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Anti-Oedipus, Lynch: Initiatory Rites and the Ordeal of Justice

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The path to heaven leads through the abyss.

Friedrich Schelling, *Philosophy of Religion*

Initiation lies at the core of any genuine human life.

Mircea Eliade, *Rites and Symbols of Initiation*

Reversal is the direction of study which transforms existence into script. Its new teacher is Bucephalus, "the new advocate," who takes the road back without the powerful Alexander—which means, rid of the onrushing conqueror . . . [H]e reads and turns the pages of our old books. . . The law which is studied but no longer practiced is the gate to justice.

Walter Benjamin, "Franz Kafka"

Introduction: "Law Dreams"

Law dreams, and forgets. It forgets its dreams and forgets that it dreams. Law dreams of law: its hidden fantasies, desires, impulses, fears. Like all dreamers, law dreams in images: taboo symbols, intimating forbidden knowledge amid forbidden urges. We repress law's disorder for the sake of its order. We repress its violence for the sake of its legitimacy. But as Freud taught, the price of repression is inescapable. In symptoms of disorder, the repressed returns. The dreams of law haunt the law. Its ghost, like Hamlet's father, returns to set things right. In daylight, law rules paternally, as infallible judge. But at night—and let us include the simulated night of darkened theaters—its demons (and perhaps also its angels) roam. On silver screens, the symbolic life of the law breathes free.

In what follows, we will explore the dream life of law. This is the scene of law's otherness, its repressed others. When we visit the dream space of law we confront law's debt to its own unconscious. Naked, incoherent forces and untapped meaning-making power lie buried in the symbolic life of the law.

We go there in search of a reckoning with law's debt. This coming to account is a making good and a putting right. And while the books of law may never be fully squared, the effort to balance its accounts remains salutary. Passing through the hell of confrontation, daring to face that which terrifies us and makes us want to forget, raises hope for illumination. Undertaking this rite of passage initiates a renewed awareness of forgotten sources of culture and meaning that may help to revitalize the dead letter of the law. That deadness, I shall argue, consists in the historic collapse of the symbolic life of the law. When we dare to call back to mind the initiatory rites of the ordeal of justice another memory stirs. Yes, law dreams.

It is fitting that we undertake this act of remembrance now, for we are living in the age of the image. It is in the image that we may explore law's rule together with its reveries and torments. Symbols, as in a dream, display the mythic origin of law. Consider in this regard the story of Oedipus, the king. His powers of detection were unsurpassed. Oedipus alone unraveled the Sphinx's riddle, thus gaining lawful rule over Thebes. But Oedipus carried a secret. Murder was also a precursor to his rule. When Oedipus unwittingly killed his own father he released the very seat of power that he would occupy. For Freud, this act of parricide is paramount. Law begins with the death of the primal father. For us, however, the emphasis will shift. It is not simply violence against the father that will concern us, but also, and more significantly, the radical misplacement of (and perverse forbearance from) violence.

In the ancient myth of kingly succession, it is the symbolic figure of the feminine that must be confronted and worked through. In the rite of royal investiture, the king's rightful successor must engage in combat with the dragon. The hero who vanquishes the female monster frees the bride. Along the way, he undergoes a symbolic sacrifice. The monster swallows him up, only to spit him back out. The hero-initiate thus undergoes symbolic rebirth. It is this ancient rite of succession that Oedipus confounds. His misplaced violence against the paternal force and his blind (perverse) fusion with the monstrous feminine brings plague to the kingdom—sure sign of Oedipus's illegitimate rule. Arch detective that he is, Oedipus will in time unravel the mystery of his crime. And his confrontation with the horror of his deeds, the trauma of b[e]aring forbidden knowledge, will trigger his tragic fall from

highest to lowest. Oedipus's fate is to become a lonely exile in the land of the blind. Only after a lifetime of suffering will he achieve purification and gain the insight that wins him redemption at Colonus.

In what follows, I shall argue that in the film work of David Lynch we witness a reenactment of Oedipus's desecration of the founding rites of law's legitimacy. Lynch's *Mulholland Drive* (2001) invites us to encounter the dream life of law. Like the Oedipus myth, Lynch's film is structured as a mystery. It is a metaphysical mystery of identity and repression, of forbidden impulses and the thousand and one tales that we tell to divert us from hidden truths. Yet, these tales are also clues. We dream the symptomatic signs of our repression and interpret what the images mean. Before taking their meaning to heart, however, we must first experience a tear in quotidian reality. The rite begins in violence.

Not surprisingly, at least on this account, it is with violence that the story of *Mulholland Drive* unfurls. A car accident at night; dead bodies strewn around a smoldering black limousine. A detective holds up a plastic bag containing a pearl earring and says, "The boys found this on the floor in back of the Caddy." His partner responds, "Yeah, they showed me. . . . Any of those dead kids wearin' pearl earrings?" The detective: "No. Could be someone's missin' maybe." Partner: "That's what I'm thinkin'." The mystery has begun.

We are about to enter the labyrinth of identity and its fragments in the Lynchian theater of dreams. It is also the stage upon which law and its unconscious will play out. If on the way down into the Lynchian abyss we confront forms of cultural and intrapsychic discord that cry out for recognition and redress, the hope is that our insightful attunement to the terrifying realities that we encounter will ultimately help to restore a healthier psychic and cultural balance. Further exploration of such a restorative possibility, however, remains premature. The immediate task before us is to cast ourselves, like a Dantesque pilgrim, into David Lynch's interior purgatory of violence, terror, and death. Before encountering the promise of light, under such guise as the times may allow, we must first venture downward, to a place where horrific forces await us. That place is David Lynch's *Mulholland Drive*.

Law as Initiation Rite: Going Down with David Lynch

My dreams are your actions.

Leontia in Shakespeare's *A Winter's Tale*

Doubtless, each organ-machine interprets the entire world from the perspective of its own flux, from the point of view of the energy that flows from it.

Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*

Lynch's 'Mulholland Drive'

Mulholland Drive consists of a series of subversions, as film director Lynch, with infinite craft, leads (one is tempted to say "seduces" or "tricks") the viewer from one plane of reality to another. The first two-thirds of the film turn out to be a dream fantasy, though we have no way of knowing this is so until later in the film. Only then do we realize that what we have taken as real life is not so. Lynch plainly wants us to experience this realization as a shock. It is the shock of suddenly "waking up" to an illusion that we've mistaken for reality. The play of reality and illusion is a central motif of the film, as the penultimate scene at Café Silencio will later reveal. Our disorientation is complete when, instead of allowing us to remain within the stable realm of what we subsequently take as real life, the film upends our expectations yet again. Like an infinite regression, Lynch's film in the end reintroduces, and yields to, powerful irrational elements. The unreality of incomprehensible ("monstrous")¹ forces now finally invades, and throws into question, the reliability of any assumptions we may have held regarding the stability of real life. We realize that the same unreality that launched this drama of jealousy, hatred, and violent retribution—the same unbearable forces that staged its figuration and violent denouement—remain present at the end, as at the beginning. There is no stable place for us to hold still in. As we shall see, this destabilizing [de]realization links Lynch's work to key elements in the distinctive culture of the baroque.

The initial dream fantasy sequence, which dominates the film, plays out as a murder mystery—as well as a mystery of identity. In time, we will learn that this mystery is the projected fantasy of Diane Selwyn. Upon repeated viewings, one may discern clues, both in style and content, that disturb the linear ("real life-like") flow of the opening story frame. On the whole, how-

ever, the initial story frame offers none of the conventional markers of a dream narrative. The general inclination is to take the mystery straight. We realize our mistake when a second story frame unfolds—the story of Diane's real life. When Diane awakens we see, for the first time, elements of her inner and outer world (the psychic conflicts and real-life characters) that make up Diane's dream fantasy. Yet, just as we manage to decode that fantasy from the details of Diane Selwyn's tawdry, conflict-ridden life, the dream images that we have been viewing do not simply dissolve into a restored normality—à la Dorothy's homecoming to Kansas upon her awakening in *The Wizard of Oz*.

In Lynch's hands, there is no reprieve from the grip of chaotic unconscious forces. Unlike Dorothy, Diane Selwyn awakens to a horror that utterly overwhelms her. That final horror is the abyss of infinite desire. It has been present from the beginning. It is that out of which the film comes, and back into which it dissolves. This is the Lynchian (postmodern) sublime, the final subversion—and there is no reality to stabilize its significance. For Lynch, there is no escape, no awakening, only the endless play of schizoid fantasy.² Folds (of desire) pass into other folds, "folding into folding to infinity,"³ like endless arabesques, forming and reforming against the void. Here we reencounter the infinitude of the postmodern sublime as baroque excess, as the schizoid self that fractures into infinite monadic possibilities.⁴ This *mise en abyme* is a definitive feature of both the postmodern and the neo-baroque sublime.⁵ In its folding of real life back into the ("monstrous") reality of desire, *Mulholland Drive* becomes an anti-*Wizard of Oz*. For in place of restabilized reality, Lynch's baroque fantasy culminates in the schizoid sublime of Deleuze and Guattari.⁶ Lynch is anti-Oedipus, the anti-philosopher.⁷

In what follows, I shall try to make good on these claims and their implications for law in our time. First, I will lay out the basic frame story of *Mulholland Drive*, describing the "real-life" events out of which Diane Selwyn's dream fantasy takes shape. Second, I will interpret the narrative configuration of that fantasy in an effort to crack the dream code. I will then withdraw to a third reality, the reality of the abyss, in an effort to interpret Lynch's film vision and its philosophical implications. As part of this effort, I will link Lynch's seriation⁸ of destabilizing subversions to the aesthetic of the post-

modern sublime. I associate the latter with the contemporary emergence of neo-baroque culture. Lastly, I will enwrap these interpretive accounts in the narrative framework of a failed initiatory rite. Relying upon Jean-Joseph Goux's analysis of the subverted rite of royal succession encoded in the story of Oedipus, we will encounter the genealogy of baroque law, a tragic sign of our inability to sustain law's legitimation.

The Basic Frame Story

First-time viewers of *Mulholland Drive* must wait for most of the film to pass before they wake up to the real plot structure of Diane Selwyn's dream fantasy. Only then do we see the details from Diane's real life that have supplied both the motive force and the code for interpreting the dream/mystery that we have been watching. Let us begin from the vantage point of this awakening. Here (in retrospect) is what we come to understand:

Diane Selwyn is a Hollywood starlet wannabe. She has traveled south from Deep Rivers, Ontario, to sunny Los Angeles, where she takes up residence in a seedy bungalow complex called Sierra Bonita. Diane auditions for the starring role in *The Silvia North Story*, but the part goes to a sultry, seductive woman named Camilla Rhodes. Some time thereafter, Diane and Camilla begin an intense love affair. As Camilla's star rises, however, Diane's falls. Diane's dreams of stardom ultimately crumble as she finds herself living a grimy hand-to-mouth existence on the dark outskirts of Hollywood's lucrative dream-weaving industry. When acting crumbs, tossed her way by Camilla, grow too scarce to live on, Diane plummets to the diminished state of a drug-addled prostitute.

The final blow comes when Camilla tells Diane that their affair must end. To add insult to injury, Diane soon learns that Camilla has acquired a new love object—in fact, two. This knowledge comes to Diane only after Camilla persuades her to attend a glamorous Hollywood party at the suitably upscale home of director Adam Keshner, located on Mulholland Drive. The occasion, it turns out, is the announcement of Adam and Camilla's engagement. This news is delivered with sadistic glee, since both Adam and Camilla are well aware of Diane's continued infatuation with Camilla. The final humiliation, laying bare the annihilation of Diane's hopes and desires, comes in the shape

of a blonde starlet who exchanges, before Diane's suffering gaze, erotic whispers and a passionate kiss with Camilla. Diane has been supplanted on every front.

Overcome by jealousy and rage, Diane hires a hit man named Joe to murder Camilla. Diane meets Joe in a diner called Winkie's, where they are served by a waitress named Betty. Joe informs Diane that when she sees the blue key in her apartment she will know that the deed has been done. Diane hands over the cash and the deal is clinched. Diane has set in motion the machinery of death on the heels of thwarted desire.

When Diane later spots the blue key on her coffee table she realizes the irrevocability of her action. She also learns from a neighbor that two detectives are looking for her. Fear and guilt play havoc with Diane's mind. She hallucinates Camilla returning to the living and recalls (or fantasizes) their making love on Diane's couch. This imagery feeds a masturbatory impulse that desperately mingles violence and pleasure. A knock at the door triggers a final psychotic break. Diane hallucinates two tiny parental figures crawling under the front door. As they grow to adult size, their hands flail madly in the air as they rush toward her, screaming. Diane backs away into the bedroom. She, too, screams madly and flails in panic as she scurries backwards. Falling onto her bed, Diane blindly reaches out to an end table drawer, pulls out a revolver, places it in her mouth, and pulls the trigger. Her body lies sprawled on the bed.

The Initial Dream Work: An Interpretation

Life is a great dream; to dream in this big dream, and to speak of dreams, is to not know where the illusion is going to end.

Tun-ch'eng, *Enchantment and Disenchantment*

[Mulholland Drive]—a love story in the city of dreams.

From the *Mulholland Drive* press kit

Mulholland Drive begins with images of a surreal jitterbug sequence.⁹ We then see Diane Selwyn flanked by two parental figures—the same figures who, in their frenzied, Furies-like reappearance at the end of the film, trigger Diane's suicide. Tightly shot in the opening sequence, together the three evoke the image of a strange Mt. Rushmore, with the face of Diane's (deceased) aunt fluttering onto the screen and then off to the lower right.

This aural-visual pun of the "jitter" (the jitterbug, the jittery image) is suggestive of the overdetermined meanings that populate Diane's dream world. A similarly floating camera will later become the telltale sign of the dreamer approaching (but never quite achieving) awareness of herself dreaming. And, indeed, the next image that we see is that of a bed, with maroon sheets, even as we hear the deep, regular breathing of the sleeper. The first-time viewer remains in the dark, but the site of Diane's dream production (and death) has been announced.

The scene then shifts to a long black limousine wending its way at night down a sinuous road. We see Camilla seated in back. The car stops unexpectedly, somewhere on Mulholland Drive. The two men up front turn toward Camilla with revolvers pointed toward her. "We don't stop here," Camilla plaintively utters. "Get out," they say. With the aid of retrospect, we recognize this scene. It is from the time Camilla sent a limo to pick Diane up and take her to director Adam Keshner's home on Mulholland Drive, the fateful site of Camilla's and Adam's wedding announcement. As Diane's dream begins, we are about to revisit the scene where her Hollywood dreams were finally shattered, sending Diane cascading down a desperate path of jealous rage. The first link between desire and death has been made.

In Diane's dream fantasy, Camilla sits in Diane's place in the limo; her death is imminent. But a sudden freak accident intervenes. Joyriding teenagers are speeding blindly down Mulholland Drive. We see two of them, ominously standing and lurching with the curves of the road, their hands flailing as they scream with the joyful speed of it.¹⁰ With sudden violence, their car crashes into the limo. The men with guns are killed instantly. Camilla stumbles out of the smoking wreckage. She is intact, we will learn, but for a cut on her head, and total amnesia. Camilla stumbles down into the streets of Hollywood, finally finding her way to the idealized cottage community where Diane will meet her again.

But this is not Camilla, nor will it be Diane who meets her. Diane has become "Betty," a naïve, perky ingénue just arrived in Hollywood to realize her dreams of stardom. She is all that Diane wished to be in real life. As for her counterpart, Camilla too has now become all that Diane would have wished her to be: a blank screen, ready for Diane's fantasies (of love and desire) to play out, as they soon will.¹¹ Camilla sees a film poster on a bathroom wall in

Diane's apartment. It features Rita Hayworth playing the star role in *Gilda* (1946). Camilla will thereafter assume the famous seductress's name as her own. In Diane's fantasy, Camilla has become "Rita," a Hollywood creation and Diane's ideal (imaginary) object of desire.¹² Together, she and Betty will reconsummate an idealized love affair as they stage (like a play within a play) the mystery story of Rita's lost identity. But, the originating reality of Camilla's death hangs over the fantasy like a dark cloud. And intimations of discovery (as the dreamer, like Oedipus, unravels the riddle of her identity and her crime) are already apparent.

Consider the two detectives, standing beside the wreckage left by the joy-riding teenagers' crash into Camilla's limo. In their oddly wooden conversation they recapitulate the dream weaver's own dynamic logic. "Looks like someone's missing," says one. "Just what I was thinking," says the other. It is the dream logic of the whodunit in the existential, postmodern mystery (or crime noir)¹³ genre of Samuel Beckett and Paul Auster.¹⁴ In her dream fantasy, Diane is missing (she has become Betty), and Camilla is missing as well (she has become Rita). The challenge of solving the dream riddle of Rita's missing identity and the real-life mystery of Camilla's death (she was murdered by a hit man hired by Diane) propels the dream forward. The solution, however, already lingers in the distance, in a future that has already passed, in the terrible reality of identity revealed.

Self-knowledge, in this Oedipian world, is an excavated horror.¹⁵ Like Oedipus, Diane/Betty is a detective bent on solving the mystery of identity. Ostensibly, it is Rita's identity that she is seeking, but in reality it is her own self that lay hidden in both, for Diane is the split psyche known as "Betty/Rita." They are but two (idealized) forms of Diane's unstable, borderline personality. In this respect, one might say that the film's drama is fueled by the return of the repressed.¹⁶ As in the fabled *One Thousand and One Nights*, the mystery's tension lies in the dream's ingenious strategies for postponing the dreamer's demise. Like the reader of Scheherazade's serial narrative arabesques, each of which gives the teller yet another day of life for the next installment to unfold, the viewer of *Mulholland Drive* is kept in a precarious state of suspense: for how long will Diane's defensive dream maneuvers stave off the terror (of forbidden knowledge) from which she is fleeing? For how long will the fantasy realm of splitting and idealization delay con-

frontation, and ultimate fusion, with the monster (the Thing behind the diner, the one "who is doing it") that she has become?

In Diane's dream, erotic fantasy desperately competes with guilt, fear of discovery, and the reality principle of death itself. The key tools of Diane's psychological dream defense are familiar ones in the Freudian toolkit: idealization, splitting, condensation, and role reversal. Diane becomes someone else to avoid the guilt of Diane's murderous deed. She becomes the idealized Betty to preserve her identification with (and jealous longing for) Camilla's Hollywood success. Betty is the idealized part of Diane that has been spoiled and lost, sacrificed on the altar of Hollywood's cruel, often destructive reality. The persona of "Betty" preserves the unspoiled Hollywood of the youthful Diane's naïve dreams and thwarted ambitions. In her fantasy, Diane realizes the talent and success that she never could achieve in real life. Wish fulfillment, denial, and idealization: in her dream, it is Diane who displaces her rival, Camilla, rather than the other way around; it is Diane who restores her lost love relationship with Camilla; and it is Diane who denies, by interrupting with a timely car accident, Camilla's murder. It is Diane as well who idealizes the real by splitting off the treacherous Hollywood into a surreal, pastel-lit, benevolent wonder-world—a domain that is infiltrated by corrupt and omnipresent conspiratorial forces.

Like a latter-day Prospero, Diane magically enfolds Camilla in the oblivion of amnesia, so that the illusion may go on, at least for a while, until the mystery's solution can no longer be put off. Diane's ultimate confrontation with herself, as the monstrous source of her unacceptably violent impulses, will mark the mystery's end. When Diane merges with the monstrous corpse on the bed with maroon covers, when she fuses with the monster behind the diner, when, in short, she assumes the identity that her dream fantasy so desperately fights to disguise, the idealized dream world vanishes. The defense is over. She is no longer Betty, and Camilla is dead, the victim of Diane's jealous rage. Diane's ensuing judgment is severe: the sentence is death, by suicide.

Along the way to this horrific denouement, Lynch offers clues that disturb the outward serenity and apparent stability of Diane's dream fantasy. Consider, for example, the scene of the two friends who meet at Winkie's, a replica of the real-life diner where Diane's murder plot was put into action.

Here we encounter the source of Diane's consciously unacceptable violence, her interior horror. In this scene, the camera floats and sways as if caught in the eddies of an unseen current. This happens, it seems, whenever we come close to the dream's horrific point of origin. Not surprisingly, then, it is at Winkie's that Diane's horror assumes tangible form. Like a Rosetta stone of the unnameable, it is momentarily figured. Just before it appears, we hear one friend tell the other (although it might as well be a patient recounting to his therapist) a dream that has been recurring. The dream takes place at this very Winkie's, he says, and it scares him to death. There is a monster behind the diner. "He's the one who is doing it," the friend reports.

Despite his terror, he allows himself to be persuaded by his friend's (the "analyst's") calm, disarmingly matter-of-fact encouragement: "So, you came to see if he's out there." And so, in the spirit of therapeutic reality testing, they go behind the diner to look. In a masterfully timed sequence of suspense and horror, the monster—which rationality would dispel—duly appears. Upon glimpsing it, the friend loses his breath and falls to the ground, apparently lifeless. Contact with forbidden knowledge equals death. That is what this dream-within-a-dream sequence tells us. Reason, it seems, contains a trap door—into the abyss. (So much for testing reality.) And, indeed, the dreamer's prophetic (Diane's hidden) knowledge is accurate, as Diane's subsequent suicide makes plain.

These clues, among others, leave no doubt that the dreamer is on the trail of solving the mystery of her own identity.¹⁷ Powerful psychological forces have been unleashed to preserve the dream-denial that is under way. But no less powerful forces of detection are also at work, threatening to disrupt the dreamer's desperate defensive wish for complacency. At the top of the pyramid of detection/surveillance/power is Mr. Rocque, a mysterious Howard Hughes-type figure who watches, and apparently controls, everything he sees from an electronically equipped living room sealed behind glass.¹⁸ It is Mr. Rocque who will set loose, always by intimation (as if to ensure deniability), a wide range of forces aimed at finding "the missing girl." For example, through a series of phone calls that Mr. Rocque initiates, the search reaches the streets. Joe the hit man (Diane's pimp?) asks a prostitute (Diane's real-life co-worker?), "Any new girls on the street?" At least two different elements of "detection" may be discerned here. On the one hand, Joe may be

acting as a stand-in for the detectives who are actively seeking to solve the murder mystery involving Camilla Rhodes. Subconsciously, Diane knows that she is a suspect in the crime investigation under way. On the other hand, it is also possible that Diane's repressed rage against Camilla has taken the form of yet another role reversal. Perhaps Diane's unconscious has placed Camilla on the streets, substituting her professional rival (and fickle partner in love) for Diane's own unconscionable fall to soliciting tricks on the dismal outskirts of Hollywood.

On a more condensed, symbolic level, the search for the "missing girl" takes the form of a widely cast, strangely potent conspiracy bent on coercing director Adam Kesher to cast "Camilla Rhodes" as the lead in his new ("star-vehicle") movie venture. "This is the girl" (the exact words Diane uttered in real life to Joe the hit man, consummating her contract for Camilla's murder) now becomes the mantra for Camilla's *carte d'entrée*, the tainted "open sesame" that lands her the part that Diane herself coveted.¹⁹ "This is the girl." We hear the words spoken by the Castigliane brothers at a business meeting with Adam and his agent. The two brothers are Italian power brokers, one a producer (whose wilting demand for the perfect espresso can never be met ["It's shit!"]), the other a lawyer (whose rumbling, animal-like roar sweeps across the conference room when Adam hesitates to comply with the brothers' casting demand). Or consider the mysterious cowboy, who instructs Adam on what to say when casting the star of his film ("When you see Camilla Rhodes, tell them 'this is the girl.'"). He speaks in sphinxlike riddles,²⁰ but his sinister intent, and the means of carrying out his implicit threats, are never in doubt.

In short, the tools of detection run the gamut: from brute force to riddles to a far-flung conspiratorial network of social forces (lawyers, producers, mobsters, banks)—all equipped with the means to cut off and control, by any means necessary, the object of their power. We will return later to reexamine this symbolic reference to criminal, financial, legal, and corporate forms of power in contemporary society.

In the penultimate scene of the film Betty and Rita rush into the blue-lit night (with its symbolic reference to the underworld) to the windswept Café Silencio. This scene embodies both the interpretive key to, as well as the final disruption of, the outward order of the dreamer's dream flow. Like the

dream-within-a-dream sequence featuring the two friends in the dream diner called Winkie's, here too the camera bobs and sways, in the grip of a hidden current, as we peer down the blue-lit alley that leads to the café. This visual trope²¹ links the monster behind the diner (the one "who is doing it") with a complementary figuration: the maestro, the magician, the poet, the film director. Inside Café Silencio, we encounter him, the master of ceremonies, a Prospero-like figure and a likely stand-in for film director Lynch himself. (Is it not Lynch—this film, this fantasy, this play of reality and illusion—that is, after all, "doing it"?) "No hay banda," the emcee cries. "There is no band." Seated in the sparsely populated late-night theater (of dreams?), Rita and Betty watch and listen as the emcee/magician reveals the truth of illusion: "This is all a tape recording, and yet we hear a band . . . if we want to hear." In the baroque play of reality and illusion, *la vida es sueño* (life is a dream). The poet-director controls it all, under the immobile gaze of his muse, the blue-haired lady, who sits like a statue in the box seat above the stage. Like the monster's artistic double (on the stage, rather than behind it), the maestro too is the one "who is doing it." He too channels the flow of Eros. His power is evident when he raises his arms above his head and a mighty roll of thunder rattles the theater—like the atavistic roar that opens Joyce's *Finnegan's Wake*, the unwordable thunder sound of Zeus, father of the gods.

Significantly, it is when the Lynchian maestro reveals to the audience the illusions of sight and sound, making plain that it is he who is directing them at will, that Diane's dream finally reaches its violent denouement. Knowledge (of the dream code) upon announcing its illusory nature terminates the play (of illusion). When Betty [Diane] and Rita [Camilla] behold this tutelary guide, and wordlessly make his Teiresian knowledge their own, the dream veil is lifted, and Diane awakens. The terror of what she has learned will now precipitate her demise. Her epiphanic knowledge will become real. Knowledge equals death. It is just as the surrogate dreamer in the diner predicted. The one who confronts the source of the mystery—the terrible reality of unbearable knowledge-desire-power, momentarily figured as the monster behind the diner—must die. As the blue-haired lady in the theater will say, uttering the final, Shakespearean words of the film, "the rest is silence."²²

One may, of course, protest: Who is to say that Diane's death at the end of *Mulholland Drive* is real? Might it not be but a symbolic death? Might it not

herald yet another dream within a dream, part of an infinite regress of unfolding arabesques, or nomadic monads, each a discrete self/world/reality? Who can say whether there is another scene to come after the silence of dissolution in the monstrous abyss: the scene of yet another awakening, the beginning perhaps of the initiate's ascent, after the torturous descent through hell? It is the scene that follows the mythic ordeal of being devoured by the monster, a symbolic death that prepares the initiate for rebirth—into humane (civilized) culture, as *bios politikon*.²³

Yet, the event of knowledge (in the aftermath of the initiate's symbolic "death") remains elusive. To all appearances, at the end of *Mulholland Drive* we remain caught in uncertainty. This state of unrelieved ambiguity, suspense, and agitation is the natural offshoot of the *mise en abyme* that Lynch brilliantly stages in this film. Indeed, it is precisely this aesthetic effect, as we will soon see, that links Lynch's film vision to the baroque sublime. The horror of the Nothing—of nothing happening—ramifies form as the infinite distraction of decorative ornamentation, what Walter Benjamin calls "the will to art." In pop-baroque art, evident, for example, in Andy Warhol's endless seriations, denial through the diversion of physical sensation takes the place of real horror. The *frisson* of the "cheap thrill" (the "spectacle") substitutes for the soul-shaking terror of deadly desire.²⁴ But Lynch is not toying here with the pop-horror of mere sensation. This is the Unnameable rapping at the front door, bringing death. Whether, and in what way, the new baroque may yet tap the mythic power needed to go beyond the seventeenth-century baroque tradition of paralysis in the sensate realm of empty, infinitely ramified form, remains to be seen.

Before pursuing this possibility further, however, it will be useful to survey more closely the philosophical, political, and legal implications of *Mulholland Drive*.

The Dream Work Writ Large: Law, Culture, and Power

Lynch's dream play may be read as prototypical. Let us call it a contemporary allegory of unchecked desire and unregulated power in a narcissistic world of mind and culture where knowledge is understood solely in terms of mastery or control.²⁵ Let us call it a neo-baroque allegory: a symbolic world

of unadulterated narcissism. Behold the Hollywood kitsch culture of solipsistic pleasure, embodied in Diane Selwyn's ambitions of stardom. This is *Mulholland Drive*, a fantasy world fueled by a borderline personality's unbound desire—violent when thwarted—as that desire inevitably will be. As psychoanalyst Benjamin Kilborne aptly observes, "In our contemporary world it is striking how much technology feeds our illusions. People come to believe that an ideal of themselves can be actualized."²⁶ Hollywood's machinery of dream production, further empowered by its alliance with new digital technology, spawns a Disneyesque ideal that denies pain, suffering, helplessness, and ultimately death itself while amplifying the momentary pleasures of narcissistic gratification. This too is a hallmark of the contemporary baroque.²⁷

I propose, then, to construe Lynch's film writ large as a baroque allegory, an account of man's fate in late modernity. I believe this analysis shares an affinity with Jean-Joseph Goux's claim that we are now witnessing the final sequence of the profoundly disordered Oedipal monomyth that Sophocles recounted with exquisite precision so many centuries ago.²⁸ Tracking Goux's analysis, in what follows I will contend that the multiple pathologies of knowledge, desire, and power that we witness in *Mulholland Drive* evoke a profoundly disturbed rite of royal investiture, a subverted ritual of law's legitimation. As Goux puts it, "the cryptic soul is not all human; it has dark, disturbing depths, unfathomable instinctual resources that elude humanity and plunge into the dangerous darkness of animality."²⁹ Reason is an authority that can tame the soul's animal components. However, there is also the danger of confusing the "inner (divine) man with man as a whole." That danger risks overlooking "the monstrous structure of the soul" (i.e., the unacceptable chaos and irrationality of the unconscious) and forgetting that the "properly human part of the soul is only one element in a larger composite."³⁰

Lynch's cinematic allegory invites us to restore (even if Lynch himself does not provide) a connection that has all but disappeared from the collective consciousness of mainstream culture. The first requirement is that we be willing to undergo a cinematic rite of passage. We must be willing to face the abyss, the unadulterated horror of schizoid desire. We must undergo a symbolic death, in the grip of the postmodern sublime. The challenge is straightforward: will we remain caught, like our baroque predecessors, in a

perpetual state of agitated suspension between opposing (and equally unreachable) infinitudes of light and dark, trapped in the nauseating proliferation of endless matter?³¹ Worse still, will our contemporary "failure of nerve"³² continue the diversionary tactics of mass culture—a pop-baroque culture of spectacle—where sensory gratification and motion for its own sake, a hallmark of baroque aesthetics, perpetuate our collective denial of a deeper lack, a deeper longing (for the sublime)? Or will we perhaps grasp the significance, the epiphanic potential, of the baroque yearning for the sublime—whether it is the sublime dissolution of self in *infinite* (albeit inhuman) *freedom*, or the Lynchian ("postmodern") sublime dissolution of self in the terrible abyss of *infinite desire*, or the ethical sublime obligation of self in response to the *infinite demands of the other* (in *agapé*, love's paradoxical marriage of the infinite and the singular)?

The contemporary challenge, then, has been set: for how long will we be content to engage in the endless ("constructivist") play of reality and illusion, mired (as Goux argues) in the perverse state of Oedipus, a perpetual exile, foreclosed from learning the ancient monomyth's higher wisdom? For how long will the pseudo-horror of mass culture, with its "pop-baroque" aesthetic of shock and sensation, or its postmodern pose of ironic detachment, continue to mock the real terror of initiation that marks the epiphanic quest for the sublime? And, to the extent that this state of affairs remains our fate, what hope is there for contemporary baroque law, a law whose validity remains, but whose significance eludes us? For that is the fate of law when the ordeal of justice lies suspended, eclipsed by the frantic motion of the baroque impulse toward form piled upon form, matter ramified in a state of hyperproductivity—baroque production on a colossal scale. Grant Gilmore grasped the implications of law's going under in a comparably baroque fashion when he invoked that hellish state where there is nothing but law.³³ Mass production in law as in art leaves a trail of desolation and endlessly ramified unfulfillment in its wake.³⁴

As an initial step toward explicating and justifying the foregoing interpretive construct, in what follows I will briefly recapitulate Goux's analysis of the fateful history of the Oedipal subversion of the ancient rite of succession, the failed monomyth, and then proceed to explore what it can tell us about the configuration of law, meaning, and power in our time.

The Subversion of the Monomyth: Oedipus Rex

In *Oedipus, Philosopher*, Jean-Joseph Goux reads the myth of Oedipus as an anomaly. "Matricide, not patricide, is at the heart of the heroic myth in its typical and universal form." Goux goes on: "The hero who is to become king is the hero who kills the female dragon, the female serpent, the female monstrosity, in bloody combat. By murdering a dangerous, dark, feminine force, the hero liberates the bride."³⁵

According to Goux, the Oedipus myth disrupts this universal structure. It is, in his view, "a myth of failed royal investiture, or of avoided masculine initiation." It is this failure that links it to parricide and incest. Oedipus's systematic disruption of the tripartite structure of the universal monomyth, its "canonical schema of the triple ordeal," gives rise to three concomitant pathologies or "sins." I want to interpret these pathologies in relation to the symbolic order of the law that measures them in terms of knowledge, power, and desire. Properly understood, this mythic code may lead us to a theory of the rites that accompany the ordeal of justice upon which the law is founded. Here lies the code by which to interpret the allegorical import of Lynch's dreamscape in *Mulholland Drive*.

The ritual of investiture that the ancient monomyth embodies enacts the normalization of power in transition from one generation to the next. In short, it describes a rite of political and legal legitimation. That rite follows the following sequence:

- (i) "A king fears that a younger man, or one not yet born, will take his place, as an oracle has predicted." The king does all he can to avoid this fate;
- (ii) "The future hero escapes from the king's murderous intentions." However, he subsequently finds himself endangered by another king who plots his demise. The second king is unable to realize this goal himself, so he sets the hero "a perilous task";
- (iii) "The trial takes the form of a fight with a monster." The hero succeeds in defeating the monster, with the help of a god, or a wise man, or a future bride;
- (iv) "Finally, the hero's triumph over the monster allows him to marry the daughter of a king."³⁶

In the Oedipus story, the "perilous task" is avoided. In fact, there is no second king and no trial to overcome. Nor is there a monster to slay. Instead, by sheer chance, Oedipus encounters a stranger in the road who turns out to be a king, his unknown father, whom Oedipus unwittingly slays.

The youthful violence traditionally reserved for the great trial of slaying the horrible, monstrous Thing has been misspent and perverted. The paternal, rather than the maternal, power has been vanquished. This failure to encounter the monster within spreads terror and plague throughout the land, and in due course it will shatter Oedipus's soul.

Parricide is not Oedipus's only mistake. He also mistakes his own efforts as the sole basis for his kingly authority to rule over Thebes. Oedipus persistently, and roughly, spurns the guidance of others, such as the blind seer Teiresias. It is by sheer force of his own intelligence, Oedipus believes, that he has solved the Sphinx's riddle. The arrogance of intellect, with its inflated belief in the ability of reason to dominate and control irrational forces, speeds Oedipus's ultimate downfall. Only belatedly will he realize his fateful ignorance, and his true state as parricide and spouse to his own mother.

This symbolic disruption of mythic elements—perverse violence, perverse knowledge, and perverse desire—becomes, in Goux's analysis, the chief paradigm for subsequent western culture. For is it not, he argues, the rationalist philosopher who mistakes the power of reason alone to rule self and society?

The universal myth³⁷ that the Oedipus story systematically perverts enacts a symbolic drama of legitimation. This political/legal drama is also a psychodrama in which the hero confronts the terrible Thing (the horrible monster), accepts aid and guidance from tutelary spirits, undergoes symbolic death (being devoured by the monster he must confront), and is reborn as the triumphant hero, spouse to the second king's daughter. As Plato too conceived, the nature of the city-state coincides with the nature of the soul. Disruption in one domain is matched in kind with disruption in the other.³⁸

In the Oedipus story a systematic disruption of the monomyth leads to pseudo or ersatz legitimation. Its proxy is baroque law, in a pop-baroque culture steeped in sensation and denial. Oedipus's rule rests on a series of deceptions and perversions. His perversion of the monomyth not only generates

plague in the community and a political regime of illegitimate tyranny, but also a psychological trauma that results in Oedipus's emotional collapse, self-mutilation, and, finally, the infinite hardships of a lifetime of loneliness, poverty, and exile. The dire consequences of failing properly to undergo the rite of royal investiture could hardly be more compelling.

In the dream fantasy of Diane Selwyn we discern a replication of Oedipus's (self-)deceits. Could it be that David Lynch has intuitively staged in *Mulholland Drive* the philosopher-detective's arrogant claims for reason against the backdrop of a subverted initiation rite, in the sense that Goux describes? Do we not recognize the symptomatic pathologies of knowledge-desire-power as they permeate and bring to climax Diane's self-annihilating dream fantasy? I contend that in *Mulholland Drive* we witness signs of an important cultural convergence. The Oedipal subversion of the ancient ("monomythic") rite of succession and the postmodern-baroque nexus play out together in the horrific sublime of Lynch's cinematic *mise en abyme*. In what follows, we shall see what more may be said to render this claim persuasive.

From Oedipal Perversion to the Postmodern Sublime

Elements of the Baroque Mind and Culture

Stripped to its barest impulse, postmodernism invites us to reencounter the inherited foundations for knowledge, meaning, and truth. One may say that this questioning represents a moment of crisis in traditional sources of authority. The baroque era, during the seventeenth century in Europe, was also a time of crisis and insecurity. Long years of warfare over competing religious viewpoints had created a climate rich in violence, cruelty, uncertainty, and despair. Events appeared to be moving toward a total excavation of worldly things.³⁹ The yearning for stability and conservation was matched by a deep fear of imminent catastrophe. As Maravall puts it, "a culture developed to bring under control not only religious disquiet . . . but all the insecurity produced as a consequence of the long period of changes that the western European societies had been undergoing for centuries."⁴⁰ This quest for control led to authoritarianism, a form of monarchical absolutism.⁴¹ As Benjamin notes, the baroque concept of sovereignty gave rise to a doctrine of

princely power that can be understood in terms of the state of emergency. "The ruler is designated from the outset as the holder of dictatorial power if war, revolt, or other catastrophes should lead to a state of emergency."⁴²

Baroque culture's main concern was to establish a mass culture of conformity and control. It was essentially a visual culture, as is our own. In the service of manipulation, it relied on the well-known efficacy of visual elements to seize and hold the public's attention. Mass culture thrives on the sensible image for its power to capture, amaze, and stupefy.⁴³ Baroque culture resorted to broadly disseminated visual spectacles (emphasizing painting and theater over poetry and prose) as its main instruments of shaping and controlling public opinion ("to color the soul with passions"⁴⁴ and to "penetrate psyches and wills"⁴⁵).

Art, under the strict rule of rhetoric,⁴⁶ had become kitsch, a mass culture put in place for the sake of engineering consent through pleasure.⁴⁷ "Opinion moves the world," wrote Juan Alfonso de Lancina, and Hobbes attested that "the world was governed by opinion."⁴⁸ The seventeenth century, like much of the twentieth, had become dominated by mass culture—a culture of dazzling spectacle and splendor amid transitory fragments, the ruins of a profoundly disenchanting, devalorized world.⁴⁹

Yet, the pleasures of visual distraction notwithstanding, the sense of imminent collapse continued unabated. Baroque man felt he was "being driven along to a cataract."⁵⁰ Deprived of grace in this world, all things were gathered together "in order to clear an ultimate heaven, enabling it, as a vacuum, one day, to destroy the world with catastrophic violence."⁵¹ A state of emergency in the soul reigned in parallel with the princely state of emergency without.

Creation without grace assumed a ghostly appearance. As in a dream, discrete fragments piled up. One lived amid ruins. And as hopelessness mounted regarding the corrupted state of worldly affairs, aesthetic forms proliferated. It was as if the desperate reaching out toward a distant heaven, as if to outrun an encroaching darkness, could only express itself in further decorative embellishments, like infinite folds within a compressed, but seemingly infinite, translunary space.⁵² In order to stave off the uncanny monstrosity of empty form, to tamp down the fear of Nothing, what Lyotard has aptly described as the fear of the nonoccurrence of the event,⁵³

baroque man piles form upon form, as if only this colossal ramification of matter could avert catastrophe.⁵⁴ And so, like arabesques endlessly improvising their monadic design, baroque ornamentation proliferated, dizzying, decentering, even nauseating in their spatial onslaught.⁵⁵

Each construction was a world unto itself, each soul a Leibnizian monad. Hence the importance attributed to perspective. As Maravall says of the great baroque painter Velazquez, "[H]e strove to capture what an individual—himself, Velazquez, the painter—had experienced of an object, thing, or person that had appeared within his field of vision."⁵⁶ As with the intensely subjective impressionist vision of van Gogh or the surrealist vision of Paul Klee, to the baroque eye everything is a question of individual viewpoint, sensibility, perspective. Such singularity of vision serves as a much-needed anchor in an endless sea of change. For the baroque mind in particular, impressed as it is with the fleetingness of all things, the best to be hoped for is to capture a moment, a fragment, a way of seeing this now before it is gone, swept away under the force of internal collapse. "Nothing of what is today will be tomorrow," writes Martinez de Cuellar. "Nothing you are aware of remains."⁵⁷

Under such conditions of extreme contingency, the baroque dream play came into its own. *La vida es sueno*.⁵⁸ "The dream stands over waking life like the vault of heaven."⁵⁹ As Richard Alewyn writes, "The baroque illusion is always conscious and intentional: it refuses to seduce the soul or even to deceive reason; it wishes to seduce the senses." Buci-Glucksmann adds, "If life is a dream, the world is truly a theater."⁶⁰

Infinitely distant from a source of authenticating meaning, the never-ending artifice of play (in theater and painting and elsewhere in public life) became the baroque era's secular god. In the grip of such icy disillusion, under the intense pressure of fear and uncertainty, human nature revealed itself: a chaotic web of animal instinct and emotion, just as Machiavelli had written. Politics was the domain in which human forces had to be captured, turned to princely purposes, or simply overcome by the counterforce of the state. Machiavelli's knowledge prevailed within the court culture of the baroque: human nature had to be studied in the infinitely complex folds of its interiority so that state power might triumph.

The deeply disturbed relationship of knowledge, power, and desire that we witness during the baroque era proper resonates uncannily within the

cinematic neo-baroque dreamscape of David Lynch's *Mulholland Drive*. Here it is plain that power, knowledge, and desire have grown potent but elusive, masked yet mired in perversion. Consider the film's evocations of power as: 1) *remote, yet ubiquitous* (as evidenced by the mysterious power of Mr. Rocque);⁶¹ 2) *cryptic* (as evidenced by the paradoxical cowboy); 3) *vicious* (as evidenced by the brutish company lawyer who intimidates, and the thug who pursues the director, Adam Keshner); and 4) *spectral* (a source of wonder and illusion, as evidenced by the emcee-magician of Café Silencio). Or consider again the film's images of knowledge as: 1) *blind* (as evidenced by the Oedipal detective Diane/Betty); 2) *prophetic* (as evidenced by Louise and the riddling cowboy); 3) *panoptic* (as evidenced by Mr. Rocque's ubiquitous surveillance cameras); and 4) *mantic* (as evidenced in the revelatory dream logic of the film itself) and *initiatory* (as evidenced by the emcee/magician as director/Lynch surrogate). Finally, consider the film's images of desire as 1) *monstrous* (as evidenced by the creature behind the diner); 2) *subject to idealistic splitting* (as evidenced by Diane/Betty); and 3) *perverse merging* (as evidenced in Diane's borderline pathology, as she fuses with and then violently repels, Camilla); while remaining 4) *endlessly generative* (as evidenced in cinematic dream production itself).

Deprived of deeper mythic resources to counter the terror of death, the baroque antihero, Diane/Betty, becomes trapped in a web of phantasmal deceptions. Like Oedipus, by the time she confronts her monstrous self, it is too late: all hope of redemption or transcendence has been lost. The implications of this allegory of cultural and intrapsychic dysfunction are no less profound in regard to the new baroque (neo-Machiavellian) law and politics of our time.

Neo-baroque Law

Baroque law, like its counterpart in baroque art, embodies a distinctly decadent form: the will to create has been divorced from the source of significance.⁶² This coincides with Scholem's formula for the status of law in Kafka's work.⁶³ As Agamben puts it, "What, after all, is the structure of the sovereign ban if not that of a law that is in force but does not signify?"⁶⁴ In this sense, the spectral reality of neo-baroque culture corresponds to that of neo-baroque law.

Baroque culture bears witness to recurrent political and legal pathologies and their intrapsychic and cultural counterparts. A drama of denial plays out in a dangerous dream world of aesthetic and violent deceits fueled by delusions of philosophical grandiosity and technological mastery over nature. Without the capacity to confront (and ultimately transcend) the terror of violence and death, life in this world becomes the life of the undead: the life of the one who, "chilled in the full current of life, sees . . . death waiting for him. So he steps outside of life. If living means dying, he prefers not to live. He chooses death in life. He escapes from the inevitability of death into the paralysis of artificial death."⁶⁵ This artificial death is sustained by endlessly ramified aesthetic forms—phantasmal arabesques, the ever-diverting spectacle of fantasy and dream weaving spawned by life-denying terror. This is the baroque sublime, a hellish labyrinth of infinite form without significance. As I have written elsewhere, "Sick reason compels obsessive repetition of a repressed excess that resists expression. . . . Life is thus lost in the living. In the face of death, and the terror that it holds for us, we encounter the metaphysical temptation. Sick reason seeks a way out of life, an escape from the terror of mortality."⁶⁶

Rationalist philosophy conspires with this state of denial. As Franz Rosenzweig noted, "philosophy might well have swallowed [death] up into the night of the Nought, but it could not tear loose its poisonous sting. And man's terror as he trembles before this sting ever condemns the compassionate lie of philosophy as cruel lying."⁶⁷ In the grip of metaphysical beatitude, sick reason is haunted by an insatiable phantom—a dybbuk, the soul's dark double, product of repressed forces. Dead, yet living, the phantom cries out to us, like Lucy in Bram Stoker's *Dracula*, "Come to me. . . . My arms are hungry for you."⁶⁸ But upon hearing her voice, our blood turns cold. There is "something of the tingling of glass when struck" in her diabolically sweet tones. It is the sweetness of Eros captured by death. To yield to the call of the undead is to embrace death itself.

This retreat from life, this capture of the soul in the night of the Nought, lies at the heart of what Nietzsche described as the spirit of decadence, and what Freud diagnosed as the pathology of death anxiety. It is not the will to power, but rather the fanatic's will to destruction.⁶⁹ As Nietzsche put it, "Man

would rather will nothingness than not will."⁷⁰ And as Henry Birault has observed, "This will, avid for meaning, we see, is at bottom a will to annihilation, a will that begins by saying 'no' to existence, to our meaningless, immoral, unreasonable existence."⁷¹ Call it revolt, or call it the undeadness that comes of unresolved death anxiety. It is, at its core, the pathological spirit of resentment (what Nietzsche called *ressentiment*),⁷² a turning away from life,⁷³ "only a death instinct."⁷⁴

I believe that this retreat from life comports with what I have described as the baroque (and neo-baroque) withdrawal to the domain of dream, fantasy, and spectacle—a realm that is haunted by repressed knowledge (of the Thing, the monster, the terror of unconscious forces). As in the Oedipus story, so long as the monster has not been confronted, its unassimilated force is bound to endlessly ramify spectral forms of denial. This is what drives the mystery plot of *Mulholland Drive*. Like the dream domain of baroque spectacle, Diane's dream is maintained by the proliferation of endlessly deceitful forms (masking unacceptable rage and desire) on the one hand, and the proliferation of tyrannical power, in its multifarious guises, on the other (e.g., Mr. Rocque's seemingly limitless legal and financial leverage, the brute force of the thugs who work for him, the legal force of the production company's lawyer, and the mysterious power of the riddling cowboy).

The fear of laying bare the irrational and pervasive forces that lie at the heart of the culture of spectacle—disenchanted knowledge, unchecked desire, and perverse power chaotically ramified—prompts a state of emergency within that parallels the state of emergency without.⁷⁵ This pathological state gives rise to tyrannical rule bent on denial and sustained by deceit. The political and legal state of emergency is the fruit of a perpetual legitimation crisis. In this sense, the failed initiation rite that Goux describes as the Oedipal perversion of the universal monomyth takes on distinctly political and legal implications. One may suggest that the dream logic that *Mulholland Drive* so vividly depicts, expresses, from a deeply interior perspective, a state of political and legal affairs first conceived by Machiavelli, Hobbes, and Locke and that achieved two distinct culmination points in the history of ideas: first, in de Sade's sensate imaginary, and later, in Nietzsche's highly estheticized will to power. Both historic culmination points reflect a profound eroticization

of death, and both have been crudely concretized in twentieth-century totalitarian societies.

This historic shared pathology may be understood as the enactment of an inversion of justice that parallels the Oedipal inversion of the ancient monomyth. According to this ancient model, which Plato also conceived, justice requires a harmonic, appropriately balanced configuration among power, knowledge, and desire—in mind as well as in culture. In place of that balance, in the late modern era we have witnessed a growing convergence between Machiavelli's understanding of brute power, on the one hand, and the machine-like bureaucracy of the Hobbesian nation-state fueled by the Cartesian model of rational knowledge (authorizing total mastery over chaotic nature), on the other. This convergence has contributed to the current impasse of politico-legal confusion which has helped to throw the modern nation-state into crisis. As Goux writes, "the tyrant gives free rein to his most frenetic impulses, as he does to the numberless horde of passions governed by Eros. . . . [H]e attempts to live out in reality what others only dream of doing in their sleep."⁷⁶ In *Mulholland Drive* we encounter various signs of this perversion of justice—as power, knowledge, and desire spin out of control in the absence of suitable regulatory norms to constrain them.

Recent prognostications of a transformed (postliberal, postdemocratic) state may accurately extrapolate from, and diagnose, current legal, strategic, and historical trends. For example, Philip Bobbitt refers to the "market-state"⁷⁷ that might now be emerging out of the collapse of the 'outmoded' modern nation-state. However, I believe that analytical efforts like Bobbitt's fall short to the extent that they fail to come to grips with the deeper cultural and intrapsychic implications of the development they seek to describe. In other words, they fail to articulate the degree to which newly emergent political entities, such as the market-state network or, for that matter, its deterritorialized ('virtual state') knockoff, the multinational terror network, may embody a transitional stage in which neo-baroque representations of fragmentation, decay, and ruin, in alliance with Nietzschean *ressentiment* and unresolved death anxiety prefigure more thoroughly reformulated political regimes.

The cultural and intrapsychic cost of the state's relegitimation as a neo-baroque "market-state" may simply have to be borne. However, if we con-

tinue to believe that human choice exercises some efficacy in the constitution of national and global states of affairs, it seems appropriate that this additional cost be taken into account. In the final section that follows, I want to take a closer look at what that price might be.

Ritual, Initiation, and the Ordeal of Justice: Neo-baroque Culture as a New Paradigm for Law

Neo-baroque law in the society of spectacle bears many characteristics of baroque culture in general, for here too we witness ramified aesthetic forms fueled by denial and devoid of normative content or compass. This diagnostic of the cultural conditions under which law is now developing tracks Gershom Scholem's powerful reading of Kafka's great modern parable, *The Trial*. Scholem's observations, which he recorded in a letter to Walter Benjamin, are recounted by Agamben:

Scholem defines the relation to law described in Kafka's *Trial* as "the Nothing of Revelation." Intending this expression to name "a stage in which revelation does not signify, yet still affirms itself by the fact that it is in force. Where the wealth of significance is gone and what appears, reduced, so to speak, to the zero point of its own content, still does not disappear (and Revelation is something that appears), there the Nothing appears."⁷⁸

The neo-baroque construct of law that I have been describing comports well with Scholem's account. Neo-baroque law in the society of spectacle takes on the phantasmal quality of the spectacle itself. Trapped within a "jurisprudence of appearances,"⁷⁹ law remains in force but lacks significance. As the offspring of metaphysical beatitude, the byproduct of the totalizing nihilism of Nietzsche's purely aesthetic will to power, law becomes manifest as the pure "Nothing of Revelation." This is what is meant when we refer to neo-baroque law as a monadic arabesque, a form devoid of normative content or compass—like other, similarly empty forms of cultural kitsch that flicker across the screen.

In this respect, Benjamin's appreciation of the work of Carl Schmitt is understandable. For notwithstanding our uneasiness in the face of Schmitt's embrace of fascism in the 1920s and '30s, it is difficult to dismiss the prescience of his thought. As Bobbitt writes,

By stripping the State of any particular legitimating myth, however, Schmitt thinks that liberalism perpetuates the greatest myth of all, the depersonalized, rational, mechanistic operation of the law. "Eventually, as part of the logic of the process, all that will matter is that the machinery functions, on the one condition that the subjects continue to enjoy protection so they can go about their own lives."

Bobbitt goes on to note:

By thus making civil society the field of competition for numberless private myths, the State sows the seeds of its own destruction because it has become marginal to the production of meaning, while private interest groups, each organized around its own myth, try to capture the machine of government. Meanwhile, the lives of the citizens dissolve into consumerism, hedonism, and an attraction to cults.

According to Schmitt, "the value of life stems not from reasoning, it emerges in a state of war where men inspired by myths do battle."⁸⁰

Neo-baroque law, manifesting the normative vacuum that haunts the market-state, risks Lenin's "law as terror" (what Italian fascists such as Marinetti viewed as a fusion of war and beauty).⁸¹ It is the natural offspring of ersatz culture, the culture of spectacle and delight, which foments emotional intensities that stand in for absented values. The element of terror (at home and abroad) usefully fuels the simulation of legitimacy by interposing coerced commitment (for survival's sake, for the sake of ersatz freedom for the ordinary individual, if not for the markets that measure flux and contingency at home and abroad)⁸² in lieu of freely chosen constitutive norms. Terror, then, becomes the culminating logic of the culture of spectacle embodied in the market model of mass media.⁸³

The legitimation of the market-state on the basis of an ersatz ("kitsch") culture of spectacle, in which baroque law predominates, also comports with Agamben's notion of "bare life" as lying at the center of contemporary political life. Here the model of law as that which is in force but lacks significance comes into its own.⁸⁴ *Homo sacer* (what Goux describes as the "monstrous part" of man's soul, his dark "animality," the embodiment of what Agamben calls *zoe*) is the one left beyond the reach of grace. He is baroque man—the man who is constituted by spectacle and delight. He is also Oedipus: the polluted man, the one whom we cannot touch without being

tainted, for he is the infected source of the community's plague, the one who must be cast out.

The rite of passage, traditionally associated with ordeals (namely the physical/spiritual/symbolic sacrifice, confronting the terrible monster, the horror of unbearable knowledge), may be called for in order to help dispel the pathology of *homo sacer*, and to instigate the creative process through which the most authentic source of law's legitimacy, the possibility of justice, may be realized. This ordeal of justice, which risks the terror of mythic injustice in its name, as Schmitt's proto-Nazi thinking disconcertingly reveals, is set in motion through an *ascesis*, a deliberate deprivation,⁸⁵ a confrontation with (symbolic) death, the annihilation of self in the midst of the sublime, for the sake of epiphanic wisdom. In this completed rite (or *ascesis*) lies the hope of humanizing law by situating the distorted and arrogant ("totalizing") claim of the rationalist philosopher/detective (legislator/judge/prosecutor) within the larger mysteries of chance, Eros, and mythic enchantment, which remain impenetrable to reason.⁸⁶ Put in Agamben's terms, the challenge is to civilize *homo sacer*, to remove the beastly taint of *zoe* ("bare life") and bring him back into the human community of politics (*bios politicon*).⁸⁷ This marks the completed passage from (symbolic) death to epiphanic affirmation, from the "night of the world to *agape*,"⁸⁸ the ethical sublime.

Absent the fulfillment of the Oedipal rite of royal investiture, which is also symbolic of man's passage from innocence to maturity (from man to human, *zoe* to *bios*), the human condition seems destined to remain paralyzed within a state of perpetual diversion and exile. Continued domestic and global crises are likely to prompt an ever-deepening legitimation crisis as the public's willingness to submit to the state's demands for sacrifice weakens. Sacrifice requires normative commitment, but this is not something the neo-baroque culture of spectacle can deliver. Amid endless parades of empty form, ersatz legitimacy may be dramatically evoked through the emotional intensities of terror and delight. Yet, the Nothingness of Revelation that lies at its heart cannot be evaded forever. The uncanny sense of imminent catastrophe—so pervasive in baroque culture generally and in the dream world of Diane Selwyn in particular—persists, testifying to the power of the repressed to return. We may seek to deny the horror we feel before the masked core of

forbidden knowledge and desire, but in the dream life of the soul, as in the dream life of baroque law and politics, that horror abides.

The edification of Oedipus, who after a lifetime of exile and suffering attains redemption at Colonus in the moment before he dies, anticipates the reversal that is called for. The arrogance of reason is humbled at last by tragic experience. Oedipus finally asks to be taught. Ritual is renewed, and divine grace redeems him.⁸⁹ As Goux aptly notes, the sacredness of the impure meets up with the sacredness of the purified. "By virtue of his avoidance and delay, by virtue of delayed passage, it is Oedipus's entire life that has been initiatory. . . . Existence itself has become the trial, and death the supreme passage."⁹⁰

If only the mystery of the symbolic had been confronted earlier, and worked through in the ritual ordeal, symbolic death might have been substituted for a real one. Then, tragic wisdom might have been gained, along with the possibilities of redemptive justice, for justice is the grail that the hero brings back to the living from his ordeal in the phantasmal realm of the underworld.⁹¹

But baroque culture offers no such wisdom. Deprived of grace, unable to confront directly the terror of death, baroque man remains imprisoned within the infinite arabesques of his own fantasies and illusions, wrapped in the multiple folds of denial. For him, life is a dream. This is what it means to live in perpetual exile, standing before the locked door of the law, a door that never opens, for the key—akin perhaps to the esoteric knowledge that completion of the universal monomyth holds out—has been lost.

The Oedipus story's systematic perversion of the universal monomyth, as recounted by Goux, describes a state of cultural pathology, political tyranny, and intrapsychic suffering. This is what comes of the systematic disruption of knowledge, power, and desire. It describes Oedipus's fate, just as it describes the fate of Diane Selwyn in *Mulholland Drive*. Like Oedipus, Diane's initial illusion of control and her brash staging of the mystery of her own identity can only quicken her flight toward tragic knowledge and death. For both Diane and Oedipus, knowledge comes too late. When the source of their denial is finally confronted, when their own monstrous nature becomes too palpable to deny, the nature and extent of their blind illusions are finally apparent. They have been wandering in a dream play, in a theater like the *Café Silencio*, where sounds and images are playthings in the hands of the magician-

emcee—like the sounds and images that David Lynch has projected onto the screen before us.

“May ours be not the fate of Oedipus”—is this the fateful prayer of David Lynch? Must we activate a new ordeal, a new rite of passage, in quest of a new understanding of ethical enchantment?⁹² Is this the “reversal” of which Benjamin spoke? By casting off the baroque pall of the Oedipal perversion of the ancient monomyth, we may be rid of the “onrushing conqueror,” master of false mastery, who remains trapped in the infinite folds of arrogant reason. What else do the “old books” hold out for us if not this esoteric knowledge leading us back, under the tutelary guidance of “the new advocate,” to “the gate to justice”?⁹³

But has cinema the power to accomplish a goal that is at once so vital and so distant?⁹⁴ Do we yet have access to the cultural resources, such as the universal monomyth, that Lynch’s film symbolically evokes? Lynch’s cultural diagnostic describes a pop-baroque culture of narcissism and spectacle that represses the terror of the abyss with the mock terror of sensation. By staging a horrifying *mise en abyme* set against this trivialized backdrop, Lynch provokes us to awaken to the real terror of the abyss. Perhaps this is the necessary precondition to curing us of our neobaroque ambivalence and agitated suspension between the unbearable infinitudes of light and dark. Perhaps in our encounter with the postmodern sublime there lies a path toward completing the thwarted rite of succession manifest in the Oedipal claim to rational mastery and the arrogance of instrumental reason. By deconstructing the impulse toward (false) mastery, amid the deceits of pathological reason and desire, perhaps a way is being prepared for renewal, for an ethical sublime. Yet, the historic danger of false mastery remains close by—the danger of the new myth that denies the spiritual terror of the *mise en abyme*, and offers in its place a different terror, and a different agency of power: the people, the Führer, the enemy of the state.

To paraphrase Georges Dumézil,⁹⁵ if the culture of modernity has lost its capacity for myth, perhaps it is already dead. But then again, perhaps the death of modernity is but a threshold to a new cultural life, a new myth—for good or ill. Like Dante’s purgatory, Lynch’s *Mulholland Drive* serves as a station along the way.

Conclusion

The great gift of culture is to give meaning to, and in so doing normalize, the constraint of desire. Accordingly, one of the key queries that lie at culture's core is what is the proper relation between law and desire, discipline and pleasure? What sort of constraint—in the name of what meaning or value, toward what end—best serves our understanding of ethics and justice? With this central query before us, it becomes plain why cultural criticism plays such an essential role within free societies. The cultural critic affords the community an opportunity freely to assess how power stands in relation to meaning. If the rule of law is distinguishable from naked, self-interested force (and law's legitimacy requires that this be so), then we need to ask: how is that difference to be understood? Is the extant relationship between law and power optimal, or might it be afflicted by some as yet undiagnosed pathology?⁹⁶ Based on the foregoing analysis of *Mulholland Drive*, I have attempted to suggest that a resurgent Hobbesian sensibility of terror pervades the postmodern sublime—and its offspring, neo-baroque law.⁹⁷

Law's norms and imperatives—and the legal institutions and processes (both official and unofficial) through which those norms and imperatives are enacted—help to shape and inform not only the outward conditions of social life, but also the ways in which the state permissibly affects, at times taking up residence within, our private lives. The nature of the debate, and the extent to which it is a debate, over the means and ends of cultural (and self-) production, set against the backdrop of state power and legalized violence, constitutes a public contest of and for mind and culture. Specific legislative enactments, social policies, and judicial decisions may be analyzed from this cultural and intrapsychic perspective. As Plato noted, one may ascertain the nature of a society and the individuals who compose it from an analysis of its legal and cultural institutions.⁹⁸ That is the strategy that has been essayed here. We have explored the cultural and intrapsychic negotiation of power, knowledge, and desire in order to ascertain and assess how law stands in regard to power.

By asking what are the cultural values and imperatives currently in circulation within society, we seek to learn more about the principle of constraint that edifies freedom and disciplines desire. The examination of individual

and collective pathologies in regard to this key function of culture drives and informs the diagnostic process. It also fuels the ensuing search for corrective measures. This critical inquiry also allows us to ask how law may yet respond to utopian aspirations for health and balance in our individual lives and in the communities in which we live. Central to this inquiry is an abiding concern with the existing configuration of knowledge, power, and desire—the three constitutive elements that configure our individual and collective sense of justice. In order to understand what sort of justice, if justice it is, lives by the law of our time, we shall need to direct our attention, from more than one vantage, to this crucial cultural and intrapsychic configuration.⁹⁹

But how does one begin such a multidimensional venture in critical thinking? Where does one look for guidance when faced with the complex demands of developing a cultural diagnostic?¹⁰⁰ Every culture in every age has its Virgil, though his name may only be confidently uttered in retrospect. For the cultural critic, however, such uncertainty cannot be helped. His task is to name names.

In this chapter, I have presented the first installment of a larger work. The first movement has taken us down (and in). The second will lead up (and out). Since this is a venture in cultural criticism, along the way I have sought the services of suitable artistic guides. For the initial leg of this journey our guide has been David Lynch, a good choice for going down. Dark, irrational forces crowd Lynch's abundantly creative imagination; and, indeed, this part of our voyage has had much to do with darkness and discord among the core elements of mind and culture. Informed by Lynch's poetic vision we have encountered and sought to assess the current cultural configuration of power, knowledge, and desire, with an eye in particular to the political and legal forms that it adopts.

In Lynch's hands, the film viewer, not unlike the main protagonist in *Mulholland Drive*, comes to recognize, as if for the first time, who and what she is. This rite of awakening from a dream that had been mistaken for real life has deep roots in both Western and Eastern culture.¹⁰¹ It is a theme that has been much on our minds of late, the fruit, no doubt, of a young digital culture still grappling with its power to make (up) realities sufficiently believable to live in.¹⁰² Asking what reality we are in, or prefer to inhabit, raises a host of difficult issues that directly implicate the strengths and limitations

of human power, knowledge, and desire. This is particularly so in advanced technological societies where the mind's power of imagination quickly translates into habitable worlds.¹⁰³

Whether and to what degree pathologically configured intrapsychic elements find their counterparts in lived experience, perhaps taking root in the culture at large—and in Lynch's world terrifying forms of pathology are more often than not the reality we confront—brings to the forefront of critical reflection the need for appropriate regulative principles. Without them, it will not be possible to restore a more healthful psychic and cultural balance. As in the reading of fairy tales, and in dream work generally, a crucial function of initiatory rites is to consciously confront, even to the point of being swallowed up by (in order to overcome),¹⁰⁴ deep-rooted terrors. We have explored this theme in order to assess the initiatory implications of Lynch's cinematic dream work and its affinity with what was regarded in premodern times as the ordeal of justice.

I have argued that the Lynchian dream state offers a window onto a political "state of exception" (in Giorgio Agamben's sense)¹⁰⁵ in which the terms of law's legitimation (as well as the conditions of legal-political succession) are starkly revealed. The dream of law's rule lays bare the power of the exception that lies at its heart. A state of crisis disrupts the veil of normalcy both in our personal life and in the life of politics.¹⁰⁶ By deliberately simulating on the screen (and perhaps inducing in real life, even if momentarily)¹⁰⁷ such a crisis, Lynch's cinematic "*mise en abyme*," like all profound rites of passage, reveals hidden realities.¹⁰⁸ In this case, I have contended, the reality that we glimpse pertains to the actual condition of state power in contemporary society. It is a condition that corresponds in significant respects with past efforts to legitimate law through the state of exception.¹⁰⁹

David Lynch's film work addresses our need to confront repressed forces of violence and disorder, both within and without. In Lynch's universe of chance and contingency, the classical detective-philosopher becomes a figure of derision and mockery. His logic is viewed as absurd in the face of irrational forces he cannot even begin to fathom. Comprehending the mystery of a murder that has been committed, or of a self that is being enacted, requires more than a detective's logic. It demands an encounter with (and perhaps ultimately a surrender to) those very forces that threaten to overwhelm

him. In Lynch's filmic universe, the typical act of "Sherlock Holmesian" mastery gives way to a transformative defeat—the reconstitution of self from the violent trauma of (symbolic) annihilation. Oedipus the detective-philosopher thus becomes anti-Oedipus, the initiate-initiator.¹¹⁰

David Lynch's *Mulholland Drive* symbolically restages the Oedipal derangement of knowledge, power, and desire, and in so doing evokes our exile from the originary order of the ancient monomyth. By going under, and within, into the mysterious depth of unconscious desire, the dreamer gains hidden/esoteric knowledge about the way things are, and in the process learns who she really is and how knowledge, power, and desire actually operate in the psyche, and in the world. Here lies the symbolic code of law's unconscious. In the epiphanic completion of the rite of succession we reencounter law's primal dream of the ordeal of justice, the wellspring of meaning from which lawful rule originates. Perhaps we may also recognize in this dream ritual a contemporary residue of the medieval ordeal, a trial in which, in place of rational proofs, deeper forces reveal the accused's fate.¹¹¹

In universal dream space we enact the initiation ceremony. What was once concretely ritualized and collectively enacted in the open amphitheater and beyond has moved, first to literature and later, perhaps, with even greater affinity for its highly symbolic psychic dynamics, to the dream space of film. Sitting in the dark, we are absorbed into the mysterious terrors of the unconscious, once again trapped in the belly of the monster, reliving the dreamtime of originary mythic reality,¹¹² awaiting some new form of knowledge coincident with rebirth, upon our reemergence under the sun.

Film director Lynch—like the magician-emcee in *Café Silencio*, a Prospero-like figure and Virgil-like tutelary guide to the underworld, the psychoanalyst's kindred spirit—plays out the contemporary role of the initiate-initiator. Diane Selwyn's story, like Oedipus's, shows us the face of intrapsychic and cultural-political discord in our time. In this way, Lynch, like Sophocles in his day, is an invaluable cultural diagnostician. He too shows what needs to be corrected, and motivates us to move toward rooting out not the poet-messenger or the symbol-rich message that he bears, but the pathology that the message reveals.

Ritual restores the moral conscience to itself (both in interior isolation and in collective practice).¹¹³ Reactivation of the ancient monomyth of royal

never arrive at the heart of the mystery—which is ultimately the mystery of himself in a world in which signifiers are no longer attached to the signified and the distinction between self and other no longer holds. See also Samuel Beckett, *The Unnameable* (New York: Grove Press, 1958).

15. Lyotard associates this horror with the experience of Pascalian terror: standing before the infinite nothingness that surrounds us and in which we are enveloped. The monstrousness of this infinite absence might be denominated the 'postmodern sublime.' See Lyotard, "The Sublime and the Avant-Garde," 97–99.

16. Diane's fantasy of Camilla not only keeps her victim alive (thereby staving off the guilt that accompanies murder); it also allows her to merge with the object of her envy, and her thwarted desire. With her old identity out of the way, Diane is now free to become an ersatz Camilla, and like Camilla, a star. This wish fulfillment is matched by another, for in the persona of "Betty" Diane can now seduce Camilla and thus regain the passionate love affair that she has lost in real life. Merging with Camilla, however, also has the most devastating consequences for Diane. For it is through Camilla that Diane ultimately tracks down her true identity, figured in the end as a stinking, swollen, hideous decomposing corpse. This is the monster that Diane, in her own mind, has become—a creature not unlike the hideous monster behind the diner, the one "who is doing it." This is the monstrous force at the center of things, the one driving the dream, a figure so terrible that to behold it is fatal.

17. An amusing joke, in the form of a clue to Rita's identity, and her own, occurs when the intrepid Betty conceives of a plan to call the police to learn about any car accidents reported on Mulholland Drive. "C'mon," Betty cries, "it'll be just like in the movies. We'll pretend to be someone else." But at this point the deadpan revelation is premature, and it goes unnoted.

18. He, too, it would seem, is the one "who is doing it"—a surrogate monster, the omnipresent policing agency of the unconscious.

19. Could it be that Diane, still enamored of Camilla, unconsciously seeks to insulate her from Diane's jealous wrath by attributing her success not to Camilla's talent, but rather to a nefarious conspiracy?

20. "A man's attitude goes some ways the way his life will be. Is that something you might agree with?" the cowboy asks the stunned and slightly bemused director. But Adam Keshner's bemusement will quickly fade. "I want you to think about that and stop being a smart aleck. Can you try that for me?" is the sobering response to Adam's initial "attitude problem."

21. In addition to the signature of the jittery, water-bobbing camera, Lynch also uses the trope of blue light to figure the mysterious, abyssal force (of endless, unutterable desire) that makes things happen.

22. Compare Jean-Luc Godard's *Contempt* (1964); at the end of the film the di-

rector cries "Silencio," after which the scene shifts, in silence, to a car accident, depicting both driver and passenger as dead.

23. See Mircea Eliade, *Rites and Symbols of Initiation* (Woodstock, Conn.: Spring Publications, 1956), 136 ("Death prepares the new, purely spiritual birth, access to a mode of being not subject to the destroying action of Time") and 62 (describing the recurring pattern of "initiatory ordeal" as enabling the initiate to descend into Hell alive in order to "confront its monsters and demons"). See also 135: "Initiation lies at the core of any genuine human life." There are two reasons, according to Eliade: 1) "any genuine human life implies profound crises, ordeals, suffering, loss, and reconquest of self, 'death and resurrection';" and 2) there comes a moment for every person when one's life seems a failure, "an obscure feeling that he has missed his vocation; that he has betrayed the best that was in him. In such moments of total crisis, only one hope seems to offer any issue—the hope of beginning life over again. . . . [T]he man undergoing such a crisis dreams of a new, regenerated life, fully realized and significant. . . . This 'nostalgia for an initiatory renewal' sporadically arises from the inmost depths of modern nonreligious man. It would appear to represent the modern formulation of man's eternal longing to find a positive meaning in death, to accept death as a transition to a higher mode of being."

24. See Lyotard, "The Sublime and the Avant-Garde," 101, 107.

25. Following Wai-Yee Li, I use the term "allegory" to refer to "the rhetorical procedure that emphasizes the relationship between different and disjunctive levels of coherence." See Wai-Yee Li, *Enchantment and Disenchantment: Love and Illusion in Chinese Literature* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1993), 161.

26. Benjamin Kilborne, *Disappearing Persons* (New York: SUNY Press, 2002), 113, 123 ("The more internal feelings are repressed the more individuals view their feelings with mistrust; and the greater their dependence on appearance, the greater the tendency to mistake appearance for reality").

27. See Heinrich Wölfflin, *Renaissance and Baroque* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1964), 33–34, 86, on baroque precariousness, and the fleeting ecstatic sublimation in the absolute.

28. See Eliade, *Rites and Symbols of Initiation*, 125–26, describing how, over time, primitive/premodern ritual ordeals shifted to literary motifs, which presented their message directly to the imagination; this, in turn, has more recently shifted to images on the screen—with directors like Lynch as initiate/mentors, dream weavers, and tutelary guides.

29. Goux, *Oedipus, Philosopher*, 155.

30. Ibid.

31. See Wölfflin, *Renaissance and Baroque*, 34, noting that the baroque seeks to stimulate the imagination through infinite figurations, and the suggestiveness of the

indefinite. Cf. Walter Benjamin, *The Origin of German Tragic Drama* (London: Verso, 1998) on the baroque artistic imagination, and creation in a void.

32. See Gilbert Murray, *Five Stages of Greek Religion* (New York: Doubleday, 1955), 119–65.

33. See Grant Gilmore, *The Ages of American Law* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1977), 111 (“In Hell there will be nothing but law, and due process will be meticulously observed”).

34. Wolfflin, *Renaissance and Baroque*, 38.

35. Goux, *Oedipus, Philosopher*, 2–3.

36. *Ibid.*, 6.

37. According to this mythic account, heroic exploits—accepting the challenge, trial, or ordeal that culminates in symbolic death and resurrection and the subsequent acquisition of the grail (esoteric knowledge/justice)—mark the cultural dynamic by which humans leave behind the naïveté of childhood and are introduced to a world of adult wisdom. See Eliade, *Rites and Symbols of Initiation*, 9. See also Wai-Yee Li, *Enchantment and Disenchantment*, 44, describing the classic Chinese literary effort to assimilate the “supernatural woman” into mundane reality, thereby integrating enchantment (in the face of infinite desire) into schemes of order (disenchantment).

38. See Goux, *Oedipus, Philosopher*, 145, discussing Plato’s methodical analysis of the tripartite division of the soul and the correspondences to how city-states are organized. Goux writes: “Each element is associated with a virtue: lust has the corresponding virtue of temperance; to anger corresponds the virtue of courage; and to intelligence, prudence. . . . The difference between just and unjust political constitutions can be deduced with precision from the interplay of these three components and the relation of harmony or disharmony that prevails among them, and the same can be said of types of souls.” *Ibid.*

39. Benjamin, *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, 3.

40. See Jose Antonio Maravall, *Culture of the Baroque: Analysis of a Historical Structure* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986), 14.

41. *Ibid.*, 71.

42. Benjamin, *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, 3.

43. See Maravall, *Culture of the Baroque*, 14.

44. *Ibid.*, 262.

45. *Ibid.*, 263.

46. *Ibid.*, 74.

47. *Ibid.*, 81–82.

48. *Ibid.*, 98.

49. *Ibid.*, 83. Maravall discusses a variety of mass media devices available at the

time for purposes of emotional manipulation, including "books, commercialized theatrical representations, painting in abundance, songs in vogue, posters, programs, lampoons, etc."

50. See Benjamin, *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, 3.

51. *Ibid.*

52. See Deleuze, *The Fold*.

53. Lyotard, "The Sublime and the Avant-Garde," 99.

54. See Wolfflin, *Renaissance and Baroque*, 38, describing the aim of baroque art as overwhelming the mind by using matter to create oppressiveness, irrationality, amorphousness, "treating matter with violence."

55. Compare *ibid.*, 45, describing St. Peter's cathedral, a masterpiece of baroque architecture, in terms of the "viscous mass lowly oozing down the slope," with Sartre's description of the "de trop" in his first novel, *La Nausée*.

56. See Maravall, *Culture of the Baroque*, 174.

57. *Ibid.*, 186.

58. *Ibid.*, 170, citing Calderon's baroque masterpiece.

59. *Ibid.*, 81.

60. Christine Buci-Glucksmann, *Baroque Reason* (London: Sage, 1994), 60 [citing Alewyn].

61. It is Mr. Rocque who moves the strings of worldly power, cutting off the director's personal money supply and shutting down his movie in order to force him to hire the female "star" that Mr. Rocque mysteriously prefers. It is the monosyllabic Mr. Rocque, immobile in his high chair in his immaculate glass-enclosed room, with its screens that panoptically reveal all that there is to see, who cryptically sets in motion all manner of worldly forces to get his way, from the brute violence of the huge thug who comes to the director's home, to the implicit violence of the strange cowboy who speaks to the director in aphoristic riddles, to the enraged film company lawyer who screams like an animal and his comrade in arms, the powerful, immaculate producer whose impossible demands are manifested during a meeting with the director and his agent in the grotesque gesture of spitting up an elegantly served espresso that tastes like "shit."

62. See Benjamin, *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, 54–55 ("Inwardly empty or profoundly disturbed, outwardly preoccupied with technical problems of form which seemed at first to have very little to do with the existential problems of the age—this is what most of the baroque writers were like. . . . [T]he baroque is not so much an age of genuine artistic achievement as an age possessed of an unremitting will. This is true of all periods of so-called decadence. . . . The form as such is within the reach of this will, a well-made individual work is not." See also *ibid.*, 66 ("[For baroque man] the hereafter is emptied out of everything which contains the slightest

breath of this world, and from it the baroque extracts a profusion of things which customarily escaped the grasp of artistic formulation and, at its high point, brings them violently into the light of day, in order to clear an ultimate heaven, enabling it, as a vacuum, one day to destroy the world with catastrophic violence”.

63. See Richard K. Sherwin, “Law’s Beatitude,” *Cardozo Law Review* 24 (2003): 685.

64. Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1998), 51.

65. Franz Rosenzweig, *Understanding the Sick and the Healthy* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1999), 102. See also Eric Santner, *On the Psychotheology of Everyday Life* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001), 13 (“The pursuit of the end of the world is . . . fundamentally fantasmatic”).

66. Sherwin, “Law’s Beatitude,” 687.

67. Franz Rosenzweig, *The Star of Redemption* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1971 [1921]), 4–5.

68. Bram Stoker, *Dracula* (London: Penguin (1994 [1897])).

69. Cf. Jean-Luc Nancy, *Freedom* (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 1993), 127–28. Compare the baroque impulse to yield to the infinite—an inhuman freedom that offers no relief from ambivalence, and agitated suspense. See Wolflin, *Renaissance and Baroque*, 88.

70. Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Genealogy of Morals*, III, section 28, 163 (1969 [1887]).

71. Henri Birault, “Beatitude in Nietzsche,” in *The New Nietzsche: Contemporary Styles of Interpretation*, ed. David B. Allison (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1999), 226.

72. See Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, ed. Walter Kaufmann (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1968 [1895]), 108–9, describing as the “masterstroke” of *ressentiment* its need “to deny and condemn the drive whose expression one is, continually to display, by word and deed, the antithesis of this drive.”

73. Sherwin, “Law’s Beatitude,” 683; Deleuze, *The Fold*, 74 (“The damned are those whose last thought is a scorn of God because, when their soul vomits all and can no longer enclose clearly anything other than this hate or this rage, it is the maximum of all possible hate or the smallest amplitude of reason”). See also Peter Goodrich, *Oedipus Lex: Psychoanalysis, History, Law* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 245, linking the absence of desire in law to “death in the midst of life: ‘tu morieris invivendo / Atique vivis moriendo’” [“You are dying in the midst of life / and you live while deserving to die”].

74. Birault, “Beatitude in Nietzsche,” 222.

75. See Benjamin, *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, 65–69, 74, 97–98.

76. Goux, *Oedipus, Philosopher*, 148.

77. See Philip Bobbitt, *The Shield of Achilles: War, Peace, and the Course of History* (New York: Knopf, 2002), 9.

78. Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, 50–51.

79. See Richard K. Sherwin, *When Law Goes Pop: The Vanishing Line between Law and Popular Culture* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 141–69, on the jurisprudence of appearances and law as spectacle.

80. Philip Bobbitt, *The Shield of Achilles*, 596, 606 [noting Lenin's "law as terror"].

81. Sherwin, *When Law Goes Pop*, 224.

82. See Sherwin, "Law's Beatitude," 689, n. 28, referring to President George W. Bush's rhetorical insistence upon the need to root out evil in the face of post-9/11 terrorism.

83. According to Bobbitt, in the market-state, "the media are well situated to succeed" in their direct competition with the government of the day (Bobbitt, *The Shield of Achilles*, 784).

84. Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, 9, 51.

85. See Lyotard, "The Sublime and the Avant-Garde" (on deprivation), and Benjamin, *The Origin of the German Tragic Drama*, 56 (on "ascetic apprenticeship").

86. Cf. Mircea Eliade, *Rites and Symbols of Initiation*, 66, on the land of the dead as the sacred realm, the realm of enchantment.

87. Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, 1. This is, as I will argue in a subsequent work, the main ethical thrust of Krzysztof Kieslowski's late film work.

88. See Žižek, *The Fright of Real Tears*, 161.

89. Goux, *Oedipus, Philosopher*, 185.

90. *Ibid.*, 186.

91. As Eliade writes, "He who makes the passage dies to one life in order to gain access to another" (Eliade, *Rites and Symbols of Initiation*, 9).

92. See Benjamin, *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, 232, 234 ("Ultimately, in the death-signs of the baroque the direction of allegorical reflection is reversed; on the second part of its wide arc it returns to redeem. . . . The Aristotelian idea of [wonder], the artistic expression of the miracle (the Biblical [sign]) is what dominates [art and architecture too] in the period after the counter-reformation"). It is in this sense that Lynch—the magician, like Virgil, like the psychoanalyst—may be viewed as the initiate-initiator, and we, the audience, in following Diane's fate, like the audience that followed that of Oedipus, encounter the awesome power that fuels the monomyth. The clues that lead the initiate through the terrors of (symbolic) death in the dream realm take on a labyrinthine design. As Eliade notes, "the labyrinth plays the role of a post-mortem initiatory ordeal; it falls in the category of the obstacles that the dead person—or, in other contexts, the Hero—must confront in his journey through the beyond." Significantly, it is the aesthetic of the labyrinth that dominates baroque narrative, theater, architecture, and painting.

93. See *ibid.*, 1. See also Zizek, *The Frigate of Real Tears*, 163, referring to “love beyond law,” a cognate notion to what I have referred to in this chapter as “the ethical sublime.”

94. Cf. Lyotard, “The Sublime and the Avant-Garde,” 103 (“an interior ascesis” allows the painter to discover “elementary sensation” hidden in ordinary perception. The viewer gains access to the artist’s vision only by undergoing a “complimentary ascesis”).

95. Georges Dumézil, *The Destiny of the Warrior* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1969), 3.

96. See Giuseppe Mazzotta, *Cosmopoiesis: The Renaissance Experiment* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2001), 30 (“The metaphysical foundation of Machiavelli’s world is the disorder of a fallen state of nature; the principles of this condition of existence are force and simulation . . . whereby power is acquired and maintained”), and Giuseppe Mazzotta, *The New Map of the World* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1999), 191–92 (“Hobbes’s Epicureanism [or doctrine of ‘chance’] envisions the breakdown of the charitable social order. Within the Hobbesian framework of justice without charity human beings are apprehended as isolated entities, as disintegrated multiplicities related by perpetual, random antagonisms and reciprocal fear”). See also Trisha Olson, “Of Enchantment,” *Syracuse Law Review* 50 (2000): 109 (“By the early thirteenth century, the Church’s focus had shifted from a wrongdoer’s ability to perfect himself with his god through purgation, to the fallen state, which made such perfecting necessary in the first place. Put differently, ‘natural’ man was now an animal who ‘would do good only out of terror’ rather than a being who was himself a ‘revelation from God’”). This Western cultural thematic reached its philosophical apotheosis in Nietzsche’s will to power. See Sherwin, “Law’s Beatitude,” 683.

97. See, for example, Lars von Trier’s allegorical film *Dogville* (Zentropa, 2003).

98. See Plato, *The Republic*, in *The Collected Dialogues of Plato*, ed. Edith Hamilton and Huntington Cairns (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1961), 683 (“A man is in the same way in which a city [is] just.”). “Each of the principles [of a person’s soul] within him does its own work in the matter of ruling and being ruled” (*ibid.*, 443a, p. 685). “Believing and naming the just and honorable action” are “that which preserves and helps to produce this condition of soul.” “Law is not concerned with the special happiness of any class in the state, but . . . [with] harmonizing and adapting the citizens to one another by persuasion and compulsion . . . and that it itself creates such men in the state” (*ibid.*, VII 519e, p. 752). See also VIII 544a, p. 773, describing four kinds of state constitutions and the “corresponding type of man” as well as constitutional “defects” and their corresponding type of man—for example, in an oligarchy rulers are determined by property ownership and the corresponding

character traits are avarice, placing wealth above all else, and doing all he can to satisfy his own appetites and desires, subduing all other things as vain and unprofitable (VIII 553, pp. 781–82).

99. Cf. Friedrich Schelling, *Philosophy of Religion*, cited in Ernst Bloch, *The Utopian Function of Art and Literature* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1996), 259. “Whoever thinks he can recognize the good without that of evil is making the greatest of mistakes, for just as in Dante’s poem, the path to heaven leads through the abyss in philosophy as well.” See also *ibid.*, 260, quoting Schelling, *Philosophical Investigations into the Essence of Human Freedom*: “After the eternal act of self-revelation, everything in the world as we now see it is law, order and form; yet lawlessness always lurks at its foundations, as if it could once again break through, and nowhere does it appear as if order and form were at the origin but rather, that as original chaos was brought to order. . . . Without this antecedent darkness, there is no creational reality; gloom is its necessary heritage.”

100. Mieke Bal describes this kind of analysis as “cultural philosophy,” a phrase I also find congenial. See Mieke Bal, *Quoting Caravaggio: Contemporary Art, Preposterous History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001).

101. See, for example, Cervantes’ *Don Quixote* and Chan Tsao’s eighteenth-century classic *The Dream of the Red Chamber* (New York: Random House, 1958). In regard to the latter, which is of particular interest in the context of Lynch’s work, see Wai-Yee Li, *Enchantment and Disenchantment*.

102. This is the compelling theme of such recent films as *The Matrix* (1999), *Existenz* (1999), and *Dark City* (1998). For a recent example of a livable virtual world, visit www.secondlife.com.

103. See, for example, *The Playful World* (New York: Ballantine, 2000); Marie-Laure Ryan, *Narrative as Virtual Reality: Immersion and Interactivity in Literature and Electronic Media* (Baltimore, Md.: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001); and Lisbeth Klastrup, *Towards a Poetics of Virtual Worlds: Multi-User Textuality and the Emergence of Story*, <http://hypertext.rmit.edu.au/dac/papers/Klastrup.pdf>.

104. See, for example, Victor Turner, *The Ritual Process* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1969); Victor Turner, *Revelation and Divination in Ndembu Ritual* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1975); and Eliade, *Rites and Symbols of Initiation*.

105. Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, 37 (“The state of nature and the state of exception are nothing but two sides of a single topological process in which what was presupposed as external [the state of nature] now reappears, as in a Möbius strip . . . in the inside [as a state of exception], and the sovereign power is this very impossibility of distinguishing between outside and inside, nature and exception, *physis* and *nomos*”).

106. Agamben refers to contemporary political life as the life of bio-politics

(*ibid.*, 3). To the extent that we are now witnessing a convergence between the bio-political state and the transnational corporate-entertainment-culture of spectacle (collapsing political life into bare life on a global scale), the sovereign exception transcends the modern nation-state just as it transcends local [state] law. In their place we find simply the circulation of power through bio-politicized market mechanisms, what Philip Bobbitt has referred to as the "market-state." See Bobbitt, *The Shield of Achilles*.

107. See Lyotard, "The Sublime and the Avant-Garde," 102, describing "colouristic sensations" that are "only accessible to the painter, and can, therefore, only be re-established by him, at the expense of an interior *ascesis* that rids perception and mental fields of prejudices inscribed even in vision itself. If the viewer does not submit to a complimentary *ascesis*, the painting will remain senseless and impenetrable to him." The initiation of the rite of passage also goes under the ancient Greek rubric of *ekphrasis*—bringing the initiate across an epistemological and existential threshold, from one reality to another, through an experience, an event, an epiphany, that affords transformative insight. This was a central goal of Renaissance (Neoplatonist, alchemically minded) artists like Botticelli, as is exquisitely evident in his masterly painting *Primavera*. See Charles Dempsey, *The Portrayal of Love* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1992), 149, n. 20.

108. See Dallenbach, *The Mirror in the Text*.

109. Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, 60 ("What after all is a State that survives history, a State sovereignty that maintains itself beyond the accomplishment of its *telos*, if not a law that is in force without signifying?").

110. See Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*.

111. See Olson, "Of Enchantment," 112–13, noting that in the Middle Ages the ordeal was the way the divine manifested itself.

112. Eliade, *Rites and Symbols of Initiation*, 35.

113. See Emmanuel Levinas, *Nine Talmudic Readings* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994).