 2: The Time-Image*<sup>1</sup>

David Lynch's 1997 film *Lost Highway* is haunted by the specter of Alfred Hitchcock's *Vertigo* (1958), itself a ghost story on many levels<sup>2</sup>. In *Lost Highway*, the spectralizing effects of recording and communication devices are rendered in graphic form; characters get lost in the medium, in the delay of the lost time. No longer simply the art of the index, *Lost Highway* puts the virtual observer into the scene, and characters are caught in the movement of affect, a vertigo of suspense that is not simply epistemological in nature. Inspired by the spiral form that dominates Hitchcock's masterpiece, *Lost Highway* explores the effects of living in a world characterized by paramnesia. A form of *déjà vu*, paramnesia is a disjunction of sensation and perception, in which one has the inescapable sense of having already lived a moment in time, of being a witness to one's life. Consider Gilles Deleuze's description of the crystal image, a key element of the time-image in Deleuze's analysis of cinema. The crystal image is an indivisible unity of an actual image and its virtual image:

The present is the actual image, and its contemporaneous past is the virtual image, the image in a mirror. According to [Henri] Bergson, paramnesia (the illusion of *déjà vu* or already having been there) simply makes this obvious point perceptible: there is a recollection of the present, contemporaneous with the present itself, as closely coupled as a role to an actor. Our actual existence, then whilst it is unrolled in time,

duplicates itself alongside a virtual existence, a mirror image.<sup>3</sup>

The effect of this doubling is manifestly uncanny; as Bergson goes on to describe it: whoever becomes conscious of the continual duplicating of his present into perception and recollection will compare himself to an actor playing his part automatically, listening to himself and beholding himself playing.<sup>4</sup> Like Hitchcock, whose greatness, and also violence, in a sense, was to adapt characters to the situation of the camera, David Lynch is one of the great thinkers of the relationship between recording mediums and the human form. *Lost Highway* takes to extreme Deleuze's contention that in the time-image, the hero records rather than reacts.<sup>5</sup> Lynch explores this on a literal level, examining the effect of recording devices and communication mediums, and insisting on the uncomfortable fit between them and the human form. In Lynch's films, technologies have an *anamorphic* effect on the body; that is to say, they do not *metamorphize* the body into a new, completed form, but de-figure it visibly and aurally.<sup>6</sup> As such, even the most familiar technologies, such as electricity or the telephone are rendered in such a way as to highlight their dirtiness to make visible what we have become accustomed to ignoring. Electricity has a presence in Lynch's work, not merely as a conduit or medium, but as a deforming element. In *Lost Highway*, the operation of technology is constantly made manifest, in two main ways: one, through temporal delay, such as the intercom message that gets lost in the medium for the length of the film, and two, through a noisy or dirty quality, where an image on a video screen competes for significance with the static between pictures, and where the failures of technology figure the brutal reshaping of the human form. Like a skipping record, Lynch's films suggest that these aspects of technology are not mere annoyances.<sup>7</sup>

Also like a skipping record, these failures generate a field of doubles and repetition, but in the sense of Deleuzian repetition, which requires a rethinking of medium. In calling attention to the medium, there is not an unmasking of illusion, but a stretching of the frequently overlooked transition and change that these mediums entail. Repetition highlights the temporal element of medium that is usually condensed or ignored, and makes it the agent of repetition with a difference. In *Lost Highway*, repetition takes the form of a loop that marks the indeterminate quality of change. In *Difference and Repetition*, Deleuze notes that what is repeated in repetition is difference itself: A

bare, material repetition (repetition of same) appears only in the sense that another repetition is disguised within it, constituting it and constituting itself in disguising itself.<sup>8</sup> The double, then, is not defined by resemblance or the same, but by masked difference as an affect of time. When in *Lost Highway* Patricia Arquette appears as Alice for the first time, but after already having appeared as Renée, thus embodying her second character, the static of Arquette's presence creates a ripple effect in the film. A clichéd use of slow motion highlights the slowness and weightiness of her actions. As she steps out of a car, the soundtrack resonates with a sense of familiarity and disquiet. Lou Reed performs a tight, minimalist version of the Drifters hit 'This Magic Moment'. The song is recognizable at once, but also strangely unfamiliar and newly inflected. It is literally a magic moment, so different and so new, but like any other. This uncanny repetition with its uncertain temporality is characteristic of the film as a whole, and Arquette as a 'bad copy'—an unfaithful woman, but also insufficiently disguised in her dual role embodies Deleuze's notion of the simulacrum as the repetition of difference.

The type of repetition this film explores through the doublings of character, the use of recording and communication devices and a thickness of mood that elicits a sense of *déjà vu*, are all means of exploring a temporality characteristic of the age of mechanical and electronic recording devices. Not yet the digital, the violent transformations of memory, experience and paramnesia involve a stretching of time that is repeated even as it is lived. Using the incapacitated Scottie character in *Vertigo* as an example, Deleuze asks 'If one of Hitchcock's innovations was to implicate the spectator in the film, did not the characters themselves have to be capable in a more or less obvious manner of being assimilated to spectators?': Deleuze describes this as being 'prey to a vision, where seeing, far from being an exercise of power and knowledge, instead renders the viewer passive.'<sup>9</sup>

Hitchcock had begun the inversion of this point of view by including the viewer in the film. But it is now that the identification is actually inverted: the character has become a kind of viewer. He shifts, runs and becomes animated in vain, the situation he is in outstrips his motor capacities on all sides, and makes him see and hear what is no longer subject to the rules of a response or action. *He records rather than reacts*. He is prey to a

vision, pursued by it or pursuing it, rather than engaged in an action.<sup>10</sup>

In *Vertigo*, Scottie has been cited by Laura Mulvey and others as an example of sadistic vision, the mastery of scopophilia, who subjects Judy (Kim Novak) to his gaze.<sup>11</sup> However, Scottie is just as clearly prey to a vision, in this case of time and memory, a vertiginous spiral beyond his diagnosed acrophobia that puts him beside himself.

The effect of this doubled temporality in *Lost Highway* is conveyed through a thickness of mood. Slow motion has frequently been used as a cinematic trope for memory. Lynch evokes the distortion of image and sound that slow motion entails, without actually using it. The result is to make every action in the film new to the spectator and narratively to the characters seem repeated and already heavy with the past. This oneiric quality is as much responsible for the effect of a temporal loop as the narrative structure of the film. When characters become witnesses to their own existence, Deleuze says: everything remains real, but between the reality of setting and that of motor action there is no longer a motor extension established, but rather a dreamlike connection through the intermediary of the sense organs, as if the action floats in the situation.<sup>12</sup> In the suspense of the situation, then, there is also a continual movement, a vivid relation of reversibility and indeterminacy, a vertigo of suspense.

While *Vertigo* makes dramatic use of special effects and animation, such as in the opening credits and in Scottie's dream sequence to graphically highlight the temporality of the loop that infuses the film, Lynch's own looping of *Vertigo* turns towards a highlighting of the devices themselves. The film opens and closes with a message relayed through an intercom: Dick Laurant is dead. The message is the moment when the snake bites its own tail, an act of sending that rebounds on itself, embodying the *delay* of lost time and generating a field of doubles and repetition. In Lynch's film, death tends to engender not only decomposition, but recomposition as well. In her article, *Meditation on Violence*, Lesley Stern notes the double force of film, both to transmit something that is red hot but also to deaden and embalm. Stern rethinks this contradiction, arguing not that film kills reality, but that this second element refers to the articulation of a death threat, of enacting a death drive":

If the cinema does not simply reconstitute a presence of

bodies, but if it participates in genesis of the bodily then it can also dismember bodies, disperse bodily fragments like Actaeon torn limb from limb by his own hounds and scattered in pieces through time and space. Moreover, the film itself can materialize as a body of sorts, a body that bleeds metaphorically, but with sensible effects, producing for instance sensations of illness, fear, ecstasy. Making a film, then, involves the risk that in generating the thrilling and ecstatic you will go beyond the pleasure principle and encounter a death threat.[13](#)

The film addresses the effect of reproductive technologies of film *and* video to loosen our moorings, to put us in two (or more) places at once, confronted with the self. When characters become spectators and vice versa, the temporality of the film continually loops back on itself in a cycle of composition and decomposition.

### **Pete and Re-Pete**

*Lost Highway* has been described as a 21st century noir horror film, a graphic investigation into parallel identity crises, a world where time is dangerously out of control, a psychogenic fugue.[14](#) It begins with the story of Fred Madison, a jazz musician who may or may not have killed his wife; however, from very early on in the film, the narrative is disrupted by a continual infolding and reversibility of events, as time and space are layered over each other with a carnal density. Fred and Renee Madison live in Los Angeles; they begin receiving anonymous videotapes. Each tape repeats the shots of the previous tape, and penetrates further into the Madison home, tracing its way through the living room, down the hallway, along a curtain and finally into the bedroom, where initially Renee and Fred can be seen in bed. The audience has already seen this same interior progression of shots, during Fred's description of a dream he had. They phone the police, who ask if they own a video camera. Renee replies, No, Fred hates them. Fred elaborates: "I like to remember things my own way":

Al (detective): What do you mean by that?

Fred: How I remember them. Not necessarily the way they happened.

While Fred's comment seems to align video images with an objective and factual truth ( how they really happened ) that is opposed to

subjective, personal memory ( how I remember them ), and while this distinction will be a part of Fred s psychoses, the film continually undermines this very distinction. It suggests instead the generative nature of recording devices that makes a singular return to the truth (the past) impossible. Unlike *Vertigo*, where the truth about Judy/ Madeline s double identity is revealed when Scottie s memories finally match up with a real event via a necklace Judy wears, but which he remembers from Madeline, that moment never comes in *Lost Highway*.

Fred receives a final videotape, which ends with quick but explicit shots of Renee s seemingly dead body next to their bed, and Fred screaming (soundlessly) into the camera. Fred is arrested and sentenced to death, but cannot recall what happened. One night in his cell, he undergoes a radical transformation; suffering physical agony, hallucinating a vision of a cabin in the desert, he suffers some sort of electrical seizure and finds himself riding down the lost highway of the film s title. He pulls over and encounters Pete Dayton, a younger man who through a simple double exposure becomes displaced in time and space. The next morning, prison guards discover Pete in the place of Fred, and are forced to release him with no idea where Fred has gone to. From this point on, the film seems to restart, centered on Pete.

No one is certain about what happened; Pete suffers from continuous headaches, blurred vision and hallucinations, but doesn t remember that night. He goes about his life, returning to his mechanic s job. One day, his rich and shady patron, Mr. Eddy (who is also Dick Laurant) shows up, in fine noir tradition with his moll in tow, and the woman is none other than well, who is it? The audience identifies her as both Patricia Arquette and as Renee, Fred Madison s wife, but she is clearly someone else, a blond instead of a brunette, named Alice.

For the audience, the doubled presence of Patricia Arquette s body produces what Jean Louis Comolli calls denegation the audience knows and doesn t know, we recognize at once the character and the body of the actress. In his article *Historical Fiction: A Body Too Much*, Comolli addresses the question of how one believes in the illusion of cinema. He takes as his subject historical film, which has as its unique problematic not only convincing the audience of the believability of its characters, but has the added challenge of trying to overcome the interference of a pre-established referent in the audience s mind. In

non-historical films, Comolli writes that the character reaches us as a bodily effect in the image, with the actor's body appearing first only as an empty mask, which the character gradually comes to inhabit.<sup>15</sup> The knowledge that the character has at best a spectral possession of the actor's body is not a problem for the audience, Comolli suggests; we accept this with boredom.<sup>16</sup> With historical fiction, there is the problem of a body too much. The actor's body as an empty mask is at odds with the referentiality of the historical body, a problem that can only be resolved by making the actor's body into such a problem that it pushes the question of how do we believe in the fictional effects of film to the limit, thus producing a kind of pleasure:

This boring knowledge has to be lost as soon as possible and the rules played. The certainty we always have, bearing it in mind, that the spectacle is not life nor the film reality, that the actor is not the character and that if we are there as spectators it is because we know it is a simulacrum, is a certainty we have to be able to doubt.<sup>17</sup>

For Comolli, that doubt is less uncanny than annoying, like a brief blur in the image that must be exorcised.

The more difficult it is to believe, the more it is worth managing to do so. Comolli argues that the spectator is never fooled, despite the extremes to which he or she is pushed. In Comolli's example of Pierre Renoir as Louis XVI, this ghostly effect produces a discomfort both in the actor and in the spectators, to the point that spectators both on and offscreen wish fervently for the body to disappear: Far and near, here and there, double inscription of the spectator's place in the auditorium and in the scene.<sup>18</sup> For Comolli, however, the effects of this double inscription, of this denegation to infinity remain untheorized, merely an interesting effect. What happens to the spectator in the face of this static? Comolli identifies the indeterminacy, but in the end can only align himself with the spectatorial wish: may it disappear!<sup>19</sup> This works conveniently in the case of Renoir as Louis XVI, but in the case of Alice and Renee this indetermination is ultimately unresolved. Pushed beyond the unsatisfying thud of Judy's body at the end of *Vertigo*, Alice/Renee/Arquette creates a generative ghosting that refuses to disappear, and spreads throughout the film as a whole. In this way, the body of the actress also highlights the disquieting status of the indexical trace. The index is the trace of a past event, the guarantor that an event

actually took place. Yet it is also a profoundly troubling sign; in the case of Arquette's doubled body, the referentiality of the index gets displaced temporally. Comolli's "may it disappear!" is answered instead by an unsettling and uncanny repetition. Identification becomes impossible; there is no recuperative moment for the spectator in this instance.

Once they meet, Pete and Alice begin having an affair. When it becomes clear the psychotically dangerous Mr. Eddy knows what is going on, Alice suggests to Pete that they rob a friend of hers and use the money to run away. When Pete shows up at the scene of the crime, he is confused and angered by Alice's seduction of the intended victim, and his headaches and hallucinations return full force. At one point, he sees a photo of both Alice and Renee, and asks in his confusion, "Is that you? Are both of them you?" Alice, refusing mystery, points to her image and answers "That's me." The photo for the first time brings together the taboo image of Renee and Alice together. For Pete, the result is an intensification of his headache and a bleeding nose. Until this point, it has been possible that what we've been seeing has taken place inside Fred's head, however, faced with the indexical proof of the photo, the distinction between interior and exterior for Pete begins to blur. Pete and Alice flee into the desert. They make love, there is another transformation, and suddenly Fred is back.

Alice leaves Fred on the sand, telling him "you'll never have me." She walks into the beach house, and when Fred follows, he finds only the mystery man inside. Fred flees down the highway to the Lost Highway hotel, where he finds Renee making love to Mr. Eddy. He kidnaps and eventually kills Mr. Eddy with the help of the mystery man. Renee's fate is unresolved. At the end of the film, Fred drives back to his home, where he presses the intercom button and tells himself the message that opened the film: "Dick Laurant is dead." He then flees once again, chased by the police, back onto the lost highway, where once again he seems to transform. The film ends where it begins, going nowhere.

As throughout the film, the message got lost somewhere in the space of the intercom, and recording and communication devices are continually undermined in their immediacy. There is an ongoing attempt to materialize the lost time of recording and registration, which bleeds out of these devices and saturates the film as a whole.



The film stretches out perception, pulling it like a rubber band that never quite snaps back into place. In this way, and through the theme of the condemned man on death row, *Lost Highway* evokes the short film *An Occurrence at Owl Creek Bridge*, in which the moment between the drop of the prisoner from the scaffolding until the crack of the neck is stretched into a half hour long hallucination of escape and the possibility of a life.<sup>20</sup> Only here, the crack of the neck never comes. In *Lost Highway*, there is only the nauseating feeling of adrenaline stretched beyond the moment of flight, the threat disseminated and suspended.

There is no better image for the temporal structure of the film than the very first scene. There is no fade in; flashing yellow lines slice the black screen in half. The lost highway itself opens before us, the yellow lines the only color in the dark night, the road only illuminated a few metres ahead of the car. It is a visceral image; from the start there is a strong sense of danger and potential, that something is about to happen, but the total lack of context keeps you from knowing what it could be. The road suggests that it is leading somewhere, but the headlights illuminate only what is directly in front of the car. The flashing yellow lines are discontinuous, like the frames of a film, flickering, but their constant repetition evokes a powerful sense of continuity as well. In many ways, this scene exemplifies what Melissa McMahon describes as the long take as repetition: a repeated return to the object, beyond the length of time needed for recognition, which destabilizes its initial determination.<sup>21</sup> Again and again in *Lost Highway* we will see this kind of look on everyday objects which exceed their own representation, but also on the repeated body of the actress as two characters, where the repeated body brings the thing to an essential singularity, endlessly referring to other descriptions. It becomes what McMahon calls a literal image :

The literal image, the most clear, obvious and emphatic a simple act of showing is also inextricably opaque because it refuses the sensory-motor link of abstraction, explanation or generalization. The image and the body is uncertain because it maintains itself in a space outside its determination in action, a space of infinite possibility, of the forces of grace or chance. This is not the secrecy of a dark interior, hidden so that it can all the better be inferred or perceived, the secret of a content within form, but a sort of unfolding or unraveling of the opposition

between interior and exterior across a surface plane, across time, defying the depths of secrecy to create an impenetrability of the surface.[22](#)

McMahon distinguishes here between representation, which requires a (hierarchical) distinction between original and copy which produces only a false movement, and Deleuzian repetition as that which does away with this distinction and thus allows for real movement, in this way destabilizing effect of looking.

The sense of urgency and rush, anxiety even before a cause is established, is eventually undercut by a slackening, an over-familiarity. The road races beneath the car, but the landscape never changes. The soundtrack is hard and pulsating, fast and rhythmic, but the beat is overcome as the languid voice of David Bowie floats in the air: funny how secrets travel. The urgency is still there, underpinning the scene but it is inaccessible under the hypnotic voice. *Lost Highway* is a film about the way secrets travel between the audience and the film, without being revealed or resolved. It locates secrets not in a depth to be plumbed or brought to light, but in an impenetrability of the surface. David Rodowick describes affect in relation to virtual conjunctions as *abject* in the sense of objectless emotion or feeling[23](#) This opening scene illustrates this sense: while we can identify elements that contribute to this feeling, the experience of the scene exceeds any cause. We have no object for our emotion, but similarly we do not properly have a subject either.

## A Psychogenic Fugue

In Lynch's film, inconsistencies of plot and narrative teleology are belied by a consistency, almost in the sense of a thickness, of mood. Many of the characters seem to be continually in the grip of *déjà vu*, and although this is all unfolding for the audience for the first time, we share in that sensation. Characters are slow to move, slow to speak; we can see time developing in their bodies. They speak their lines as though they've said them before, as though they are being spoken by the lines. In this "21st century film noir," the mystery lies less in figuring out which is the original and which is the bad copy than in the generative effects of doubling and repetition. These characters evoke a sense of *déjà vu* in the audience, through their doubled presence and through a reflection on the film medium itself.

There is a character in the film described in the credits as The Mystery Man, whom Lynch describes as a hair of an abstraction<sup>24</sup>. The description suits the film as a whole, encapsulating the ephemerality and mystery, especially of the narrative, while still insisting on its material status, as incarnated. In the same way as a single hair can today provide information about the perpetrator of a crime can provide enough evidence to convict without ever revealing the entire story or even the motivation in certainty, *Lost Highway* deals with a mystery that is felt rather than revealed, which saturates the characters, settings, and spectators without ever being fully actualized. The mystery man, with his face made up like a mask, is a figure of crossing in the film, appearing in both realities unchanged. He literally embodies the delay of lost time, a figure of terror and uncertainty at once. At one point in the film, he hands Fred a phone at a party: Fred phones his own home, only to be answered by the mystery man, who stands in front of him, in both places at once. In this scene, he is in two places at once, physically and telephysically present. His approach causes the surrounding sounds of the party to fall away, almost as if he and Fred were now moving at a different rate of time. There is an association of the mystery man with the undead, the suspension of recording and communication devices in the film. This undead is associated with distortions of space and time, with reversibility. With the mystery man, one type of suspense narrative suspense, Fred's growing suspicion of Renee and his surveillance of her at the party becomes a kind of epistemological suspense. How did you do that? he asks, but also what is the mystery man? the audience wonders. The voice on the phone gains its effect from being at once non-diegetic and un-localizable, and spectrally embodied by the mystery man. Writers on early cinema have noted the parallels between the scientific, evidentiary nature of filmic perception, and its uncanny side effects. This comes to be in the hair of the abstraction of the mystery man the literalization of spectrality.

This affect of time, both literal and spectral, is conveyed through the paranoia of the first third of the film, through characters, setting and tone. The first third is remarkable for its stillness, quiet and pacing. It is excruciatingly uncomfortable to watch, and yet not much happens. Most of it takes place in Renee and Fred's home, an *unheimlich* or uncanny space if there ever was one. In his essay on the uncanny, Freud notes that *heimlich*, homely or familiar, also comes to mean its opposite: secret, hidden. *Unheimlich* is not simply a state then, or a quality, but specifically a quality in motion, a quality that *develops* it is

all that should have remained hidden, but has come to light<sup>25</sup> The uncanny is also closely related to a sense of repetition; in the first third of the film, this is most clearly demonstrated through the unheimlich effect of a long take as repetition, where the most banal and everyday objects, such as chairs, are subjected to such a bland and yet relentless stare that their functionality falls away. Designed for human use, something else is revealed during these long takes, an inhuman quality, a different kind of recording, a gathering of impressions. In the Madison home, the space is unremarkable, rooms are quite barren, there is no obvious visual sense of things being hidden or concealed, but the very familiarity and exposure itself becomes uncanny through compression and repetition. The spaces are all decorated in earth tones, and are shot in such a way that they are overly intimate hallways seem to lead nowhere, entrances are compressed into the space, the geography of the house is uncertain, the lack of doors makes it all the more claustrophobic. Hallways are treated as either dead spaces, lit so that they are merely black gaps between rooms, with no sense of transition, or singular spaces that are unconnected from the rest of the house.

Hallways are thus homologous to the lost time of recording and communication devices. Rather than functioning as sensory-motor linkages, they become disrupted and sites of the dual unfolding of time described above. There are two matched scenes in the film, one with Fred and one with Pete, which take place in a darkened hallway. The man stands, seemingly uncertain of what to do, and then moves ever so slightly into the frame, so that we become aware that what we had seen was a mirror image. This image suggests a disconnect between self and simulacrum, that becomes explicitly connected to electricity in the film. Fred and Pete both become, to an extent, lost in the medium. Although on the surface, *Lost Highway* is set as a Manichean structure, with two worlds, one light and one dark, as this mirror image suggests, duality is an insufficient concept for understanding the film. The hallway functionally literalizes the lost time of recording devices (as transition), but it does so in a way to solicit attention to the virtual perspectives, not the actualized outcome of the image. The encounter with the mirror takes place in no-place, the atopia of electricity, like the intercom message delayed for the length of the film, where the trace and medium no longer serve to explain the effect. The trace is belied by the mirror image, in which near perfect resemblance leaves absolutely no mark, and the medium mocked by the hallways that go nowhere, that are nowhere.

Lynch highlights the presence of electricity in order to bring attention to the medium itself. Frequently, the sound in Lynch's films is characterized by a low buzzing, as though all the noises we tune out in daily life were intimately evident. In the opening scene, thick with silence, Fred suddenly hears a loud buzzing on the intercom, and answers it to hear a voice say "Dick Laurent is dead." He passes to the windows to see who is speaking but no one is there. As we discover at the end of the film, it is Fred himself who sends this message. It is in this obsession with the effects of medium that I believe Lynch's films tend to move beyond the time-image as Deleuze formulates it. In a sense all of Lynch's films are "lost in the medium" in both a narrative and aesthetic/structural sense; although this is often associated with electronic medium of image and sound in Lynch's film, I don't think the line is simply that between film and video.<sup>26</sup> Although Fred seems to anticipate the message he receives, pressing the "listen" button without ever asking who is there, he apparently can make no sense of the message, and does not seem to know who Dick Laurent is.

Fred's break, and the appearance of Pete, can be justified as a mental break, with the next section of the film taking place, as it were, in Fred's mind as he seeks to escape his terrible crime. In the same way that Renee's supposed infidelity is played out in the film as potentially only a figment of Fred's imagination, it is possible to see that his mind could take him elsewhere as he sits on death row. Chris Rodley describes Patricia Arquette's understanding of the film:

Arquette's own rationale for *Lost Highway* goes something like this: a man murders his wife because he thinks she's being unfaithful. He can't deal with the consequences of his actions and has a kind of breakdown. In this breakdown he tries to imagine a better life for himself, but he's so fucked up that even this imaginary life goes wrong. The mistrust and madness in him are so deep that even his fantasies end in a nightmare.<sup>27</sup>

But while this explains in some way the narrative break, it is ultimately dissatisfying, not because of some other truth behind it, but because it fails to do justice to the *experience* of the film. In *Vertigo*, the film feels the way it does and has the effect it does because of the oneiric quality that saturates it. Only when the dream is broken does the action pick up again. For Deleuze, this is why *Vertigo* is a hinge

between the action-image and the time-image. In *Lost Highway*, though, it is impossible to ascribe any part of film to the realm of day. Regardless of narrative explanation, the film resists with a spiral form that refuses again and again the return to action. Recall that Deleuze writes of the hero of the time-image that he records rather than reacts. One could say this about Fred, that the events he's been part of are engraved on him, recorded on him like a song on a record, like an image on a videotape, and he is played over and over again. Fred's passivity derives from this; not that he is a victim, but that he is stuck in the lost time of recording.

If in Hitchcock characters become suspended by becoming voyants et non plus actants, in *Lost Highway*, there is a materialization of the effect of looking and of articulation with mechanical and electronic devices that demands a different materialization. Hitchcock anticipates this with the theme of death and remembering in *Vertigo*; Lynch intensifies this in a reaction against the clean disappearance of the virtual image. In effect, in some ways Lynch takes us through a crisis of the time image and it is around the notion of the simulacrum and doubles that this achieves its interest and force. By thickening out the space of the carnal density and electronic stretchiness of vision and sound, Lynch puts perception itself into crisis. Lynch pushes indiscernability to an essential singularity precisely through repetition and bad copies. Arquette describes *Lost Highway* as a man's fantasy escape gone wrong, where even his fantasies are faithless. But that is exactly the point. Alice/ Renee are both bad copies, in the Deleuzian sense of the simulacrum faithless to their origins and engendering yet more copies. The copy evokes the loop, but always with a difference.

When Fred drives home to send himself the message, too late, that Dick Laurant is dead, it's not quite a vicious circle; Fred flees the house and once more heads down the lost highway. Has the film ended where it began, or are we still lost in the space of transmission, of the message lost in the intercom that lets Fred be in two places at once, never coinciding with himself?

In Deleuze's cinema books, as well as in his rethinking of the simulacrum, it is the question of referentiality that is rendered unimportant. The supposed crisis of the image generated by the digital revolution can easily be overstated. If the significance of repetition is masked difference, then even a medium like film, maybe

especially a medium like film produces the reality effect through this sense of difference, not through its proximity to the real. Or if it is proximity, it is a proximity of the splitting of time. The spiral structure of *Lost Highway* reflects this, and in the attempt to materialize the delay of lost time generated by electricity, recording devices, the elements of telepresence that stretch and pull on the tug of ordinary reality there is the movement of masked difference, the vitality of repetition. The association of the mystery man with these devices, his ability to dematerialize and rematerialize and to change the frequency of the world around him, emphasizes this. If he has no double, the only character with one name, one identity by means of his lack of identity it is because he already embodies the repetition of film.

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1. Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 2: The Time-Image*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Robert Galeta (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989), 41. ↑
2. David Lynch, *Lost Highway* 35 mm, 135 min., Ciby-2000, USA/France, 1997 and Alfred Hitchcock, *Vertigo* 35mm, 129 min., Paramount, USA, 1958. ↑
3. Deleuze, *Cinema 2*, 79. ↑
4. Ibid. ↑
5. Ibid, 3. ↑
6. By anamorphic, I do not mean to refer strictly to anamorphic lens, for example, but use the term in the broader sense of distortion. ↑
7. Lynch uses the skipping record during the murder of Maddy (Sheryl Lee), Laura Palmer's (also Sheryl Lee) cousin, in *Twin Peaks*. It is another instance in which the failures of technology, not their unbridled success, becomes associated with repetition, doubling and a temporal loop. ↑
8. Gilles Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, trans. Paul Patton (New York: Columbia UP, 1994), 21. ↑
9. Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 1: The Movement-Image*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Barbara Habberjam, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press,

- 1986), 205. ↑
10. Deleuze, *Cinema 2, 3*, my italics. ↑
  11. Laura Mulvey, *Visual and Other Pleasures*, (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1989), 23. ↑
  12. Ibid, 3. ↑
  13. Lesley Stern, Meditation on Violence, in *Kiss Me Deadly: Feminism and Cinema for the Moment*, ed. Laleen Jayamanne, (Sydney: Power Publication, 1995), 254. ↑
  14. Chris Rodley, *Lynch on Lynch*, (Boston: Faber and Faber, 1997) xviii. ↑
  15. Jean Louis Comolli, Historical Fiction: A Body Too Much in *Screen 19.2* (Summer 1978) trans. Ben Brewster, 43. ↑
  16. Ibid. ↑
  17. Ibid, 45-6. ↑
  18. Ibid, 50. ↑
  19. Ibid, 50. ↑
  20. *An Occurrence at Owl Creek Bridge*, dir. Robert Enrico (1962). An excised scene found in the original script also suggests a connection with *An Occurrence at Owl Creek Bridge*. The scene takes place immediately after Fred's trial and conviction; in it, two beautiful young women discuss the case while shopping for lingerie. The debate the relative merits of hanging versus the firing squad as a way for a convicted killer to die.  
 Marian: So you'd rather be hung, huh?  
 They both giggle at the obvious joke.  
 Raquel: Absolutely)soon as your neck snaps, you black out. It might take a while for the body to die, but you wouldn't feel it. (37)  
 Fred's break with reality has often been interpreted as a flight from his impending doom; the scenes cut in the original script would have made Fred's situation clearer and more obvious to the viewer. ↑
  21. Melissa McMahon, Fourth person singular Becoming ordinary and the void in the critical body filmic in Jayamanne ed., 137. ↑
  22. Ibid, 137-8. ↑
  23. David Rodowick, *Gilles Deleuzes Time Machine*, (Durham: Duke UP, 1997), 64. ↑
  24. Rodley, 229. ↑
  25. Sigmund Freud, The Uncanny in *Psychological Writings and Letters*. Sander



- Gilman, ed. Trans. Alix Strachey (New York: Continuum, 1995), 126. ↑
26. Nor is this a distinction between the analog and digital, which is sometimes mapped onto the distinction between film and video especially around the question of virtual reality. Brian Massumi (in *Parables for the Virtual: Movement, Affect, Sensation*, Durham: Duke UP, 2002) points out that Equating the digital with the virtual confuses the really apparitional with the artificial (137). Laura Marks in *The Skin of the Film: Intercultural Cinema, Embodiment and the Senses* (Durham: Duke UP, 2000) also makes a useful distinction between indexical and non-indexical practices, rather than indexical and non-indexical media. ↑
27. Rodley, 232. ↑

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