FREUD/LYNCH
Behind the Curtain

Edited by

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Stefan Marianski is Education Manager at the Freud Museum London, where he works to engage young people with psychoanalytic thought. He has organised a number of events and conferences on psychoanalytic themes, and has written and lectured on dreams, sexuality, anthropology, surrealism, and masculinity. He is a member of the Psychosis Therapy Project and a trainee at the Centre for Freudian Analysis and Research.

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Todd McGowan teaches theory and film at the University of Vermont. He is the author of *Universality and Identity Politics* (Columbia, 2020), *Emancipation After Hegel* (Columbia, 2021), *Only a Joke Can Save Us* (Northwestern, 2017), *Capitalism and Desire* (Columbia, 2016), and other works. He is the co-editor of the Diaeresis series at Northwestern University Press (with Slavoj Žižek and Adrian Johnston) and the editor of the Film Theory in Practice series at Bloomsbury.

Carol Owens is a psychoanalyst and clinical supervisor in private practice in Dublin. She has edited and authored a number of publications in the field of Lacanian psychoanalysis, most recently *Psychoanalysing Ambivalence with Freud and Lacan: On and Off the Couch* with Stephanie Swales (Routledge, 2019). She is series editor for Studying Lacan's Seminars published by Routledge.

Chris Rodley, at the age of six, decided he wanted to be an artist. He graduated in Fine Art (Painting) in 1974, and then in 1976 with a Postgraduate Art Teaching Degree. Having become disillusioned with his painting, horrified by his experience of teaching, but now completely obsessed with the movies, he began programming independent cinemas in 1977, and was Co-Director of Cinema at the Institute of Contemporary Arts in London from 1979–1984. Courtesy of Channel Four, he was able to begin making documentaries in 1983 and he has been an independent filmmaker ever since. In the intervening thirty-five years he has produced and/or directed over eighty arts documentaries for television and contributed to over a dozen documentary series. These include award-winning films on Andy Warhol and Johnny Cash, as well as the series *The Genius of Photography* and *This is Modern Art*. He first worked with David Lynch in 1993 while making a documentary about American independent cinema. In 1996 he spent some time on the set of Lynch's *Lost Highway* and made a short film for the BBC about its making and meaning. That year he and Lynch also began working on the book *Lynch on Lynch* (Faber & Faber, 1997), which has since been updated (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2005). He also worked extensively with the director David Cronenberg, making two documentaries about his work (one in 1986 and one in 1992), as well as editing the book *Cronenberg on Cronenberg* (Faber & Faber, 1996) based on years of recorded interviews. Unlike David Lynch, he never returned to painting—David really told him off about that.

Jamie Ruers is Events Manager at the Freud Museum London, where she builds a public programme of events, conferences, and exhibitions that engage with psychoanalysis through a range of disciplines. She is an art historian whose research focuses on various cultural aspects of Vienna

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Introduction

Jamie Ruers and Stefan Marianski

This book collects together many of the papers given at the Freud Museum London's conference, "Freud/Lynch: Behind the Curtain". Over a sunny May weekend, fans, cinephiles, scholars, and psychoanalysts descended on Dalston in East London to ponder the wonderful and strange work of David Lynch. Held in the intense, uncanny atmosphere of the Rio Cinema, a venue eerily reminiscent of *Mulholland Drive*'s (2001) Club Silencio, the conference was abuzz with excitement. Animated discussions filled the auditorium, mingling in the foyer with the aromas of damn fine coffee before spilling out onto the street, so that any passers-by catching a few fragments of conversation about the mysteries of Lumberton, the sinister underbelly of Twin Peaks, or the depravity of Bobby Peru could be forgiven for surmising that it was a convention of detectives (or perverts).

Freud/Lynch

As organisers of the conference—and editors of the present volume—we were excited at the prospect of putting the shrink from Vienna into dialogue with the Eagle Scout from Missoula, but also aware of the potential

sensitivities of doing so. Like the taste sensation when maple syrup collides with ham, the combination Freud/Lynch would be appealing to some but repellent to others, particularly those sympathetic to the latter's notorious reticence about the meaning of his works and aversion to reductive explanatory frameworks. Lynch, who famously walked out of his first and only session with a "psychiatrist" upon being told that the therapeutic work could damage his creativity (Lynch, 2007, p. 61), prizes the creative act of producing filmic worlds above all else, placing the onus on his spectators to find their own unique ways of entering into the experience. In his view, trying to "make intellectual sense" of a film comes at the expense of finding "an explanation from within" for which there is no other guide than one's own intuition (ibid. p. 20).

With views like these, it seems likely that Lynch would agree with Freud's famous maxim that "before the problem of the creative artist analysis must, alas, lay down its arms" (Freud, 1928b, p. 177). Yet curiously enough, this turns out to be just one of many ways in which Lynch appears to be in alignment with Freud. While not sharing the latter's technical vocabulary, Lynch's films are replete with Freudian motifs and preoccupations, as is the approach that guides their creation, so much so that many of his accounts of his creative process sound like excellent descriptions of Freud's method of free association: a fragment of an idea comes like a "little fish", and "thinking about that small fragment, that little fish, will bring more, and they'll come in and they'll hook on" (Lynch & Holdengräber, 2014). Lynch figuratively describes these fragments as arriving as if from an "other room" (ibid.), a description strikingly analogous to the famous "other scene" in which Freud locates the unconscious as a psychical locality distinct from consciousness (Freud, 1900a, p. 536).

Lynch's apparent unfamiliarity with Freud makes their common ground all the more intriguing. The conceptual vocabulary of psychoanalysis is notoriously inelegant, but it enables its practitioners to elicit the kinds of dreamlike and often deeply moving subjective compositions that make up the fruits of Lynch's own associative process, to the point that one could even characterise Lynch as a Freudian who has no need for Freud. Chris Rodley, at a time when he was rather more enthusiastic about theory than he is in the present volume, wrote that Freud's account of "the uncanny" (1919h) captures "the essence of

Lynch's cinema" (Rodley, 2005, p. x). Yet in spite of all this, Lynch is by no means a card-carrying Freudian.

Paging Dr Jacoby!

An exchange in the first season of *Twin Peaks* (1990–1991) seems to encapsulate the apparent misalliance between Lynch and Freud:

> *AGENT COOPER: Were her problems of a sexual nature?*
> *DR JACOBY: Agent Cooper, the problems of our entire society are of a sexual nature!*

The response to FBI Special Agent Dale Cooper's (Kyle MacLachlan) question could almost have been lifted from Freud's *Civilization and its Discontents* (1930a), yet it comes from the mouth of eccentric psychiatrist Dr Lawrence Jacoby (Russ Tamblyn), to whom Agent Cooper, and we as spectators, have taken an instant dislike. If Jacoby's rejoinder leaves any room for doubt as to his Freudian inclinations, consider the ensuing conversation, in which he suggests to Cooper that Laura Palmer (Sheryl Lee) suffered from an obscure psychosexual malaise against which she was engaged in a violent defensive struggle—and that her cocaine use was in fact a form of self-medication. Noticing a map of Tibet on the wall, Dr Jacoby proclaims to a po-faced Cooper that

> my abiding interests lie to the east as well. But only as far as Hawaii. The ancient Hawaiians often turned to the soothing rhizome of the ginger plant to ease the pain of profound confusion *which, more often than not, was sexual*.

In a town populated by lovable eccentrics, it is striking that Jacoby's quirks make him conspicuously *un*lovable from his very first appearance, which has him suggestively running his finger under the skirt of the hula dancer on his tie (little wonder the audience of a 1991 episode of *The Phil Donahue Show* voted him most likely to be Laura Palmer's killer). Insinuations of sexual depravity will of course be familiar to those of a psychoanalytic persuasion, for whom the popular caricature

of Freud as a "creep" goes hand-in-hand with the irreducibly disturbing nature of his discoveries.

Needless to say, it would be extremely fanciful to ascribe the negative light in which Jacoby is portrayed to some cryptic expression of Lynch's misgivings about Freud. The exchange features in an episode written by Robert Engels under the supervision of Mark Frost and directed by Tim Hunter, and even allowing for Lynch's creative influence, such a contrived subtext would go against everything we know about him as a filmmaker. Nonetheless, with his sexual interests, questionable professional ethics, and permissive attitude towards cocaine, Dr Jacoby is practically a living embodiment of the anti-Freud stereotypes that were in circulation by the 1990s—all the more so when we learn from the official *Twin Peaks* mythology that shortly after Laura Palmer's death his licence to practice was revoked due to his failure to recognise the signs that she had been suffering sexual abuse at the hands of her father (Frost, 2016, p. 333). This indictment resonates with the infamous and widely disputed claims put forward by Masson (1985) that Freud ignored his discovery of widespread sexual abuse within families.

Curious resemblances aside, the exchange between Agent Cooper and Dr Jacoby suggests a deeper incongruity. The latter's Freudian wisecrackery comes across as not only creepy but downright obstructive and, worse still, indicative of a fundamental incompatibility of worldviews. His appeal to common ground serves only to accentuate that his interest in "the east" goes no further than the sexual hang-ups of the ancient Hawaiians, a dubious piece of sexual trivia that calls to mind the local sexual customs of the Bosnian Turks that Freud thinks better of bringing up with a perfect stranger in his famous "Signorelli" parapraxis (1901b, p. 3). Cooper's compassion for the plight of the Tibetan people, on the other hand, is of a seemingly higher dimension: it is bound up with his acquisition of "a deductive technique involving mind-body coordination operating hand-in-hand with the deepest level of intuition". The message seems clear: the closest Twin Peaks has to a resident Freudian is not only uncooperative but—with "apologies in advance for Albert"—un-*Cooper*-ative. Freud and Lynch would thus be as likely bedfellows as Dr Jacoby and Cooper. Of course, if the scene labours to sustain an opposition—a little *too* strenuously, a psychoanalyst might observe—between the squeaky-clean lawman and the licentious shrink, it is one

that is far from intact by the end of season two, let alone *Twin Peaks: Fire Walk With Me* (1992), by which time Twin Peaks' primal scene has been laid bare in all its Freudian intensity. But perhaps that's another story. Despite his love of dream logic, one would be hard pressed to imagine Lynch giving his countenance to such a reading.

Behind the curtain

Is there something fundamentally un-Cooper-ative about Freud? Does Freud/Lynch presuppose the reduction of the playful, creative flow of the artist to a set of predefined coordinates? The question was never far from our minds, yet our fidelity was first and foremost not to stultifying theorisations but rather to what we took to be the *spirit* of both Freud and Lynch: a spirit of radical openness to the new and the unexpected, of questioning rather than answering, of opening things up rather than closing them down, and above all of the dialogue. Our subtitle, *Behind the Curtain*, should not be taken to imply that psychoanalysis lays bare what in Lynch's films remain veiled. Our goal was not to fill in what Lynch leaves open, but rather to mobilise these gaps as productive spaces where thought and imagination can be set to work. Few of our contributors would call themselves Freudian, yet each of them is engaged in their own kind of conversation with Lynch. An encounter with Lynch, with Freud, or indeed with one's own unconscious, is always a singular experience.

Chris Rodley opens this volume with a contribution that draws on personal experience. Having interviewed Lynch numerous times, Rodley reflects on their meetings, and particularly on Lynch's reluctance to explain or entertain any specific readings of his work. Lynch's very practice, Rodley notes, is itself "a dreaming process", and dreams are easily trampled. Sceptical of both the auteur theory of the 1940s and 1950s, with its insistence on grounding the work in the author's intentions, and the rise of psychoanalytic film theory in the 1970s, with its search for the unconscious in the text of the film itself, Rodley's chapter might seem an inauspicious start for *Freud/Lynch*. Yet curiously enough, many of his observations—about the limits of language and the artwork's resistance to it, about the material dimension of language that is outside any question of meaning, and about the impossibility of any exhaustive

intellectual recuperation of what is at stake in dreams—find remarkable consonance with psychoanalytic thought, as explored in many of the chapters that follow.

What made it possible to describe something as "Lynchian"? Focusing on Lynch not as a person but as a cultural phenomenon, Carol Owens' contribution makes a compelling case for "the Lynchian" as a palimpsest of "the Freudian", drawing on an array of examples from Lynch's works, psychoanalytic theory, popular culture and the clinic, to affirm that "David Lynch doesn't need to be a Freudian for the cultural moment that is 'the Lynchian' to be so". If Rodley warns us of the misguidedness of any attempt to supply the hidden "meaning", Freudian or otherwise, of Lynch's oneiric work, Owens reminds us that such interpretative speculations had little to do with Freud's approach to the workings of the unconscious in the first place. Of particular note is the attention Owens pays to what Freud called the dream's "navel", its "point of contact with the unknown" (Freud, 1900a, p. 525), which resists domestication by language and remains irreducibly disturbing, and which becomes with Lacan the epistemological predicament of speaking beings.

Disturbance is also at the heart of Olga Cox Cameron's contribution, which finds in *Mulholland Drive* a text replete with the mechanisms of the dream-work identified in Freud's *Interpretation of Dreams* (1900a). Placing it alongside James Joyce's *Finnegans Wake* (1939) as rare examples of artworks which succeed in reproducing dream logic, Cox Cameron examines the film with reference to the question posed by Lacan (1991, p. 155) in relation to Freud's famous dream of Irma's injection: given that the dream repeatedly comes up against something that provokes anxiety, what allows the dreamer to continue dreaming? Cox Cameron deftly identifies specific "nevralgic points" at which the film's narrative approaches, then veers away from a traumatic encounter that is distinctly suggestive of the aforementioned "navel", showing how the means it employs to protect the dreamer have the paradoxical effect of staining the entire narrative with its traumatic Freudo-Lynchian nucleus.

Veering away (fittingly) from this line of thought, Mary Wild's contribution is a lyrical homage to Los Angeles. Wild's playful meditation starts out by considering Lynch's own attachment to the City of Angels before going on to ponder its peculiar psycho-geography, finding in its many contrasts and incongruities an apt setting for *Lost Highway* (1997),

Mulholland Drive, and *Inland Empire* (2006). In a wide-ranging exploration that touches on the O. J. Simpson trial, the glamour of the Hollywood dream factory, and the abject darkness of its underside, Wild's chapter takes as its touchstone the notion of "psychogenic fugue". The term, itself a remnant of the era of psychoanalytic psychiatry, is said to have captivated Lynch in the 1990s, and seems to epitomise his ongoing preoccupation with the blurring and fragmentation of identity that are particularly characteristic of this apparent trilogy of LA-based films.

Is Jeffrey Beaumont (Kyle MacLachlan) a detective or a pervert? Both, according to Andrea Sabbadini, whose contribution trenchantly dissects the sinister underbelly of Lumberton in Lynch's *Blue Velvet* (1986). Focusing particularly on the theme of voyeurism, Sabbadini examines how we as spectators become implicated in this "strange world": the identifications the film induces in us as spectators accompanying Jeffrey to the primal scene at the core of his masculinity and identity. While avoiding the usual clichés of reading *Blue Velvet* as a straightforward oedipal fairy tale, Sabbadini's intervention is also of note for deftly bringing out the psychoanalytic significance of the severed ear. Serving as the film's emblematic MacGuffin, this uncanny "part object" is examined not only in terms of the primitive anxieties it evokes but also as a means of initiating us into the oft-overlooked auditory dimensions of Lynch's work and of the inner world.

Lynch's depictions of women are the focus of Jamie Ruers' contribution, which finds surprising points of resonance between his female characters and psychoanalytic understandings of hysteria. Ruers interrogates the "Lynchian hysteric" through a series of remarkable juxtapositions drawn from the history of hysteria, from the ancient notions of "wandering womb" from which the term derives to its modernisations by Charcot and Freud, the fascination of the surrealists, through to Lacan's structural revision with its emphasis on hysteria as a mode of questioning the Other. Touching on themes of desire, trauma, the body, father–daughter relations, and the death drive, Ruers finds in the Lynchian hysteric the subversive embodiment of the incongruities of Lynch's filmic universe.

Stefan Marianski draws on Lacan's interest in the topology of surfaces to propose that *Lost Highway* be investigated topologically. His tentative reading of the film sets out with an examination of the line "Dick Laurent

is dead" that both opens and closes the film. The simultaneous sameness and difference of this enigmatic line, Marianski suggests, discloses a constitutive disturbance that determines the film's structure as a surface organised around a hole, another possible parallel with the nevralgic "navel" of the dream. Echoing Rodley's caution about the misuses of interpretation, Marianski opposes approaches that aspire towards an ideal of narrative closure, arguing instead that a properly psychoanalytic reading of the film must take into account the hole as a formal element of constitutive incompleteness and its jouissance effects on the filmic text.

The famous Club Silencio scene from *Mulholland Drive* serves as the point of departure for Allister Mactaggart's contribution, which finds in the Magician's (Richard Green) words "it is an illusion" fertile ground for a reflection on Lynch's creative practice. Navigating a wide array of perspectives on Lynch's philosophical roots. Mactaggart's chapter is also notable for its bold and timely reading of *Twin Peaks: The Return* (2017) as offering a poetic response to the Anthropocene and imminent climate catastrophe. Against the criticism of Lynch as a deliberately incomprehensible trickster, Mactaggart concludes that he is first and foremost a fine artist, "a damn fine artist", whose film and television work must be situated as part of a creative practice that also encompasses painting, photography, design, and music.

At the time of the conference, many of us were still reeling from *Twin Peaks: The Return* the final episode of which had aired just eight months previously. While *The Return* finds its way into most of the chapters in this volume—from Rodley's comments on the celebrated "who is the dreamer?" dream to Ruers' exploration of the tragic fate of Audrey Horner (Sherilyn Fenn), Mactaggart's reflections on episode eight and the Anthropocene, and Marianski's reading of the glass box as the site of an ontological rupture—it is the principal focus of the last three chapters.

How did the charming, small-town, and geographically-bounded world of Twin Peaks (population: 51,201) unravel into the vast and fragmented spatio-temporal expanse that confronts us in *The Return*? Sprawl is the theme of Richard Martin's contribution which, in addition to laying claim to being, alongside Todd McGowan's contribution, one of the first serious examinations of Michael Cera's celebrated cameo as Wally Brando, takes on the series' unmistakable depiction of "a world escaping and exceeding its usual boundaries, spilling out in unexpected

directions at uneven speeds". Revisiting its numerous scattered locations, Martin's perceptive reflection approaches the various kinds of sprawl of *The Return*, embracing the term's geographic, temporal, and psychological resonances and the sprawling, free-associative formal level of the series itself.

Like Agent Cooper's comeback in *Twin Peaks: The Return*, Todd McGowan's keynote address was the most anticipated paper of the conference (albeit without the earth-shattering destitution that the eventual return of everyone's favourite FBI man brought in its wake), combining a sustained and compelling reading of *The Return* with the opportunity to revisit and reflect on many of the series' most beloved characters and moments. Noticing, as Martin does, that much of the narrative of *The Return* takes us away from the idyllic small-town setting of Twin Peaks, McGowan interrogates the distance that separates *The Return* from the original series in terms of the fantasmatic underpinnings of the *Twin Peaks* universe and its inherent impasse. Focusing extensively on the long-awaited revival of Agent Cooper in the season's closing episodes, McGowan traces the logic of fantasy which, rather than restoring the previous state of affairs for which viewers were so nostalgic, pushes instead to an encounter with its own internal limit point: the traumatic loss around which the first two seasons were largely constructed. In McGowan's reading, the closing episodes of *The Return* present something of a cautionary tale: in striving to avert Laura Palmer's murder before it has happened, Cooper's efforts amount to an attempt to eliminate the traumatic loss that founds subjectivity itself, effectively redoubling the traumatic violence through which the subject comes into being.

What happened to Audrey? What does Lynch reflect about America today? Who is the dreamer? The closing chapter of this volume is an edited transcript of the panel discussion on *Twin Peaks: The Return* that made up the final session of the Freud/Lynch conference. In addition to Richard Martin, Allister Mactaggart, and Todd McGowan, all of whom had discussed *The Return* in their respective papers, the panel also included psychoanalyst Tamara Dellutri, to whom we had assigned the task of watching *The Return* in the space of a week, without having seen the previous seasons or *Fire Walk With Me*. While deciphering is surely one of the great pleasures of Lynch spectatorship, we were interested to see what kinds of readings of *The Return* could emerge in the absence of

any in-depth contextual knowledge of the *Twin Peaks* universe—readings which, without having recourse to the series' mythology, might be less encumbered by the task of attempting to resolve the series into some final all-encompassing explanation, and freer to orient themselves by the points of inconsistency and rupture of which explanatory readings are typically intolerant. The discussion opens with Dellutri's response to *The Return* before opening out into a wide-ranging conversation touching on themes of communication, technology, capitalism, repetition, nostalgia, and sincerity, revisiting along the way some of the season's defining moments.

Coda

It should be clear by now that our subtitle involves a sleight of hand. Far from implying that behind appearances lies a hidden reality—and tempting as such a proposition may be when we recall the traumatic revelations of *Twin Peaks: Fire Walk With Me* or the covertly witnessed scenes in Dorothy's apartment in *Blue Velvet*—the promise of disclosing a concealed reality behind appearances can only ever be a false one. Lynch's trademark red curtains have more in common with the famous anecdote from antiquity of the painting contest between Zeuxis and Parrhasius: when the time comes to reveal their paintings, Zeuxis unveils a painting so realistic that birds fly down to peck at the canvas. Trying to pull back the curtain to reveal his rival Parrhasius's entry, he is taken aback to find that he himself has been duped: what Parrhasius has painted is the curtain itself! The story, enthusiastically alluded to by Lacan in his eleventh seminar (1977, p. 103), is an apt reminder that although there is nothing behind it, the curtain engages each of us as spectators with the traces of our own peculiar nothing: a nothing which enables us to find and lose ourselves in Lynch's films, just as we do in the analytic transference. "The foundation of such a method", as *Twin Peaks*' Albert Rosenfeld (Miguel Ferrer) puts it, "is love".

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