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DEEP SURFACES: THE PRODUCTION OF CULTURE AND THE CULTURE OF
PRODUCTION IN TWENTIETH-CENTURY HOLLYWOOD

A THESIS SUBMITTED TO
THE DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE DEGREE OF BACHELOR OF ARTS

BY
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ABSTRACT

Deep Surfaces: The Production of Culture and the Culture of Production in Twentieth-Century Hollywood

By: Catherine DiGiacomo

In this thesis I argue the idea of film as art rather than an industry that mass-produces culture is a recent concept. I show how culture studies theorists received film in the early 20th century, and how the director David Lynch transforms the medium of film into art in the late 20th century. I analyze the conflicting arguments made by Walter Benjamin in *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*, and those made by Theodore Adorno, and Max Horkheimer in *Enlightenment as Mass Deception: The Culture Industry*. I argue that Adorno and Horkheimer view film as a vehicle for the distribution of pre-packaged ideals and values, while Benjamin views film as a mechanism which brings to the public a better political understanding of their world. However, all theorists agree that film is a mechanism that can not be considered art in the way painting (for example) is considered art. This is because, they contend, film requires an absent-minded spectator. I demonstrate how Nathanael West's novel, *The Day of the Locust*, and Joan Didion's novel, *Play it As it Lays*, reflect the arguments of these theorists in their "anti-myth" and "anti anti-myth" depictions of Hollywood. Finally, I use the film *Mulholland Drive* to reconcile both positions of film and to argue that film does require an aware spectator, and therefore is art.

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“I love Los Angeles. I know a lot of people go there and they see just a huge sprawl of sameness. But when you’re there for a while, you realize that each section has its own mood. The golden age of cinema is still alive there, in the smell of jasmine at night and the beautiful weather. And the light is inspiring and energizing. Even with smog, there’s something about that light that’s not harsh, but bright and smooth. It fills me with the feeling that all possibilities are available....It was the light that brought everybody to L.A. to make films in the early days. It’s still a beautiful place.”¹

The Golden Age of Cinema. As the imagery of the name suggests, this was a time of optimism, profitable ideas, and progress in Hollywood. Much like the plant it is named after, Hollywood is a place associated with magic; it is a place that can create anything imaginable, and grant wishes on the big screen. Demonstrating this magical quality, the city is a place that entertains and produces dreams and, as a byproduct, culture. Termed the culture industry, Hollywood has attracted quite a lot of attention to itself and initiated arguments about its influence in the mass production of culture. Along with the ever-changing zeitgeist of American culture, these arguments have also changed with time, often embedding themselves in American literature. To understand how film production operates and evolves in the culture of 20th century Hollywood, I look through the counterpart of film--literature. Specifically, I am concerned with Nathanael West’s, *The Day of the Locust*, which was answered later by Joan Didion’s, *Play it as it Lays*. Both texts look at the mechanical aspects involved in the process of creating a film, yet express opposite arguments. I argue the reason behind this is, in part, due to the 40-year time gap between the novels, but can also be understood by looking at certain cultural studies theorists such as Walter Benjamin, Theodore Adorno, and Max Horkheimer.

¹ David Lynch, *Catching The Big Fish: Los Angeles* (New York: Penguin, 2006), 31–32.

Walter Benjamin focuses on reproduction's function as a freedom from traditional values and cultural constraints.² He describes how the camera creates a mediated distance between the actor and the viewer of a film. This distance is further emphasized by the fact that a single scene can be filmed over the course of a week. Benjamin argues that this reproduction releases the film from its aura. The concept of aura describes the essence of the work of art as it is related to the time and space in which the art piece was created. He contends that along with the work of art comes the feeling of the conditions (cultural, historical) in which the work was created. This is the idea that the art takes with it in its very being a feeling of the culture of the time that is imposed on the viewer even thousands of years later. Not only does the artwork absorb the feeling of the times it was created, but it also accumulates a sort of essence of the history during which it was created. Whatever brush strokes, finger marks, scratches or fading the work endured over time has added to its character, in a way, or its "aura." Benjamin is concerned with the affect the aura has on the viewer. The separation of the viewer from the aura made the idea of the original more appealing.

Inventions such as the camera affect this aura. A photographic copy of something may be able to reveal details in the original that were unapparent to the naked eye, or a film can be viewed in slow motion so that the viewer may see something he hadn't in real life. The other aspect to consider, Benjamin contends, is that the reproduction of the artwork can be exported around the world and seemingly put the original in places it may not have been able to be otherwise. For example, the Mona Lisa would not be able to be removed from the Louvre, without the aid of photographic reproduction. Now, it is visible all over the world--in history

² Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," UCLA School of Theater, Film and Television. (1998): accessed October 23, 2012, <http://www.marxists.org/reference/subject/philosophy/works/ge/benjamin.htm>.

textbooks and art classes--affecting millions of people. But is it the same painting? Benjamin argues that the mechanical reproduction of the original effectively “shatters” tradition and “liquefies” the traditional value of the cultural heritage. Although this may seem like a negative effect, Benjamin points to the new capabilities of reproducing a work of art: its ability to be politicized.^{3,4} Benjamin does not argue that the masses mindlessly absorb the values presented in film. He argues, rather, that although the viewer is distracted, he is still contemplating what he is absorbing.

Reception in a state of distraction, which is increasing noticeably in all fields of art and is symptomatic of profound changes in apperception, finds in the film its true means of exercise. The film with its shock effect meets this mode of reception halfway. The film makes the cult value recede into the background not only by putting the public in the position of the critic, but also by the fact that at the movies this position requires no attention. The public is an examiner, but an absent-minded one.⁵

Here Benjamin emphasizes film’s ability to be absorbed by the public, and with it, any political or ideological messages embedded in the film. However, he does give the viewer the benefit of contemplation. He argues that film is the medium that does politicizes art the best because it best recreates reality. The most inherent element of film is fragmentation. Film is constructed by taking fragments of reality and re-organizing them to form a “new law” or new reality. He contends that because the film hides from its viewer the process by which it manufactures this new law, it is the most seamless way to access reality, without being reality.

³ Paul A. Taylor and Jan Ll. Harris, *Critical Theories of Mass Media, Then and Now: Walter Benjamin’s ‘The Work of Art’ essay* (New York: McGraw Open University Press, 2008) 17-38.

⁴ Ulrike Weißenborn, “Just Making Pictures” (Tübingen: Gunter Narr Verlag, 1998) 43-71.

⁵ Benjamin, “The Work of Art”

Contrary to Benjamin, Horkheimer and Adorno claim that the realistic nature of film is not an artistic element, but a dangerous one. Because of its seamless ability to reflect Benjamin's "new law," the viewer is hopelessly engulfed in an imaginary world.

Real life is becoming indistinguishable from the movies. The sound film, far surpassing the theater of illusion, leaves no room for imagination or reflection on the part of the audience, who is unable to respond within the structure of the film, yet deviate from its precise detail without losing the thread of the story; hence the film forces its victims to equate it directly with reality.⁶

The difference here from Benjamin's contentions is that Adorno and Horkheimer argue the viewer has no ability to contemplate what he is absorbing. The film industry weaves a web of lies, falsely representing reality and giving the viewer expectations that will never be met in his lifetime. Another concern is that the mechanical reproduction of life allows people to become numb to art entirely. Because any piece of artwork can be copied, it can be distributed and known to everyone. Rather than seeing this in a positive light as Benjamin does, Adorno and Horkheimer argue that art becomes common, and therefore loses all cultural value.

The text goes on to explain that the culture industry trains its consumers how to act and how to predict life, rendering the public merely cogs in the grand machine. Because the industry appears to be accessible to the public in the sense that seemingly any Average Joe can get lucky and make it into the spotlight, members of society begin to believe that the world operates on chance rather than hard work, become less active in working towards their goals, and instead wait for opportunities to come to them. This notion applies accordingly to those who move to

⁶ Adorno, Theodor, and Max Horkheimer, "Dialectic of Enlightenment. Frankfurt School: The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception," *Marxist Literary Criticism*, (2005): accessed May 17, 2012, <http://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/adorno/1944/culture-industry.htm>.

Hollywood to be “discovered,” as though at any moment they could be signed to a contract just because they live amongst the stars. The problem, then, becomes a lack of new production in culture and a proliferation of copies.

How does 20th century Hollywood literature converse with culture industry theorists such as Theodor Adorno, Max Horkheimer, and Walter Benjamin? I argue that West’s novel, *The Day of the Locust*, agrees with Adorno and Horkheimer’s point of view. The novel argues that art is absent from film, and that film has only negative effects on a public. Didion’s novel, *Play it As it Lays*, reflects notions that align more with a Benjaminian way of thinking. Her novel does not argue that film is a corrosive industry. Rather, it argues in favor of film’s ability to change a perception of reality, albeit, this perception is predetermined by the director. After understanding both sides of this debate, it may seem as though the problem comes down to a matter of opinion, and therefore is irresolvable. However, I would like to shed light on a solution found only by looking to the source--through the lens of a director. In David Lynch’s 2001 film, *Mulholland Drive*, he turns the problem of authenticity back onto the individual by creating a dualistic film which is considered both art and pop culture. Lynch’s film reconciles these two opposing arguments by looking not at the film industry, nor the film itself, but at the spectator. The main conflict between Adorno, Horkheimer and Benjamin is their perceptions of how the public reacts to film. All three theorists determine that film offers a prepackaged message that is easily absorbed and by either an absent or semi-absentminded audience. Lynch gives the audience autonomy, arguing that the spectator is fully aware and capable of ample speculation during the viewing of a film. He proves this argument by creating a film that is non-linear, and has a very ambiguous message. By creating a film that is not easily absorbed, Lynch forces the individual to contemplate deeply about himself and his own understanding of the film. Lynch is

able to bridge the chasm between art and film by creating a completely subjective work of art via a medium that has been long thought of as only able to provide mechanical reproductions. I therefore argue that the only way to reconcile these theories is through a Lynchian perspective.

“What are the roots that clutch, what branches grow
 Out of this stony rubbish? Son of man,
 You cannot say, or guess, for you know only
 A heap of broken images, where the sun beats,
 And the dead tree gives no shelter, the cricket no relief,
 And the dry stone no sound of water. Only
 There is shadow under this red rock,
 (Come in under the shadow of this red rock),
 And I will show you something different from either
 Your shadow at morning striding behind you
 Or your shadow at evening rising to meet you;
 I will show you fear in a handful of dust.”

T.S. Eliot, The Wasteland, 1922

Hollywood literature is particular to American literature in that it depicts Hollywood as the consumption of the American Dream. “Pursuit of the dream is a dominant theme in both American literature and film. Hollywood itself quickly became associated with the dream. Obviously, the location of the film industry in California contributed to this association since, historically, pursuit of the dream was related to westward expansion.”⁷ The often bleak, seemingly nihilistic atmosphere of the Hollywood novel is the result of the discontentedness felt by the main character who is endlessly searching for the object of his desire. “Relentless pursuit of the dream requires that one never be satisfied with what one has attained.”⁸ Furthermore, in much Hollywood literature females are seen as the embodiment of this desire that can never be attained; females are the tease that is the illusion of success.⁹ While some critics contend that this insatiable desire is an issue that has been born out of an insubstantial world, others argue that

⁷ K. Edington, “The Hollywood Novel: American Dream, Apocalyptic Vision,” *Literature Film Quarterly* 23.1 (1995): 2, accessed October 23, 2012, <http://connection.ebscohost.com/c/literary-criticism/9505094200/hollywood-novel-american-dream-apocalyptic-vision>.

⁸ Edington, “The Hollywood Novel,” 4.

⁹ Chip Rhodes, “The Hollywood Novel: Gender and Lacanian tragedy in Joan Didion’s *Play it as it Lays*,” *Literature Online* 34.1 (2000): accessed October 23, 2012, <http://lion.chadwyck.com/display/printView.do?area=abell>.

the problem arises when an individual uses the world as a mirror to understand himself.¹⁰

Charles L. Crow, for example, in his essay *Home and Transcendence in Los Angeles Fiction*, discusses the idea of the land of the west (in this case LA) being the final frontier for immigrants in the sense of Manifest Destiny and compares this to the way the presence of Hollywood acts as a final frontier to those whom Nathanael West refers to as “Locusts.” Citing Walt Whitman’s poem, “Facing West from California’s Shores,” Crow explains, “The western landscape, with its incredible variety representing infinite choices and opportunities, holds out a promise of success....the wanderer awaits either renaissance or cultural collapse. These are precisely the extremes explored in literature about California.”¹¹ “*The home*” that he refers to in this essay will never be found because it no longer exists; the city just does not, and can not, offer this. This, he insists, is the reason behind the discontentedness and eventual cultural collapse.

“In a sense, the image of the movie capital is the mythic culmination of the American Dream.”¹² These theories each speak to a very pertinent detail of what I will refer to as the Hollywood problem. Instead of rendering this a stable issue of which the source can be found and labeled, it is my intent to show how the Hollywood problem depicted in the Hollywood novel is continuously evolving over time in accordance with the zeitgeist of the era, and how the literature reflects this change.

¹⁰ Rodney Simnard, “The Dissociation of Self in Joan Didion’s *Play it as it Lays*,” *Narcissism and The Text* (1986): 273-289.

¹¹ Charles L. Crow, “Home and Transcendence in Los Angeles Fiction,” *Narcissism and The Text* (1986): 190.

¹² Mark Royden Winchell, “Fantasy Seen: Hollywood Fiction Since West,” *Narcissism and The Text* (1986): 147.

“It is hard to laugh at the need for beauty and romance, no matter how tasteless, even horrible, the results of that are. But it is easy to sigh. Few things are sadder than the truly monstrous.”¹³

During the Great Depression, the film industry was just beginning to make technological advancements such as sound and color. The films of this time often depicted small-town families finding success in the big city and war heroes who fought for their country proudly. The ideals presented were inspiring sentiments that often warmed the hearts of the audience and filled them with hope for a happier future, while implying that hard work was the way to get there, an American ideal we are all accustomed to that is deeply rooted in the American Dream. Hollywood not only helped inject these ideals into society, but also in a way became the embodiment of the American Dream:

For millions of Americans, Hollywood is a far-off enchanted city where a lucky few can rise not only from rags to riches, but from obscurity to fame. The movies gave Tom Wingfield a rich vicarious dream life in Tennessee Williams’ *The Glass Menagerie*. For Binx Bolling in Walker Percy’s *The Moviegoer*, they provided a means of ‘certifying’ the mundane reality of his life. In a sense, the image of the movie capital is the mythic culmination of the American Dream.¹⁴

Winchell refers to J. U. Peters’ term “The Los Angeles Anti-myth” to create an argument that every myth has an antimyth, including the antimyth itself, which in turn creates the anti-antimyth (for lack of a better term). Most modern Hollywood literature follows the theme of the antimyth: the main character is tricked into believing the myth of the Hollywood dream and soon realizes

¹³Nathanael West, *Miss Lonely Hearts & The Day of the Locust*, (New York: New Directions), 2009) 61.

¹⁴ Winchell, “Fantasy Seen,” 147.

his disillusionment, eventually losing his sense of self, dying, or both. “Our pursuit of the dream estranges us from who we are and encourages us to live for the future. Ultimately, pursuit of the future is pursuit of death.”¹⁵ The modernist era was a time critical of the rapid development of industrial societies, primarily cities, and the artificiality that arises from an industrialized world. This criticism led most modernist writing to focus on the “real.” Published in 1939, Nathanael West’s novel, *The Day of The Locust* is a novel concerned with the film industry’s ability to make the real out of the unreal. Echoing the earlier thoughts of apocalyptic authors such as W.B. Yeats and T. S. Eliot, West argues that the commodification of illusive dreams and wishes leads the people to revolt against a false system, causing an apocalypse.

To make this argument, West uses the main character, an artist named Tod, to interpret the city and its entertaining inhabitants. Unlike the other characters, Tod seems to be relatively sane, with no handicaps other than his violent lust for Faye. As an artist, he holds his place as the outside observer, always analyzing the others, working on his masterpiece painting, “The Burning of Los Angeles.” Meanwhile, all of the contrasting characters embody an idea. Homer Simpson is the simpleton who comes to California to escape his life for a while. He is “an exact model for the kind of person who comes to California to die, perfect in every detail down to fever eyes and unruly hands”; he is the Locust.¹⁶ Harry Greener and Faye Greener both represent the failed dream; they are unknown actors who have spent their lives acting but never living, and never reaching their goal of becoming famous. Faye Greener is the daughter of Harry, but embodies more than the failed dream. She is the desire for the dream, in all its lustiness and phoniness. Finally, Earl is the archetype of the classic western cowboy. By bringing these characters together, West makes an argument about what types of people come to

¹⁵ Edington, “The Hollywood Novel,” 5.

¹⁶ West, *The Day of The Locust*, 79.

Los Angeles, and metaphorically depicts the ways in which Hollywood interacts with these types of people. By looking through the eyes of an artist, rather than a director, West argues that only art is qualified to analyze and interpret. The directors and producers of film, along with those who wish to be the focal point of film, are represented as ridiculous and unconscious characters, while Tod remains constantly aware of the world and of reality. In this way, West argues that art leads the viewer to an awareness about the world, whereas film leads the viewer to an unawareness of reality.

The novel fits snugly into the genre of the Hollywood anti-myth in the sense that it is a story about the failure of the Hollywood dream. Moreover, by arguing that film is not art, it also reflects Adorno and Horkheimer's view of film as a medium that manipulates the ideals of masses. *The Day of the Locust* questions the artificiality of reality by looking directly at the film industry and arguing that the film industry creates a blurred line between real life and artificial performance.

The novel begins by submerging the reader into a fabricated world. He is presented with an elaborate description of a scene which seems to be describing the setting in which the novel will take place: “An army of cavalry and foot was passing...the dolmans of the hussard, the heavy shakos of the guards, Hanoverian light horse, with their flat leather caps and flowing res plumes, were all jumbled together in bobbing disorder.”¹⁷ It is soon revealed, however, that Tod is not in the middle of witnessing the defeat of a war. The beautiful descriptive language lures the reader into this world only to jerk him out of it by the piercing reality of the setting: “Stage Nine--you bastards--Stage Nine!” a stage director screams through a megaphone. West echoes the thoughts of Adorno and Horkheimer by demonstrating how easy it is to be engulfed by the facade of reality, especially when the viewer wants to believe in the fiction. This technique is emphasized throughout the text to different ends.

As Tod walks down the street he truly embodies the artist, observing his environment and interpreting it. The people on the street are presented as actors in their own lives, all wearing clothes that suggest occupations that they do not have, and more importantly, lives that they do not live:

He left the car at Vine Street. As he walked along, he examined the evening crowd. A great many of the people wore sports clothes which were not really sports clothes. Their sweaters, knickers, slacks, blue flannel jackets with brass buttons were fancy dress. The fat lady in the yachting cap was going shopping, not boating; the man in the Norfolk jacket and Tyrolean hat was returning, not from a mountain, but an insurance office; and

¹⁷ West, *The Day of The Locust*, 59.

the girl in slacks and sneaks with a bandana around her head had just left a switchboard, not a tennis court.¹⁸

This scene is exemplary not only of how Hollywood production disguises reality, but also of how the members of the city's population lives as characters in their own lives, pretending to be people they are not. The narrator contrasts these people to Tod, describing Tod as a "very complicated young man with a whole set of personalities, one inside the other like a nest of Chinese boxes."¹⁹ The people Tod observes, however, are more like a hollow box; they have only a surface, and nothing hidden inside. Although he refers to these people as masquerades, implying they are hiding behind a disguise, they are treated like a commodity. As facades, they tend to become what they are pretending to be. These masqueraders do not know what their own reality is but are merely reflections of a fraudulent reality. "That fraud is life itself, lived in a creation of elaborate artifice comparable to the artifice of Hollywood, so that Hollywood's lie, in which men are 'eating cardboard food in front of a cellophane waterfall,' (91) becomes merely an emulation of the greater falsity of God's creation...."²⁰ Hackett is a part of the crowd physically, yet he separates himself from it mentally by examining the people walking by him as though he is an expert at observing people. This distances him from the rest of his subjects.

This paragraph also touches on another problem Adorno and Horkheimer are concerned with in their essay: the illusion of dreams and desires. The narrator describes people as doing ordinary day-to-day things, while claiming that their attire suggests they were doing more extra-curricular activities. The narrator is suggesting here that the "fat lady" with the yachting cap inwardly desires to own a yacht. These people wish to be mountain-climbers or tennis-players,

¹⁸ West, *The Day of The Locust*, 60.

¹⁹ West, *The Day of The Locust*, 60.

²⁰ James F. Light, "Nathanael West and the Ravaging Locust," *American Quarterly* 12.1 (1960): 44-54. JSTOR. PDF file.

but they are not these things, therefore the desire has become their identity. Adorno and Horkheimer discuss how the culture industry creates ideal and prepackaged desires and forces them upon the public. In this scene West demonstrates how the public is absorbing these dreams, and also exploits their artificiality.

The masqueraders are described in juxtaposition to the Locusts, the people that have come to California to die. West presents a battle here between two striving forces, those who become a part of the commodity and those who are tortured by it. By comparing these two groups, West argues that the film industry creates a pull of desire so strong that there are only two options: allow it to consume you, or allow it to slowly destroy you. Immediately after this dichotomy is presented, we learn that Tod plans to understand it not through the industry that has created the division, but through artists. “He would never again do a fat red barn, old stone wall or sturdy Nantucket fisherman. From the moment he had seen them, he had known that, despite his race, training and heritage, neither Winslow Homer nor Thomas Ryder could be his masters and he turned to Goya and Daumier.”²¹ Like Tod, through art we are able to understand what it is that makes Hollywood unlike any other town. Without any background knowledge of the artists named, we learn what kind of town Hollywood is not: it is not “fat,” “old,” or “sturdy.” Since art is the best medium to access reality, the adjectives West uses describe more than the paintings, but the reality of the places in which these subjects are found. The word “fat” implies a certain fullness, “old” refers to tradition through the implication of time, and “sturdy” indicates something that is solid with foundation or culture. We have already learned that Hollywood can produce barns, stone walls and even Nantucket fishermen; however, none of these things would be full, but only empty facades. These imitations of real artifacts have no history or culture

²¹ West, *The Day of The Locust*, 60.

attached to them to produce an aura, and the term “sturdy” is far from an appropriate quality to attribute to the “plaster, lath and paper” which is used to construct them. Knowing that Homer and Ryder most likely paint subjects with these heavy, substantial qualities, Goya and Daumier must paint subjects with characteristics more akin to the characteristics of Hollywood. Goya’s paintings depicted fantasy and darkness associated with war. Daumier’s works are similar in their darkness, and are very politicized, often criticizing political figures. Both painters are concerned with realistic subjects, while Homer and Ryder are considered naturalists, who paint landscapes and nature. The switch that Tod makes from his naturalist style to the darker, more fantastical style speaks to the illusory elements of this city, depicting it as a place full of chaos and foreshadowing its eventual destruction via apocalypse.

West is not arguing that true art does not or can not incorporate illusion; he argues, rather, that in an authentic work of art illusion brings the viewer to a an understanding of himself. Film uses illusion to offer the viewer an escape from reality, therefore film can not be art. Adorno and Horkheimer discuss this problem by claiming that true art requires a state of consciousness whereas film does not. Therefore, film cannot be art:

Art for the masses has destroyed the dream but still conforms to the tenets of that dreaming idealism which critical idealism balked at. Everything derives from consciousness: for Malebranche and Berkeley, from the consciousness of God; in mass art, from the consciousness of the production team....The short interval sequence which was effective in a hit song, the hero’s momentary fall from grace (which he accepts as good sport), the rough treatment which the beloved gets from the male star, the latter’s rugged defiance of the spoiled heiress, are, like all the other details, ready-made clichés to

be slotted in anywhere; they never do anything more than fulfill the purpose allotted them in the overall plan.²²

As an artist, Tod does not value the illusions he witnesses. At Claude Estee's party (a movie producer) the guests are delighted to show off Estee's party trick: "a life-size, realistic reproduction of [a dead horse]."²³ The emphasis on the quality of the illusion is evident in this description, as is, simultaneously, the fact that it is a reproduction. Tod is confused at the sight of the dead horse and can not give Mrs. Schwartzen the reaction she is expecting. When another guest denies its realness she pretends to cry. "You're just like that mean Mr. Hackett," she complains, "You just won't let me cherish my illusions."²⁴ Art is not intended to cherish illusion, but to resist it. This rubber horse is a giant, useless "reproduction." Although it is extremely realistic and skillfully tricks people into believing it is authentic, it serves no other purpose than to amuse. By mocking this reproduction, West is making a statement about film (another form of reproduction), in that it also serves no other purpose but to, because of its artificial reality, entertain momentarily.

Film produces a premeditated response in the viewer, whereas art requires an aware viewer who interacts with the work. Adorno and Horkheimer argue that the speculation which art requires is not allowed by film:

Even though the effort required for his response is semi-automatic, no scope is left for the imagination. Those who are so absorbed by the world of the movie – by its images, gestures, and words – that they are unable to supply what really makes it a world, do not have to dwell on particular points of its mechanics during a screening. All the other films

²² Adorno and Horkheimer, "The Culture Industry"

²³ West, *The Day of The Locust*, 70.

²⁴ West, *The Day of The Locust*, 71.

and products of the entertainment industry which they have seen have taught them what to expect; they react automatically.²⁵

As Tod discusses a metaphorical story about the difficulties of chasing a girl, “like carrying something a little too large in your pocket, like a briefcase or a small valise,” Estee tries to picture it as a movie. Eventually deciding that the metaphor was good but too complicated to be filmed, he explains to Tod, “It’s good, but it won’t film. You’ve got to remember your audience. What about the barber in Purdue? He’s been cutting hair all day and he’s tired. He doesn’t want to see some dope carrying a valise or fooling with a nickel machine. What the barber wants is amour and glamor.”²⁶ Here West offers another aspect of his argument through the voice of Estee. Tod’s artistic ideas have no place in the film industry because art is not film. Instead, film is thought of as a commodity, where “amour” is sold. Amour is the prepackaged idea being sold to the audience, and in this novel it is sold best by Mrs. Jennings.

Films are made to embody the desires of the audience, yet maintain a distance so that the audience never reaches these desires. Adorno and Horkheimer refer to this effect in their essay:

The culture industry perpetually cheats its consumers of what it perpetually promises.

The promissory note which, with its plots and staging, it draws on pleasure is endlessly

prolonged; the promise, which is actually all the spectacle consists of, is illusory: all it

actually confirms is that the real point will never be reached, that the diner must be

satisfied with the menu. In front of the appetite stimulated by all those brilliant names and

images there is finally set no more than a commendation of the depressing everyday

world it sought to escape. Of course works of art were not sexual exhibitions either.

²⁵ Adorno and Horkheimer, “The Culture Industry”

²⁶ West, *The Day of The Locust*, 72.

However, by representing deprivation as negative, they retracted, as it were, the prostitution of the impulse and rescued by mediation what was denied.²⁷

West represents this lust between film and audience through a metaphor--Mrs. Jennings' callhouse. Mrs. Jennings is an out-of-work actress; since she can not sell herself, she sells others. The commodification and manipulation of love and desire is best represented in this callhouse, especially when Estee tells Tod, "She makes a vice attractive by skillful packaging. Her dive's a triumph of industrial design."²⁸ Estee refers to the brothel as though it were a Costco, and the women as though they could be packaged and sold like food items. Foreshadowing the mob riot at the end of the novel, the scene in Mrs. Jennings' movie theater portrays the consequences that ensue when a crowd is deprived of the happy ending they desire. The film machine gets stuck, the audience yells, "The old teaser routine!" and they cause a ruckus.²⁹ This desire is represented via sex in this scene, and steadily throughout the novel via the lusty main female character, Faye Greener.

Faye is the epitome of a desire that can never be reached; she does not exist, except as a dream; she is Hollywood. Throughout the novel this lust and desire is wrapped in violence. Faye is described as having "long, swordlike legs," implying that touching them would wound you--she is dangerous.

Her invitation wasn't to pleasure, but to struggle, hard and sharp, closer to murder than to love. If you threw yourself on her, it would be like throwing yourself from the parapet of a skyscraper. You would do it with a scream. You couldn't expect to rise again. Your

²⁷ Adorno and Horkheimer, "The Culture Industry"

²⁸ West, *The Day of The Locust*, 72.

²⁹ West, *The Day of The Locust*, 75.

teeth would be driven into your skull like nails into a pine board and your back would be broken. You wouldn't even have time to sweat or close your eyes.³⁰

The first thing we learn about Faye is that she is will destroy you. It is not simply said in that way, but instead we are given a gruesome, graphic description of this destruction to emphasize its reality. After thinking this description, Tod forces a laugh and the narrator tell us that nothing was destroyed by its falseness. Again, Tod is juxtaposed against a character in the way art is continuously juxtaposed to film. While Faye's facade of pleasure will demolish every part of your existence without giving you even a second to react, Tod's facade of pleasure is absolutely harmless, and simple--it is described in once simple sentence. This contrast between the characters shows the similarities and difference of the art and film, then immediately explains why art "wouldn't have him." Tod can't better Faye's career in the same way the argument is made later that there is no room for art in film; it will not bring in an audience, therefore will not aid the industry.

Although the novel makes intense statements about the fraud of movies and their inherent danger to the lives of the audience, it can not deny either their charm or their beauty. Faye is seen as a dangerous character, but her beauty is not just a trap to attract men like moths to a light bulb. She is truly beautiful, but only in her physical form. A film is not a representation of reality, but a conglomeration of pieces taken from reality to create a new reality. Although Tod is aware of the empty façade, he cannot deny that the structural creation is beautiful, even intoxicating. Tod admits that Faye's "beauty was structural like a tree's, not a quality of her mind or heart" and that is why (like the structural quality of film) selling herself could not

³⁰ West, *The Day of The Locust*, 68.

damage her appearance.³¹ Although the commodification of art, Adorno and Horkheimer argue, damages its capital, film's capital is built on commodification. Its steel-like beauty is the hard characteristic that makes it durable. Faye's beauty is like a film's beauty, it is purely structural whereas true art has heart and intelligence. Film touches these qualities in people, but does not offer real insights to them. Homer observes that Faye makes elaborate gestures that are "so completely meaningless, almost formal, that she seemed a dancer rather than an affected actress."³² Like the people Tod watched on the street in the beginning of the novel, Faye is constantly performing. Her performance goes beyond what she presents herself to be physically, and engulfs her own consciousness. She is a woman who refuses to embrace reality, but instead she creates and lives day-to-day in little stories of lives she has never known. Faye describes these stories like a pack of cards; she creates them and stores them in her mind so that whenever she needed one she could flip through the whole stack to find a card that suited her mood. In this way Faye embodies the entire film industry--she is the director, writer, and producer of these little films in her mind, as well as the theater and the audience. She is the microcosm of Hollywood.

West juxtaposes Faye (and the metaphor she embodies) with the other characters to emphasize his anti-myth perspective. If Faye is Hollywood and Tod is the unappreciated artist, Homer is the Locust. Like a locust, Homer sleeps for many years before finally waking to wreak havoc on the land (the metaphor in the novel works as an allusion to the biblical scriptures). Homer comes to Hollywood for his health and only because other people have told him to do so. He is easily manipulated and allows the other characters to walk over him; even a random homeless man on the street can get something from Homer just by demanding it. He does not

³¹ West, *The Day of The Locust*, 127.

³² West, *The Day of The Locust*, 94.

make his own decisions, but is content with forcing himself to enjoy the decisions others have made for him. This rule holds true with Homer right down to his new Hollywood home, which comes completely furnished; Homer does not even think to rearrange the furniture. He sits in the chair on the patio that came with the house in the position that it was placed and never thinks of turning the chair, even though “there was a much better view to be had in any direction other than the one he faced. By moving his chair in a quarter circle he could have seen a large part of the canyon twisting down to the city below.”³³ Instead he entertains himself with the view he was prescribed by whomever placed the chair in the yard. Homer has no sense of his own wants or desires, and is always sleepy or sleeping. He uses sleep as a way to remain detached from the world, like a constant escape. If he remains asleep he never has to confront the reality of his artificial life. “Although it was still early in the afternoon, he felt very sleepy. He was afraid to stretch out and go to sleep. Not because he had bad dreams, but because it was so hard for him to wake again. When he fell asleep, he was always afraid he would never get up.”³⁴ The fear of not waking is really a fear of the reality that he may not be strong enough to wake himself. Although he is a character that must “work laboriously toward consciousness,” he is not a simple character. Homer’s half-hearted smiles reveal to Tod that Homer is depressed with himself and his life. Despite Homer’s efforts to wake himself, his hands (which are consistently disobeying him) remain asleep. Homer’s hands speak to his struggle to awaken not just physically in this scene, but emotionally throughout the novel.

These hands-with a "life and will of their own" (p. 39)-suggest Homer's suppressed emotional needs. These needs are in constant conflict with the external man, and the external man has only partial control over them. Thus the external Homer is revolted by

³³ West, *The Day of The Locust*, 89.

³⁴ West, *The Day of The Locust*, 82.

sex, as is shown by his attitude toward a hen's copulation, but shortly after Homer has met Faye, his hands become intolerable in their itching, and he has to hold them under water. Eventually the desires of the internal man become so strong that Homer's "fingers turned like a tangle of thighs in miniature. He snatched them apart and sat on them."³⁵

Whenever Homer's reality becomes too terrifying this conflict is intensified and he begins to either fidget with his hands or attempt to put his whole body to sleep. When sleep is impossible and he is thoroughly awake, he feels profoundly alone, forcing himself to tears in the hope of a certain release. However, West argues the anguish of the Locust is beyond any sort of comfort other than escape. Because only those with hope can feel better after a release of tears, Homer is doomed to be permanently depressed. In this way, West is a proclaimer of the anti-myth.

Homer is an example of what happens to a person when he comes to Hollywood expecting to finally live his dreams and realizes they were unrealistic.

Faye is a constant reminder of the impossibility of the fulfillment of his desire, so rather than getting Homer closer to his wants, she draws him into a deeper depression. Even with Faye in his life, (she lives with him and allows him to take her out on dates) Homer knows he can never be happy. Faye flirts with other men in front of Homer, works as a prostitute, and even sleeps with Miguel--sending Homer into an impenetrable stupor in which he curls into a tiny ball. Faye forces Homer to drink alcohol, mocking him when he refuses, and mocking him even when he accepts. The closer Homer gets to Faye's affections the further away he becomes, and all he can do to escape is sleep. It is not a rejuvenating sleep, but a self-induced unconsciousness saturated with anxiety. As he sleeps curled into a ball Tod perceives him as a "steel spring which has been freed of its function in a machine and allowed to use all its strength centripetally.

³⁵ Flight, "The Ravaging Locust," 56.

While part of a machine the pull of the spring had been used against other and stronger forces, but now, free at last, it was striving to attain the shape of its original coil.”³⁶ This insight to Tod comes after Faye finally leaves Homer and he is free of her teasing. Faye is likened to once force, while Homer’s small-town persona is the other. These conflicting forces had been pulling Homer in opposite directions, but finally, through sleep, he is released from the tension.

Like other proponents of the anti-myth theory, West depicts Hollywood as a promised land that can only cause disappointment. The story of the interactions between these three characters in a make-believe land is a metaphor for West’s argument about film: Film is a tease. It can only offer you pieces of the world while assembling the pieces in a way that tricks the audience into believing it is the whole. The audience is satisfied with this whole momentarily, but seeks more when they become conscious again. The commodification of film makes these momentary escapes available for everyone so that, like an addict, the audience can keep feeding their appetite. However, because film is only a facade of truth, it will never be able to satisfy their desires. West argues the apocalyptic consequences of this arrangement are not only probable, but inevitable. Fortunately, West gives us a way to understand this problem and perhaps by understanding it we are able to keep an emotional distance from the system of an unfulfilling capitalistic society. Only through art, West demonstrates, can this distance be understood. This solution is demonstrated in the means by which Tod escapes the angry mob riot at the end of the novel.

The novel ends with the long-anticipated awakening of the Locusts, outside of a theater where film stars are getting ready to gather to view the premier of a new picture. Walking through the crowd to observe the scene, Tod suddenly senses he is in danger. Angry rioters

³⁶ West, *The Day of The Locust*, 171.

begin to scream and shout at him, and a reporter documents the ravaging crowd as the police desperately try to contain its members. The scene escalates when the little child-star, Adore, begins to shamelessly taunt Homer, finally succeeding in getting his attention by hurling a rock in his face; destruction ensues. The mob turns on Homer and quickly becomes violent, consuming Tod as it lashes out. The crowd of Locusts represents all of the Homers who have come to California in the hope to find a new and better life and were greatly disappointed.

They realize they have been tricked and burn with resentment. Every day of their lives they read the newspapers and went to the movies. Both fed them on lynchings, murder, sex crimes, explosions, wrecks, love nests, fires, miracles, revolutions, wars. This daily diet made sophisticates of them. The sun is a joke. Oranges can't titillate their jaded palates. Nothing can ever be Violent enough to make taut their slack minds and bodies.

They have been cheated and betrayed. They have slaved and saved for nothing.³⁷

Finally these bored people have something to entertain them: a lynch mob. West argues that their boredom and jadedness has risen out of a culture thoroughly saturated with constant entertainment; their minds “have not the equipment for leisure” after so many years of being fed on excitement. The lack of art in society is a monumental problem because it means a lack of mental stimulation. People have stopped using their minds to read and interpret books and instead have become accustomed to turning on the television and letting the media formulate the images and ideas for them. The artist, the character who uses his mind to observe, analyze and interpret, is able to escape the violence through his craft, the painting. Despite his broken leg and the rioting crowd, Tod is able to mentally escape the chaos by using his mind and imagining himself painting his masterpiece. Tod's painting, “The Burning of Los Angeles” mentally

³⁷ West, *The Day of The Locust*, 178.

separates Tod from being included in the Locusts, just as West's novel works as a piece of artwork analyzing the Hollywood problem and understanding it. West not only argues that film is not art, but that it is an inferior replacement for it. It is inferior because it does not offer insight to the world, but weaves a web of lies that leads to chaos and destruction (once revealed).

Adorno and Horkheimer describe this problem well:

The secret of aesthetic sublimation is its representation of fulfilment as a broken promise. The culture industry does not sublimate; it represses. By repeatedly exposing the objects of desire, breasts in a clinging sweater or the naked torso of the athletic hero, it only stimulates the unsublimated forepleasure which habitual deprivation has long since reduced to a masochistic semblance. There is no erotic situation which, while insinuating and exciting, does not fail to indicate unmistakably that things can never go that far.³⁸

Tod is a character constructed in West's idea of himself as the artist who forces his readers into a greater understanding of the world. West argues, through metaphor and demonstration, that art is the only savior in the inevitable apocalypse that will devour the city of golden dreams.

³⁸ Adorno and Horkheimer, "The Culture Industry"

“The director is the foreman. It is also his difficult task to organize the visual material--which is as beautifully unorganized as life itself--into the unity that life owes art. He locks himself and the strips of film into his private screening room and has them projected over and over. They are sifted, spliced, cut up, and labeled until finally from the huge chaos emerges a little whole: a social drama, a historical event, a woman’s fate. Most of the time the result is good: glass clouds brew and then scatter. One believes in the fourth wall. Everything guaranteed nature.”³⁹

Approaching the Hollywood genre through a new lens, Joan Didion’s 1970, postmodern novel, *Play It as It Lays*, responds to *The Day of the Locust* mockingly, using the anti anti-myth approach to Hollywood novels and echoing the views of Benjamin. The novel is told through the perspective of a female, immediately promising a fresh perspective to the past versions of the Hollywood novel. Maria’s character ultimately demolishes the argument made in most modernist Hollywood works that the female embodies the world’s insatiable desires because she is the exact opposite of desire: she is apathy. Her nothingness comes from the distance she creates between herself and the “other” and is not a direct result of the corrupting film industry.⁴⁰ The novel argues that, rather than being a cause of disillusionment, Hollywood is a city that receives people who have been previously disillusioned by their lives. Rather than blaming the film industry for the lack of art in society, and blaming the lack of art for society’s frustrated citizens, Didion looks at film as a way not to escape, but to change your perception of the world. Like Benjamin, Didion sees film as a vehicle for the spread of ideas. This view effectively demythologizes the city and strips it of its power. “The Hollywood novel has met the same fate

³⁹ Siegfried Kracauer, *The Mass Ornament*: “Calico-World.” Accessed January 15, 2013: monoskop.org/images/0/0f/kracauer_siegfried_the_mass_ornament_weimer_essays.pdf

⁴⁰ Simard, “The Dissociation of Self,” 173.

as the Southern novel: it has become passé because it depicts a mythic conflict which has ceased to exist....Because Hollywood is no longer seen as the embodiment of the American Dream, it can no longer be portrayed as the realization of the American Nightmare.’⁴¹ Echoing Benjamin’s positive view of non-auratic art, Didion demonstrates that by stripping away tradition and cultural meaning, Maria is able to assume the job of director in her own life and therefore live in whatever time, perception, or version of life she chooses. Like Benjamin, Didion enjoys the mechanical elements of film and has respect for the director’s ability to create a new whole out of small, fractured bits of reality. In contrast to West, Didion argues that reality is not an objective thing, but is subjective to your own perspective of life. Although she may appear to be, Maria is not an apathetic character; she is simply resistant to the concerns of the reality in which the other characters live. Didion is a proponent of the anti anti-myth approach to understanding Hollywood literature. She argues that Hollywood is not the cause of fragmented lives, but that life is fragmented in nature, demythologizing Hollywood. Maria takes control of her perception of life by becoming the director of her own life. Although Didion gives Maria more autonomy than West gives his Locusts, she does not solve West’s problem. She does not argue that film allows for contemplation by the spectator. Maria, as well as the novel, are both resistant to contemplation and instead argue that contemplation is worthless. To do this Didion argues that film and life are indeed undistinguishable, but that the road to find authenticity leads one in circles. Didion therefore agrees with Benjamin because she argues that total awareness is not necessary for the spectator to understand a film. The authenticity of an experience is ambiguous, and people over-concern themselves with validity.

⁴¹ Winchell, “Fantasy Seen,” 165.

The novel opens with a simple question: “What makes Iago Evil? some people ask. I never ask.”⁴² Setting the tone for the rest of the novel, Didion does two things immediately. First, she mocks the idea of “high” art by presenting Shakespeare’s most complex character in *Othello* and essentially saying, “who cares?” We will soon learn that Maria does not make these critical distinctions about culture in her life. Second, she tempts the reader to read into the reference to Shakespeare and then immediately moves on to another topic, mocking the reader for trying to analyze the text. She tells us, “To look for ‘reasons’ is beside the point. But because the pursuit of reasons is their business here, they ask me questions.... They will misread the facts, invent connections, will extrapolate reasons where none exist, but I told you, that is their business here.”⁴³ We are to assume that Maria is referring to the doctors in the hospital, however she seems to also be speaking of the readers of the novel--the people who will analyze and interpret her work however they decide. Didion argues that to create distinctions between traditional art and film is irrelevant because the difference is subjective. Didion is warning the reader not to make something out of nothing.

Didion is an anti anti-myth novelist because her main character is not like West’s Locust. Not once does Didion hint that it is the film industry that has corrupted Maria or anyone else. Maria is from a small town in Nevada, and her life was disorganized from the beginning. She moved around a lot, her parents divorced, her father gambled and Maria eventually moved to New York to pursue her dreams. By the time Maria came to Hollywood, she was already experiencing problems. Didion’s argument is not that the characters of this novel are disillusioned because of the lack of culture in Hollywood to guide them, nor because of the

⁴² Didion, *Play it As it Lays*, 3.

⁴³ Didion, *Play it As it Lays*, 4.

corruption of a materialistic city, but because life simply has no objective pattern or reason for the characters to follow. Each character has a different perspective of life.

An important way Didion demonstrates Benjamin's fascination with the fetishization of originality is through the inability to authenticate her novel. Didion cleverly adds many meaningless signifiers to the novel to lead the reader on a hunt for meaning. The snakes, white linens, air-conditioner, and other repeated objects in the novel are all empty signifiers that lead the reader in circles. The narrator adds to this parody of the modernist novel by frequently referring to "signs" that Maria looks for to understand her own life, as though her life were a film she had to interpret: "Maria lay at night in the soar of Beverly Hills and saw the great signs soar overhead at seventy miles an hour"; "the beach towels signified how temporary the arrangement was"; "Sleeping in the afternoon was a bad sign."⁴⁴ Maria is telling us that nothing in life has a reason. She does not say that life is meaningless, but rather, that life is senseless and chaotic. Keeping in mind that Maria's life is undistinguishable from a film, Didion is simultaneously arguing that it is pointless to try to find authenticity in film. Like life, things happen for no specific reason; they just happen and they are absorbed. She explains, "Why should a coral snake need two glands of neurotoxic poison to survive while a king snake, so similarly marked, needs none. Where is the Darwinian logic there. You might ask that. I never would, not anymore."⁴⁵ Maria's refusal to look for the "aura" in her life represents Benjamin's argument that the aura is an unnecessary component to art. The signs Maria looks for herself do not lead her closer to happiness or to a greater understanding. The "aura" for Benjamin does not prevent film from being considered art:

⁴⁴ Didion, *Play it As it Lays*, 17 and 34.

⁴⁵ Didion, *Play it As it Lays*, 3.

Magician and surgeon compare to painter and cameraman. The painter maintains in his work a natural distance from reality, the cameraman penetrates deeply into its web. There is a tremendous difference between the pictures they obtain. That of the painter is a total one, that of the cameraman consists of multiple fragments which are assembled under a new law. Thus, for contemporary man the representation of reality by the film is incomparably more significant than that of the painter, since it offers, precisely because of the thoroughgoing permeation of reality with mechanical equipment, an aspect of reality which is free of all equipment. And that is what one is entitled to ask from a work of art.⁴⁶

Maria reads the signifiers in her life like a novel but is always avoiding the truth of what they are telling her. Instead, she prefers to alter her reality like a director alters scenes in a movie to create a different story.

The structure of the novel resembles the cutting room version of a film in a few ways; it comprises very short scenes, then longer scenes which are cut and mashed together in a new order. Sometimes the narrator is relaying the events, sometimes Maria speaks directly, and the time of the novel varies from present (as Maria is in the hospital writing), to recent past (as the narrator relays the events leading up to Maria's hospitalization), to distant past (as Maria or the narrator recalls memories from Maria's childhood). The scenes of her life are organized in the novel as if they were clips of film laying strewn about the cutting table and a director taped them together in an order that depicts a different reality. To further emphasize the feeling of a film strip, the characters in the novel often refer to their lives as scenes as though they were aware of the fact that they existed only in a film-like novel.

⁴⁶ Benjamin, "The Work of Art"

Maria's tendency to understand herself through the films Carter made of her distinguishes her from West's hero, the artist. Maria is not an artist in this film, but an actor and a director. Didion reflects Benjamin's argument that films do not need to be artistic in the traditional sense to be art. Maria can cut and paste the scenes of her in Carter's movies to manipulate the audience's understanding of her character and her own understanding of herself. Carter has made two films starring Maria, one in which she is filmed very realistically in her every day activities. This film portrays Maria as she is viewed by others: a waste. Students from UCLA or USC would want to talk to Carter about the film but Maria never wants to talk to them having known their first impression of her was this first film.

(Sometimes they walked up to Carter in front of a theater or bookstore and introduced themselves, and Carter would introduce Maria, and they would look sidelong at Maria while they talked to Carter about coming to see their film programs, but Maria had nothing to say to them, avoided their eyes) and she disliked their having seen her in that first picture. She never thought of it as *Maria*.⁴⁷

The effect of likening Maria's life to a film is very emphasized in this passage. The film's very title is her own name, making a clear argument that this depiction is *the* Maria Wyeth. If Carter can cut and paste scenes of Maria's life together to create the image through which outsiders to her life will understand her, then he is ultimately the master of her persona, and therefore her Self as it is seen by others. In the short film she is seen cleaning marijuana, passed out at a party, and maintaining her vanity. This film depicts her as a metaphorical zombie, exaggerating this notion in end of the film when "she was thrown into negative and looked dead."⁴⁸ This idea of the Hollywood, vanity-zombie is a very Nathanael West theme, or I should say, a theme that is

⁴⁷ Didion, *Play it As it Lays*, 21.

⁴⁸ Didion, *Play it As it Lays*, 20.

associated with Winchell's theory of the Hollywood anti-myth. In this section Didion is speaking very loudly to make the argument that *Play it as it Lays* is not an anti-myth. The extreme, dramatic tone of death in this section of the novel contrasts with Maria's ability to rewrite her own life.

The second film Carter directs, starring Maria is titled *Angel Beach*. Maria doesn't see herself in his character of her either, but the narrator points to a specific sentence the girl on the screen says to explain why Maria can't relate to that girl. She says, "I look at you and I know that...*what happened* just didn't mean anything,' the girl on the screen would say, and 'There's a lot more to living than just kicks, I see that now, kicks are nowhere.'"⁴⁹ The reason Maria can't see herself in this character is because of the girl's helplessness. The girl speaking was raped by a gang of motorcyclists, and even after she has seemingly begun to recover from the trauma, she can not even talk about the incident of the gang rape. This girl has no sense of autonomy. The narrator points out, "Carter's original cut ended with a shot of the motorcycle gang, as if they represented some reality not fully apprehended by the girl Maria played, but the cut released by the studio ended with a long dolly shot of Maria strolling across a campus. Maria preferred the studio's cut. In fact, she liked watching the picture: the girl on the screen seemed to have a definite knack for controlling her own destiny."⁵⁰ Maria believes she is in control of her own destiny, of her own choices. In order to control how she views herself, she refuses to watch the first film and only watches the studio version of the second film. Maria is a character who cuts things she doesn't like out of her life. Moreover, she gets physically ill after watching even bits of the first film because the girl on the screen is not a reality to her, and she is angry that her friends watch it so often. She repeats, "The girl on the screen in that first picture has no

⁴⁹ Didion, *Play it As it Lays*, 19.

⁵⁰ Didion, *Play it As it Lays*, 20.

knack for anything,” clearly emphasizing her point.”⁵¹ Maria understands herself through these films by contrasting herself to the girls onscreen and using them as a guide for what not to be. While manipulating the audience’s understanding of herself and her own understanding of herself gives Maria autonomy, it presents a problem. Maria is not being absorbed by film; she is absorbing it. As Benjamin argues, Maria is still an absent-minded audience of her own life:

Distraction and concentration form polar opposites which may be stated as follows: A man who concentrates before a work of art is absorbed by it. He enters into this work of art the way legend tells of the Chinese painter when he viewed his finished painting. In contrast, the distracted mass absorbs the work of art.⁵²

There are no characters in the novel who do not absorb film.

Not only does Maria understand herself through film, but the characters in the novel speak as though they are living in a film. During the brief chapter that Carter narrates he says, “here are some scenes I have very clear in my mind,” and then proceeds to highlight a very short clip of an exchange between him and Maria.⁵³ He quickly transitions to the next scene with a paragraph break and the phrase, “Another scene,” as though he were flipping through slides of his life.⁵⁴ Carter lives scene-to-scene, and represents Didion’s argument that life can be just like film; in fact, life is naturally just as disorganized and meaningless as a bunch of different movie clips strewn around a table, therefore the characters are forced to somehow pin them together. The difficulty Carter experiences when trying to organize his life is clear when he says, “After BZ’s death there was a time when I played and replayed these scenes and others like them, composed them as if for the camera, trying to find some order, a pattern. I found none. All I can

⁵¹ Didion, *Play it As it Lays*, 20.

⁵² Benjamin, “The Work of Art”

⁵³ Didion, *Play it As it Lays*, 13.

⁵⁴ Didion, *Play it As it Lays*, 14.

say is this: it was after a succession of such small scenes that I began to see the improbability of a rapprochement with Maria.”⁵⁵ Life just happens, scenes occur and it is the responsibility of the person who’s life it is to make sense out of them and formulate a story. The problem with finding a pattern out of the chaos is that every person will see something different; it is a problem of perspective. The novel emphasizes this point also in this chapter and the chapters before it, as it outlines the limited perspectives of the other characters affected by Maria. After the first three perspectives, the novel is narrated by a third-person narrator, which creates the feeling that the reader is an outside observer looking in on the events that are about to take place, rather than relating to a first-person narrator and taking on her perspective. Much like a film, the reader can sit back and watch as the story unfolds. None of the perspectives presented, though, are in agreement with each other and there seems to be a lot of confusion between characters and plot throughout the novel. There are many metadramatic moments when a character will realize that the scenes presented in the novel do not have transitions, do not seem to flow together or have any connection to each other. In response to Maria’s random admission of her illegitimate pregnancy Carter says, “I missed a transition.”⁵⁶ At another point there is a chapter with confusion about lemons and even the masseur says, “I seem to have come in after the main titles.”⁵⁷ It is also significant that the novel does not have a plot. Just as Maria says that nothing has a point, neither does this book. It begins at the conclusion and then rewinds to tell the reader some (not even all) of the events that happened leading up to that conclusion.

Furthermore, understanding life as though it were a movie grants Maria the ability to rewind, fast forward, and alter endings. Maria often contemplates her decisions before she

⁵⁵ Didion, *Play it As it Lays*, 14.

⁵⁶ Didion, *Play it As it Lays*, 48.

⁵⁷ Didion, *Play it As it Lays*, 47.

makes them, especially those concerning Carter. She plays out the possible future as though she were writing a phone call scene: ““So you just happen to be in Baker,’ he could say. ‘Get on up here.’ Or he could even say: ‘Listen. Get up here quick.’”⁵⁸ The use of the semicolon here also mimics the screenplay style of writing, with a character’s name, or the staging of a scene and then a semicolon, then the dialogue. In fact, Maria is aware of this screenplay and of the rehearsed acting that will ensue; she has seen this scene before:

He would say something and she would say something and before either of them know it they would be playing out a dialogue so familiar that it drained the imagination, blocked the will, allowed them to drop words and whole sentences and still arrive at the cold conclusion. ‘Oh Christ,’ he would say. ‘I felt good today, really good for a change, you fixed that, you really pricked the balloon.’

‘How did I fix that.’

‘You know how.’

‘I don’t know how.’⁵⁹

Maria imagines the whole conversation before she even has it. The conversation is even scripted as though it were a screenplay in the sense that the dialogue is written line by line for each character. The passage goes on until Maria comes to an outcome in her head and makes a decision: she will not call. With this tactic, she is able to screen her life before producing it. She fast-forwards and decides she doesn’t like that scene, and then just cuts it out of the film completely. She does this again later in the text using just dialogue. Instead of “he said” she uses, “he would say.” The change of phrasing is unique because this particular phrase can indicate both that something hasn’t happened yet, and that the thing has already happened at the

⁵⁸ Didion, *Play it As it Lays*, 31.

⁵⁹ Didion, *Play it As it Lays*, 31.

same time. Maria is remembering a reoccurring conversation and predicting a new conversation simultaneously. Her decision not to let it play through this time is an invocation of her directorial authority over her life.

At other times Maria is not editing her film, but looking back on it, or just watching it roll. She views parts of her life not as natural things that will have to occur (such as telling your husband that you are pregnant with someone else's child) but as scenes that must be included in the film. The narrator says, "she paused. It came to her that in the scenario of her life this would be what was called an obligatory scene, and she wondered with distant interest just how long the scene would play."⁶⁰ Maria is completely disassociated from her life, and barely interested in what is happening even though she is a main character in the exchange taking place. There is a connection here between Maria's sudden disinterestedness with her life and the events that are occurring; Maria does not have control. She knows Carter will make her get an abortion and that she has no choice, and she knows that she has no control over the argument that is about to happen. It is all "obligatory," and therefore she can not relate to it. The Maria that is the star of her film has autonomy, makes choices. She certainly does not follow signs or cues because they do not lead anywhere.

Like Benjamin, Didion contends that film is so easily manipulated to represent reality. Maria is able to control her life through her imagination. When something in her life is happening that she is not in control of, she transports herself mentally to another place and time. This is Marai's way of editing her film. She is having an abortion only because Carter is forcing her to have it by bartering Kate. If she has the unborn child her reality of one day having Kate will be destroyed. Although her physical reality is that she is in a mysterious bedroom in Encino

⁶⁰ Didion, *Play it As it Lays*, 50.

and the gruesome truth is that a strange man who claims to be a doctor is about to give her an abortion, in her mind she is able to transport herself to another place and time. Again Maria finds a way to edit her mental film; she adds a flashback, a scene from the past and remains in that time, leaving the present for the duration of the procedure. “If she could concentrate for even one minute on a picture of herself as a ten-year-old sitting on the front steps of the house in Silver Wells reading the gray book with the red cross on the cover...if she could concentrate for one more minute on that shed...those were two minutes during which she was not entirely party to what was happening in this bedroom in Encino.”⁶¹ The narrator uses the phrase “party to” because it implies Maria is not the one in the chair, but rather she is an outsider witnessing the procedure. By leaving the scene entirely in her mind she takes this escape one step further. Just like pushing the rewind button, Maria is suddenly back to her childhood. Then suddenly she cuts to another story about the lady who decorated the bedroom, then flashes to a vague memory about another time she had been in a room with an air conditioner. Although physically her body was being forced to sit in the chair in the bedroom, her mind was completely free and could take her anywhere in any time at her will. She could rewind, fast-forward, skip scenes, etc. By splicing these scenes together in her head, Maria detracts from the painful significance of what is happening to her.

Although her ability to edit these scenes transforms the way Maria is understood as a character, she also reminds us not to consider this a way of authenticating her, or her life. The personality of the doctor, the man in white duck pants and even the temperature of the room itself are all cold and sterile things, creating an eerie atmosphere. Yet although the scene we are reading is emotionally disturbing, Maria reminds us that “no moment [is] more or less important

⁶¹ Didion, *Play it As it Lays*, 81.

than any other moment, all the same: the pain as the doctor scraped signified nothing beyond itself, no more constituted the pattern of her life than did the movie on television in the living room of this house in Encino.”⁶² This passage is reminiscent of Maria’s earlier warning not to attribute importance to anything that seems significant but it is also a direct comparison of her life to a movie. Like many scenes of a film are put together to create an idea, so is her life, as she just demonstrated to the reader during the procedure. Mentally escaping from her physical reality, according to the novel, does not mean that she is living in an artificial reality, as much as a film is not an artificial reality, it is just another perception of reality. This argument is seen again when BZ tells Nelson, the masseur, “that lemon is not artificial. That lemon is reconstituted.”⁶³ Like Benjamin’s view of film and art, these reproductions and replications of real objects are greeted by an open mind and are no less important than “real” objects or “real” art.

Maria lives in a psychiatric institution. The novel beings at the end, only take a round-about way through a conglomeration of the events that lead the reader back to where the story began. After everything we learn about how Maria came to be living in this place, after all of the different perspectives we are offered, we come right back to where we began. Do the details really matter if nothing changes? None of the events that were explained, none of the perspectives, none of the signs (regardless if we followed any of the empty signals or not), changed the reality, because it can not be changed. Some say Maria is depressed, some say she let BZ die, but the fact remains that the reality is subjective. Although Maria is living in a home, she has ceased interaction with people from her past life. Now she spends her days living in a fantasy in her mind, concentrating “on the way light would strike filled Mason jars on a kitchen

⁶² Didion, *Play it As it Lays*, 82.

⁶³ Didion, *Play it As it Lays*, 47.

windowsill.”⁶⁴ She focuses on the imaginary scenes playing and replaying in her mind. They are real to her, so they are real. Didion argues that films, whether they are art or not, are not the reason for chaos in society, but that they can actually aid people in gaining autonomy over themselves, if they decide to become the director of their own lives. Hollywood doesn’t devalue art, it celebrates its mobility through time and space. Reproducing art allows the public to engage with artwork from all over the world, all over time, and also allows them to control their perception of the world as well as their lives.

⁶⁴ Didion, *Play it As it Lays*, 214.

“Cinema is a lot like music. It can be very abstract, but people have a yearning to make intellectual sense of it, to put it right into words. And when they can’t do that, it feels frustrating. But they can come up with an explanation from within, if they just allow it. If they started talking to their friends, soon they would see things—what something is and what something isn’t.... and they would come to some conclusion. And that would be valid.”⁶⁵

Entering into the picture roughly thirty years after Didion’s open-minded perspective of the artificiality of film, David Lynch disproves the previous two arguments via the medium in question--film. In his 2001 film, *Mulholland Drive*, Lynch offers a way to reconcile both Adorno and Horkheimer’s and Benjamin’s view of the film industry. The Hollywood dream is the myth, the Hollywood nightmare is the anti-myth, and the absence on Hollywood in the role of dreaming is the anti anti-myth. Accepting this, Lynch’s film can not be classified in any of these categories because it denies the film industry any power. Instead, Lynch gives all the power of interpreting myths to the individual. The previously discussed cultural studies theorists have two essential arguments. First, that film provides a prepackaged message encoded by the director and second, the very nature of a film (its fragmented structure) refuses the audience the opportunity for contemplation that would be allowed by traditional art. Lynch responds to these theories by arguing that the essence of film can actually be used to provoke contemplation in the audience. In turn, he is arguing that the audience of film is indeed an aware and present audience, and that the emotional interaction between the audience and the film validates it as a work of art. Moreover, Lynch argues that despite Didion’s claim that the meaning of film is subjective, finding meaning is not pointless. He separates the individual from the mass and

⁶⁵ Lynch, *Catching the Big Fish*, 19-20.

argues that each individual spectator's interpretation is original. Therefore the subjectivity of a viewer's response to film does not discredit its authenticity, but actually substantiates it. In essence, film does have an aura, and therefore it is, in fact, art.

Lynch makes his argument by refusing its viewer the easy escape that most films provide. Instead, Lynch forces his spectator to look into himself and confront his own reality. He does this by producing a film that enters into the unconscious minds of the audience. In this way the artistry of the movie reveals itself to audience members who are aware and not absent-minded. Lynch's audience can not absorb the film, he must be absorbed by it. It is a valid form of art, and not merely an obvious, simple message that is easily digestible and requires no active thinking on the part of the viewer. Lynch also validates his argument by proving that it is possible to create a popular film that is recognized and is very profitable, while remaining subjective, provokingly ambiguous, and beautifully artistic. To prove this Lynch speaks directly about Hollywood, through Hollywood.

In this defense of filmmaking, Lynch produces a film that mocks the typical Hollywood film's linear and formal structure, which *Mulholland Drive* completely destroys. (There is no simple $A+B=C$ equation to the film that allows its message to be understood.) Lynch supports the idea that an interpretation of art is intended to be subjective, based on the viewer's perspective. This film does just that; by not providing a linear story-line, nor explicitly answering any questions the film brings up, or obeying the general laws of time. The film remains a somewhat abstract representation of the viewer's unconscious mind (the part that is responsible for coloring his perceptions of art). Finally, the very fact that Lynch was first and foremost a traditional artist--a painter-- ensures that he is coming from an artist's perspective, rather than purely from the Hollywood director's perspective. Because Lynch is dedicated to

producing a pure emotional response from the audience rather than plotting out how it should react and then manipulating it, his film offers a way to reconcile all previous perceptions of art in the film industry. Most importantly, Lynch distinguishes himself from Adorno, Horkheimer and Benjamin by looking not at the film itself, nor at the industry, but at the individual. He claims neither that the industry produces an absent-minded audience, nor that that the audience is, in fact, one that is absent-minded.

Music begins to play and lights flash rhythmically on the television screen as the story welcomes us into a world of imagination. We are confronted by images of couples jitterbug-dancing on the screen against a purple background. There is no setting, only the dancers, as though they are dancing in a person's mind. We hear applause and a white, transparent image of a young blonde girl between an older couple flickers on and off the screen repeatedly as the dancers fade away to reveal a blurry background. The camera focuses and we are seeing through the eyes of a sleeping person who is tossing in bed, before the camera dives lens-first into a pink pillow, signaling the commencement of a dream. However, the fact that more than half the movie is a dream is not revealed to the audience until we see the dreamer awaken; therefore we naturally understand the dream as the film's reality.

The dreamer, Diane Selwyn, is a young girl who moved to Los Angeles after winning a jitterbug contest. Her failed rags-to-riches story is not dissimilar to Maria's. She inherited some money from the death of her aunt and met her ex-girlfriend, Camilla Rhodes on the set of a film. We quickly learn that Diane is depressed. She was not successful like Camilla and their relationship ended painfully for Diane. To add to Diane's heartbreak, Camilla now dates a rich director. The reality of Diane's life is cold and harsh. She came to Hollywood from a small town called Deep River in Ontario to live the Hollywood dream and become a famous actor, but instead she became an out-of-work extra who, upon losing the love of her life, hires a hit-man to murder her. Through the dream in the beginning of the film Diane unconsciously re-writes her Hollywood story--she reclaims her innocence, lives in a beautiful home, falls in love with a sweet, gorgeous woman who is completely dependent on her, and is also a phenomenal actor. The dream revolves around the wish that Camilla's murder was botched and she escaped to fall into the hands of Betty, Diane's alternate ego. This dream gives Diane a chance to live the life

she wanted; this is the Hollywood dream she was promised by the movies. Although the two female characters seem very similar, the difference between Didion's Maria and Lynch's Diane is that Maria fails at real life but is successful in her mental escape and Diane fails at both imaginary and real life. Maria edits her life as though it were a film, viewing her life and then consciously and deliberately changing the way she perceives it. Diane's conflict between her life and her dream is an unconscious one which she has no control over. Her physical body is sleeping while her desires work on their own to create a new life for her. This lack of physical awareness proves Diane's lack of control over her thoughts. Maria makes conscious decisions in every moment to believe she is somewhere else, or that her life is what she wishes it to be. Diane does not have control over her perception of her life any more than she has control over what she is dreaming.

By not giving Diane conscious thought, Lynch seeks to prove that the viewer has an emotional, rather than speculative relationship to film.

The dream is a manifestation of the wishes of the sleeping woman, Diane Selwyn. Lynch speaks to the fantasmatic elements of films by emphasizing the unlikeliness of the events that occur during this section. The dreaminess of this first half of the film is subtly indicated in the mechanical aspects. The camera focuses closely on single subjects, rather than the whole picture. The viewer (not Diane but the viewer of the film itself) sees just half of a doorway and part of the kitchen, just a phone and an ashtray, a close up of a sign, etc. The camera moves around to the other pieces of the room one-by-one, never giving the audience the whole picture, but rather letting the viewer assemble the picture himself. In doing this, the spectator is forced to actively engage with the film like a puzzle or a work of art. However, it also resembles the method in which we dream. The spectator of the film is trapped in Diane's dream. Dreams are

constructed from images that we either create or remember from our daily experiences, and are put together into a story that either makes sense or not, but it is up to the dreamer to interpret the thought after he wakes up. Diane's dream is assembled in the same way, and is also fragmented by clips of mini-dreams that seem to be occurring simultaneously. One minute we are observing Betty and Rita, the next we are in a mobster's office, and shortly after we are watching two men talk at a diner. The interruptions of mini-dreams seem to be Diane remembering herself hiring a hit man in the same diner, and her imagination filling in the unknown aspects of the murder.

The composition of the scenes also reflects a dreamlike, unreal place. The scenes are mended together with smooth transitions; one scene blurs and then fades out as another fades in. Even the background music is dreamlike. The score consists of soft, whimsical notes that are drawn out and slur easily into each other. It is all beautifully harmonized and evokes a feeling of comfort and happiness, even hope. While the music plays soothingly in the background, Betty's life mimics the facility of the music, rolling by easily on the screen. LA is a place full of kind, helpful people, where taxi drivers not only stop willingly to pick up a passenger, but even get out of their car to put the bags in the trunk.

As she says good-bye to the couple, we see her looking for her bags, fearing that someone has stolen them. The shot of Betty looking down and exclaiming "My bags!" builds a sense in the spectator that someone has taken advantage of Betty's naiveté about the big city. In the next instant, though, a reverse shot shows the cab driver placing her bags in the trunk of his car and asking her "Where to?" This is not a Los Angeles where thieves steal the bags of unsuspecting visitors but one in which everyone is eager to help. It is, as Betty says to Rita later, a "dream place."⁶⁶

⁶⁶ Todd McGowan, "Lost on Mulholland Drive: Navigating David Lynch's Panegyric to

In this dream place not even the shock of a home-intruder is a sign of danger. The naive assumption that the strange woman is a friend of her aunt's has no negative consequences on Betty but, on the contrary, her kindness earns her a new friend. Just like a mystery film the two set off to solve the mystery of who Rita is and what happened to her.

As the two sit on the couch Betty persuades Rita to let her solve the problem. She says, "Come on, it'll be just like in the movies; we'll pretend to be someone else." The two phrases here are like keys to Diane's unconscious. The first phrase, "just like in the movies," is obviously ironic because to the spectator, these actors are in a movie, but also because Diane's dream is like a movie. However, the two women are each a manifestation of a part of Diane's unconscious. When Betty tries to convince Rita to pretend to be someone else, it represents Diane's conflict with her own reality. Betty represents the part of Diane's unconscious that wants to believe in "the movies," whereas Rita represents the part that is trying to find the truth. This phrase is clearly significant to Lynch because it is repeated later in the film during Betty's audition scene. The "offhandedly lecherous assigned partner,"⁶⁷ Woody Katz, tells Betty, "Now we're gonna play this nice and close, just like in the movies." In this scene Betty is alone without Rita. Leaving behind the part of her unconscious that represents the dark truth, Diane gives Betty complete control over her desires. In this scene we see Betty transform into a phenomenal actor and nail the audition.

Aside from the internal conflict that the two women represent, Lynch uses the audition scene to make a statement about the film industry. Betty's audition scene mocks the people who continue to breathe life into the industrial aspect of Hollywood and emphasizes the poor quality

Hollywood," *Cinema Journal*, 43. 2 (2004): 67-89, accessed August 24, 2012.

<http://www.jstor.org/stable/1225915>

⁶⁷ George Toles, "Auditioning Betty in Mulholland Drive," *Film Quarterly*, 58.1 (2004) 2-13, accessed August 24, 2012, doi: 10.1525/fq.2004.58.1.2

of films being produced. “The atmosphere is thick with satiric signals that there is no place for art in this gathering, and that if art entered by accident, it would go unrecognized. The vocabulary of fraudulence that defines—and binds together—this club of seasoned hacks is an instant corrosive to any lively intuition or flash of inspiration.”⁶⁸ However, instead of seeing the whole audition go down in flames, we witness a transformation in character as Betty quickly adapts to her predicament. Despite Woody’s determination to manipulate Betty’s naiveté (for purposes relating to his own human desires) by distorting and saturating the scene in a lustful sexuality, Betty reclaims her autonomy and becomes the manipulator, pushing Woody away and then guiding his hand to her buttocks, under her conditions. This scene is a quick re-telling of the small-town-girl-in-the-big-city story: the city preys on young innocence to give itself life. At first Betty is resistant to the inappropriate, over-tanned, handsy actor, but once we see her gain her autonomy she jumps into another personality. Betty’s autonomy in this scene only represents the power of Diane’s unconscious desires once she is not held back by the dark truth which can only be revealed by Rita.

After the audition, Betty and Rita’s plot to solve the mystery gets a huge boost forward, as Betty’s plucky personality slowly becomes tainted with the ugly truth. She finds herself at another audition for the Director, Adam’s film. As they meet eyes intensely for a prolonged dramatic moment, Betty becomes flustered and quickly runs off the set. It seems Diane’s subconscious is being reminded of Adam, the reason she had Camilla murdered. Adam is watching “Camilla Rhodes” audition for his film, but this Camilla seems more like the plucky Betty. Her pale blonde hair and almost shy gestures imply a certain amount of innocence compared to the real Camilla’s dark features and sexy, sinister smile. The distortion of the

⁶⁸ Toles, “Auditioning Betty,” 4.

reality is the unconscious' way of keeping the truth from Diane, but the lurking reminder is still there, forcing Betty to flee from the scene, as well as the memory. She jumps back into her safe place and into her role of the heroine. She can run but cannot hide from her alter ego.

Immediately following the suppressed memory of Adam, the two women break into Diane's apartment and are confronted by Diane's decomposing body. The sound of the world is suddenly replaced with loud, high-pitched notes of a keyboard. Although the actors on the screen are running, all the audience can hear is the music. The loud rumbling cymbals and a dark, ominous bass note lurking behind them provokes emotion from the spectator, rather than the actors themselves. Lynch emphasizes the emotional response by not giving away any details as to who the woman is or why she is dead. By revoking the power from Diane's unconscious and restoring it in the pure emotional response experienced, Lynch argues that the way to break into the unconscious mind is through emotion. Like Diane's unconscious stream of thought is disrupted in her dream, the spectator of the film is also interrupted by this emotional response. At this point the audience is as confused and alarmed as the characters in the film. As the sound overwhelms the audience the characters turn transparent and their movements are lagging before the whole scene gradually fades into another. The combination of the emotional response with the physical illusiveness of the images on the screen emphasizes the dreaminess of what is occurring. Dreams are, after all, images, thoughts and emotions conglomerated into a story, which usually dissolves at least partially after we awake, leaving us with only an emotional response.

The scene in which Betty changes Rita's hairstyle is metaphorical of the unconscious' attempt to force Rita to believe she is someone else. Rita tries to change her own appearance, but Betty tells her to let her do it, taking control. As we learn later, Camilla takes Diane under

her wing and helps her get into a few films as an extra. In this version of Diane's Hollywood story it is Diane who takes Camilla under her wing. Not only has Rita been reduced to a child-like state throughout the film ("...and don't drink all the Coke," Betty says as she leaves for her audition, "be ready to go when I come back...") which is apparent through her constant helplessness and fear, allowing Betty to be the courageous heroine, but now even Rita's physical appearance resembles Diane's. This projection is a way for Diane to reclaim her power over Camilla, which she desperately wants. However, Diane was unable to be this heroine, and the only way she could regain control was by hiring someone to murder Camilla, a fact too terrible to confront. The similarity between the dream's ability to create new personalities for people and the film's ability to do the same is emphasized in this scene as the camera scans over all of the supplies and equipment used to transform Rita's hair. As the couple stares into the mirror looking like twins, Betty tells Rita, "You look like someone else." This statement is reminiscent of Betty's earlier proposition of pretending to be someone else, but signals that they were successful. The two women are no longer pretending--the illusion has become reality, but only in Diane's mind. While he is being taunted to join in this illusion, the spectator is still physically distanced. Lynch allows the spectator to choose whether he wants to believe or remain skeptical by giving him his own camera perspective. The camera is at a position to observe the women looking in the mirror, but only the mirror is being observed so that the physical bodies are not present in this scene, but only the reflection of the two bodies. Therefore, the viewer is reminded that the women on the screen are only images, despite his own desire to believe in the reality of their problems and feel the realness of their emotions. The mirror also reminds us that Diane is not only seeing Diane, but Betty, Diane's ideal ego and Rita, the projection of Diane's innocence and helplessness. Lynch demonstrates that the unconscious conflict that takes place in the mind

when the spectator views a film. Unlike Adorno, Horkheimer, and Benjamin, Lynch believes that the spectator interacts on an unconscious level with a film, both wanting to believe in its reality and reminding himself of the façade. This interaction is only capable by an aware audience member, and not one who is absent-minded.

The mirror scene allows the spectator, and Diane, to view all of the pieces of Diane together. This is the beginning of the mergence of these pieces. From this moment until after the women have made love the two characters are finally merging into one person. When the two women make love, Betty tells Rita, "I'm in love with you," and when Rita does not respond she repeats the words in almost the same tone. Rita does not need to respond because these two characters are simply two manifestations of one person's unconscious--the ideal ego, the naive personality and both the light and dark (good and evil) sides of her. Betty says the statement twice as though it were Rita saying it back to her. The scene fades out, and when it fades back in again we see a close-up of Betty and Rita's hands clasped together, and then half of Betty's face merged with just a one-sided profile of Rita's face so that the two faces align perfectly to create one person. When Rita's half of the face wakes up, it represents the part of Diane's conscious that realizes she is dreaming, and nothing has been real up to this point. Despite Betty's reassurance that "it's OK, it's OK," Rita knows that "no, it's not OK." Betty is resistant to allow Rita to show her the truth, but eventually concedes.

When the magician in Club Silencio tells Betty and Rita everything they see is an illusion, he is speaking directly to the unconscious of the sleeping Diane and also to the audience. In another use of dramatic irony the magician is on a stage performing for an audience like the characters of the film have been performing for the audience. "No hay banda and yet, we hear a band" the magician tells the audience, "if we want to hear a clarinet...listen..." The

phrase, “if we want to,” argues that it is our psychological Self that chooses what is real and what is not real. This direct engagement with art is clearly present in Lynch’s film, therefore maintaining his argument that film is art. It is the responsibility of the spectator of the film to decide whether they want to accept the invitation into an alternate reality or remain detached from it, but only an aware audience will experience this conflict. Diane is not an absent-minded audience member because she experiences the friction that leads to a deeper awareness. Unlike Diane, Maria does not have this conflict. She is able to accept the false reality easily. Not only does she slip into her dream world at will, but she also refuses to question it. It is not the illusion deceiving and playing games on the mind of the spectator, as West would argue, nor does the film give us other possible “truths” to understand about our lives, as Didion would argue; the film simply provokes an internal conflict in the audience. The spectator decides whether to enter into the world or not. Diane represents a conflicted spectator trying to decide whether or not to accept the invitation. Along with arguing that the psychological Self is in complete control over the reality, Lynch argues that this Self thinks in fragmented images and emotions.

Like the magician in *Club Silencio* evokes a pure emotional response in Diane’s unconscious, Lynch’s film evokes a pure emotional response in the spectator. By removing dialogue and background noise in scenes, Lynch emphasizes only music. The music is either wordless, or in another language other than English, which the characters speak. Without understanding the words, the characters are forced to react only to the vibrations of the notes. Lynch is targeting a response on a deeply emotional level. It is this provocation of a pure emotional response that transitions the pair into reality, just as the emotional responses provoked by Lynch’s film transitions the spectator into reality. The women return to their home and Betty literally vanishes, leaving Rita alone and finally allowing her to put the pieces together and

unlock the blue box--the box which holds the truth. Without Betty to assert her dominance over her Rita is free to lead Diane to the truth, and her fears are at last confirmed. Diane wakes up from her dream and the conflict ends leaving the (now) conscious Diane to again face reality. We quickly realize that this reality causes Diane to go insane, as she begins to hallucinate. Finally, after staring at the blue key on the coffee table, the signifier that Camilla is dead, she can not live with herself any longer. She has a last hallucination of the elderly couple from the beginning of the movie chasing her, puts a pistol in her mouth and pulls the trigger. The lady from the theater with blue hair whispers a final word, silencio, and the film ends. Diane's conscious self loses control altogether and she begins to operate on a completely emotional level. Her suicide was controlled by her emotions, rather than rational thought. Lynch's choice to end the film with the suicide of the main character argues that film is art and not simply a vehicle to transport ideals and fairytales. The film has a realistic ending. It does not paint a pretty picture of a heroine who won a conflict between her Self and Society. Rather than boosting the audience's hopes and desires, the film stays true to its goal—to be subjective, to provoke emotion, to enter the unconscious, and to be art.

These three texts show a cultural progression of a society's relationship with film and Hollywood. Lynch answers the concerns of West and Didion, and reconciles the views of Adorno, Horkheimer and Benjamin by bringing the responsibility of life back to individual. He argues, and exceptionally well proves, that film is a legitimate form of art. He presents a simple, fantasmatic plot formula so that the contrast of reality would stand out more, and mocks typical Hollywood productions. The fact that his film has its own place in popular culture disproves Adorno's argument that art can not be considered pop-culture. Lynch's film engages his audience by forcing it to interact directly with the film, so that their own unconscious and pure

emotions decipher a personalized meaning to images flashing across the screen. This individualized reaction to film proves that film does provoke the unconscious mind of the spectator. Film indeed has its place in the world of art.

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