In Dreams: A Freudian Analysis of David Lynch’s Mulholland Dr. and Lost Highway

Thesis

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Abstract

The film art of David Lynch is undoubtedly some of the most bizarre, mysterious, and difficult being made by an American filmmaker. As such numerous interpretations and theoretical lenses can and have been applied to Lynch’s work in an effort to decode, unlock, or make clear and sensible what is otherwise an enigmatic body of work. The project of this essay then, is to bring bear upon Lynch’s work, a theoretical lens and concomitant reading that is both fruitful and largely ignored in scholarship on Lynch’s films. The theoretical lens in mind is that of Freud’s psychoanalysis, in particular his theory of dreams, and to lesser extent, his theory of mourning and melancholia. The objects of study will be two films of David Lynch that lend themselves to interpretation as film representations of dreams. The films in question are *Mulholland Dr.* (2001) and *Lost Highway* (1997).
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Introduction

The film art of David Lynch is undoubtedly some of the most bizarre, mysterious, and difficult being made by an American filmmaker. As such numerous interpretations and theoretical lenses can and have been applied to Lynch’s work in an effort to decode, unlock, or make clear and sensible what is otherwise an enigmatic body of work. The project of this essay then, is to bring bear upon Lynch’s work, a theoretical lens and concomitant reading that is both fruitful and largely ignored in scholarship on Lynch’s films\(^1\). The theoretical lens in mind is that of Freud’s psychoanalysis, in particular his theory of dreams, and to lesser extent, his theory of mourning and melancholia. The objects of study will be two films of David Lynch that lend themselves to interpretation as film representations of dreams. The films in question are *Mulholland Dr.* (2001) and *Lost Highway* (1997).

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\(^1\) When it comes to psychoanalytic approaches to interpreting Lynch’s films, Freud and Dreams have largely passed over for Lacan and fantasy. However, when Freud and his dream theory are invoked for understanding Lynch, such as with Graham Fuller’s “Babes in Babylon” and Calvin Thomas’ “It’s No Longer Your Film”, they are only used superficially. Even the one other reading to really focus on Freud’s dream theory, Jay Lentzner and Donald Ross’ “The Dreams that Blister Sleep” only appeals to *Interpretation of Dreams* and ignores the rest of Freud and his numerous later essays on or involving dreams.
Before diving into a Freudian (dream) analysis of these films it will first be necessary to provide an overview of the Freudian theory that I’ll be relying upon. To that end I’ll begin with an outline of Freud’s models of the human psyche or mind and the drives which motivate it. Next, I’ll outline Freud’s theory of dreams and their mechanics. Following this I’ll turn to an outline of Freud’s understanding of the uncanny and mourning and melancholia; meanwhile taking care to address how and why these aspects of psychic life would appear in dreams.

Having laid out all the Freudian theoretical tools for my analysis, the following chapters will be devoted to the analysis of the films. With one film to a chapter, I will analyze the film from the perspective that it is a film representing a dream(s). The analysis chapters will then provide arguments for why it makes sense to understand the films as dreams and then show how the Freudian mechanics of dreams, along with the appearance and mechanics of mourning and melancholia, allow much of the bizarre and mysterious aspects of the films to be rendered clear and understandable.
Chapter 1: Section A - Outline of Freudian theory

To begin with then, we will outline the Freud’s models of the human mind or psyche. The major components of Freudian theory that I’ll be using to analyze Lynch’s films are Freud’s theory dreams, the uncanny and mourning and melancholia. Freud’s major works on dreams, *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1899) and *On Dreams* (1901) inaugurate his first complete theory of mind. Freud’s *Mourning and Melancholia* (1917) comes a few years before his second and final theory of mind elaborated primarily in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1921) and *The Ego and the Id* (1923). Given the positions of these theoretical components in the progression of Freud’s thought one might expect difficulties resolving Freud’s theories of mind and their relations to his works on dreams and mourning and melancholia. However, and thankfully, Freud never abandons his earlier models but instead chooses to merge his models and to view each as extensions of the others, with their varying strengths and weaknesses as explanations of the mind (Freud, *Ego and Id*, 115). As such, while different works were written using different terms and models of the mind, none of these works are inconsistent or contradictory, in any major way, with Freud’s final and most refined model of the mind. However, whenever I come to a point of change in Freud’s thought I will utilize Freud’s latest revisions to explain the matter in question.
Freud’s first theory of the mind was developed while working out his theory of dreams. With this first theory Freud developed two complementary and ultimately incomplete models of the mind, a topographical model and a dynamic model (Freud, *Interpretation*, 605). The topographical model aims to convey the shape or structure of the mind and the dynamic model aims to convey what motivates the activity of the mind and how that activity works. Freud’s second and final theory of mind encompasses revisions both to the dynamics of the mind and to the structure of the mind. For the sake of convenience then, in the following sections I will cover Freud’s theory of mind in two steps: first are structural models of the mind, the earlier topographical model and then the later structural model. Second, will be the dynamics or motivating forces of the mind and how its structures relate to these forces, the early dynamic model and drives and the revised drives and their relation to the later structural model.

First then is Freud’s topographical model of the mind. This model consists of three systems, the perceptual conscious system (Pcpt-Cs), the pre-conscious system (Pcs) and the unconscious system (Ucs) (Freud, *Ego and Id*, 107,110,111). This model is based on the fundamental premise of psychoanalysis, that is, “The division of the psychic realm into the conscious and the unconscious” systems (Freud, *Ego and Id*, 105). The theoretical division between conscious and unconscious is the result of the observation that there exists psychic material, word-notions, memories, desires, etc., of which the subject is not aware, that is, conscious (Freud, *Ego and Id*, 106/7). Also, by
conscious, Freud simply means consciousness in the normal sense “of everyday opinion” (Freud, *Outline*, 28). The unconscious system then is defined largely by its relationship to the conscious system (Cs) or consciousness, that is, by not being conscious.

However, Freud goes on to elaborate two forms of the unconscious: “one that is latent, but capable of becoming conscious, and one, consisting of the repressed that is not inherently and spontaneously capable of become conscious” (Freud, *Ego and Id*, 107). It is this repressed psychic material, barred from consciousness, populates the unconscious (Ucs) system properly defined (Freud, *Ego and Id*, 106/7). On the other hand, the unconscious psychic material which can inherently and spontaneously become conscious is what populates the pre-conscious (Pcs) system. Beyond the difference in their relation to consciousness, the unconscious and pre-conscious systems are also distinguished in that the pre-conscious has access to “word-notions” and “verbal residues”, that is, to language, where the unconscious does not have this access.

The last system of the topographical model is that of consciousness, which Freud often labels “Pcpt-Cs” or perceptual conscious system. The Pcpt-Cs makes up the outer surface of the psychic apparatus and is spatially closest to the external world (Freud, *Ego and Id*, 110). As one might expect, consciousness is populated by perceptions, both the sense perceptions received from the external world and sensations issuing from within, such as feelings (Freud, *Ego and Id*, 110).

To sum up, we have three systems in an order of distance, or descending depth, from conscious awareness and the external world; they are consciousness (Pcpt-Cs), the
pre-conscious (Pcs) and the unconscious (Ucs). Psychic material is either conscious, something that can become conscious (pre-conscious) or repressed (unconscious). For repressed psychic material to become conscious it must convert itself into something that has already been conscious (Freud, *Ego and Id*, 111). In the course of psychoanalytic therapy this was done by building a bridge between the unconscious material and consciousness in the form of pre-conscious intermediary links, or in other words, through making verbal connections (Freud, *Ego and Id*, 112).

Freud’s second and final structural model of the mind, like the first, is composed of three parts, the ego, the id, and the super-ego. The id is the oldest structure of the mind and the ultimate origin of the other two parts (Freud, *Outline*, 9). The id “contains everything that is inherited, that is present at birth, that is fixed in the constitution—above all, therefore, the instincts...” (Freud, *Outline*, 9). To map the earlier topographical model onto the later structural model, we can think of the id as synonymous with the parts of the unconscious system that cannot become conscious, that is, its repressed psychic materials (Freud, *Outline*, 33).

While not sharply separated from the id, the ego is the second psychic structure to develop and can be thought of as that part of the id which was directly altered or influenced by external world (Freud, *Ego and Id*, 115/6). The ego is the seat of consciousness, perception, and the intellective processes (Freud, *Ego and Id*, 114). Also, the ego is in control of voluntary movement and is tasked with self-preservation (Freud, *Outline*, 9). As such, one can think of the ego as that structure of the mind which
functions as an intermediary between the primal, instinctual demands of the id and the demands of a given situation presented by the external world (Freud, *Outline*, 9). To once again map the topographical model onto the later structural model, the ego begins with the perceptual-conscious system (Pcpt-Cs) and extends to include the pre-conscious system (Pcs) (Freud, *Ego and Id*, 114). As the intermediary between the often contradictory demands of the id and the external world, the ego, and its topographical counterpart the pre-conscious and conscious, is responsible for much of the repression that bars certain psychic material from consciousness, rendering it trapped within the id (Freud, *Ego and Id*, 108). Otherwise put, “The ego represents what may be called reason and calm consideration, in contrast to the id, which harbours the passions (Freud, *Ego and Id*, 116).

The third and final structure of the mind to develop is the super-ego (Freud, *Ego and Id*, 119). Following the pattern established with the earlier structures, the super-ego develops as an outgrowth of the structure that preceded it, in this case the ego. Mapping the topographic model onto the super-ego, Freud ultimately, concludes that the super-ego is present within all three systems, the pcpt.-cs. (consciousness), the preconscious and the unconscious (Freud, *New Intro*, 98). In structural model terms, the super-ego is present from the ego’s conscious awareness all the way down to merging with the unconscious id (Freud, *New Intro*, 98).

The super-ego is the psychic result or “precipitate” of the long period of human childhood and the influence of parental figures on psychic life during that time (Freud, *New Intro*).
Consciously recognized as one’s conscience and as sensations of guilt, the super-ego is built out of the influence of parents and all parental successors and substitutes, such as social ideals, national traditions, teachers, and admired public figures (Freud, *Ego and Id*, 127). As a structure of the mind then, the super-ego takes on the functions of the people (and accompanying norms, values, and ideals) to which it corresponds in the external world (Freud, *Outline*, 92-3). As one might expect from the superego’s associations with conscience and guilt then, its primary functions are to observe ego, give it orders, correct it and threaten it with punishments (Freud, *Outline*, 92-3).

When working harmoniously with the ego, the super-ego is indistinguishable from the ego as they both function in unison to repress psychic material that is deemed unacceptable (Freud, *Outline*, 36). The difference in resistance between the super-ego and the ego in simplest form is that the ego resists the demands of the id when they are irrational and contradict the goal of survival or when the exigencies of reality don’t lend themselves to satisfaction and the super-ego resists the id’s demands when they are contrary to the social, moral, and sexual prohibitions it upholds.

Having outlined the structure of the mind, we can now turn to the forces that motivate the activity of the mind and their relations with the various structures of the mind. For Freud, the forces that ultimately motivate all human activity, mental and physical, are the drives (sometimes translated as instincts) (Freud, *Outline*, 13). Like Freud’s understanding of the structure of the mind, his understanding of drives and
their relations to the parts of the mind has two models. The first model or version of the drives and their relation to the structures of the mind is outlined as follows.

The drives are “the psychic representative of stimuli flowing into the psyche from inside the body” and “represent the somatic [bodily] demands upon mental life (Freud, Outline, 13, Drives, 16). As a stimulus upon the psyche, the source of drives is the body and their stimuli to the psyche, while ebbing and flowing, never ceases to pressure the psyche (Freud, Drives, 14). While the drives present themselves to the psyche in numerous forms, in this first model, all drives can be seen as derivatives or mixtures of two groups of primal or most basic drives. These two primal drive types are “the ego or self-preservation and the sexual drives (Freud, Drives, 18).”

In order to understand how the stimulus that the drives produce affect the psyche we must first briefly touch upon a foundational element of the psychic apparatus, that being, the pleasure principle. The pleasure principle is in essence a tendency that the mind is governed by, though other principles exist, in relation to stimuli (Freud, Drives, 16). This tendency is that the psychic apparatus is devoted to reducing stimuli as much as possible and when able to eliminate stimuli altogether (Freud, Drives, 15). This tendency is motivated due to the fact that stimulus and in particular increases in stimulus are registered by the psyche as unpleasure, while the reduction and or elimination of stimulus is registered as pleasure (Freud, Drives, 15-6). Thus the pleasure principle is psyche’s effort to seek pleasure and avoid unpleasure where pleasure and unpleasure are caused by the ebbing and flowing of drive stimulus.
However, it is worth noting that in Freud’s second model of the drives a revised version of the pleasure principle is also introduced.

With the pleasure principle in mind we can turn briefly to the aim and objects of drives. As Freud writes, “It is better to call the drive stimulus a ‘need’; what removes this need is ‘satisfaction’”, where satisfaction is a reduction or removal of the stimulus or need in question (Freud, Drives, 15). The aim of drive stimulus or needs then is always satisfaction (Freud, Drives, 17). However, while the aim of a need is always satisfaction, many circuitous routes may be followed to reach it. For instance, the objects of a drives, or “that upon which or through which the drive is able to achieve its aim”, is quite variable and can change as many times as is necessary in order to find satisfaction (Freud, Drives, 17). Also, a drive may produce several intermediate or partial aims which, “can be combined and interchanged with one another (Freud, Drives, 17).”

With a picture of Freud’s first model of the drives now outlined we can turn to the first model’s relationships with the structures of the mind. To begin with then, let’s examine how the unconscious, and its structural model counterpart the id, respond to the drives and their stimulus (Freud, Outline, 34-5). The manner in which the id or unconscious responds to and manages the drives and their stimulus, Freud calls, the primary processes (Freud, Outline, 34-5). Freud writes, “The highest tendency obeyed by these primary processes is easy to identify; we call it the pleasure-unpleasure principle (or the pleasure principle for short) (Freud, Formulations, 3-4).” Thus, the primary
processes highest tendency is to react to drive stimulus by seeking to reduce stimulus, thereby seeking pleasure, and to avoid increasing stimulus, thereby avoiding unpleasure.

Also, there are several methods that the unconscious or id uses to respond to drive stimulus in accordance with the pleasure principle. Perhaps most importantly, there is displacement and condensation, which we will explore later in more detail when outlining Freud’s theory of dreams. In brief however, the processes of displacement and condensation are strategies that the unconscious or id utilize to bypass the resistance of preconscious or ego and super-ego, thereby gaining access to consciousness and ideally satisfaction of the drive, that is, a release and reduction of stimulus energy. Displacement allows the stimulus energy of a drive to shift from one object or idea of desire to another (Freud, *Unconscious*, 69). Condensation allows objects or ideas invested with stimulus energy to be compacted or condensed into a new object or idea (Freud, *Unconscious*, 69).

Beyond condensation and displacement, there are several important qualities to the primary processes that the unconscious or id utilizes in its pursuit of pleasure, a reduction or release of drive stimulus. First, the primary processes are timeless, that is, their pursuits take no account of chronological order, the passage of time, or any “relation to time whatsoever (Freud, *Unconscious*, 70).” Second, the primary processes pay “little heed to reality” and will often simply attain whatever is wished for (by a drive need) by substituting psychic reality for external reality, that is, by hallucinating (Freud,
For example, let’s say the unconscious or id is feeling the stimulus of an ego (self preservation) drive, in this case hunger, finding no suitable object of desire in reality to satisfy the need of hunger, the unconscious or Id simply hallucinates something previous eaten that satisfied the same desire. However, given that a hallucination cannot actually provide a real or lasting satisfaction to the hunger drive, as there is no nutrition in hallucination, Freud, calls the primary processes irrational processes (Freud, Interpretation, 601).

As one might expect from the lack of satisfaction that must ultimately result from the irrational and hallucinatory primary processes, the mind developed another set of processes to correct this problem. The solution in question is the secondary processes, according to which the preconscious or ego acts (Freud, Outline, 84). Where the primary processes act according to the pleasure principle, the secondary processes accord with the reality principle. The reality principle is a modified version of the pleasure principle, where the goal of seeking pleasure and avoiding unpleasure remains the same. However, the reality principle, as the name implies, requires that the external reality of the world be taken into account in the pursuit of pleasure and avoidance of unpleasure (Freud, Formulations, 4). As such, the ego or preconscious must incorporate its goal of self preservation, the consequences of its actions, and the conditions of the external world into the calculus of its pleasure seeking decision making (Freud, Outline, 82). Unlike the primary process then, the secondary processes are rational and take heed of reality and time. The secondary processes also include an intellective activity
that decides “whether the attempt to obtain satisfaction is to be carried out or postponed or whether it may not be necessary for the demand of the instinct to be altogether suppressed as being dangerous” (Freud, *Outline*, 84). Now we can see how and why the ego would postpone irrational or dangerous drive demands issuing from the unconscious id.

Freud’s second model of the drives, and the principles by which they operate, retains a great deal from the first model. Like the progression of the structure of the mind, from the topographic to the structural model, the evolution of the drives can be understood as making some refinements and additions to an earlier model instead of discarding it altogether. As to the primary drives two big changes are made. First, the early model’s pair of primary or basic drives, ego or self preservation drives and the sexual drives, are now condensed into a single category called Eros drives (Freud, *Outline*, 14). The energy or stimulus of these drives is referred to as libido (Freud, *Outline*, 15). Second, Freud maintains the symmetry of his model possessing an opposed or competing pair of basic drives by adding a new basic category of drive called the death or destructive drive (Freud, *Outline*, 15). Unlike Eros, there is no analogous term to ‘libido’ for the energy or stimulus of Thanatos (Freud, *Outline*, 15).

Though coined by a follower of Freud, Wilhelm Stekel, the death or destructive drive has come to be commonly referred to as Thanatos. Where Eros ultimately aims to preserve and create life, Thanatos ultimately seeks to reduce life “to an inorganic state. For this reason we also call it the death instinct” (Freud, *Outline*, 14). Among the ways
that death drive or Thanatos is manifested in the external world, Freud includes the
drives for mastery and the will or drive to power (Freud, *Masochism*, 4075). Where it is
easy to imagine how Eros manifests in waking life, say as hunger or sexual desire, etc.,
Thanatos was relatively difficult for Freud to demonstrate, though he found sadism to
be a representative of it (Freud, *Ego and Id*, 130).

The explanation to Freud’s difficulty in distinguishing clear examples of Thanatos
can be understood by a brief discussion of the relationship between Eros and Thanatos.
Freud writes, “a very extensive fusion and amalgamation, in varying proportions, of the
two classes of instincts takes place, so that we never have to deal with pure life instincts
or pure death instincts but only with mixtures of them in different amounts” (Freud,
*Masochism*, 4076). Otherwise put, Eros and Thanatos are so deeply intertwined that
the presence of one will inevitably involve the presence of the other. Moreover, Freud
believed that one of the tasks of Eros was to divert the destructive drive away from the
interior world of mind and self to the external world and objects in it (Freud,
*Masochism*, 4075). This mixing of drives and the task of Eros make perfect sense if we
consider that Eros’ goal of self preservation would conflict with a death drive taking the
self as its object. Hence sadism as Freud’s example of primary example of Thanatos, it is
Thanatos redirected from the object of self destruction to the object of another’s
destruction via the force of Eros. As such, Thanatos is “routinely put at the service of
Eros” (Freud, *Ego and Id*, 132).
Along with the revision of the basic drives, Freud also revised and complicated his picture of the principles by which the drives operate and in particular the pleasure principle. Originally, the pleasure principle was simply the mind’s tendency to seek pleasure and avoid unpleasure where the decrease or elimination of drive stimulus is felt as pleasure and the increase as unpleasure. However, Freud observed two problems this picture of the pleasure principle. First, in the course of his clinical work Freud observed behaviour in his patients that contradicted the logic of the pleasure principle, that is, he saw behavior which directly lead to unpleasure and contained “no potential for pleasure whatever” (Freud, *Beyond*, 58). Second, Freud observed that pleasure principle’s rule of increasing stimulus being felt as unpleasure and decreasing stimulus as pleasure was sometimes contradicted; “sexual excitation is the most striking example of a pleasurable increase of stimulus of this sort, but it is certainly not the only one” (Freud, *Masochism*, 4071).

To correct his theory in light of the first problem, Freud concluded that the behaviours which aimed beyond the pleasure principle must be motivated by a previously unrecognized drive that follows another principle and aims at another goal, other than that of the pleasure principle and pleasure (Freud, *Beyond*, 61). This drive would be in opposition to Eros, the ego (self preserving) and libidinal (sexual) drives, that accords with seeking pleasure and avoiding unpleasure. The drive in question is Thanatos, the death drive (Freud, *Beyond*, 77-8). The principle Thanatos operates by is the Nirvana principle, which seeks to reduce stimulus to nothing, or failing that to
reduce it as much as possible (Freud, *Masochism*, 4071). In contrast to the pleasure principle, the Nirvana principle pays no heed to pleasure or unpleasure, its sole concern is eliminating stimulus entirely (Freud, *Beyond*, 75). Thanatos in accord with the Nirvana principle then, seeks to “conduct the restlessness of life into the stability of the inorganic state” or in other words to reduce the stimulus of life to nothing, that is, to death (Freud, *Masochism*, 4071). The Nirvana principle also explains the connection between Thanatos and the behaviours Freud felt contradicted the pleasure principle (Freud, *Masochism*, 4071).

For example, in the play of his toddler grandson Freud recognized a repeated behaviour that symbolized the recent death of the child’s mother and could only bring the child an unpleasurable experience (Freud, *Beyond*, 75). Freud explained this seemingly bizarre contradiction of the pleasure principle by suggesting the the repetition of the traumatic, unpleasant experience (the death of the child’s mother) was an attempt to master this experience and integrate it into the psyche (Freud, *Beyond*, 75). By mastering and integrating the traumatic experience through repetition the unpleasure causing stimulus it carried would be reduced and eventually eliminated (Freud, *Beyond*, 75). To the extent that this behaviour followed the nirvana principle in seeking to eliminate stimulus, and ignored the pleasure principle’s rule of avoiding unpleasure, it was motivated by Thanatos.

With regard to the second problem, Freud was forced to acknowledge that a core principle of psychic functioning, the pleasure principle, was more complex and
unresolved that previously thought (Freud, *Masochism*, 4072). The original pleasure principle sought pleasure and avoided unpleasure, wherein pleasure is understood to be felt when stimulus decreased and unpleasure when it increased. The revised pleasure principle still seeks pleasure and avoids unpleasure but, recognizes that the relationship between what is felt as pleasure and unpleasure is more complex than a simple quantitative matter of reductions and increases in stimulus (Freud, *Masochism*, 4072). Instead, Freud concluded that pleasure and unpleasure are tied to some kind of qualitative element of stimulus but, the details of this mechanism of stimulus remained a mystery to him” (Freud, *Masochism*, 4072).

It is worth noting that in spite of these difficulties with the pleasure principle, Freud maintained that, “ the description of the pleasure principle as the watchman over our life cannot be rejected” (Freud, *Masochism*, 4073). Moreover, while the original formulation of the pleasure principle was not entirely accurate in equating pleasure with decreases in stimulus and unpleasure with increases, this equation is in general correct (according to Freud) and remains the guiding principle of Eros drives (Freud, *Outline, 10 / Masochism*, 4072). Finally, the ego continues to account for external reality by following a reality principle that is unchanged from the first model (Freud, *Masochism*, 4073).
Chapter 1: Section B - Dream Theory

Having covered Freud’s various models of the psyche and the drives that motivate it we can now turn to an overview of Freud’s theory of dreams. This theory of dreams was first elaborated in what may be Freud’s magnum opus, *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1899). In the course of Freud’s dream researches leading up to *The Interpretation of Dreams* he also developed his early topographical and dynamic models of the mind in order to explain the phenomena he observed in dreams. Though Freud continued to work on his theory of dreams throughout his career, the theory changed surprisingly little (Freud, *On Dreams*, 4). Aside, from acknowledging a single minor exception to his basic theory of dreams as wish fulfilments (in trauma neurosis dreams) the only significant change to Freud’s dream theory was its conversion from being described in terms of the early topographical and dynamic models to the later structural model of the mind (Freud, *On Dreams*, 4). In this section I’ll be covering the following: the primary components of dreams, the relations of dreams to the topographic and dynamic models of the mind, the relations of dreams to the structural model of the mind, the various processes involved in the actual formation of dreams, and finally, the method and assumptions I’ll be using in applying this dream theory to the film’s of David Lynch.

The primary components of dreams are the manifest dream, latent dream thoughts, and the dream-work. Manifest dreams are dreams in the form they appear as upon waking (Freud, *On Dreams*, 16). Latent dream thoughts are the thoughts and
intentions that the manifest dream is a substitute for and which are discovered upon analyzing the dream (Freud, *On Dreams*, 40). Latent dream thought possess all the complexity, creativity and logic of waking thought (Freud, *Interpretation*, 587 / *On Dreams*, 40/41). For instance dream thoughts contain chains of evidence, conditions, digressions and illustrations, counter arguments, etc. (Freud, *On Dreams*, 40). Latent dream thoughts are preconscious (Pcs.) in origin and typically issue from the day immediately preceding the dream, what Freud calls the “dream day” or the previous few days (Freud, *On Dreams*, 35). Being preconscious in origin, the latent dream thoughts are not inadmissible to consciousness but have for whatever reason been neglected or broken off and suppressed by the conscious mind (the Pcs.-Cs. or Ego) while waking (Freud, *Interpretation*, 587). The dream-work is the process that transforms the dream thoughts into the manifest dream we remember upon waking (Freud, *On Dreams*, 16). While the dream-work processes will be covered in greater detail later on a brief summary is in order here. In essence, the dream-work is “an unconscious working-over of preconscious thought processes”, that is, a working over of the dream thoughts (Freud, *Outline*, 39). This working-over by the unconscious mind (the Ucs. or Id) of the dream thoughts occurs via three functions, condensation, displacement, and representation of the dream thoughts in visual and audible form (Freud, *On Dreams*, 40/41). By condensing, displacing and representing, pictorially and aurally, the dream thoughts, the logical links or relations holding the dream thoughts together are stripped away (Freud, *On Dreams*, 40/41). In being worked over by the
unconscious dream-work processes the preconscious dream thoughts are treated by the unconscious mind (the Ucs. or Id) as portions of the unconscious or Id and as the unconscious or Id is without logic only the substantive content of the dream thoughts are manipulated by the unconscious processes of the dream-work (Freud, *Outline*, 39 / *On Dreams*, 40/41). However, the preconscious mind (or Ego and Super-Ego) are also represented in the dream-work via censorship of the unconscious dream-work processes and with a secondary revision of the dream as it is produced by the unconscious dream-work processes but, more on this later (Freud, *Interpretation*, 325, 494/5).

Now we turn to the relations of dreams to the topographical and dynamic models of the mind. In the topographical model two mental agencies are involved in the production of dreams, the preconscious (Pcs.) and the unconscious (Ucs.) systems of the mind (Freud, *Interpretation*, 593, 595, 597). In dynamic model terms, the unconscious (Ucs.) system is the only portion of the mind which functions according to the primary process (Freud, *Interpretation*, 597). In brief, the primary process is a manner of psychic functioning that blindly follows the pleasure principle (the pursuit of pleasure and avoidance of unpleasure) it is timeless, and irrational or non-logical, in short, “It is unable to do anything but wish” or desire (Freud, *Interpretation*, 597). Accordingly, the unconscious processes of the dream-work mentioned above operate via the primary process. In turn, the preconscious system functions according to the dynamic model’s secondary process (Freud, *Interpretation*, 597). The secondary process
operates according to a modified pleasure principle, the reality principle, in doing so the preconscious mind and secondary process prize concerns of survival and external reality and methods of rationality and temporary deferral of pleasure (Freud, Formulations, 4 / Outline, 82/84). The preconscious system and its secondary process functions appear in two forms within the formulation of dreams. First, they appear as censorship of the dream-work’s unconscious primary process functions, in their attempt to construct a dream out of the dream thoughts (Freud, Interpretation, 326, 597). Second, the preconscious and secondary process appears in dream formulation as a secondary revision of the products of the unconscious dream-work processes. This secondary revision is, in essence, a preconscious working over of the products of the unconscious dream-work processes, that is, a dream made of converted and fragmented dream thoughts stripped of their logical relations (Freud, Interpretation, 494/5). As such, the secondary revision alters the dream according to the secondary process adherence to reason by filling the gaps between the now transformed and fragmented dream thoughts, thereby attempting to give the dream an appearance of rationality or coherence (Freud, Interpretation, 494/5). Also, the censorship, like secondary revision, operates on grounds of rationality, censoring the dream-work when its products offend reason (Freud, Interpretation, 494/5)².

² However, as we will see when discussing the relations of dreams to the structural model, dream censorship is motivated by more than secondary process rationality alone.
At the border between the unconscious and preconscious, “where the first passes over to the second, there is a censorship, which only allows what is agreeable to it to pass through and holds back everything else (Freud, On Dreams, 62).” This censorship, which is the same censorship that hinders the unconscious dream-work in formulating dreams, is what we have earlier referred to as repression and deserves a brief elaboration (Freud, On Dreams, 62). Repression, in “its essence consists simply in the act of turning -- and keeping -- something away from the conscious (Freud, Repression, 36).” As the preconscious is the agency or domain of psychic material that can become conscious, repression must keep its offending material out of the preconscious in order to prevent the possibility of it reaching consciousness.

With this understanding of censorship/repression in mind we can frame the production of a dream in the following formula, there is repression, we fall asleep and censorship/repression is relaxed (though not eliminated), a compromise is formed through a dream (Freud, On Dreams, 63). The manifest dream then, is the result of the compromise between a weakened preconscious resistance/censorship and the unconscious’ effort to push its material, the dream thoughts and unconscious wishes, past preconscious censorship/resistance into the preconscious and consciousness via the dream that is remembered upon waking (Freud, New Intro, 18). It should be noted that sleep allows for a weakening of repression for several reasons, among which is the paralysis of the body. While waking the preconscious mind exercises significant energy or effort in resisting unconscious desires which it deems dangerous to survival if acted
upon. During sleep, the paralysis of the body largely eliminates the danger from irrational unconscious wishes or desires as the body cannot act them out while paralyzed. As such, the preconscious mind can afford, to a degree, to relax its repression of the unconscious.

Having outlined the relations of dreams to the topographical and dynamic models of the mind, we can now turn to Freud’s theory of dreams as it appears in terms of his later structural model of the mind. At its most basic, we can think of this conversion as the Id replacing the unconscious (Ucs.) and primary process and the Ego and Super-ego replacing the Preconscious and secondary process (Freud, *Outline*, 34/5). However, it is worth examining this transition in a bit more detail by outlining the various relations between the structures of the mind, the Id, Ego, and Super-ego, and dreams.

As already mentioned, the Id is the structural counterpart to the unconscious (Ucs.) agency and the primary process. The Id has but one eternal goal, which is to satisfy its desires, or wishes (Freud, *Interpretation*, 597). When sleeping, the Id cannot seek fulfilment of its wishes in the external reality beyond the dreamer’s mind as its body is paralyzed while sleeping. The Id’s recourse then, is to find the fulfilments of its wishes in the phantasy of a dream (Freud, *Some Additional*, 4044). Dreams then can be thought of as the fulfilments of unconscious wishes, and in fact Freud, only ever acknowledged one exception to this rule (Freud, *On Dreams*, 4). In the context of dreams as unconscious wish fulfilments, we can now make sense of the unconscious’
relation to and usage of preconscious dream thoughts. Dreams derive their motivation
and content from a varying mixture of preconscious dream thoughts and unconscious
wishes (Freud, *Interpretation*, 591 / *Remarks*, 4032). Freud writes,

“It is possible to distinguish between dreams *from above* and *from below*, provided the
distinction is not made too sharply. Dreams from below are those which are provoked
by the strength of an unconscious (repressed) wish which has found a means of being
represented in some of the day’s residues. They may be regarded as an inroads of the
repressed into waking life. Dreams from above correspond to thought or intentions of
the day before which have contrived during the night to obtain reinforcement from
repressed material that is debarred from the ego” (Freud, *Remarks*, 4032).

From the above remarks, we know that the unconscious uses the preconscious dream
thoughts as a vehicle for representing and fulfilling its wishes in the dream, and that this
is necessary because of the preconscious, or Ego and Super-ego’s, censorship of the
unconscious’ wishes when they are undisguised.

The Ego is the structural model counterpart to the preconscious system and its
secondary process method of functioning (Freud, *Outline*, 34/5). The Ego has two
primary relations to dreams. First, during sleep the Ego has its own wish, which is to
continue sleeping undisturbed by the wishes of the unconscious (Freud, *On Dreams*, 67).
As such, the Ego takes part in formulation of dreams by allowing the creation of the
dream as a compromise with the unconscious, that is, the Ego allows the dream
phantasy to fulfill the wishes of the unconscious instead of disturbing its slumber by
waking and affecting the fulfilment of wishes in the real world (Freud, *On Dreams*, 67).
In this sense, dreams are a double wish fulfilment. Second, the Ego takes part in the
censorship and secondary revision with which the unconscious dream-work must
contend while formulating the manifest dream; as the Ego’s repression (censorship) is still active, though reduced, during sleep (Freud, *New Intro*, 23/4). Furthermore, the Ego’s role in censorship and secondary revision is one of adding, altering or eliminating material from the dream according to the demands of reason (Freud, *Interpretation*, 494/5).

The super-ego continues its waking role of observing, critiquing and punishing within the context of the dream world and performs two significant roles in dream formulation. First, like the ego, the super-ego takes part in censoring the unconscious dream-work processes (Freud, *New Intro*, 34). However, whereas the ego censors dreams on grounds of rationality the super-ego censors on grounds of moral, social, and sexual prohibitions (Freud, *Ego and Id*, 127). Also, as the secondary revision of dreams appears to be solely concerned with the appearance of rationality and not morality or sexuality, it is unlikely that the super-ego plays any part in it (Freud, *Interpretation*, 494/5). Second, in some dreams the super-ego plays a creative and transformative role in the production of the dream. In these cases the super-ego intervenes into the scenario of the dream to punish and criticize the dreamer for his or her offending wishes in a variety of ways (Freud, *New Intro*, 34). As part of the compromise process of dream formation, depending on which part of the mind wins in the contest of desire vs. repression, the super-ego will at points or completely revise the dream scenario to replace the fulfilment of Id wishes with super-ego wishes (Freud, *New Intro*, 34).
As mentioned above, the dream is a compromise that fulfills wishes, of which the dream represents as fulfilled, a variety of unconscious wishes almost always, the ego wish to sleep almost always, and super-ego wishes of punishment and criticism occasionally. In the representation of these wishes, dreams “fall into three classes according to their attitude to wish fulfillment (Freud, *On Dreams*, 60).” The first class represent unrepressed wishes, that is, wishes issuing from preconscious dream thoughts, in a clear undisguised fashion (Freud, *On Dreams*, 60). The second class represent repressed wishes, that is, wishes issuing from the Id, in a disguised fashion and the third class represent repressed id wishes, “with insufficient or no disguise (Freud, *On Dreams*, 60).” The “disguise” involved with the repressed wishes mentioned above, is something to be explored at length later on but, in short, it is the dream-work’s unconscious processes of transforming the dream thoughts in order to represent the Id’s repressed wishes through the dream thoughts and slip them past the ego and super-ego’s censorship into the manifest dream (Freud, *On Dreams*, 65). To elaborate on the relations of dreams to wish fulfilment it is worth briefly going over the apparent and real exceptions to this core notion of Freudian dream theory.

Freud acknowledges three kinds of dreams which either seem to or actually violate his claim that dreams are wish fulfilments. The first, anxiety dreams, are of the type which only appear to violate the wish fulfilment rule (Freud, *Interpretation*, 579). In anxiety dreams, the dream, “can no longer perform its function of preventing an interruption of sleep, but assumes instead the other function of promptly bringing sleep
to an end” (Freud, *On Dreams*, 68). In these cases, the dream represents a repressed wish but for some reason the censorship of the dream-work fails to occur sufficiently or at all and the repressed wish enters the manifest dream in an undisguised fashion (Freud, *On Dreams*, 60). In the absence of censorship or “dream distortion,” a repressed wish is experienced by the ego as anxiety and causes the dreamer to wake (Freud, *On Dreams*, 60)\(^3\).

The second exception, punishment dreams, are also, “only apparent exceptions, to the rule that dreams are directed towards wish-fulfilment (Freud, *Remarks*, 4039).” In these cases, the super-ego reacts to the presence of repressed Id wishes in the dream, which it deems unacceptable, by rejecting and contradicting them (Freud, *Remarks*, 4039). In reacting to repressed Id wishes in the dream, the super-ego, “can go so far as to blot out the immoral subject-matter completely and replace it by something else that serves as an atonement, thought it allows one to see what lies behind” (Freud, *Some Additional*, 4050). In punishment dreams then, what gets represented in the final manifest dream is not the fulfilment of repressed Id wishes but rather, the critical punishing wishes of the super-ego (Freud, *New Intro*, 34). While punishment dreams are typically wholesale replacements of repressed Id wishes by punishing super-ego wishes, super-ego dream censorship frequently punish the dreamer by replacing an individual dream element with its opposite or contrary, thereby denying the Id a

\(^{3}\) Of the classes of dreams in their attitude to wish fulfilment, Anxiety dreams are of the third class (Freud, *On Dreams*, 60). It is also worth noting that repressed wishes in dreams that are disguised only avoid anxiety by virtue of their disguise (Freud, *On Dreams*, 60).
representation of a wish fulfilled and, frequently, creating the representation of something unpleasant (Freud, *Remarks*, 4040).

Finally, the third exception to the wish fulfilment rule are the dreams that sometimes accompany traumatic neuroses (Freud, *Remarks*, 4039). Trauma dreams are the one true exception that Freud grants to his wish-fulfilment rule (Freud, *Remarks*, 4039). In these cases the dream is a replay of the traumatic episode that caused the neurosis. Freud accounts for these dreams by suggesting that they serve a different purpose from normal dreams, that they are the mind’s attempt to work through and integrate the traumatic episode into psyche and thereby reestablish normal functioning (Freud, *Beyond*, 75).

Having covered the primary components of dreams, the relations of dreams to the topographic and dynamic models of the mind, and the relations of dreams to the structural model of the mind, we can now turn to the various processes involved in the actual formation of dreams, or in other words, the dream-work. The dream-work consists of three unconscious Id based processes and two preconscious, or ego and super-ego, based processes which all operate simultaneously and in contest with one another (Freud, *Interpretation*, 503). The unconscious Id processes of the dream-work function according to the primary process and are condensation, displacement and the representation of dream thoughts in visual and aural material and scenarios (Freud, *Interpretation*, 503). These unconscious Id processes of the dream-work are not creative in the sense that the do not generate new content or thoughts in the process of
formulating the dream, instead these processes simply alter and manipulate content which already exists in the mind, that is, the latent dream thoughts and visual and aural memory-traces (Freud, *On Dreams, 50 / Interpretation, 511*). The preconscious or ego and super-ego based processes function according to the secondary process and are the dream censorship and secondary revision. The dream censorship is generally just a static force of resistance that the unconscious Id must contend with in order to get its content into the dream, and not a process actively adding content to or manipulating content in the dream. All the other functions of the dream-work mentioned, Id, ego, and super-ego based alike, have an active role of adding, manipulating, or removing content from the dream (Freud, *Interpretation, 503*). However, it should be noted that the ego and super-ego based components of the dream-work are capable of being creative and generating new content to insert into the dream but, in general the censorship and secondary revision operate uncreatively, like the Id processes, by reworking or manipulating already existing psychic material (Freud, *Interpretation, 494/5*).

In the following, I’ll outline in greater depth the processes that actively shape the manifest dream; they are in order, condensation, displacement, representation, and secondary revision. Condensation is the process of creating a composite structure or object out of multiple objects (Freud, *Interpretation, 340*). Manifest dreams are, “a mass of these composite structures (Freud, *Interpretation, 340*). Composite structures can be formed in a variety of ways but in general the process takes advantage of some
aspect of similarity between two or more objects and then merges these objects into a composite that blurs the differences between the objects and allows the similarity to shine through (Freud, *Interpretation*, 340). A simple example, which could easily occur in a dream, is to take two people who share some similarity of character or appearance and condense these people into a composite person who could be represented as mixtures of the appearances or characters of both (Freud, *Interpretation*, 340). In addition to composite people, condensation can create condensed or composite situations, place, events, images, etc. (Freud, *Interpretation*, 313 / *On Dreams*, 27). In fact, the condensation process is so extensive that every element appearing in the manifest dream is a condensation or composite structure of some kind and as such a representative of multiple dream materials, usually including multiple dream thoughts and memory-traces (Freud, *On Dreams*, 32). Also, since condensation is a primary process function it knows no logic and is unable to recognize contradictions, as such, condensation “is particularly fond of representing two contrary ideas by the same composite structure” (Freud, *Interpretation*, 341).

Displacement is the process that “in the course of the dream work the psychical intensity passes over from the thoughts and ideas to which it properly belongs on to others which in our judgment have no claim to any such emphasis” (Freud, *On Dreams*, 34). By the “psychical intensity” mentioned above we can think of it as a different description of the same kind of psychic energy or stimulus that the drives use motivate the psychic apparatus into fulfilling its goals. Displacement then, transfers psychical
intensity or energy from “what is important but objectionable” in the dream (to the ego or super-ego), “on to what is indifferent”, some element of dream thoughts (Freud, Interpretation, 586). As such, displacement is the chief means of circumventing the censorship of ego and super-ego resistance to unconscious repressed wishes or material by displacing the intensity or energy of these objectionable wishes or material on to some element of the dream thoughts which is indifferent to the censorship (Freud, Interpretation, 586). As one might imagine, displacement is also the chief contributor to the obscure and confused nature of many dreams as repressed meanings or wishes in the dream become hidden behind content which they otherwise have nothing to do with (Freud, On Dreams, 34/5). In addition to occurring as a means of avoiding censorship, displacement also occurs out of consideration for the means of representation in dreams, as the dream thoughts and wishes, “have to be reproduced exclusively or predominantly in the material of visual and acoustic memory-traces... (Freud, Interpretation, 511).” Lastly, displacement varies in amount from dream to dream and is capable of combining with condensation in its manipulation of dream content (Freud, On Dreams, 34/7).

The third Id process of the dream-work are the methods and limitations of representation available to the Id in its conversion of wishes and dream thoughts into the manifest dream content. In its simplest form this transformation is the conversion of abstract wishes and thoughts into visual and aural situations (Freud, On Dreams, 39). In turn, these dream situations or scenarios are built out of visual and auditory
memories already stored in the unconscious mind (Freud, *Interpretation*, 511). This process of representation, like the other Id dream-work processes, is not creative in the sense that it does not create new material for the dreams but, rather it reproduces modified repetitions of visual scenarios and audible speeches or comments present in the dreamer’s memory (Freud, *On Dreams*, 40). However, the dream-work’s methods of representation are very clever in their manipulations of memory, dream thoughts and wishes, which we will see as I turn next to outlining the more interesting and important methods of representation used in the formulation of dreams.

As mentioned earlier, the dream-work, for the most part, strips the dream thoughts of the logical relations or links that hold them together and then manipulates the substantive content of the dream thoughts (Freud, *On Dreams*, 40/1). However, many of the more interesting and important methods of representation in dreams are the Id’s attempts to represent indirectly what it cannot represent directly, that is, logical relations (Freud, *Interpretation*, 330). In fact, Freud likened these attempts by the illogical Id to represent logical relations as a hurdle similar to the one the medium of painting faced in representing the verbal activity of characters in a situation represented in a static image (Freud, *Interpretation*, 330). Instead of painting a representation of language in thought bubbles it learned to represent in its static images the intentions and emotions behind the words of the figures it represents, in the scene of a static painted image (Freud, *Interpretation*, 330).
Logical connections are represented in dreams through various manipulations of time and space in the dream scenario (Freud, *On Dreams*, 41). For instance, to extend Freud’s painting metaphor, logical connection is often represented as an, “approximation in time and space, just as a painter will represent all the poets in a single group in a picture of Parnassus. ... Dreams carry this method of reproduction down to details; and often when they show us two elements in the dream content close together, this indicates that there is some specially intimate connection between what correspond to them among the dream thoughts” (Freud, *On Dreams*, 41).

As seen above, logical connection between dream elements is represented through simultaneity or approximation in time and space (Freud, *Interpretation*, 330 / *On Dreams*, 41). Another kind of manipulation of space and time to represent logical connection is the dream-work’s tendency to, wherever possible, convert temporal relations into spatial relations (Freud, *New Intro*, 32). To give an example of this type of conversion consider the following,

“The fact of a dream referring to childhood may also be expressed in another way, namely by a translation of time into space. The characters and scenes are seen as though they were at a great distance, at the end of a long road, or as though they were being looked at through the wrong end of a pair of opera-glasses” (Freud, *Interpretation*, 417).

Another kind of logical relation to be indirectly represented by the dream-work are causal relations which, are represented in several ways. First,

“A causal relation between two thoughts is either left unrepresented or is replaced by a sequence of two pieces of dream of different lengths. Here the representation is often reversed, the beginning of the dream standing for the consequence and its conclusion for the premise” (Freud, *On Dreams*, 42).
In the above case, causality is indicated in chronological reverse, where in a cause and its effect are translated into pieces of the dream and the effect piece of the dream is followed by the piece that is its cause. In addition to reversing the chronological order of dream material to represent causality, reversal “is one of the means of representation most favoured by the dream-work” and is often used to reverse the subject matter of a dream in order to represent a wish as fulfilled (Freud, *Interpretation*, 342). For example, often the simplest way fulfill a wish concerning a painful or frustrating situation is just to reverse it such that “x” never happened (Freud, *Interpretation*, 343).

Second, a causal relation can be represented by the dream transforming one dream element, a person, thing, etc., into another dream element where the first element is meant to be the cause and the second element the effect (Freud, *Interpretation*, 331/2). However, transformations such as these are apparently only representations of causality when the transformation “actually occurs before our eyes and not if we merely notice that one thing has appeared in the place of another” within the dream (Freud, *Interpretation*, 331/2).

As mentioned earlier with condensation being particularly fond of representing a thing and its opposite in one composite structure, the logical relation of “‘either--or’ is never expressed in dreams, both of the alternatives being inserted in the text of the dream as though they were equally valid” (Freud, *On Dreams*, 42). When interpreting dreams then,
“if an uncertainty can be resolved into an ‘either-or,’ we must replace it for purposes of interpretation by an ‘and,’ and take each of the apparent alternatives as an independent starting point for a series of associations” (Freud, *On Dreams*, 28).

As one might expect, the logical categories of contraries, contradictions, and negations are almost always ignored in the representation of dreams; to the extent that Freud claims that “‘No’ seems not to exist so far as dreams are concerned” (Freud, *Interpretation*, 334). Instead, “no” is combined with “yes” in a condensation or followed by a yes (Freud, *Interpretation*, 334). As such, it is impossible to tell “at first glance whether any element [of the manifest dream] ... is present in dream-thought as a positive or as a negative” (Freud, *Interpretation*, 334). However, Freud does admit of at least two ways that dream-work attempts to represent contradiction in indirect ways. First, if the dream thoughts express a contradiction between two desires or wishes, this conflict of will may be represented by “the sensation of inhibition of movement which is so common in dreams” (Freud, *On Dreams*, 42). Second, contradiction is sometimes represented in dreams by the presence of absurd elements in the manifest dream (Freud, *On Dreams*, 43). However, absurdity in dreams more often reflects the presence of “any criticism, ridicule or derision which may be present in the dream-thoughts” (Freud, *Interpretation*, 452).

Another clever method of dream-work representation is to utilize the form of the dream itself to express its “hidden subject-matter” the dream thoughts or repressed wishes (Freud, *Interpretation*, 347). For instance, a lack of visual or aural clarity in the dream content may be used to represent “part of the material which instigated the
dream,” say, a confusion or indecision over some matter of concern in the dream thoughts (Freud, *Interpretation*, 347). Another instance of dream form expressing hidden dream meaning are the phenomena of dreams within dreams (Freud, *Interpretation*, 353). Freud writes,

“What is dreamt in a dream after waking from the ‘dream within a dream’ is what the dream-wish seeks to put in the place of an obliterated reality. It is safe to suppose, therefore, that what has been ‘dreamt’ in the dream is a representation of the reality, the true recollection, while the continuation of the dream, on the contrary, merely represents what the dreamer wishes. To include something in a ‘dream within a dream’ is thus equivalent to wishing that the thing described as a dream had never happened” (Freud, *Interpretation*, 353).

As seen above, the dream within a dream is a representation of some troubling or unhappy event that happened in reality to the dreamer and the dream that occurs after waking, within the dream, is a representation and fulfilment of the wish that the unhappy event had never occurred.

While logical relations of the dream thoughts are largely ignored and stripped from the dream thoughts one relation, and only one, “is very highly favoured by the mechanism of dream-formation; namely, the relation of similarity, consonance or approximation--the relation of ‘just as’” (Freud, *Interpretation*, 335). Given the dream-work’s reliance upon condensation, the relation of similarity is both representable and favored by the dream-work, for the composite structures described earlier are just the sort of creation one might expect as a representation of similarity in a visual medium like dreams (Freud, *Interpretation*, 335/6). Similarity, consonance, and the possession of common attributes are all represented in dreams through forms of unification or
condensation (Freud, *Interpretation*, 336). Representation in dreams via unification or condensation can occur with any kind of dream material whether it be locations, things, people, etc. (Freud, *Interpretation*, 336).

Given that “dreams are completely egotistical” and deal largely with representations of the dreamer him or herself and with figures of people in the dreamer’s life, condensations of people, in particular involving the dreamer him/herself, are common (Freud, *Interpretation*, 338). Dreams are so egotistical that Freud claimed that,

“Whenever my own ego does not appear in the content of the dream, but only some extraneous person, I may safely assume that my own ego lies concealed, by identification, behind this other person; I can insert my ego into the context” (Freud, *Interpretation*, 338/9).

In the above quote the term “identification” is another word used to describe a condensation or composite structure in the dream; in this case a composite person with the appearance of one person and the dreamer hidden within it in some fashion. Through condensations the dreamer can, and typically does, appear several times within the manifest dream, appearing as him/herself and as others (Freud, *Remarks*, 4041). In these representations of the dreamer it is common for the dreamer to have separated off parts of him/herself and represented them as separate people (Freud, *Interpretation*, 419). For example, neurotic dreamers often represent their neurosis or “sick personality” as a separate person in dreams and dreamers generally separate off their super-ego from their ego and represent their super-ego or “observing, critical,
punishing agency (an ego ideal)” as a separate person from the dreamer and their ego (which contains one’s sense of self identity) (Freud, Remarks, 4041).

Given the commonality of the dreamer fragmenting into parts of itself and or being represented multiply in dreams, it is worth going over the various ways in which people and in particular the dreamer are represented as condensed in dreams. A condensation of two people can be such that only one person is represented in the visual appearance of the person while the relations or situations in which this condensed figure appears are appropriate to the other visually hidden person. A condensed figure could be made up of visual features all the people being condensed. Alternatively, a condensed figure could look and act like one person but have the name of another. Also, a condensed figure could use the gestures or speech of one person but look like another. In all these ways, and likely many more, multiple people can be condensed to create composite figures in dreams.

Finally, one more important aspect of dream representation is the manner in which affects are represented in dreams. Affects can be altered by the dream-work in several ways, such as being reversed, reduced to nothing, or left unaffected (Freud, Interpretation, 477). Most importantly however, affects are the aspect of the dream thoughts and wishes which are least influenced by the alterations of the dream-work (Freud, Interpretation, 468). As such, affects are often useful tools for interpreting dreams as the affects the dreamer experiences in relation to specific dream elements are usually appropriate to the dream thoughts and wishes disguised behind those
dream elements (Freud, *Interpretation*, 468). For example, imagine that a dream thought is “I hate person ‘x’”, next the dream-work displaces this thought onto another person one is indifferent to, due to censorship, or even reverses the affect. Now, the manifest dream would have the dreamer experience the feeling of hate towards someone who is undeserving of the affect or experiencing an even more confusing and intense feeling of love towards someone the dreamer does not love. Such alterations are typical and the affects and patterns of dream-work transformation involved in them provide clues to uncovering the dream thoughts and wishes hidden in manifest dreams.

The last process to cover in the dream-work is the process of secondary revision. Secondary revision is a function of the ego that operates according to the reality principle covered earlier (Freud, *Interpretation*, 494). As such, the secondary revision operates on some of the same grounds that the ego does in waking life, in this case, it revises the dream according to the demands of reason or intelligibility (Freud, *Interpretation*, 495). The other primary concerns of the ego and reality principle, external reality and survival, play no role in secondary revision, likely because, the body is paralyzed and thus physically inactive in the external world during sleep (Freud, *Interpretation*, 494/5). Given that the Id’s dream-work processes strip the dream thoughts of most of the logical relations connecting them to one another, the dream becomes populated with gaps and voids in and between its dream structures (Freud, *Interpretation*, 494/5). The alterations that secondary revision makes to the dream then, are to fill in the gaps and voids in the dream such that the dream is given, when
successful, the appearance of an intelligible whole and coherent scenario (Freud, *Interpretation*, 503). However, it should be noted that the secondary revision is never entirely successful in making the whole manifest dream coherent as it inevitably misunderstands or ignores the hidden and repressed wishes and thoughts behind the manifest dream content, that have been displaced, condensed, and converted to visual and audible representations (Freud, *On Dreams*, 48/9). Also, the material that the secondary revision uses to create its dream patches are in general taken from the preconscious and unrepressed dream thoughts of the day before, though, in rare cases, it is capable of creating brand new material (Freud, *Interpretation*, 494/5).

**Chapter 1: Section C - Dream theory applied to Film**

Having now outlined all the major elements of the dream-work and Freud’s dream theory in general, we can turn to addressing a few problems and assumptions with regard to applying Freud’s dream theory to David Lynch’s films and interpreting those films as dreams in film form. Freud would in general question the possibility of successfully interpreting dreams without access to the dreamer and their various associations to the elements of the dream (Freud, *New Intro*, 10). However, there are good reasons for dismissing Freud’s concern and it is Freud himself who supplies the line of thinking that leads out of this problem. Freud writes, “since I had some knowledge of the dreamer’s personal relations, I was able to interpret certain pieces of it
independently of her” (Freud, *Interpretation*, 357)⁴. Freud thus allows for the possibility of at least a partial dream interpretation given that one has knowledge of the dreamer’s life and personal relations. This knowledge of the dreamer in conjunction with knowledge of the various mechanics and methods of dream formation would allow the interpreter to infer at least some of the dream thoughts and wishes, obscured by the Id’s displacements, condensations, and representations, without the help of the dreamer. It is the intent of this project to make the same sort of partial interpretation of film-dreams that Freud would make of actual dreams. However, to do so requires a few assumptions and translation of human dream analysis into the terms of film analysis.

**Assumptions and Translations**

My assumptions and translations are as follows. The dreamer of a film that represents dreams is the protagonist of the film. Film representations of dreams are manifest dreams, that is, dreams that have completed their dream-work transformation and are in the form they appear in upon waking. Film representations of dreams will not be perfectly analogous to actual dreams; beyond the differing mechanics of celluloid, projectors, cameras, and screens versus human brains, minds, bodies, and perceptions, film representations of dreams will differ from actual dreams in their usage

⁴ Freud may well have objected to the project of using his dream theory as a tool to analyze films as a kind of dream or dream analogue but, it seems a risk worth taking in the attempt to give a 114 year old theory some new life.
of meaning obscuring displacement. Displacement will, in general, be less present in film representations of dreams than in actual dreams as a certain minimum level of film coherence is required for a film to be successful as a commodity and source of popular entertainment. Beyond an attenuated usage of displacement, film representations of dreams will conform to many, though not all, of the same mechanics of dream-work and methods of representation that actual dreams utilize. At least a partial interpretation of film representation of a dream will be possible by virtue of the film presenting its viewer or interpreter with privileged access to the protagonist’s dream, given that part or all of the film is the representation of that dream. Also, aiding interpretation of film representations of dreams will be any sections of the film that represent the protagonist and dreamer in their waking life as such sections would give the interpreter knowledge “of the dreamer’s personal relations...” (Freud, *Interpretation, 357*). Furthermore, to the degree that a film gives the viewer / interpreter privileged access to the protagonist’s dream and access to the protagonist’s waking life, in conjunction with a knowledge of the mechanics and methods of dream formation, the interpreter should then be able to infer a great deal of hidden wishes, thoughts, and connections in the film’s representation of a dream(s).

**Dream Analysis - Goals**

Each film analysis will include the following goals. First, outlining the evidence in the film supporting the conclusion that the film is in part or in its entirety a
representation of a dream(s). Second, outlining the sections of the film which provide information concerning the dreamer’s real waking life relations. Third, inferring the dreamer’s wishes within the dream(s) by analyzing the dreamer’s real life relations in conjunction with what happens in the dream(s) Fourth, outlining instances where the film dreams correspond with the dream-work mechanics and methods of representation of Freudian dream theory; instances being particular scenes, characters, shots, locations, etc. which fit the dream theory. Fifth, while examining these instances of correspondence I’ll utilize Freud’s dream theory to explain the mysterious, confused, nonsensical, or absurd aspects of these parts of the film. Finally, I hope to provide a convincing and coherent explanation to film representations of dream(s) as a whole which render the film’s confusing elements comprehensible.

Chapter 1: Section D – Freud’s theory of mourning and melancholia

Freud’s theory of mourning and melancholia was first formulated in his essay “Mourning and Melancholia”, written in 1915. At this point Freud had already begun to transition in his thinking from his topographical model of the mind to his later structural model (Bradbury, 212/213). As such, the presentation of “Mourning and Melancholia” required only a few significant changes when reformulated in “The Ego and the Id” his 1923 work that fully elaborated his structural model. In this section then, I will outline Freud’s theory of mourning and melancholia in the following steps. First, I will outline
mourning and melancholia as it is first formulated. Second, I will put mourning and melancholia into the terms of Freud’s structural model and examine a few significant changes to mourning and melancholia that Tammy Clewell suggests may follow from the structural model. Third, I will briefly outline the relationship between mourning, melancholia and dreams and how I intend to utilize mourning and melancholia to analyze Lynch’s films.

To begin with then, let’s establish an outline of mourning. For Freud, mourning is the normal, non-pathological, reaction process to the loss of “love-object” (Freud, *Mourning*, 203). By “love-object” Freud means, “a beloved person or an abstraction taking the place of the person, such as fatherland, freedom, an ideal and so on (Freud, *Mourning*, 203).” The cause of mourning then, the loss of a love-object, typically comes in the form of the death of a loved one (Freud, *Mourning*, 205). The mourner is conscious of the mourning process, that is, they know what they’ve lost and that they are suffering due to this loss. The conscious experience of the mourning process manifests as, “a profoundly painful depression, a loss of interest in the outside world, the loss of the ability to love, the inhibition of any kind of performance…” (Freud, *Mourning*, 204).

As for the psychic mechanics of mourning, the mourning process is one of detaching libido from the lost love object, where libido is the psychic energy that the Eros drives produce and attach to objects (Freud, *Mourning*, 204 / *Outline*, 15). The process of detaching libido from the lost love-object is a piecemeal progression of reality
testing the memories and expectations involving the lost love-object (Freud, *Mourning*, 204/5). In Freud’s words the process is as follows,

“To each individual memory and situation of expectation that shows the libido to be connected to the lost object, reality delivers its verdict that the object no longer exists, and the ego, presented with the question, so to speak, of whether it wishes to share this fate, is persuaded by the sum of narcissistic satisfactions that it derives from being alive to loosen its bonds with the object that has been destroyed” (Freud, *Mourning*, 215).

As seen above, the mourning process’ detachment of libido from the lost object is motivated by the ego’s narcissism and occurs via working through each of the individual memories and expectations associated with the lost object. In addition, this process of detaching libido from the object is lengthy, deeply painful, and requires a great deal of energy to perform (Freud, *Mourning*, 212). As such, the lack of interest in the external world and activity of any kind other than mourning is understandable given the excessive amount of time and energy that mourning requires. Finally, however, the mourning process comes to an end when the investment of libido has been successfully detached from the lost object and is now free to be reinvested in or reattached to a new love-object (Freud, *Mourning*, 212). However, Freud does allow for the possibility of mourning becoming pathological and yet remaining distinct from melancholia (Freud, *Mourning*, 210). In this intermediate form of grief between mourning and melancholia, that Freud simply calls “pathological mourning”, the key elements are, like regular mourning, the loss of a love-object and the mourner being conscious of the loss but, unlike regular mourning, there is also ambivalence toward the lost object that manifests as self-reproaches (Freud, *Mourning*, 210). This new addition, ambivalence, refers to
the mixture of love and hate, or Eros and Thanatos in the structural model, in one’s attachment to and relationship with a loved one or object.

Melancholia is an abnormal, pathological, reaction to the loss of a love-object that substitutes the mourning process in those with a “pathological disposition (Freud, *Mourning*, 203). Though similar to mourning, there are several differences between mourning and melancholia. For instance, unlike mourning, the loss of the love-object is often “more notional in nature. The object may not really have died, for example, but may instead have been lost as a love-object (as, for example, in the case of an abandoned bride) (Freud, *Mourning*, 205).” In mourning the mourner is conscious of the process he or she is going through, in melancholia however, the process is largely unconscious and thus the melancholic is unaware of parts of his or her condition (Freud, *Mourning*, 205). To elaborate, with the melancholic, the loss of the love-object is withdrawn from consciousness, in the sense that the melancholic may be unaware of what or who has been lost or, “he knows who it is, but not what it is about that person he has lost (Freud, *Mourning*, 205).” As for the conscious experience of melancholia, the melancholic experience is the same as that of mourning, painful depression, withdrawal from the world, etc. but, with the addition of one important quality, that is a loss of self-esteem manifesting in self-recreminations and self-reproach (Freud, *Mourning*, 205/6). Freud expresses this distinction eloquently when wrote, “In mourning, the world has become poor and empty, in melancholia it is the ego that has become so” (Freud, *Mourning*, 205).
The psychic mechanics of melancholia are a bit more complicated than mourning in that where mourning has only one core component, the loss of the love object, melancholia has three, the loss of the love object, identification and ambivalence (Freud, Mourning, 217). Like with mourning, a precondition of melancholia, is that an object-choice had been made, “a bond had been formed between the libido and” and the object, and something occurred that caused the object to be lost; whether it be death, betrayal, breaking up, etc. (Freud, Mourning, 209). Where the mourning and melancholia begin to diverge is in what happens to the libido that had been invested in the love-object. On one hand, in mourning, the libido is eventually detached from the object and then reinvested or reattached to a new love-object. On the other hand, in melancholia, the libido is not displaced onto a new object after having been detached, instead, the libido is, “drawn back into the ego. But it did not find any application there, serving instead to produce an identification of the ego with the abandoned object (Freud, Mourning, 209).” Through identification, the melancholic gives up his or her love-object only to resurrect that object within ego; it is as if a part of the ego had reshaped itself in the image of what was lost in order to hold on to that object (Freud, Mourning, 209).

In addition to the loss of a love-object, and identification with that object, melancholia also requires ambivalence (Freud, Mourning, 217). For Freud, ambivalence refers to the mixture of love and hate, or Eros and Thanatos in the structural model, in one’s attachment to and relationship with a loved one or object. In the case of
melancholia then, at some point in the melancholic’s relationship their love-object or loved one, “through the influence of a real slight or disappointment on the part of the beloved person, that object-relation had been subjected to a shock” (Freud, *Mourning*, 209). This disappointment, or series of disappointments, with the love-object, allows the relation of love for the object to shift in to a mixture of love and hate for the object.  

A series of “battles of ambivalence” play out within the unconscious mind of the melancholic, “in which love and hatred struggle with one another,” one to free libido from the object and the other to maintain libido attachment to the object (Freud, *Mourning*, 216). In melancholia, the culmination of these battles is that libido flees the object and returns to the ego where it can maintain its attachment by resurrecting the object via identification with the ego (Freud, *Mourning*, 216). At this point, after identification with the lost object is established, melancholia can become partially conscious; the melancholic then consciously experiences his melancholia as, “a conflict between one part of the ego and the critical agency” (Freud, *Mourning*, 216). In other words, the melancholic consciously expresses hate via insults, humiliations, recriminations, etc. toward him or herself (Freud, *Mourning*, 211). However, the melancholic does not know that these self-recriminations are in fact veiled abuse directed at the love-object that had disappointed them and who now resides, through identification, within the melancholic him or herself (Freud, *Mourning*, 208). Also, while mourning works toward its conclusion by reality testing, melancholia works towards its end by loosening the bonds that attach the libido to the narcissistic identification that
has replaced the love-object (Freud, *Mourning*, 204/217). Melancholia accomplishes this detachment through the episodes of ambivalent self-abuse, which the melancholic’s critical agency directs towards the melancholic’s own ego (Freud, *Mourning*, 204). Assuming that the melancholic doesn’t kill him or herself before successfully detaching libido from their identification with the love-object, the process of melancholia will typically end like mourning; with a freed libido that is now able to attach to a new object and an exit from pathology. However, melancholia does have another possible outcome, where in, it transforms, “into the symptomatically opposite state of mania” (Freud, *Mourning*, 213). In the manic person, the ego has overcome, “the same ‘complex’ to which the ego probably succumbs in melancholia...” and “demonstrates his liberation from the object from which he had been suffering by pouncing on his new object-investments like a ravenous man” (Freud, *Mourning*, 214).

Lastly, an interesting aspect of melancholia is that it allowed Freud a way of explaining suicide, which had previously been a mystery to him (Freud, *Mourning*, 211/212). The mystery of suicide was, the contradiction between the “great self-love of the ego” that drives it to survive and the self-extinction of suicide which the ego shouldn’t be able to accept (Freud, *Mourning*, 211). As one may have already guessed, melancholia allowed a way out of this contradiction through the phenomena of identification. To elaborate, melancholics resurrect their lost love-object within the ego through identification and then direct attacks and abuse toward their ego, as a proxy for attacking the lost love-object which had died, or betrayed, or abandoned them
(Freud, *Mourning*, 211/212). In this way suicide, for the melancholic, isn’t really suicide or killing the self, rather it is a kind of murder, killing the identification of the lost love-object within the ego (Freud, *Mourning*, 217).

Having outlined the mourning and melancholia concepts as they are first presented in Freud’s “*Mourning and Melancholia*” essay, we can now turn to putting these concepts in terms of Freud’s structural model. Following this will be a brief examination of a handful of changes to the mourning and melancholia concepts that Tammy Clewell suggests are implied by Freud’s structural model. Translating mourning and melancholia into the terms is relatively simple and requires noting only three significant points of translation. First, the process of identification observed in Freud’s work on mourning and melancholia was greatly expanded in importance within the structural model as the ego came to be understood as an agency which “very largely develops out of identifications” and that the agency of the super-ego is formed through the first identifications made in life, usually ones parents (Freud, *Ego and Id*, 138). Second, the self-abuse, self-recriminations, and hate that was expressed by the critical agency toward the ego in melancholia becomes the abuse of that the super-ego directs toward the ego (Freud, *Ego and Id*, 120). Third, in the structural model the drives transition from an opposed pair of ego drives (or survival drives) and libido drives (or sexual drives) to the opposed pair of Eros drives (including ego and libido drives) and Thanatos drives (the drive toward destruction, mastery, and the stillness of death, etc.). As such, in the melancholic, when libido becomes detached from the lost love-object
and redirected inwardly to the ego where an identification is erected, the intertwined presence of Eros and Thanatos within this libido become separated (Freud, *Ego and Id*, 145). The Eros libido attaches to the identification in the ego and the Thanatos energy or hatred is taken up by the super-ego (Freud, *Ego and Id*, 145). In fact, the amount of Thanatos energy absorbed by the super-ego large enough that Freud refers to the super-ego of the melancholic as a “rallying-ground for the death drives [or Thanatos drives]...” (Freud, *Ego and Id*, 144, my addition in brackets).

In Tammy Clewell’s essay “*Mourning Beyond Melancholia: Freud’s Psychoanalysis of Loss*” Clewell claims that Freud opens up the possibility of three important changes to the mourning and melancholia concepts. These changes follow from structural model additions to psychoanalysis, presented in “*The Ego and the Id*”, such as the notion that the ego is largely formed through the process of identification and that identification may be the only way that objects can be abandoned by the psyche (Clewell, 62). First, Clewell suggests that with “*The Ego and the Id*” the distinction of melancholia as a process incorporating identification and of mourning as one without identification collapses (Clewell, 62). Clewell believes this to be the case because the structural model no longer offers the option of abandoning love-objects without utilizing identification (Clewell, 62). Second, mourning under the structural model no longer has a definitive end, instead, an acute phase of grief is followed by an attenuated as the lost object is preserved within the ego through identification (Clewell, 62). Clewell offers the evidence of a 1929 letter by Freud wherein he explicit states that
mourning is interminable when generalizing from the death of his daughter nine years earlier (Clewell, 62). Third, as Clewell suggests that melancholia and mourning are no longer strictly distinct processes, if it is true of identifications in mourning that they endure throughout life and that the mourning process never truly ends, there is no reason to suspect that melancholia doesn’t similarly make identifications and thus never truly end. The structural model of mourning and melancholia, with Clewell’s input in mind, is one where mourning and melancholia share the loss of the love-object and identification but, only melancholia includes the element of ambivalence and super-ego self-abuse (Clewell, 62/64).

To summarize Freudian grief after taking into consideration structural model changes and Clewell’s suggestion, we have three categories, mourning, pathological mourning, and melancholia. Mourning’s key components are that it includes a loss of a love-object, identification with the lost object, and the mourner is conscious of the process. Pathological mourning’s key components are loss of a love-object, identification with the lost object, ambivalence toward the object, and the mourner is conscious of the process. Finally, melancholia’s key components are that there is a loss of a love-object, identification with that object, ambivalence towards that object, and the melancholic is unconscious of what has been lost.

**M and M applied to films**

In order to apply Freud’s theory of mourning and melancholia to film I will attempt to make a diagnosis of the protagonist of the film, if suitable, as fitting within
one of the categories of mourning or melancholia. To make this diagnosis I will attempt to identify several criteria by asking the following question of the film’s protagonist. First, has he or she lost a love object? Second, has he or she identified with their lost love object? Third, is he or she conscious or unconscious of what has been lost? Fourth, is he or she ambivalent in their feelings toward the lost love object? If all four of these questions can be clearly answered then a diagnosis will a kind of mourner, melancholic, or neither will be possible. If the protagonist is a mourner or melancholic I will then attempt to discover what the criteria of mourning and melancholia present in the film do to explain about the film either in support of or in addition to Freud’s dream theory.
Chapter 2: Section A – Mulholland Dr. – Intro to dream analysis

In this section I’ll provide an analysis of *Mulholland Dr.* using Freud’s theory of dreams and his theory of mourning and melancholia, augmented with the suggestions of Tammy Clewell outlined above. The path traveled in communicating the analysis will take the following steps. First, I will give a brief synopsis of my analysis of the film in terms of dream theory and mourning and melancholia. Second, I’ll examine various scenes and shots in the film and provide evidence for my dream theory reading while progressing through the plot of the film, from start to finish. Third, I’ll provide further evidence of the film adhering to the mechanics and methods of representation in Freudian dreams. Fourth, I’ll examine the evidence for reading the film in terms of mourning and melancholia and then outline what this reading explains about the film in support of or in addition to the earlier dream theory reading.

In terms of dream theory, *Mulholland Dr.* can be summarized as a sequence of three dreams dreamt by the film’s protagonist, Diane Selwyn. The first dream consists of the opening shot of the film and is an anxiety dream that ends with Diane waking. After waking briefly, Diane returns to sleep, with the camera in her point of view, falling into a pillow and fading to black. The second dream begins as the camera fades back in to a close-up shot of the *Mulholland Dr.* road sign; this is a normal dream in that it is full
of and produced for the sake of the Id’s wish fulfillments. Also, it should be noted that
the second dream’s use of condensation has caused our protagonist dreamer Diane, to
be named Betty and her former lover Camilla Rhodes to be named Rita. The transition
to the third dream begins when Diane, as Betty, and her former lover Camilla, as Rita,
enter Club Silencio. This transition from the second to the third dream does not
interrupt sleep instead, it seamlessly transitions from one dream to the next. The film
remains within this third dream until it eventually returns to Club Silencio and ends.

This third dream is a punishment dream and as such is orchestrated by a super-
ego overflowing with Thanatos. The punishment dream forces Diane to relive the
memories of the key events that occurred in her waking life and that led up to her
dream-day which, she rejected and reversed in the first and second dreams\(^5\). This
pivotal sequence lasts for roughly fifteen minutes, of a two and half hour long film, and
provides virtually all the information concerning Diane’s real world life and relations
that are necessary to understand and interpret her dreams, with the help of knowledge
of the methods and mechanics of dreams. As we will see, many of the people, events,
and wishes or desires revealed in this sequence become the building material for
Diane’s first and second dreams which are in large part modified repetitions of elements
presented in this series of Diane’s memories. Also, the modified repetition of elements
from the memories of waking life (i.e. situations, locations, people, etc.) are precisely
what we would expect to see in dream’s that operate according to Freudian dream

\(^5\) The term “dream-day” refers to the day immediately preceding the night of dreaming (Freud,
\textit{On Dreams}, 35).
mechanics as the Id’s dream-work cannot create new content but, rather it only manipulates the already existing content of memories (Freud, *On Dreams*, 40). It should be noted that so far, I have merely asserted that the remembering sequence mentioned above provides real or accurate access to Diane’s waking life and relations, in what is otherwise a series of dreams. However, there are several reasons in line with Freudian theory for concluding that the remembering sequence does accurately represent Diane’s real life that I will cover in detail in the section on dream three later on.

In brief then, the remembering sequence begins with a close-up following shot of Diane from behind and at roughly waist height as she walks to her couch, in apartment #17, dressed in a robe and with coffee in hand. As Diane nears the couch she drifts left out of frame and the camera passes over the back of the couch to reveal Diane’s lover, Camilla Rhodes, waiting for her. In the next shot, a medium shot from the opposite side of the couch, we see Camilla and Diane, still with coffee in hand but now without her robe, as she hops the couch to embrace Camilla. The remembering sequence ends with a scene of Diane at Winkie’s contracting the murder of her now former lover, Camilla via the hit-man named Messing. In between entering and exiting the sequence of memories, Diane also relives several episodes having to do with her painful loss of Camilla as a love-object to a film director character named Adam Kesher. This sequence includes a Dinner party scene which reveals key info about Diane’s life and also presents several characters and events which are repeated in a modified fashion within Diane’s first two dreams.
The overall trajectory of this sequence of dreams is that the dream censorship, in particular the super-ego censorship, is rather weak in the beginning and the Id is strong but, as the dreaming progresses the super-ego and its role in the dreams become stronger and stronger. As for mourning and melancholia, *Mulholland Dr.* can be read as the dreaming wish fulfillments of a pathological mourner in dreams one and two. However, when we get to the punishment dream, the third dream, the swelling of Thanatos in the super-ego that follows identification with a lost love-object compels the super-ego to punish Diane by killing herself within the dream, though in pathological mourning suicide is also a form of murdering the lost love-object.

To make the above synopsis a bit clearer, consider the following two timeline charts. They provide timelines of *Mulholland Dr.*’s plot and story as I read them via dream theory. For the charts, plot is defined as, “all the events that are directly presented to us, including their causal relations, chronological order, duration, frequency, and spatial locations” and story is defined as, “all the events that we see and hear, plus all those that we infer or assume to have occurred, arranged in their presumed causal relations, chronological order, duration, frequency, and spatial locations (Bordwell, 480/481).”
Figure 1. Plot Timeline
Figure 2. Story Timeline
Chapter 2: Section B – Diane’s first dream, an anxiety dream

With an outline of the dream theory reading of Mulholland Dr. in mind let’s turn to examining the plot of the film and analyzing sections of it in terms of dream theory. To begin with, let’s examine the opening shot of Mulholland Dr. In this shot we see people dancing the jitterbug, an image of Diane with an elderly couple, and an image of Diane in a fine dress seemingly smiling under a spotlight. Simultaneously, we hear in this shot, swing music, low strings seemingly separate from the contest, a droning sound that comes and goes, and cheers, whistles, and claps, all of which is non-diegetic.6

Given the story that Diane tells within her memory of the dinner party presented in dream three, that she won a Jitterbug contest and then came to Hollywood to become a star, it is reasonable to conclude that the visual and aural fragments in Mulholland Dr.’s opening shot tell a wish fulfilling story in extremely condensed fashion.7 In a somewhat muddled manner this first dream makes a composite structure out of two events and one wish from Diane’s life, they are, winning a jitterbug contest, coming to Hollywood, and wishing to become a star actress (Freud, Interpretation, 340). Winning the jitterbug contest becomes represented by the fragment of people dancing the jitterbug. Coming to Hollywood is represented by the image of Diane with the elderly couple she met on the flight to Hollywood. The wish-fulfillment of becoming a Hollywood star is represented by the image of Diane shining, brightly lit in a fine dress with cheers,

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6 The term “non-diegetic” refers to something which has no identifiable source within the world presented on screen. Non-diegetic sound would be sound that has no source within the space presented on screen.

7 Diane’s story of how and why she came to Hollywood is included in a flashback sequence of memories occurring in dream three and will be covered in more detail later on.
whistles, and clapping accompanying her, as if she were a star. This simple story of coming to Hollywood and becoming a star is told in an indirect fashion here, but is repeated in a clearer fashion in Diane’s second dream. In fact, for Freud, this pattern of dreaming a wish fulfillment indirectly or timidly in one dream and more confidently in a following dream is a typical pattern of dreaming over the course of a night (Freud, *Interpretation*, 349).

Beyond the simple quality of visual and aural condensation taking place in the opening shot it also conforms to several further elements of representation in Freudian dream theory. For instance, the dream-work of the Id tends to represent logical connections by “approximation in time and space” which is exactly what happens here via simultaneity and superimposition of the shots visual and aural elements (Freud, *On Dreams*, 41). This superimposition and simultaneity then represents that winning the jitterbug contest led Diane to wanting to become an actress and come to Hollywood and coming to Hollywood would, if her wish is fulfilled, lead to becoming a star.

Furthermore, it is likely that this first dream is an anxiety dream for at least three reasons. First, the visually and aurally muddled quality of the dream, due to everything being superimposed and occurring simultaneously, suggests that the super-ego and ego were not on the job during this dream’s formulation as secondary revision has not reworked the dream to give it a coherent and linear appearance. Second, there doesn’t appear to have been any censorship of the dream, its indirect nature just being due to
the fact that the Id can only represent its wishes and thoughts with the material it has on hand, memories. If Diane was never a star actress, it would have no more direct memories to appeal to in representing her as a star. Third, immediately after having her wish fulfilled by being represented as a star Diane wakes up. When dream censorship is omitted and the Id’s inappropriate wishes are noticed too late to censor, the super-ego typically generates anxiety sufficient to wake the dreamer (Freud, *Some Additional*, 4049). In this case, the inappropriateness of the wish, in the judgment of Diane’s super-ego, is probably just her desire to reject and reverse reality, as we will see in more detail later on.

As the first shot dissolves into the second, we find the camera in the point of view of the dreamer, seeing blurry surroundings in close-up before resolving to show a bed, scarlet sheets and pillow, and a green blanket. Beyond the simple assumption that the protagonist of the film, Diane, is the dreamer of the film’s dreams and now the eyes the camera is seeing through, there is visual evidence that supports this conclusion. For instance, consider the presence of the scarlet sheets and green blanket appearing when the dreamer wakes after the opening shot. These sheets and blanket reoccur in both dream two and three in what is represented as the bedroom of Diane’s apartment, #17. In any event, shortly after waking Diane falls back asleep as the camera falls forward toward the pillow and fades to black. The next shot fades back in to a close up of the *Mulholland Dr.* road sign and we have arrived in Diane’s second dream.
In examining the second dream of *Mulholland Dr.* I will focus on analyzing Diane’s wishes and wish fulfillments as they are presented in the dream and on several of the representations of Diane and portions of her psyche (Id, ego, super-ego). To begin with then, let’s look at the wishes and their fulfilments that Diane’s Id generates within the second dream. These wishes come in two related and interwoven clusters.

First, Diane wishes to be talented star actress and to be recognized as such by others. Diane simply tells the viewer of her stardom wish when she says to Rita, “I couldn’t afford a place like this in a million years. Unless of course I’m discovered and become a movie star. Of course, I’d rather be known as a great actress than a movie star, but sometimes people end up being both and that is, I guess you’d say, sort of why I came here. I’m sorry. I’m just so excited to be here. I just came here from Deep River, Ontario and now I’m in this, dream place” (*Mulholland Dr.*).

Diane also wishes to punish those who have stood in the way of her stardom or otherwise failed to recognize her talent. Second, Diane wishes for Camilla Rhodes, her former lover, to be alive and with Diane; to need and love Diane. Diane also wishes, simultaneously, to help or protect Camilla and to punish Camilla for leaving her and to punish the man whom Camilla left her for, Adam Kesher.

To examine any one of Diane’s wishes is to pick up a thread that eventually entangles with several other wishes as the threads becomes interwoven via a variety of condensations and displacements. Moreover, as we will see, the dream’s use of
condensations and displacements allows for high economy of representation where in
many dream elements are related to or expressing several different wishes or meanings
from Diane’s dream thoughts. For lack of a better place to start then, let’s begin with
looking at Diane’s wish to punish those who stood in the way of her becoming a star.

The best example of Diane wishing to punish someone who denied her a shot at
stardom is with the character, Bob Brooker, a film director. Bob’s relationship with
Diane is recounted in a dinner party scene that is presented to the viewer within the
sequence of remembered events from Diane’s waking life in dream three, her
punishment dream. At this dinner party Diane tells the story of how and why she came
to Hollywood and how she met Camilla. In this story it is mentioned that Diane met
Camilla on the film “The Sylvia North Story” where they both auditioned for the lead
actress part. Though Diane desperately wanted the lead role, Camilla got the part and
the two later became friends with Camilla helping Diane to get bit parts in the movie’s
she starred in. Through this story it is revealed that Bob Brooker was the director of
“The Sylvia North Story” and that “he didn’t think much” of Diane (Mulholland Dr.).

Back in the second dream, Diane’s Id has utilized two methods for punishing Bob
Brooker. First, Diane uses one of dream-work’s more oblique methods of attacking
someone, that is, absurdity. According to Freud, the presence of absurdity in a dream
signifies derision, ridicule or contradiction within the latent dream thoughts and wishes
informing the dream (Freud, On Dreams, 63). In the case of Diane’s second dream,
absurdity attaches to the character of Bob Brooker through his ridiculous dialogue in a
scene where Diane auditions for a part in one of Bob’s movies, though the title is never mentioned. Just before Diane begins her audition, the producer Wally says, “Bob, do you have anything you wish to say; something to Betty before we begin (Mulholland Dr.)?” Bob responds, “No... it’s not a contest. The two of them, with themselves, so don’t play it for real, until, it gets, real” (Mulholland Dr.). At these painfully absurd words several people in the room register their astounded or mocking reaction visibly. However, the audition continues and Diane’s performance is praised enthusiastically by all present, even begrudgingly by Bob; she is a shoe in for the part. By playing out in this fashion the audition scene achieves an economy of representation in simultaneously satisfying two wishes. First, Diane’s performance is loudly praised and it is implied that she will get the part and become the star which, reversing what happened to Diane in her real life audition with Bob. Second, Diane indirectly punishes and expresses derision toward Bob by causing him to look like a fool via absurd dialogue in front of his peers.

Second, Diane’s punishment of Bob Brooker goes beyond this short scene and its absurdity by being displaced onto the character of Adam Kesher and the excessive punishments that Diane’s Id constructs for him within her second dream. While the third dream reveals, through a memory of waking life, that Bob directed “The Sylvia North Story” and that Camilla got the lead part for that film, in the second dream the Id has subtlety condensed the figures of Bob and Adam by making Adam the director of “The Sylvia North Story”. The title of the film that Adam is directing in Diane’s second dream is only mentioned once by someone off screen just before Camilla Rhodes
auditions for and gets the lead part. If the dream-work were logical it would simply resolve this contradiction as the director of “The Sylvia North Story” is either Bob Brooker or Adam Kesher but, not both. However, the Id’s dream-work is not logical and when an either-or situation such as this appears both alternatives will be treated by the dream, “as though they were equally valid (Freud, On Dreams, 42). As such both Bob Brooker and Adam Kesher are the director that Diane wishes to punish, the director of “The Sylvia North Story”. Punishments that Diane’s dream orchestrates for Adam are by extension then also punishments of Bob Brooker. However, punishing Adam Kesher isn’t only attacking Bob indirectly, it is also punishing Adam for his own perceived crimes against Diane. To elaborate let’s examine how and why Adam Kesher is punished in dream two.

As noted earlier, Diane’s memories present her as having lost her lover Camilla Rhodes to Adam Kesher and she directs a great deal of anger toward both. As such, Diane has two reasons to punish Adam. First, Diane wishes to continue punishing Bob Brooker through Adam. Second, Diane wishes to punish Adam for stealing Camilla from her or otherwise causing the end of their relationship. Both of these wishes are fulfilled in in several scenes where Adam confronts the aggressive, vengeful side of Diane’s Id. For instance, consider the boardroom scene at the office of “Ryan Entertainiment”. In this scene Adam is confronted by the absurd, aggressive and mysterious figures of the Castiglione brothers, Vincenzo and Luigi, who insist on Camilla Rhodes as the lead actress in his film, “The Sylvia North Story” (Mulholland Dr.). To understand this scene
and its relation to Diane, the dreamer, requires that we briefly examine the relationship between Diane and the Castigliane brothers.

If we believe Freud, then there scarcely exists a scene within dreams where the dreamer is not present (Freud, *Interpretation*, 338). In the cases where the dreamer does not figure in a scene as themselves then we can almost always find the dreamer concealed within the figure of another through condensation (Freud, *Interpretation*, 338/9). In the case of the scene in question it is of course, the Castigliane brothers who are condensed with Diane and become vehicles through which Diane can vent her anger towards Adam.

The notion that the Castigliane brothers are condensed with Diane is supported by the language that they use. The brothers repeatedly use the line, “This is the girl.” In reference to Camilla Rhodes being the girl for the lead part in Adam’s movie (*Mulholland Dr.*). Diane also uses this line in the real world when she meets with the hitman, Messing, and passes him a glossy photo of Camilla saying “This is the girl” that he is being paid to murder (*Mulholland Dr.*). In the Diane’s dream then, we can read the Castigliane brother’s dialogue as an instance of Diane speaking and acting through another body.

Further evidence that the Diane is hidden within the Castigliane brothers is presented by the affects that the brothers express in the toward of Adam. According to Freud, affects are important tools for dream interpretation because they are the part of the dream thoughts that is least altered by the dream-work and often reveal some
aspect of what the dreamer actually wants or thinks (Freud, Interpretation, 468). In this case the affects that the Castiglione brothers express in Adam’s presence seem ridiculous or absurd as the scene implies that they’ve never met Adam before as they are introduced to Adam. However, if we assume that these affects actually belong to Diane, who knows and has reason to hate Adam, then all the hostility, disgust, and absurdity in the scene suddenly makes sense.

Vincenzo, for instance, seems to be boiling with anger almost immediately upon entering the boardroom, for no apparent reason. Furthermore, Vincenzo erupts screaming, “Help me!” which seems ridiculous as the Castiglione brothers are dominating the conversation in the scene. However, if we insert Diane for Vincenzo, who is insisting that Camilla Rhodes be given the part for “The Silvia North Story” his strangely conflicted shout for help can be rendered sensible. Diane’s story at the dinner party in dream three reveals that she had desperately wanted the lead part to “The Sylvia North Story” in real life but, the part was given to Camilla Rhodes. In the boardroom scene, Diane as Vincenzo is conflicted because he is expressing two conflicting wishes of Diane. First, the Castiglione brother’s insisting on Camilla Rhodes allows Diane to deny the reality that Camilla was the best actress and that she hadn’t become a star because she wasn’t talented by creating figures that make sure that Camilla was preordained as the lead and that Diane had never had a real chance at getting the part. Second, Diane still wishes to be talented star actress and to be
recognized as such. In this way, Diane has to relive not being chosen for the star role a
second time and is upset at the event.

Luigi, on the other hand, expresses Diane’s feelings toward Adam through his
absurd and contemptuous behavior involving a cup of espresso. Luigi, sips the espresso,
grimaces and spits the espresso into a napkin, quietly exclaiming, “shit,” and then gazes
at Adam with
what appears to be contempt and anger (Mulholland Dr.). All these affects are
appropriate for Diane but, absurd within the context of the scene and this absurdity
itself is a further indirect expression of the ridicule or derision that Diane wishes to
direct at Adam (Freud, On Dreams, 43).

After having met the Castigliane brothers and being informed by Vincenzo that,
“The Sylvia North Story” is, “no longer your film”, Adam returns home to experience the
second chapter of his punishment within Diane’s dream. In this scene, Diane’s Id and
it’s dream-work and construct a punishment scenario out of information available to her
from her memory of the dinner party at Adam’s home, presented in the third dream’s
remembering sequence. In this case the scenario is uses the location of the dinner
party, Adam’s home as the setting and a bit of Adam’s dialogue, “I got the pool and she
got the pool-man” as the foundation for a scenario of emasculation and betrayal. Upon
his arrival at home, Adam discovers his wife is cheating on him with Gene the pool-man
who subsequently punches and literally throws Adam out of his own home.
After a hellish day, between the boardroom and home, Adam holes up in a cheap hotel. At this point Adam is still resisting being forced to choose Camilla Rhodes for the lead part of his film but discovers that, in addition to his already incredible day, his bank accounts and credit cards have been mysteriously frozen and maxed out, leaving him at the mercy of the Castigliane brothers and their boss Mr. Roque. Soon after this discovery, Adam agrees to meet another mysterious figure, “the Cowboy”, as his secretary suggests it could be a solution to his mysterious financial problems. The cowboy character, like the Castigliane brothers, is a condensation with Diane, in particular her Id, for he serves as one of her several vehicles for punishing Adam. In this case, the Cowboy speaks in a rather belittling and aggressive manner to Adam who submits to the Cowboy’s orders that Adam will,

“audition many girls for the part. When you see the girl that was shown to you earlier today, you will say ‘This is the girl.’ The rest of the cast can stay—that is up to you, but that lead girl is not up to you. Now, you will see me one more time if you do good. You will see me two more times if you do bad. Good night” (Mulholland Dr.).

By resisting the Castigliane brothers until meeting the Cowboy and submitting to his orders dutifully, Adam Kesher provides Diane with two wish fulfillments. First, to the extent that Adam resists choosing Camilla Rhodes it gives Diane’s Id opportunity to continue devising and enjoying punishments for Adam, who had wounded Diane in real life by stealing her lover Camilla. Second, when Adam submits to being coerced into choosing Camilla for the lead role, which Diane desired but did not get in real life, he contradicts the reality which had disturbed her ability to go on believing that she is a
talented actress who will become a star, that is, Adam fulfills the Diane’s wish that she is
talented and not inferior to Camilla as an actress.

An extension of Diane’s wish to reject and reverse her unhappy reality, where
she is not chosen to be the star actress and not recognized as talented by directors, is
the character of Mr. Roque; who pulls the strings of the Castigliane’s, the Cowboy, and
the studio execs of Ryan Entertainment. Mr. Roque’s role within Diane’s scheme of
wishes and wish-fulfilment is to play the mysterious source of the obstacles keeping her
from becoming a star by denying her a fair shot at being chosen for parts. This
interpretation is supported by the film’s plot in two ways. First, Mr. Roque is on speaker
phone during the boardroom scene and thus privy to the conversation. Second, Ray
Hott, one of the studio execs in the boardroom scene, reports to Mr. Roque and takes
orders from him, also implying that the Castigliane brothers report to Mr. Roque as well.
Beyond these plot elements, Mr. Roque’s obstructing role in the dream is also suggested
by his visual presentation and by his name. First, roque is the Spanish equivalent to the
English word rook which, can mean a swindler or a cheat, and this is precisely the role
that he plays to Diane’s acting career, at least with regard to “The Sylvia North Story
(Mulholland Dr.).” Second, Mr. Roque’s physical form is that of a cripple who is confined
to a wheelchair and, given the presence of an armrest, microphone, and lack of any
movement save with the mouth and eyes, may be paralyzed from the neck down. In
this way, Mr. Roque’s body is constrained as visual representation of the forces that
constrain Diane’s attempts to become a star actress. This kind of visual representation
of an abstract idea, in this case obstruction, is common in Freudian dreams (Frued, *Interpretation*, 422).

The second cluster of wishes that Diane’s Id attempts to fulfill in the second dream concern her former lover Camilla and are an ambivalent mixture of love and hate toward Camilla. Before examining the various scenes which exemplify Diane’s wishes regarding Camilla, it is worth explaining why Diane’s name becomes Betty and Camilla’s name becomes Rita within the second dream. As we see in Diane’s third dream, in a memory of contracting the murder of Camilla with the hit-man Messing at Winkie’s, the waitress that attends to them is named Betty. In the second dream, when Betty visits Winkie’s the same waitress is now named Diane. From this it is reasonable to conclude that Diane and Betty have been condensed in the second dream. The simplest explanation for this is that it coheres with Diane’s wish to reject and avoid reminders of the unhappy reality she is wishing away in her first and second dream. If Diane is an unsuccessful and unloved murderer, Betty can be loved, successful, and not a criminal. As for Camilla, her character becomes condensed in the second dream with a nameless woman she kisses, in front of Diane, at the dinner party at Adam Kesher’s house. In the second dream, the nameless woman becomes Camilla Rhodes and receives the lead part in “The Sylvia North Story” in place of the real Camilla. By becoming Rita within the dream, Camilla Rhodes can remain an obstacle to Diane’s stardom and simultaneously be a helpless, amnesiac, non-star who needs and eventually loves Betty/Diane.
The best example of Diane’s wish to punish Camilla for leaving her occurs in the opening scene of the second dream, a car crash on Mulholland drive. In this scene we have a repetition of an event remembered from Diane’s real life in the third dream, a limo ride to a dinner party at Adam Kesher’s house, which is located on Mulholland Drive. This repetition is so little modified from the event in Diane’s waking life that Rita even repeats Diane’s dialogue in the limo, “What are you doing? We don’t stop here” when the limo stops on the same shoulder of the road near Adam’s home (Mulholland Dr.). This type of repetition of material and events from the memories of the dreamer is a foundation of Freudian dream construction (Freud, On Dreams, 40). Where the repetition of the limo ride diverges from Diane’s memory is, aside from it happening to Camilla and not Diane, is that when the limo pulls over, Camilla gets a gun pointed at her and seconds later a car of joy-riding teenagers plows into the limo. Dazed and now suffering from amnesia, Camilla, now without a name, wanders down to the apartment where Betty is staying.

The punishment aspect of this scene is clear enough, you don’t point a gun at, or subject to amnesia causing trauma, someone you don’t feel some hatred for. However, Camilla’s/Rita’s car crash serves a few of Diane’s other wishes as well. First, the car wreck depicts an attempted assassination of Camilla as a failure with Camilla surviving both her would be assassin and the car wreck itself. Surviving the hit is a simple reversal of the reality depicted in the third dream, wherein Diane has already received the news, in the form of a blue key, that Camilla has been successfully murdered. This simple
reversal of reality suggests that Diane’s wish here is just for Camilla to be alive. Second, the car wreck creates a situation that delivers Camilla to Diane as a helpless, traumatized, amnesiac which presents Diane with the opportunity to help and take care of Camilla. Once again, the wish involved is a reversal of the real life situation where Camilla helped Diane to get parts in her films. In the second dream then, Diane can help Camilla and reverse the relation of indebtedness and superiority between the two.

Another example of Diane’s wishes concerning Camilla are expressed in the second dream’s scenes involving Messing, the hitman. In third dream, Diane is presented as having received a signal from Messing, in the form of a blue key, that the hit has taken place and Camilla is dead. In Diane’s second dream however, her Id wishes to escape the unhappy reality of being a murderer by rejecting and reversing that reality. As such, the attempted assassination presented in the car wreck scene, at the beginning of the second dream, is a failure. Subsequently, the second dream presents two scenes with Messing. First, we find him in a shabby office building killing the loose end who had orchestrated the failed limo hit attempt. However, in an over the top absurd fashion, Messing fails to competently and cleanly kill his mark. Instead, Messing accidently shoots a woman in the next room and ends up killing her and another guy who happens to witness the charade unfold. Messing’s failure to kill Camilla, and his incompetent fiasco at the office building, lends plausibility to the fulfilment Diane’s wish that Camilla avoid execution by Messing and by extension that Diane isn’t really a murderer. Another brief scene with Messing, shows him interrogating a prostitute as to
whether she had seen a woman matching Camilla’s description. There are at least two wishes involved with this scene. First, Diane’s hate and wish to punish Camilla has not dissolved within her second dream and Messing’s continued pursuit of his target, Camilla, suggests that Diane’s Id is still looking for ways to punish or kill Camilla. Second, the continued threat of people chasing after Camilla/Rita creates a situation where Diane is provided a further opportunity to protect Camilla/Rita from her pursuers, in addition to simply helping a lost amnesiac. Once again, the dream-work finds a way to economize the representation of its wishes and attempts at their fulfillment, by making single elements or scenes of the dream work for multiple purposes simultaneously.

Another example of Diane’s wishes concerning Camilla/Rita takes place when the pair visit Diane’s real life apartment, though neither are aware that this apartment belongs to Betty/Diane. As part of Diane/Betty’s to wish help Camilla/Rita uncover who she really is they wind up visiting Diane’s actual apartment. Camilla/Rita doesn’t want to break into the apartment but, Diane/Betty insists. Once inside, the two discover the dead body of a blond woman in Diane’s bed. Camilla/Rita screams at the sight and is visibly horrified and traumatized. Diane/Betty, on the other hand, is hardly affected by the sight of the dead body. This event and in particular Camilla/Rita’s reaction to it satisfy two of Diane’s wishes. First, the obviously traumatic impact of this sight on Camilla/Rita is another cruel form of Diane punishing her lover for having left her in the real world. Second, the Camilla/Rita’s powerful reaction to the sight of the dead body
also satisfies the Diane’s wish to be loved by Camilla/Rita if we assume that the body is a representation of Diane and that on some level Camilla/Rita recognizes the body as Diane. If this were the case, then the Camilla/Rita’s potent traumatic response to the body would be exactly the kind of response that Diane would want from her lover, a response that indirectly proves that Diane is loved. Also, there are several reasons to believe that the body in Diane’s bedroom is a representation of Diane. First, the body is blond, a woman, and in Diane’s bedroom. Second, the body is wearing similar clothes and in a similar position to that of Diane when she is represented as waking up within her third dream.

Finally, there is Diane’s wish to be romantically reunited with her former lover Camilla/Rita. In this case, almost the whole of the second dream is a fulfillment of the wish as Camilla/Rita hardly ever leaves Diane’s side and the second dream culminates with them becoming sexually intimate once more. This wish fulfillment is again a reversal of Diane’s real world life as Camilla is dead and sex and or being together again is impossible. As such, Rita and Betty stand in as a couple for Diane and Camilla who have no chance at being reunited.

With the wishes and fulfillments of Diane’s Id having been enumerated, we can now turn to two scenes in the second dream that cleverly represent the dynamics between Diane’s Id, ego, and super-ego and the wishes of her ego and super-ego, separate from her Id’s wishes. The first scene in question takes place at Winkie’s diner and is the first appearance of this location in the film. While Diane doesn’t figure in the
scene directly, the egotistical nature of Freudian dreams demands that the dreamer be present even when they aren’t directly presented (Freud, *Interpretation*, 338/9). In this case, three characters appear in this scene, Dan, Herb, and “the bum”, and they each represent a piece of Diane’s psyche, that is, her Id, ego, and super-ego. In brief, the situation presented is that Dan has called Herb, who may be his therapist or perhaps just a friend, to Winkie’s and tells him the story of several dreams he has had concerning the Winkie’s they are sitting in. In these dreams at Winkie’s Dan encounters a man behind Winkie’s, whose face utterly terrifies him and lingers as an awful feeling upon waking. At first, Herb is skeptical and dismissive at being informed that he has been brought to Winkie’s to listen to a dream and comments, “Oh, boy” (*Mulholland Dr.*). However, Herb relents and allows Dan to tell his story. When Dan is finished telling his story, Herb replies, “So, you came to see if he is out there” and Dan responds, “To get rid of this god awful feeling” (*Mulholland Dr.*). Next, Dan and Herb head out of and behind Winkie’s where the Bum suddenly appears in front of Dan from behind a wall. Dan is so terrified by the appearance of this face that he either faints or dies, it is difficult to tell which. However, the pilot script from when Mulholland Dr. was offered to ABC as a television program indicates that Dan has died (Lynch, Pilot).

In terms of Id, ego, and super-ego, we can place Dan in the role of the Id, Herb in the role of ego, and the bum in the role of the super-ego. Dan is identifiable as representing Diane’s Id because he follows the Id’s pleasure principle, that is, he is only concerned with avoiding unpleasure and seeking pleasure. In this case, Dan calls Herb
down to Winkie’s because he wants to “get rid of this god awful feeling” or, in other
words, to be rid of his unpleasure (*Mulholland Dr.*). Herb is identifiable as a
representation of Diane’s ego because, on one hand, he plays the ego’s role as the voice
of reason and skepticism. On the other hand, Herb’s inclination is to reality test Dan’s
fear of the Bum and to see if the danger is real which, corresponds to the ego’s use of
the reality principle.

Finally, the Bum, is identifiable as Diane super-ego for several reasons. First,
Winkie’s is the scene of Diane’s real world crime, that is, Winkie’s is the location where
Diane contracts a hit on her former lover Camilla. As such it makes sense for the super-
ego to haunt this Winkie’s as a reminder of the crime that took place there. Second, the
image the super-ego presents to Diane, the dreamer, and Dan her Id, via the Bum is a
terrifying and filthy face. This face, if we look closely, is that of a woman and not a man
as Dan misidentifies her. This face is a visual representation of the judgment that the
super-ego has made of Diane as a criminal, and Diane’s Id, who wishes to deny the
reality of her crime and ugly nature. Third, the location of the Bum suggests a struggle
between the wishes of the super-ego, to judge and punish Diane/Dan, and the Id’s wish
to deny reality and the crimes committed there in (*Freud, New Intro*, 18). As such, the
Bum haunts Winkie’s but only from out of sight, in an alley behind the dinner. Also, this
nearness of the Bum to Winkie’s allows the logical connection between Winkie’s, as
crime scene, and the bum, as image of the criminal, Diane, to be represented via the
dream-work’s method of translating logical connections into spatial approximations.
Moreover, it should be noted that while the super-ego’s appearance in this scene is dramatic and shocking, the super-ego’s strength in censoring Diane’s Id is rather weak. For instance, at this point in the dream, the super-ego can only approach Diane through her condensation in the form of Dan and even then the super-ego Bum doesn’t speak to or even touch Dan. Only his super-ego’s image is able to effect Dan, albeit dramatically.

There is one more fascinating feature of this scene at Winkie’s that bears looking at, the uncanny quality of the bum. While the bum seems uncanny throughout the film, at least to this viewer, his terrifying appearance before Dan is likely the most uncanny moment in the film. With Freud’s understanding of the uncanny and of dreams one can account for several elements of this episode in the film; such as, what the uncanny is, why it occurs with the bum, why the superego would use the uncanny and most importantly why the uncanny is likely to occur in a dream.

For Freud, the uncanny is a kind of fear that is elicited when something repressed appears to have returned (Freud, On Dreams, 41). As for the sources of the uncanny experience, Freud identifies two general categories of psychic phenomena, repressed infantile or primitive beliefs, and repressed wishes or fears and childhood complexes (Freud, Uncanny, 141). With the bum behind Winkie’s the source of the uncanny is an infantile or primitive belief which had been repressed and now seems to return, that is, the impossibility that a nightmare figure might emerge into the real waking world of the dreamer now appears to be possible. Or as Freud puts it,
“an uncanny effect often arises when the boundary between fantasy and reality is blurred, when we are faced with the reality of something that we have until now considered imaginary…” (Freud, *Uncanny*, 150).

For Dan/Diane the effect of the uncanny, that the bum produces, is fear and doubt as to whether the impossible is possible and whether his/her seemingly real world is in fact unreal, a dream. Given that the superego/bum wishes to punish Diane for her crime of murder and for attempting to escape punishment, the usage of the uncanny seems a perfect method for undermining Diane’s enjoyment of her escape and thus a fitting punishment.

However, the presence of the uncanny also lends support to the interpretation that *Mulholland Dr.* is primarily the representation of Diane’s dreams because dreams offer a much more fertile environment for the uncanny than mundane waking reality. For instance, the uncanny depends on something which is normally repressed returning to consciousness and being presented to the senses (Freud, *Uncanny*, 147). Things that are repressed are much more likely to return in dream than in reality because the ego and superego relax repression while sleeping (Freud, *On Dreams*, 63). Also, the impossible or irrational is much more likely to occur in dreams than in reality because dreams are primarily constructed according to the irrational primary process that owes no allegiance to normal waking world laws, like physics, time, causality, etc. (Freud, *Interpretation*, 601). As such the presence of the uncanny, for the sake of interpretation, should be taken to indicate the presence of a dream or unreal world
before it indicates that the real waking world has taken a turn for the magical or impossible.

The second scene in Diane’s second dream that reveals the dynamics between her Id, ego, and super-ego is a brief scene occurring at the doorway of Betty/Diane’s aunt’s apartment, where she is confronted by Louise Bonner, a neighbor, and saved by her landlord Coco. That Betty/Diane plays the role of Diane’s Id has been established the earlier examination of her web of wishes and wish fulfillments in the second dream. We can identify Louise Bonner as Diane’s super-ego because of her strangely aggressive behavior toward Betty and by her dialogue. For instance, Louise asks Betty/Diane who she is and what she is doing in her aunt’s apartment. Betty/Diane responds telling Louise that she is the niece and that her name is Betty. Louise replies, “No its not! That’s not what she said. Someone is in trouble. Something bad is happening (Mulholland Dr.).” Though in a somewhat weak and confused manner, Louise Bonner questions Betty’s reality and attempts to make Betty/Diane acknowledge the troubling reality Diane is attempting to escape via her dream. Also, while the Bum merely looked at Dan, here the super-ego seems a bit stronger as it speaks Betty/Diane and attempts to touch her through the doorway. As one would expect of the Id, Betty/Diane simply rejects Louise’s concerns by saying, “I’m sorry, but I don’t know who you are and... (Mulholland Dr.).”

At this point Coco arrives and manages to put a stop to Louise’s interrogation of Betty and leads Louise away. The next day however, Coco follows up with Betty/Diane
on what Louise was talking about and notices that Betty/Diane is sheltering Rita/Camilla in her Aunt’s apartment against the wishes of the Aunt. After hearing Betty/Diane’s lie of an explanation for the presence of Rita/Camilla, Coco replies, “Don’t make me out to be a sucker. Louise Bonner said there is trouble in there. Remember last night? Well, sometimes she’s wrong but, if there is trouble, get rid of it” (Mulholland Dr.). In both incidents Coco acts in such a way as to fulfill the ego’s wish that sleep should continue. To elaborate, in the first incident Coco intervenes to keep the super-ego from disturbing Betty/Diane and possibly generating enough anxiety to wake up the dreamer. In the second incident Coco indirectly suggests that Betty/Diane get rid of the trouble that could cause Diane to wake up, in this case the trouble is Rita/Camilla. Also, it should be noted that Coco’s admonition, or attempt at censorship if you will, concerning Betty/Diane keeping the trouble, Rita/Camilla, in the apartment is on grounds of reason and not morality. Coco objects to Betty/Diane attempting to make a fool of her and doesn’t object to any hetero-normative moral qualms that might be suggested by keeping Rita/Camilla around, who broke into the apartment, or to Betty/Diane’s implied homosexuality. By keeping her objections or censorship to the concerns of rationality and the desire to continue sleeping, Coco acts in accord with the ego and its rational reality principle.
Chapter 2: Section D – Diane’s third dream, a punishment dream

Before examining the dream mechanics of the third dream and the evidence for reading it as a punishment dream, it is worth covering the transition from Diane’s second, Id constructed dream, to her third, super-ego constructed, dream. As mentioned above, Diane’s second dream reaches its wish fulfilling peak or conclusion with Betty and Rita physically consummating their relationship; indirectly reuniting Diane and Camilla. After making love the pair fall asleep and Betty/Diane is awakened by Rita/Camilla repeated the word “Silencio” in a mechanical fashion, while she appears to be asleep with open eyes. As Rita/Camilla becomes fully awake she demands that Betty/Diane follow her somewhere in the middle of the night. It is at this point in the film that the super-ego begins to take over the process of dream creation and in this case seems to possess Rita/Camilla. The idea that Rita/Camilla has been possessed by Diane’s super-ego is supported by Rita/Camilla’s change in behavior, where she becomes somewhat aggressive and commanding to Betty/Diane in a way that she exhibits in no other portion of Diane’s second dream. Rita/Camilla’s language, repeating “silencio” also suggests her new connection with Diane’s super-ego as this same language is repeated by a character named Bondar who, as we will see, takes on the super-ego role of punishing Betty/Diane.

Following Rita/Camilla’s possession by the super-ego, her and Betty/Diane travel to Club Silencio, a space which appears to be dominated by the presence of Diane’s
super-ego and for this reason marks the beginning of or transition to Diane’s third dream. As Rita/Camilla and Betty/Diane sit down in the theater of Club Silencio we see a performer, named Bondar, create and break a series of illusions using music. His performance culminates with him staring menacingly at Diane, who clenches up and shakes uncontrollably until Bondar disappears from the stage in puff of blue smoke. Similar to Louise Bonner, Bondar’s performance appears to act out the super-ego’s wish that Betty/Diane, the dreamer, recognize the falseness or illusory quality of the happy fantasy world her Id has constructed for her in the world of the second dream. As Bondar says, “It is an Illusion” and proceeds to show Diane something which could not occur in reality, that is, a Man vanishing into a cloud of smoke (Mulholland Dr.). Moreover, Diane’s uncontrollable shaking during Bondar’s performance may well be a manifestation of a competition of wills between Diane’s Id and super-ego for control over the unfolding of the dream and which psychic agency’s wishes will be fulfilled. Also, a similar dream phenomenon to Betty/Diane’s shaking was noted by Freud, wherein the inhibition of movement in dreams was recognized as a common representation of a conflict between two impulses or wills (Freud, On Dreams, 42).

After Bondar disappears, Betty/Diane discovers a mysterious blue box in her purse. Betty/Diane and Rita/Camilla return to Betty’s Aunt’s apartment to unlock the box with the key that Rita/Camilla had discovered earlier. At this point Betty steps out of the camera’s frame.
and thereby vanishes from the apartment. Rita/Camilla unlocks the box and disappears within the box. Next, we see Diane wake up in her bedroom, of apartment #17, and we have now arrived in another dream world, this time created by the super-ego to match Diane’s reality and thereby act as a kind of hell, or in other words, as a punishment.

Punishment dreams are dreams in which the super-ego becomes so provoked by the display of the Id’s offending wishes that the super-ego seizes control over the creation of the dream and provides, “a rejection and complete contradiction” of the dream wishes and thoughts previously expressed by the Id. In this case the dream event that seems to have finally provoked the super-ego sufficiently to cause it to take over the dreaming is the event of Diane/Betty and Rita/Camilla reuniting as lovers. For it is immediately after this event that Rita/Camilla drags Diane/Betty to Club Silencio, wherein the super-ego provides the means of transit from the Id’s dream world to the super-ego’s punishment dream world in the form of the blue box that Rita/Camilla passes through. As for the reasons for viewing this final section of the film as a punishment dream, there are several.

First, once the film enters the world of the punishment dream only two significant events occur and both are rejections and contradictions of the wishes displayed in Diane’s two preceding dreams. First, in what I have been calling a remembering sequence, as Diane sits on her couch in apartment #17, she experiences a flashback sequence of events which portray the opposite of events portrayed in Diane’s first two dreams. For instance, this sequence contains the dinner party scene where
Camilla Rhodes reaffirms that she has left Diane for Adam Kesher and perhaps another woman as well, as she kisses the woman who plays Camilla Rhodes in Diane’s second dream. The dinner party scene also reveals that Diane is not a successful or especially talented actress as she has relied upon Camilla to get parts in the films Camilla stars in. The dinner party thus rejects and contradicts Diane’s first and second dream wishes to be a successful talented actress and to be a couple with Rita/Camilla. Also, in the flashback sequence we see Diane as disheveled mess at Winkie’s where she contracts a hit on Camilla with the assassin, Messing. Meanwhile, upon the coffee table in front of Diane, as she experiences these flashback episodes, rests the blue key that Messing says Diane will receive when Camilla has been killed. The presence of the key plus the Winkie’s flashback rejects and contradicts Diane’s wishes that Rita/Camilla is alive and with Diane, and that Diane is not a murderer.

Crucially for my dream analysis of the film, this flashback sequence needs to give the viewer access to Diane’s real life and relations in order for the dream interpretation to have some ground upon which to analyze the rest of the film. While I claim that this remembering sequence takes place within the space of Diane’s third dream there are several reasons for believing that the sequence provides either close approximations to real events in Diane’s life or the direct access to Diane’s real life through unmodified repetitions of her memories of real events. First, Freud’s understanding of the mechanics of dreams within dreams suggests that what the super-ego represents is largely or totally true of Diane’s reality while what the Id represents in the first two
dreams, the dreams within the dream Diane wakes into, represent an escape from and reversal of reality (Freud, *Interpretation*, 353). Second, as the Id’s favored method of representation is reversal and its wishes are in general for things which it does not possess in waking life, it makes sense to suppose that the Id’s dreams, dream one and two, present the opposite of Diane’s waking life in many respects (Freud, *Interpretation*, 342). As the flashback sequence reveals events that reverse the Id’s wish fulfilling reversals, it makes sense that its content would reflect Diane’s reality as it is or nearly so. Third, the film’s theme of the super-ego pointing out the illusory or false quality to the happy dream world that Diane’s Id creates (as demonstrated by Bondar and Louise Bonner) suggests that the world of the third dream’s world is an accurate representation of Diane’s reality. It would make no sense for the super-ego to damn Diane for her escapist fantasy world only to have Diane enter another dream world that also distorts or rejects Diane’s reality.

After the conclusion of her flashback sequence with the scene at Winkie’s with Messing, the bum reappears behind Winkie’s with the blue box and a smoking fire behind him. The camera then cuts to Diane once again on her couch. At this point the second and final event of the punishment dream occurs wherein, the elderly couple Diane had met on the plane at the beginning of the second dream emerge from the blue box and crawl under her apartment door to torment Diane. Fleeing into her bedroom

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8 In his note on dreams within dreams Freud suggested that when created by the Id, what the Id represents as dream what is real and what it represents as real is fantasy. When created by the super-ego in response to an Id dream then, it seems likely that the super-ego would have the dreamer leave the fantasy of the Id’s dream by waking into a representation of reality.
Diane kills herself by a gunshot to the head and disappears into a cloud of smoke, much like Bondar in Club Silencio and the bum in his second appearance. The camera then cuts to Club Silencio and the film ends there.

Second, the form of the film’s dreams matches the pattern of dreams in which punishment dreams typically occur. To elaborate, for Freud, punishment dreams often occur in a series of dreams over the course of a single night wherein one dream grants a series of sinful wish-fulfilments and another dream punishes the dreamer for those wishes (Freud, New Intro, 33). Given that the first two dreams of the film provide fulfillments to Diane’s wishes, in particular the morally objectionable wishes to escape the reality where one is a murderer and to be reunited with the very lover one had killed, the sequence of the film’s dreaming makes the third dream an appropriate position for the punishment dream to reject and contradict the sinful wishes granted earlier in the night.

Third, the film ends with a brief scene returning to Club Silencio and a medium close-up shot of a blue haired woman in the balcony of the theatre repeating the word “Silencio,” which had inaugurated the super-ego’s control over the dream and now concludes with it (Mulholland Dr.). If we assume that the film makes sense then this reappearance of Club Silencio after the event of Diane killing herself should be interpreted as occurring still within the super-ego’s dream world and that Diane’s suicide is also only a figment of dream. This must be the case if the film is coherent because a dead dreamer cannot continue to dream.
Fourth, the last big clue to reading this section of the film, Club Silencio to Club Silencio, as a punishment dream has to do with the appearance and meaning of the blue box and the blue key. As mentioned above, Diane receives the blue key from Messing when the hit on Camilla has been carried out. As such, the blue key becomes a symbol of Diane’s crime. In the second dream, Betty/Diane and Rita/Camilla find the blue key, now in a triangular form and not as the regular blue key from Messing, in Rita/Camilla’s black leather bag along with stacks of money. As for the blue box, in the Winkie’s scene where Diane speaks with Messing, she asks Messing what the key opens but, he merely laughs in reply. In Club Silencio then, the super-ego supplies the answer to Diane’s question as she discovers the blue box within her purse while sitting in the club’s theater. As it turns out the key opens the blue box and then acts as a portal or gateway to the punishment dream world of Diane’s third dream. Through the associations of the key with Diane’s crime, the key with the box, and the box with the super-ego and a world that rejects and contradicts her Id’s wishes, the blue key and box suggest that the Diane’s third dream is a punishment dream. Furthermore, the blue box’s connection to the super-ego and its punishment world explain why Betty/Diane would disappear from the apartment just before the blue box is opened. On some level, the Diane and her Id’s representative Betty, recognize that the blue box is a symbol of the rejection and contradiction of the happy dream world Betty occupies, thus she refuses to enter the box and flees the scene.
Having covered my dream analysis from the beginning to the end of the film’s plot we can now cover a few instances of dream-work in Mulholland Dr. missed above. While there are numerous further elements of Mulholland Dr. that fit well with Freudian dream mechanics and methods of representation, only the category of dream-work displacement needs further demonstration. Displacement in Mulholland drive seems to center around the relationship between Betty/Diane and Rita/Camilla, though there may be other examples. For instance, while the third dream reveals that the cops are looking for Diane in real life this situation is displaced onto Rita in the second dream, with the cops looking for Rita and not Betty. Also, Rita’s bag full of money in the second dream suggests that the money is dirty and connected to some kind of crime. This too is a displacement from Diane on to Rita as the only bag full of dirty money shown in Diane’s real life is the bag of money that Diane pays Messing with for killing Camilla/Rita. Another example of displacement could be represented in the second dream’s car crash just below Adam Kesher’s house on Mulholland Dr. In this case the emotional disaster of Camilla’s snubbing and betrayal of Diane at the dinner party is now represented in a car crash occurring near the location of the party with emotional damage being translated into physical trauma displaced from Diane on to Rita/Camilla.
Chapter 2: Section E – Mulholland Dr. in light of Mourning and Melancholia

Having examined Mulholland Dr. in terms of Freud’s dream theory, we can now turn to examining the film through the lens of Freud’s theory of grief, which centers on the concepts of mourning and melancholia. As the dream analysis has focused on Diane Selwyn as the dreamer and protagonist of the film this section will continue focus on her now as a subject who is grieving. The section will proceed in the following steps. First is determining which category of grief, mourning, pathological mourning, or melancholia, that Diane falls into. Second is examining what this categorization of grief explains about the film in addition to and or in support of the earlier dream theory reading. Third, is an expanded reading of mourning and melancholia to include Judith Butler’s work on the concepts and the critique of Freud’s understanding of gender and sexuality that is included in her development of melancholia. Fourth, is deploying Butler’s understanding of the heterosexual logic of Freudian gender and sexuality in order to demonstrate that Diane and Mulholland Dr. are similarly caught up in the same heterosexual logic as Freud and are thus apt objects for Freudian analysis.

To begin with then, lets go through the criteria of grieving established above to determine whether Diane is in mourning, pathological mourning, or melancholia. First, the love-object that Diane has lost is established in her third dream, that is, her lover Camilla Rhodes who leaves Diane for Adam Kesher and toys with Diane’s emotions at the dinner party. Second, Diane has identified with her lost love object Camilla. That
Diane has identified with Camilla is supported by at least two pieces of evidence. On one hand, identification in its simplest definition is just resurrecting a lost or dead loved one within the mind of the person who grieves the loss (Freud, *Mourning*, 209). Camilla is surely resurrected within Diane’s unconscious mind as Camilla continues to exist there in the form of Rita. On the other hand, Diane’s second dream visually represents the identification of Betty/Diane with Rita/Camilla via a visual condensation. In this case Rita/Camilla alters her appearance to become more like Betty/Diane by donning a wig similarly shaped and colored to the hair of Betty/Diane and in doing so their images and identities begin to merge. The third element in grieving is the presence or absence of ambivalence in the one who grieves. In this case the ambivalence of Diane toward her lost lover Camilla is established in numerous examples outlined above. In the simplest case however, Diane murders Camilla in flashbacks of her third dream and yet resurrects Camilla as Rita within the world of Diane’s second dream. Surely this is ambivalent love at its most extreme. Fourth and finally, we can conclude that Diane is quite conscious of her loss of Camilla as love object if we continue to assume that the flashback or remembering sequence in Diane’s third dream provides memories of real events in Diane’s waking life. These four criteria in concert suggest that Diane is in a state of pathological mourning.

In turn, the diagnosis of Diane as being in pathological mourning explains several elements of the film. First, the state of the drives, Eros and Thanatos, with regard to pathological mourning supports the reading of the third section of the film, from Club
Silencio to Club Silencio, as a punishment dream. To elaborate, for Freud, all expressions of the drives incorporate a mixture of Eros and Thanatos in varying measure. When a love object is lost and then resurrected within one’s mind through identification the psychic energies, of Eros and Thanatos, that had been invested in the love object now detach from the object and separate upon being withdrawn back into the ego. The energy of Eros reattaches to the figure of the lost object resurrected within the ego and the energy of Thanatos is taken up by the super-ego which in turn directs all the hate and criticism of an ambivalent love toward the ego which has identified with the lost love object (Freud, *Ego and Id*, 144). For the pathological mourner then, the super-ego has become a “rallying-ground for the death drives” which seeks to punish and or destroy the mourner who has identified with the lost love object who betrayed or left the mourner (Freud, *Ego and Id*, 144). As such, it makes sense for Diane’s super-ego to assert control over the dreaming and punish the dreamer as Diane is a pathological mourner.

The second element of the film that pathological mourning explains is Diane committing suicide. Normally, for Freud, suicide is an unthinkable conundrum to which an ego concerned with survival would never consent (Freud, *Mourning*, 211). However, in the presence of ambivalence and identification the super-ego of the pathological mourner can compel the mourner to suicide, and the ego consents, because such an act isn’t really suicide but rather, a murder of the lost love object that now resides within the self (Freud, *Mourning*, 211/12). As such, one can read Diane’s suicide as both a form
of self-punishment and as the murder of Camilla Rhodes for the second time, once in waking life and once again in dream.

The third element of the film explained by pathological mourning is the film’s obsession with killing Diane. Throughout the course of Diane’s second and third dreams she is represented as having been killed at least three times. Diane’s first death comes in her second dream via her condensation with Dan. Though it is unclear in the film, the ABC pilot script of Mulholland Dr. states that Dan has died from having seen the Bum behind Winkie’s (Lynch, Pilot). Diane’s second death appears when Betty and Rita discover the body of a blond woman in Diane’s bedroom. For reasons covered above it is reasonable to consider this dead body Diane’s. The third death of Diane Selwyn, now in its clearest form, occurs with the climactic conclusion of the film where Diane is tormented by super-ego demons, the elderly couple and the bum, and then throws herself on her bed and shoots herself through the mouth. These instances of Diane’s death would not occur within dream unless the super-ego was overflowing with Thanatos, which seeks expression through self-destruction and torment. Also, the sleeping ego would presumably consent to these representations of self-destruction as they allow sleep to continue by satisfying the super-ego instead of the super-ego forcing the dreamer to wake up via an anxiety dream, as in the first dream/shot of the film.

In Judith Butler’s 1990 work, “Gender Trouble”, Butler follows the trajectory of melancholia and its mechanism of identification through Freud’s later work, The Ego and the Id, and in particular how melancholia and identification shape the formation of
As Butler tells Freud’s story, one’s gender and sexuality is largely determined by the passage through the oedipal crisis wherein a heterosexual incest taboo forbids the child from desiring its opposite sexed parent (Butler, 59/60). In resolving the crisis, the child must repudiate its desire for the opposite sexed parent and can choose a positive or negative method for this repudiation (Butler, 59/60).

On one hand, if a boy chooses the positive resolution he displaces his desire for the mother onto other women as substitute and thereby chooses heterosexual objects and consolidates his gender identification as male by fortifying his attachment to his father (Butler, 59/60). If a boy chooses the negative resolution he internalizes the loss of the mother by identifying with her. In identifying with the mother the boy takes on a “feminine libidinal disposition” effectively becoming gendered as a woman and then desires men as sexual objects (Butler, 60). On the other hand, the young girl has the same negative and positive resolutions as options but with the other parent, the father, being given up either by being identified with or by desire being displaced from the father to other men. Just as with the boy, the girl’s positive resolution includes identifying with the gender of the same sexed parent and desire for heterosexual objects, in this case other men, and the negative resolution includes identifying with the lost object, the father, and taking on both his gender, or libidinal disposition, and his choice of sexual-objects, other women (Butler, 60).

For Freud, the factor that determines whether the child chooses the negative or positive resolution to the Oedipal crisis is the degree to which their “disposition” is
masculine or feminine, though he fails to clearly identify what these dispositions are (Butler, 60). Butler suggests that these “dispositions” are the product of a taboo against homosexual desire which precedes the heterosexual incest taboo of the Oedipal crisis as Freud understood it (Butler, 64). In other words the logic of desire present in the oedipal crisis is always already heterosexual as the child always takes the opposite sexed parent as the object of desire in its crisis and not the same sexed parent (Butler, 61). The options to resolve the oedipal crisis then are really different kinds of heterosexual desire, one can either identify with the opposite sex in terms of gender and desire the same sex as objects or one can identify with the same sex in terms of gender and desire the opposite sex as objects (Butler, 61). What is not an option, in Freud’s logic of desire, is the truly homosexual desire where in one could identify with the same sex in terms of gender and choose the same sex as objects (Butler, 61). Or to put it in a slightly vulgar manner, for the sake of clarity, Freud’s heterosexual logic allows for masculine gendered lesbians and feminine gendered gays but does not allow for feminine gendered lesbians and masculine gendered gays (Butler, 61). As such, Butler’s melancholia of gender is that truly homosexual desire (same sex object choice and gender identification) for the same sexed parent is erased and preserved through identification. For Butler then, Freud’s understanding of the formation of sexuality and gender is caught up in a heterosexual logic of desire which disavows and erases the earlier taboo against homosexual desire and desire for the same sexed parent (Butler, 64).
In the following section I will provide further evidence for the appropriateness of reading *Mulholland Dr.* through a Freudian lens by applying Butler’s critique of Freud to the film. To the degree to which *Mulholland Dr.* and its protagonist, Diane are caught up in a heterosexual logic of desire this will amount to evidence that the film operates on a logic which conforms with that of Freud’s theory. By extension this conformity of logic between Freudian theory and the film would suggest that the film is accurately understood through Freud’s theory⁹. The evidence that *Mulholland Dr.* is caught up in a heterosexual logic of desire is provided in two interwoven elements of the film.

The first element of *Mulholland Dr.* which is clearly caught up in the “heterosexual matrix of desire” that Butler identifies in Freud’s process of gender and sexuality formation is our protagonist, Diane Selwyn. To elaborate, Diane is a woman who Freud would have claimed had chosen a negative resolution to her oedipal crisis. In doing so, Diane identified with her opposite sexed parent and consolidated a masculine or male gender identification and with it the choice of objects that heterosexual men prefer, that is, women. Diane is a lesbian trapped within a heterosexual matrix of desire that allows her to choose women as her love objects but, only at the cost of effectively becoming a man, that is, a masculine woman.

While it may seem strange to identify Diane as male, or a masculine lesbian, given that her outward physical appearance is quite feminine, Diane’s behavior can be easily read as masculine or male. In order to identify the male or masculine component

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⁹ However, proving this conformity between the logic of Freudian theory and the logic of the film does not also imply that the real world follows the same logic.
of Diane it is first worth briefly explaining what masculine and feminine amount to in
Freud’s understanding. For Freud, in its simplest form, masculine and feminine qualities
or dispositions are defined through a binary opposition where masculine equals active
and feminine equals passive (Freud, *Three Essays*, 1624). In addition to activity, the
masculine also includes desire for mastery, sadistic impulses, and sexual energy, or
libido, itself (Freud, *Three Essays*, 1624, 1942). As for the feminine, in addition to the
passive, the feminine also includes masochism, shyness, modesty and a need for

To demonstrate that Diane is caught up in a heterosexual logic of desire then is
to demonstrate that she is a masculine lesbian, someone whose behavior is active,
aggressive, seeking mastery or dominance, etc. especially with regard to her behavior
during sex. As for Diane’s masculine behavior, this is clearly manifested in both of the
film’s sex scenes. In Diane’s third dream, she relives a memory of a sexual encounter
with Camilla on her couch in her apartment. In this example, Diane is dominant,
aggressive, and active. To be specific, Diane mounts Camilla and initiates their physical
contact. Also, when Camilla mentions that she no longer wants to be physically intimate
with Diane, Diane attempts to break Camilla’s resistance by physically forcing her into
an embrace. All of this behavior is masculine in the extreme. In Diane’s second dream,
Betty/Diane once again initiates the sexual encounter by beckoning Rita/Camilla into

10 To be sure, this understanding of masculine and feminine is not favorable to the
feminine and may well be inaccurate of real world sexuality but, what I’m after with
Freud is to show that his theory is apt for analyzing the film-art of David Lynch and not
necessarily right about the real world.
her bed. This time however, the sexual encounter is consensual and both parties are active. In her sexual behavior then, Diane demonstrates that she is caught up in a heterosexual logic of desire which constrains her to masculine gender identification as the cost of her desire for women as love objects.

The second element of the Mulholland Dr. that is caught up in a heterosexual matrix of desire and that also places Diane in the role of a man, or masculine lesbian, is the film’s noir sub-plot. Several critics of Mulholland Dr., such as Heather Love and Graham Fuller, have noted its film noir elements but, it is worth going over a few of its noir characteristics before turning to its two primary examples of noir genre conventions, the detective and the femme fatale. In identifying features of film noir in Mulholland Dr., I will be relying on a seminal essay on film noir, Raymond Borde’s and Etienne Chaumeton’s Towards a Definition of Film Noir and the various elements they identified in their definition of film noir.

First, Borde and Chaumeton identify film noir, “qualities such as nightmarish, weird, erotic, ambivalent, and cruel” and a “peculiar oneirism” (Borde, 18/24).” The nightmarish, and oneiristic qualities of film noir would then make the genre a rather suitable one to be used within the film setting of a dream, such as Diane’s dreams. The erotic, ambivalent, and cruel aspects of Mulholland Dr. are presented in stark relief through Diane’s actions as a pathological mourner and the various manifestations of her love and hate toward her lost lover Camilla/Rita throughout the film described above in the section on Diane’s dream wishes. Second, Borde and Chaumeton that the most
consistent elements of film noir are the presence of a crime and an obsession with death; “In every sense of the word a noir film is a film of Death (Borde, 19/20).” The most obvious crime of *Mulholland Dr.* is the murder of Camilla Rhodes by Diane and the hitman, Messing. Also, in line with Borde’s and Chaumeton’s observations of film noir is that the film is told from the point of view of the criminal, in this case Diane (Borde, 20). Furthermore, even the *Mulholland Dr.*’s usage of amnesia, as with Rita, is a common theme of noir films, utilized in noir films such as *The Crooked Way* and *Somewhere in the Night* (Borde, 24).

The two most important noir elements utilized by *Mulholland Dr.* are, of course, the detective and the femme fatale. As for the detective, we have our protagonist Diane Selwyn who takes on the amateur detective role as she attempts to help Rita recover her lost memories and discover who she is and what crime she might be involved in. The detective in film noir is almost without exception a heterosexual male (Borde, 21/22). As Diane plays a male and heterosexual role as the detective in a film noir plot she demonstrates through this performance just how caught up in a heterosexual logic of desire she is. Consider that even in Diane’s second dream, constructed by her Id to satisfy all her wishes, she is still bound to heterosexual desire as she plays the man’s detective role in order to be reunited with her female lover, Rita/Camilla.

As Heather Love notes in her essay, *Spectacular Failure: The Figure of the Lesbian in Mulholland Drive,* *Mulholland Dr.* provides the two most familiar lesbian plots of the
twentieth century (Love, 123). The romance of Betty and Rita in the second dream is “lesbianism in its innocent and expansive form” and “as one big adventure, an entrée into a glamorous and unknown territory (Love, 123). The affair of Diane and Camilla in the real world “offers us a classic lesbian triangle, in which an attractive but unavailable woman dumps a less attractive woman who is figured as exclusively lesbian (Love, 123).” Love is of course, right with her observation of the above lesbian plots and also with her note that “Diane Selwyn is a structural effect of homophobia” but, Love is right in a sense beyond what she states explicitly (Love, 130). The homophobia of the taboo against homosexuality that Butler claims precedes the oedipal incest taboo is fundamental in the formation of sexuality and gender (Butler, 64). As such, Diane is most definitely a structural effect of the homophobic taboo against homosexuality, as it structured her desire, that is, her gender and object-choice. Moreover, the lesbian plot of Betty and Rita which Love sees as a compensation and screen for the failed love of Diane and Camilla is itself still an evocation of the impossibility of truly homosexual desire as Diane must become a man or detective as the price for her lesbian desire of being reunited with Rita/Camilla (Love, 123).

As for the femme fatale of *Mulholland Dr.* we have Camilla Rhodes, whose visual presentation, according to Graham Fuller, was based on another femme fatale, Ava Gardner’s character in *The Killers* (Fuller, 16). To provide further evidence of Camilla as a femme fatale however, I will be appealing to Slavoj Zizek’s understanding of the femme
fatale figure worked out in his book, *Looking Awry: An Introduction to Jacques Lacan through Popular Culture*. According to Zizek the femme fatale is a character,

“who ruins the lives of men and is at the same time victim of her own lust for enjoyment... who endlessly manipulates her partners and is at slave to some third, ambiguous person, sometimes even an impotent or sexually ambivalent man (Zizek, 65).”

In Diane’s real life, glimpsed through the memories presented in Diane’s third dream, it is revealed that Camilla Rhodes is manipulative and ultimately the victim of the traps she lays for Diane. For example, Camilla coaxes Diane, through honeyed words and a gentle touch, into coming to the dinner party only to announce her engagement to Adam Kesher and to kiss another woman in front of her. This cruel betrayal is the catalyst that prompts Diane to have Camilla murdered and ruins Diane’s life.

Another aspect of the film noir plot that often accompanies the femme fatale character is the sexually ambiguous third man, that Zizek points out (Zizek, 65). In this role of the third man, serving as third wheel to the detective (Diane’s ego) and the femme fatale (Camilla) couple, we have Diane’s Id. Diane’s id is the orchestrator of her second dream wherein Camilla is resurrected as Rita, subjected to brain trauma that renders her amnesiac, and helplessly dependent upon Betty, rather like a slave.

In sum, Diane plays the role of a man within the film noir plot in several ways. First, if her real waking life was viewed as a noir plot then, as criminal who murders Camilla, she would be playing a typically male role. Second, Diane’s id serves the role of the third man whom Camilla, the femme fatale, is slave to by creating the second dream
world wherein she is helplessly dependent on Betty/Diane. Third, Diane plays the male detective role who seeks to aid Camilla.

Finally, Zizek notes that the detective has two options with regard to the femme fatale, he can either reject her and save himself or he identifies with her and “meets his fate in a suicidal gesture (Zizek, 66). Once again, the film noir plot offers the perfect platform for Diane’s story as dreamer and pathological mourner. In this case, Diane the detective and pathological mourner cannot help but identify with her lost love and femme fatale Camilla/Rita. As such she inevitably chooses the “suicidal gesture” of killing herself and reaffirming the ultimately impossible nature of a truly homosexual desire within the film (Zizek, 66). Or as Love puts it, “As long as lesbianism is socially denigrated, her corpse [Diane’s] will continue to turn up in the midst of even the dreamiest lesbian fantasy (Love, 130, my addition in brackets).”

Chapter 2: Section F – Mulholland Dr. – Conclusion

In terms of dream theory, Mulholland Dr. can be summarized as a sequence of three dreams dreamt by the film’s protagonist, Diane Selwyn. The first dream consists of the opening shot of the film and is an anxiety dream that ends with Diane waking. After waking briefly, Diane returns to sleep, with the camera in her point of view, falling into a pillow and fading to black. The second dream begins as the camera fades back in to a
close-up shot of the Mulholland Dr. road sign; this is a normal dream in that it is full of
and produced for the sake of the Id’s wish fulfillments. Also, it should be noted that the
second dream’s use of condensation has caused our protagonist dreamer Diane, to be
named Betty and her former lover Camilla Rhodes to be named Rita.

The transition to the third dream begins when Diane, as Betty, and her former lover
Camilla, as Rita, enter Club Silencio. This transition from the second to the third dream
does not interrupt sleep instead, it seamlessly transitions from one dream to the next.
The film remains within this third dream until it eventually returns to Club Silencio and
credits role. The third dream is a punishment dream and as such is orchestrated by a
super-ego overflowing with Thanatos. The punishment dream forces Diane to relive the
memories of the key events that occurred in her waking life and that led up to her
dream-day which, she rejected and reversed in the first and second dream. This pivotal
sequence provides virtually all the information concerning Diane’s real world life and
relations that are necessary to understand and interpret her dreams. It also reveals the
memories that become the building blocks for Diane’s first and second dream which, are
in large part modified repetitions of elements presented in this series of Diane’s
memories.

The overall trajectory of this sequence of dreams is that the dream censorship, in
particular the super-ego censorship, is rather weak in the beginning and the Id is strong
but, as the dreaming progresses the super-ego and its role in the dreams become
stronger and stronger. As for mourning and melancholia, *Mulholland Dr.* can be read as the dreaming wish fulfillments of a pathological mourner in dreams one and two. However, when we get to the punishment dream, the third dream, the swelling of Thanatos in the super-ego that follows identification with a lost love-object compels the super-ego to punish Diane by killing herself within the dream, though in pathological mourning suicide is also a form of murdering the lost love-object, in this case, Camilla Rhodes.

The above Freudian dream reading also explains the more mysterious features of *Mulholland Dr.* by placing them in a clear relationship to Diane and her dreams. For instance, the bum is clarified as being a part of Diane, her super-ego, which attempts to censor Diane’s dream wishes and to punish Diane for having committed crimes that violate the moral and social prohibitions it upholds. Another mysterious element of the film explained by the dream reading is the relationship between Diane and Betty. In this case Betty is a dream condensation that merges Diane with the Winkie’s waitress named Betty and serves as a vehicle for the fulfillment of Diane’s wishes. Also, Rita is a condensation that merges Camilla Rhodes with the poster of Rita Hayworth. For Rita her amnesia and helplessness make her a suitable version of Camilla for the fulfillment of Diane’s wishes of being with a loving Camilla again. Furthermore, the ensemble of Mr. Roque, the Castigliane brothers and the Cowboy are all representatives of Diane’s Id. With this lot the Id’s wish to provide an external road block to keep Diane from stardom and to ensure Camilla’s stardom allows Diane to believe she was robbed of
stardom and not properly judged as untalented. Another mysterious element explained is the blue box which is both an answer to Diane’s curiosity in waking life and a portal between dream worlds supplied by the super-ego in order to get her into a punishment dream. Finally, the repeated appearance of the dead body in rm# 17 is Diane Selwyn and is a manifestation of the supere-ego of a pathological mourner which, is overflowing with desire to punish the dreamer and the lost love object she has identified with, Camilla Rhodes. In addition, pathological mourning explains that Diane killing herself at the conclusion of her punishment dream is properly understood as the second murder of Camilla Rhodes, rather than as a straightforward case of suicide.

Lastly, I hoped to have demonstrated in several ways that Freudian dream theory is not only useful for understanding *Mulholland Dr.*. For instance, the presence of the uncanny with the bum suggests that Mulholland Dr. takes place in an impossible or magical world. This in addition to the irrational nature of dreams and the easy appearance of the uncanny therein suggest that *Mulholland Dr.* is for the most part a dream. Also, *Mulholland Dr.*’s adherence to Film Noir genre conventions, which is noted for its dreamlike and nightmarish qualities, suggests that reading the film as a dream is reasonable. Furthermore, by demonstrating that *Mulholland Dr.* shares the use of a logic of gender and sexuality that Butler observes in Freud suggests that *Mulholland Dr.* is appropriately understood through Freudian theory. Taking all the above into consideration, along with its explanatory value, I hope to have shown that Freud’s
theory, in particular his dream theory, is a useful and appropriate lens for understanding

*Mulholland Dr.*\(^{11}\).

\(^{11}\) However, given the complexity and ambiguousness of *Mulholland Dr.* it seems likely that there are other useful and appropriate lenses through which to view the film.
In this section I’ll provide an analysis of *Lost Highway* using Freud’s theory of dreams and his theory of mourning and melancholia, augmented with the suggestions of Tammy Clewell outlined above. The path traveled in communicating the analysis will take the following steps. First, I will give a brief synopsis of my analysis of the film in terms of dream theory and mourning and melancholia. Second, I’ll examine various scenes and shots in the film and provide evidence for my dream theory reading while progressing through the plot of the film, from start to finish. Third, I’ll examine the film in terms of mourning and melancholia while also making use of Judith Butler’s critique of Freud and the film’s noir genre elements, outlining what this reading explains about the film in support of or in addition to the earlier dream theory reading.

In terms of dream theory the plot of *Lost Highway* is comprised of two dreams and a brief period in the waking world in the life of the film’s protagonist, Fred Madison played by Bill Pullman, who is in pathological mourning after murdering his wife Renee. The first dream of Fred begins with the opening shot of the film. In this medium shot we see the titular lost highway illuminated by the beams of headlights as the opening credits overlay a pitch black sky. Fred’s first dream continues until he watches the third video tape to show up on his doorstep and sees himself having murdered his wife Renee.
Madison on tape. As waves of anxiety and revulsion hit Fred while watching this shocking scene he stands up from his couch and calls out for Renee. Flashes of light burst over the living room and Fred as the camera cuts to Fred in another room as the name of Renee still echoes. Fred has awoken only to be immediately punched in the nose by a detective who shouts, “Sit down, killer!” (*Lost Highway*).

Beyond the many instances of the film corresponding with Freudian dream theory within this first forty five minutes of the film, which we will get to later, there are a few good and simple reasons for thinking that this section of the film, from beginning to prison, is Fred’s dream. The first reason is that this section of the film takes the form of a relatively coherent unit, by telling a story consistently from the perspective of Fred Madison, and this unit is rendered impossible or unreal by the presence of the Mystery Man character. Fred meets the Mystery Man, played by Robert Blake, at a party. At this party the Mystery Man tells Fred something impossible, that he is in two places at once, both at the party and at Fred’s home. Fred replies, “That’s fucking crazy, man” but, the Mystery Man demands that Fred call him at Fred’s home for proof and the impossible happens, the Mystery Man answers. Given that dreams are created largely via the dream work, which operates on the primary process that is unconstrained by logic, reason, or laws of physics, anything is possible in dreams including much that is impossible in the mundane reality of waking life (Freud, Outline, 34/5). The first instance in the film which resembles waking up that follows this irruption of the
irrational or magical quality of dreams is Fred’s abrupt shift from the dream world, while watching a horrifying tape, to the waking world where he is in the custody of two detectives. Thus the first dream is delimited by the beginning of the film, along with the evidence that it is not the real world given its impossible and or bizarre dream features, and the episode of waking that signals the end of the dream. Also, though it is a minor detail, the fact that Renee is always wearing high heels in this section of the film, even immediately after getting up in the morning while grabbing the newspaper off their doorstep, suggests this is a dream. The consistent presence of Renee’s high heels just strikes this viewer as exceedingly odd, and more likely in a dream world than the real world, after all, who wears heels while getting the newspaper?

The next few scenes, following Fred waking up to the detectives, show Fred having been found guilty of murder and sent to prison to eventually be executed by electric chair. Tormented by the memory of his crime and insomnia the prison doctor gives him pills and says “Sleep now” (Lost Highway). I read this section of the film as taking place in the normal reality of Fred’s waking world for two reasons. First, this section of the film contains nothing supernatural or impossible that could not take place in waking reality. Second, as we will see through examination of the film later on, this section of the film reveals an unhappy reality that Fred wishes to escape.

Immediately after receiving the sleeping pills from the prison doctor and returning to his cell another impossible event occurs, that is, Fred goes through a horrifying metamorphosis and is replaced with Pete Dayton. The sleeping pills plus this
impossible event signal that the film has now returned to the dream world of Fred Madison, beginning his second dream. Given that dreams are entirely egotistical, for Freud, it is safe to assume that our protagonist and dreamer Fred Madison has now been condensed with Pete Dayton in such a way that Fred is hidden within the vehicle named Pete, who satisfies all sorts of Fred’s wishes including the most obvious wish to escape prison (Freud, Interpretation, 338/9). As we will see later however, Fred’s wish to escape goes beyond simply leaving prison. *Lost Highway* progresses within Fred’s dream world without any further episode that resembles waking up and contains further elements of the impossible, such as Fred later emerging from or simply replacing Pete near the end of the film. The film concludes with Fred fleeing the police down the lost highway in the desert which leaves the viewer and Fred where we began. Given that this section of the film, from falling asleep to the end of the film, contains the impossible and no evidence of waking up, it is reasonable to conclude that this whole section of the film is the second dream of Fred Madison.

To make the above plot synopsis a bit clearer, consider the following two timeline charts. They provide timelines of *Lost Highway*’s plot and story as I read them via dream theory. As in the preceding chapter, plot is here defined as, “all the events that are directly presented to us, including their causal relations, chronological order, duration, frequency, and spatial locations” and story is defined as, “all the events that we see and hear, plus all those that we infer or assume to have occurred, arranged in their presumed causal relations, chronological order, duration, frequency, and spatial
locations (Bordwell, 480/481).” The story timeline will be supported by arguments and examples from the film provided in the following sections.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Figure 3. Plot Timeline</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Plot Timeline - Lost Highway Begins</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fred's first dream with opening shot on the lost highway</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fred Madison at home, Intercom says “Dick Laurent is dead”</td>
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<tr>
<td>Fred and Rene's awkward sex scene and Fred's dream within dream</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fred and Renee go to Andy's party and meet the Mystery Man</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fred watches the tape of him having murdered Renee</td>
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<tr>
<td>Fred wakes up to find himself in custody of detectives Al and Ed</td>
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<tr>
<td>Fred is sentenced to death, goes to prison and receives sleeping pills</td>
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<tr>
<td>Fred's second dream begins in his cell having transformed into Pete Dayton</td>
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<tr>
<td>Pete/Fred goes home/escapes prison</td>
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<tr>
<td>Alice and Pete get together.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mr. Eddy/Dick Laurent grows suspicious. Sheila confronts Pete for Cheating</td>
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<tr>
<td>Alice and Pete rob and kill Andy</td>
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<tr>
<td>“You will never have me.” Alice and Pete disappear and Fred reemerges</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Mystery Man confronts Fred</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fred and the Mystery Man kill Mr. Eddy/Dick Laurent.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fred goes home and tells himself that “Dick Laurent is dead”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fred flees the police onto the lost highway</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lost Highway ends</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Fred dreams his first dream (first 45 minutes) of the film, from opening shot to Ed punching Fred.

Fred is captured by the detectives Ed and Al and falls asleep while in their custody.

Fred dreams his second dream of the film upon returning to his prison cell.

Lost Highway ends still in Fred's second dream on the same shot of the lost highway that opened the film.

“A long time ago” Renee meets Andy at Moke’s and takes a job working for Andy and by extension Mr. Eddy/Dick Laurent, whom Andy works for/makes pornography for.

Fred and Renee meet and get married.

It is uncertain whether Renee meets Andy and Dick Laurent/Mr. Eddy before or after marrying Fred or whether she continues her relationship with Andy and Dick after marrying Fred.

Fred discovers Renee’s relationship to Andy and Dick and pornography. This could be cheating or just Renee’s premarriage sexual history.

The above discovery causes jealousy, paranoia of infidelity (real or imagined), and anger sufficient that Fred kills Renee.

Fred desired to kill Andy and Dick along with Renee but it is uncertain whether he actually did so in the waking world or only in his dreams.

Fred is sentenced to death for murder and goes to prison. The prison doctor gives him sleeping pills.

Fred discovers Renee’s relationship to Andy and Dick and pornography. This could be cheating or just Renee’s premarriage sexual history.

The above discovery causes jealousy, paranoia of infidelity (real or imagined), and anger sufficient that Fred kills Renee.

Fred desired to kill Andy and Dick along with Renee but it is uncertain whether he actually did so in the waking world or only in his dreams.

Fred is captured by the detectives Ed and Al and falls asleep while in their custody.

Fred dreams his first dream (first 45 minutes) of the film, from opening shot to Ed punching Fred.

Fred is sentenced to death for murder and goes to prison. The prison doctor gives him sleeping pills.

Fred dreams his second dream of the film upon returning to his prison cell.

Lost Highway ends still in Fred’s second dream on the same shot of the lost highway that opened the film.

Figure 4. Story Timeline
Chapter 3: Section B – Fred’s First Dream

Having outlined the plot structure of Lost Highway above, as two dreams and a brief segment in waking life, we can now turn to examining Fred’s first dream. As Freud noted, it is possible to interpret some of a dream without the help of the dreamer if one knows something about the dreamer’s personal relations in waking life and, of course, knows the mechanics and theory behind dreams (Freud, *Interpretation*, 357). As such I will examine and interpret Fred's first dream in light of sections of the film that give the viewer access to some of Fred’s waking life personal relations. The information about Fred's life from these sections in conjunction with material from Fred’s dreams will allow the wishes motivating and fulfilled by Fred’s dreams to be inferred. Along the way I will point out instances where Lost Highway corresponds to the mechanics of Freudian dream theory and Freudian theory in general.

The first section to turn to for information on Fred’s waking life and personal relations therein is the brief section of the film that actually occurs while Fred is awake. This section begins with a close-up shot of Fred getting punched in the nose by Detective Ed as he yells, “Sit down, killer” (*Lost Highway*). Fred replies, “Tell me I didn’t kill her” (*Lost Highway*). After entering prison one of the guards refers to Fred as “that wife-killer” identifying with certainty that Fred is a murderer and his victim is Renee. These scenes in the waking world in conjunction with the fact that Fred’s first dream
represents Renee as both still alive and married to Fred suggests a few wishes on Fred’s part. Fred wishes that he wasn’t a killer and that Renee wasn’t dead and by extension Fred wishes to escape or deny this unhappy reality. Fred also wishes to still be with and loved by Renee. All of these wishes are fulfilled by Fred’s first dream, save perhaps the wish that Renee loves him where the fulfillment of that wish is less certain.

Another section of the film, within the first dream, that offers access to Fred’s waking life are the video tapes that Fred and Renee receive at their home. These three tapes proceed in a linear fashion with each consecutive tape observing their home and steadily getting closer to the event of Fred’s crime, the murder and dismemberment of his wife Renee, within their bedroom. In this case the important element revealed from Fred’s waking life is a few brief glimpses of the act of Fred murdering and dismembering Renee. There are several reasons for believing that these tapes, especially the third and final tape, give some access to an actual event in Fred’s waking life. First, Fred sees flashes of identical images of a dead mutilated Renee while waking in prison as he does on the third tape. Second, a bit of Fred’s dialogue within his first dream emphasizes the role of video cameras and their products, tapes, for Fred.

“AL (to Renee)
Do you own a video camera?
RENEE
No. Fred hates them.
The Detectives both look at Fred.
FRED
I like to remember things my own way.
AL
What do you mean by that?
FRED
How I remember them. Not necessarily the way they happened (Lost Highway).”
The above dialogue suggests that, for Fred, video cameras and their products record and reproduce the reality of events the way they actually happened. The dialogue also suggests that Fred wishes to escape and or reconstruct the past in order to remember a past and live in a present that suits his wishes better than reality. This kind of desire is precisely the function of dreams as the dream work is essentially a wish fulfillment engine. It also suggests that the tapes reproduce real world events and not mere figments of Fred’s dream imagination (Freud, *Interpretation*, 503). If the tapes now seem like a contradiction, as they show the reality that Fred wishes to deny and escape it is only an apparent contradiction. To elaborate, as Fred watches the third tape and witnesses his brutal act of murder, he is struck by obvious waves of anxiety and revulsion, it is so horrifying in fact that he promptly wakes up in order to escape that horrible vision. In Freud’s terms the first dream has ended with the third tape as an anxiety dream. With anxiety dreams one of the Id’s repressed wishes is able to find fulfillment in the dream without any censorship from the ego or superego (Freud, *Interpretation*, 579). In such cases what is experienced as a pleasing wish fulfillment for the dreamer’s Id’ is experienced by the other structures or agencies of his mind, the ego and especially the superego, as an anxiety sufficiently intense to prompt waking and quickly end the inappropriate dream (Freud, *Interpretation*, 579/ *On Dreams*, 68). With Fred’s anxiety dream it seems clear that the repressed wish harbored by Fred’s Id is to murder and dismember Renee and that this is experienced as horrifying anxiety by Fred’s ego and superego. With regard to Renee then, it seems clear that Fred holds
contradictory and competing sets of wishes characteristic of a deeply ambivalent love. On one hand Fred wishes to kill and or punish Renee, for reasons that will become clear later on. On the other hand, Fred wishes to deny killing Renee, for her to be alive, well, and lovingly with Fred.

Within Fred’s first dream there is one further section that offers the viewer a glimpse into Fred’s waking life and that is Fred’s dream within a dream. In this scene Fred and Renee are in bed and have just finished one of the more awkward sex scenes in film history as Fred fails to evoke any reaction, let alone pleasure, in Renee save the fact that she consoles him by patting his back and repeating “its ok” several times (Lost Highway). As Fred recoils from Renee’s consolatory embrace a strange play of unpleasant emotions cross Fred’s face. Next, without any smooth transition out of this painfully awkward moment Fred tells Renee the story of a dream he had. The camera then leaves Fred and Renee in bed to reveal the dream that Fred had, wherein the camera in Fred’s point of view travels through the house to find Renee alone in bed and then swoops down toward her face as she reacts to the camera by registering terror on her face and putting her arms up in a defensive gesture.

For Freud, when dreams are operating normally, being constructed primarily to suit the wishes of the dreamer’s Id, what is represented within a dream as a dream can safely be considered to be, “the reality, the true recollection, while the continuation of the dream, on the contrary, merely represents what the dreamer wishes” (Freud, Interpretation, 353). With Fred’s dream within a dream then, its suggestion of Fred
attacking Renee is something the dream interpreter should consider to be real, a true recollection of something that happened in waking life.

In terms of wishes, Fred’s dream within a dream can be read in multiple contrary ways. However, given the irrational nature of dreams, Freud indicated that any point of dream interpretation that suggests an “either-or” resolution, should be replaced for interpretation with an “and”, that is, with both contrary alternatives being present and valid within the dream (Freud, *On Dreams*, 28). To elaborate, if we analyze Fred’s dream within a dream in the context of his ambivalent feelings toward Renee and in conjunction with the immediately preceding sex scene several contrary wishes are evident.

First, the awkward sex scene appears to be one of several point of compromise in dream construction and wish fulfillment where Fred’s id and censoring superego have made a bargain (Freud, *New Intro*, 18). In this case Fred’s id wish to “have” Renee again is granted but the cost of the superego’s censorship and or punishment is to sour the fulfillment itself by ensuring that Renee doesn’t enjoy or even participate in the act save to point out Fred’s sexual inadequacy by consoling him afterwards. Second, Fred’s dream within a dream can be interpreted as the id’s wish to punish Renee, perhaps for emasculating him within the dream or perhaps for emasculating him and or cheating on him in waking life. Third, the punishment of Renee, issued by Fred’s implied attack upon Renee, is also a punishment for Fred given that it contradicts his id wishes that Renee be alive and with Fred and his wish to deny or escape the reality that he is a murderer.
Having covered all the segments of Fred’s first dream that give the viewer some insight into his waking life and the various wishes fulfilled and or confounded t, we can now turn to placing the last significant and ambiguous element of the first dream, the mystery man, within the frame of Freudian dream theory. Fred and the viewer first meet the mystery man when Fred and Renee go to a party at Andy’s house. A man, dressed all in black and wearing makeup that casts a deathly pallor upon his face, begins a conversation with Fred. He doesn’t give his name but, *Lost Highway*’s credits refer to him as the “Mystery Man”. It is common in dreams for the dreamer to appear multiple times within a dream both as himself and hidden within others (Freud, *Remarks*, 4041). The dreamer also often splits off parts of himself and places these parts hidden within other characters (Freud, *Remarks*, 4041). Such is the case with the mystery man he is a portion of the film’s dreamer Fred placed within another body. The part of Fred that the mystery man represents is Fred’s superego. As covered earlier, the superego’s role, relative to the dreamer and dream construction, is to observe, to correct or censor, and to punish (Freud, *Outline*, 92/3). In the following section I will examine how the mystery man becomes rather clear and simple if viewed from the perspective of an observing, censoring, and punishing superego.

First, the mystery man’s bizarre behavior and dialogue can be explained if understood as issuing from Fred’s superego and not as a nameless stranger. For example, while the mystery man is talking to Fred at the party, Fred asks him, “Who are you” (*Lost Highway*)? The mystery man replies simply by laughing, echoing between
laughter in person and over the phone. While this seems rather bizarre at first glance, it is a perfectly reasonable response if the mystery man is Fred, or rather a part of Fred. The mystery man concludes their conversation by demanding his phone back and saying, “It’s been a pleasure talking to you” (*Lost Highway*). A few obvious questions raised by this episode are why does the mystery man take the trouble to prove to Fred that he is, impossibly, at both the party and at Fred’s house, and why exactly did the mystery man enjoy their conversation? The answer to both questions involves the super-ego’s role as censor and punisher of the dream and dreamer.

As established above, Fred wishes to deny and or escape the reality of the waking world where he is a killer. To the superego, as upholder of moral and social prohibitions, Fred has committed the crime of murder and then added a second crime of attempting to escape punishment by escaping reality into a dream and by constructing the dream such that the crimes never happened, that is, with Renee still being alive. The superego then intervenes within Fred’s dream to censor his wish fulfillments and punish the dreamer by reversing and or contradicting Fred’s wish fulfillments. Also, punishment dreams are usually wholesale replacements of the id’s wish fulfillments with the fulfillment of the superego’s wish to critique, censor, and punish the dream and dreamer (*Freud, New Intro*, 34). However, in the case of Fred’s first dream the superego is unable to force the id into submission and dominate the construction of the dream but, rather it is only able to punish the dreamer and censor the dream by forcing points of compromise in the wish fulfillment and or to convert the
pleasure Fred receives at the fulfillment of his id’s wishes into unpleasure. With the mystery man’s impossible performance of being at the party and simultaneously at Fred’s house he obviously scares Fred and causes him to suspect that the impossible may be true as Fred immediately returns home and searches the house. With this performance the mystery man has revealed that the dream world is impossible and unreal world and a punishment dream, at least at points. With regard to why the mystery man so enjoyed their conversation, it is now clear that the superego derived pleasure from having its own wish fulfilled. The superego/mystery man wished to punish Fred, the dreamer, and fulfilled this wish by causing Fred to doubt the reality of his dream world and or at least by causing Fred to suffer through instead of taking enjoyment in his dream world escape.

Another aspect of the superego, the role of observation, is nicely demonstrated by the mystery man through the video tapes which show up anonymously on Fred and Renee’s doorstep. As the viewer discovers later in the film, within Fred’s second dream, it is the mystery man who has produced the video tapes. The evidence for this is that we see the mystery man with a video camera taping Fred at a cabin in the desert while the camera cuts back and forth between Fred’s point of view and the camera’s point of view. The image we see through the mystery man’s video camera is the same grainy black and white image that is present with all of the tapes involving Fred and Renee’s house. Given the earlier examination of the tapes we already know that the tapes represent reality for Fred and an event therein that he desperately wishes to avoid or
deny. In this sense the tapes are a form of voyeuristic observation and a punishment to the dreamer, both of which are entirely in accord with the functions of the superego (Freud, *Outline*, 92-3).

Before moving on to examining Fred’s second dream, there is one more fascinating feature of the mystery man that bears looking at, which is the uncanny. While the mystery man seems uncanny throughout the film, at least to this viewer, his impossible display of being at two places at once discussed above is likely the most uncanny moment in the film. With Freud’s understanding of the uncanny and of dreams one can account for several elements of this episode in the film, such as, what the uncanny is, why it occurs at the party, why the superego would use the uncanny and most importantly why the uncanny is likely to occur in a dream.

For Freud, the uncanny is a kind of fear that is elicited when something repressed appears to have returned (Freud, *Uncanny*, 147). As for the sources of the uncanny experience, Freud identifies two general categories of psychic phenomena, repressed infantile or primitive beliefs, and repressed wishes or fears and childhood complexes (Freud, *Uncanny* 141). With the mystery man at the party the source of the uncanny is an infantile or primitive belief which had been repressed and now seems to return, that is, the impossibility of being at two places at once now appears to be possible. Or as Freud puts it,

“an uncanny effect often arises when the boundary between fantasy and reality is blurred, when we are faced with the reality of something that we have until now considered imaginary…” (Freud, *Uncanny*, 150).
For Fred the effect of the uncanny that the mystery man produces is fear and doubt as to whether the impossible is possible and whether his seemingly real world is in fact unreal, a dream. Given that the superego/mystery man wishes to punish Fred for his crime of murder and for attempting to escape punishment the usage of the uncanny seems a perfect method for undermining Fred’s enjoyment of his escape and thus a fitting punishment. However, the presence of the uncanny also lends support to the interpretation that *Lost Highway* is primarily the representation of Fred’s dreams because dreams offer a much more fertile environment for the uncanny than mundane waking reality. For instance, the uncanny depends on something which is normally repressed returning to consciousness and being presented to the senses (Freud, *Uncanny*, 147). Things that are repressed are much more likely to return in dream than in reality because the ego and superego relax repression while sleeping (Freud, *On Dreams*, 63). Also, the impossible or irrational is much more likely to occur in dreams than in reality because dreams are primarily constructed according to the irrational primary process that owes no allegiance to normal waking world laws, like physics, time, causality, etc. (Freud, *Interpretation*, 601). As such the presence of the uncanny, for the sake of interpretation, should be taken to indicate the presence of a dream or unreal world before it indicates the real waking world has taken a turn for the magical or impossible.
Chapter 3: Section C – Fred’s Second Dream

Having covered the mystery man/super-ego we can turn to examining Fred’s second dream. This dream begins just after Fred has received sleeping pills from a prison doctor in the waking world and returns to his cell. The film ends still within Fred’s dream. To place this dream within the frame of Freud’s dream theory I will examine it in the following order. First, I will outline sections of the film that provide information about Fred’s waking life relations, in addition to such sections already covered with Fred’s first dream. Second, I will address the dream wishes that can be inferred from Fred’s waking life in conjunction with the content of his second dream. Third, I will show how these wishes are fulfilled and or confounded by examining various scenes within the second dream’s portion of the film. Throughout all this I will be pointing out how parts of the film discussed accord with mechanics of Freud’s dream theory.

From the earlier examination of Fred’s first dream we know that information concerning Fred’s waking life, and his personal relations therein, is accessible to the viewer through Fred’s dream within a dream, the video tapes Fred and Renee receive from the mystery man, and, of course, the section of the film that actually occurs within Fred’s waking world. From these portions of the film, and Fred’s first dream, it was inferred that Fred had the following wishes fulfilled and or contradicted, for Renee to be alive, for Renee to be with and love Fred, for Renee to desire Fred, for Fred not to be a
murderer, and finally for Renee to be punished. If we include Fred’s superego in the wishing list as well then, the wish to punish Fred is also present in the first dream. As we will see, all the above wishes remain in play within Fred’s second dream. However, there are wishes in the second dream that go beyond the ones covered above and they depend on the sections of the film occurring in the real waking world and on a further video provided by the mystery man, this time via a handheld TV.

First, in the waking world and before drifting into his second dream, Fred is imprisoned for murder and awaiting execution by electric chair. Upon falling asleep, Fred is promptly replaced by and or transformed into Pete Dayton and Pete is released from prison. Given that the first thing to happen to the man in Fred’s prison cell, after Fred takes sleeping pills, is release from prison, it is a safe bet that Fred wishes to escape prison and execution in addition to escaping from the reality of being a murderer.

Second, the only source of information concerning Fred’s waking life relations that is presented within Fred’s second dream is the mystery man’s hand held TV. Near the end of the film Fred and the mystery man have kidnapped Mr. Eddy/Dick Laurent and slit his throat in the middle of the empty desert. Dick asks what Fred and the mystery man want, that is, why they are tormenting him and the mystery man replies by handing him the TV which plays a video for Dick. The video reveals to Dick shots from the pornography that he had arranged for Renee to be in and shots of him aggressively kissing and grabbing Renee while he and several others watch the same porn film at
Andy’s house. Given that these shots are provided by the mystery man and have for the most part a similar look, being in displayed by the TV in grainy black and white, it is likely that they, like the earlier video tapes, represent actual events from Fred’s waking life. In addition Fred’s association between tapes/video cameras and an unpleasant reality supports the reality of what the TV shows. Also, the TV shows why exactly Fred would wish to punish and kill Mr. Eddy/Dick Laurent and Andy as it suggests both are involved with Renee’s participation in porn and possibly cheating on Fred.

If we assume that what Mr. Eddy/Dick Laurent watches on the mystery man’s TV are true recollections from Fred’s waking life and not mere figments of dream imagination then a few more interesting consequences follow. First, dreams are constructed out of memories and scenes in dreams are often just modified repetitions of actual events in the life of the Dreamer (Freud, On Dreams, 40/ Interpretation, 511). If the TV shows reality then the scene where Pete and Alice rob and kill Andy is just such a modified repetition of events from Fred’s real life. In this case the modified repetition is probably a mixture of Fred’s memories of watching the porn that Renee was in combined with memory of Andy’s house, perhaps from a party Fred had attended at Andy’s.

Second, if we assume the mystery man’s TV shows reality then Lost Highway has built a set of associations connecting the following items: reality, Renee, pornography, and tapes, films and video cameras. As such, tapes become the perfect medium with which to torment or punish Fred as they not only show Fred the reality his wishes to
deny or avoid but, they are also a symbol that evokes pain and jealousy for Fred. This symbolic function of tapes and video cameras for Fred is produced through their association with Renee’s infidelity and or Fred’s sexual inadequacy. Tapes and video cameras are the medium that records reality and Renee in porn wherein she is much more active and seemingly enjoying sex more than she does with Fred, if we take the awkward sex scene from Fred’s first dream to be any indication of their sex life in reality.

Having established the list of wishes that Fred seeks to have fulfilled we can get to the business of examining how these wishes are fulfilled and or confounded within Fred’s second dream. To begin with then, let us place what is perhaps the most confusing element of the film, Pete and his relationship to Fred, within the frame of Freudian dream theory. The second dream, beginning in Fred’s prison cell, is dreamt by Fred but we don’t see Fred in this dream until near the end of the film. However, if we follow Freud’s principal that “dreams are completely egotistical” then we can assume that even though Fred is not present as himself, for about an hour of the film, he is nevertheless present within the dream (Freud, Interpretation, 338/9). As mentioned earlier, the answer to this puzzle is that Fred remains the protagonist of his second dream but as the character Pete Dayton and not as himself. In dream theory terms Pete Dayton is an instance of both condensation and displacement\(^\text{12}\).

\(^{12}\) For Freud, combinations of displacement and condensation are a commonplace of dreams (Freud, On Dreams, 37).
As for condensation, Fred and Pete have been merged or condensed into one character where Pete retains the name, friends and family, voice and mannerisms of someone named Pete Dayton but, carried within is Fred Madison, and in particular Fred’s desires or dream wishes. However, there are several reasons to assert that Pete is Fred beyond the simple observation that it’s Fred’s dream. First, at several points in the second dream Pete has brief glimpses of the same memory images of Renee’s dead body that Fred sees both while dreaming and while awake in prison. This suggests that Pete and Fred are of one mind (and dream) as Pete would have no access to such memories or images otherwise. Second, the wounds to Pete’s face upon his appearance in Fred’s prison cell and the glimpses of Fred’s face contorting and bulging as he flees the police at the end of the film both suggest a physical transformation from Fred’s body to the body of another: to Pete’s body in the first case. I claim that Fred has merely transformed his visual appearance to Pete, while remaining himself within, because of the context in which both transformations occur. In both cases this grotesque physical transformation, or just its grotesque aftermath, occurs precisely when a change of appearance and identity will fulfill Fred’s wish to escape punishment for his crimes by becoming someone whom the police cannot punish for Fred’s crimes.

As for displacement, Pete serves as a vehicle for the expression and fulfillment of Fred’s wishes or desires, like the wish to escape prison. Freud writes of displacement that,
“for reasons of censorship it [the dream-work] transfers psychical intensity from what is important but objectionable on to what is indifferent” (Freud, Interpretation, 586, My addition in brackets).

The displacement that occurs with Pete then, is a displacement or transfer of what is important to the Id but objectionable to the super-ego, Fred’s dream wishes, on to what is indifferent to super-ego, a vehicle named Pete. As discussed earlier, Fred’s wishes are largely objectionable to the super-ego because they violate various moral and social prohibitions, and mostly concern his crimes in the waking world. Pete on the other hand is largely indifferent to the super-ego, as he has committed no serious crimes and Fred’s wishes issuing from Pete are thus less objectionable to the censoring super-ego. On one hand, for example, it isn’t in principle morally objectionable for Pete to wish for Renee to be alive, to be with Renee, and for Renee to desire him and have sex with him. On the other hand, these same wishes are morally objectionable for Fred given that he has brutally murdered and mutilated Renee. The bizarre mysterious appearance of Pete and his relationship to Fred is rendered clear if we understand these elements of the film as the id’s attempt to circumvent the dream censorship of Fred’s super-ego. Also, we will see in the following that this attempt to avoid dream censorship with Pete is fairly successful.

Having established that Pete is Fred, transformed through condensation and displacement, we can now turn to another set of condensations and how Fred’s wishes

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13 It is worth noting that Pete’s occupation provides a metaphor for his function within the dream. Pete is a car mechanic by trade and his dream function is being a vehicle and care-taker for Fred’s wishes.
are fulfilled and or confounded through them. In Fred’s second dream Renee has also been subjected to transformations using condensation and displacement. In this case Renee has been split, roughly along the divide between her good and bad qualities according to Fred’s judgment, into the characters of Alice and Sheila. To support this claim let’s consider the evidence for each character being a condensation of Renee in turn.

Alice is easily read as being a condensation or merging of Renee with another person for several reasons. First, Alice’s face and body are identical to Renee’s save Alice having blond hair while Renee has dark brown hair. Second, the mystery man tells the viewer that Alice is Renee when he says, “Alice who? Her name is Renee. If she told you her name is Alice she is lying” (*Lost Highway*). Third, consider the photo(s) of Alice/Renee with Andy and Mr.Eddy/Dick Laurent at Andy’s house\(^\text{14}\). When this photo first appears it is at the exact moment when Alice has begun to contradict Fred’s wishes concerning her, that she desire him and be with and be faithful to him, by suggesting betrayal and threatening Pete/Fred with a gun. When Pete/Fred notices the photo it displays Renee and Alice as two separate people along with Andy and Mr.Eddy/Dick Laurent. Fred has split Renee and Alice in the photo because he wishes to retain Renee as an object of desire and Alice for the moment appears to be abandoning that role. Later, when the police view the same photo in Andy’s home the photo only shows

\(^{14}\) The minor mystery of Mr. Eddy/Dick Laurent’s two names is solved by condensation. Mr. Eddy is what Pete and Alice call Dick Laurent. Fred, Andy, and the detectives call the same man Dick Laurent. Mr. Eddy is a creation of Fred’s second dream and therein a condensation with Dick Laurent. Dick Laurent is a character from Fred’s waking life who was involved with Renee and her role in porn.
Renee with Andy and Mr.Eddy/Dick Laurent and Alice has disappeared. This
disappearance is because Fred has already abandoned Alice as a vehicle for enjoying
Renee at this point in the film and no longer needs or wishes for the photo to show
something other than the truth.

Assuming that Alice is Renee let’s look at how she relates to Fred’s wishes, to
their fulfillment and contradiction. First, If Alice is Renee then Fred’s wish that Renee be
alive is fulfilled. Second, Alice initiates a relationship with Pete/Fred. She also initiates
and is aggressive in their numerous sexual encounters. For instance, Alice pushes Pete
up against a wall and pins him there with a kiss saying, “I want more. Can I call you?”
and Pete agrees, of course (Lost Highway). This is the opposite of Renee’s behavior in
the first dream’s sex scene. Alice/Renee satisfies Fred’s wishes that she desire him, and
aggressively enjoy their encounters. With Alice and Pete, Fred can enjoy everything he
lacked sexually and or physically in the first dream and presumably in waking life. With
Pete and Alice, Fred can be young, handsome, virile, and desired by Renee.

Embodying the other side of Renee is her condensation with Sheila. Where Alice
is sexually aggressive and initiates sex with Pete, Sheila is passive and accepts Pete
instead of taking him. Where Alice is dangerous and threatening, playing a seductress
and gangster’s (Mr.Eddy/Dick Laurent’s) moll, Sheila is the good girl from Pete’s
neighborhood who is faithful and caring. Though there is less evidence to support that
Sheila is Renee than there is to support Alice being Renee, the binary opposition in
qualities between Sheila and Alice suggest that they are two versions or parts of the
same person, Renee. Perhaps the most convincing reason to view Sheila as a condensation of Renee however, is the ways in which Sheila fulfills Fred’s wishes.

For example, several elements of Fred’s second dream concerning Sheila involve the method of reversal, the most favored means of dream representation, in order to fulfill Fred’s wishes (Freud, *Interpretation*, 342). First, Sheila is jealous and needy concerning Pete. This would be a reversal of Fred’s behavior toward Renee in the first dream and likely also a reversal of Fred’s behavior in the waking world. For instance, consider the following dialogue spoken while Sheila and Pete make out in a car,

“SHEILA - Why don't you like me? 
PETE - I do like you, Sheila. 
SHEILA - How much?” (Lost Highway).

Second, Sheila accuses Pete of cheating on her and is violent towards him, hitting him repeatedly and knocking him down. This is a reversal of how Fred acts toward Renee, with violence and jealousy, both in the first dream and in the waking world. Third, Pete betrays Sheila by cheating on and abandoning her for Alice. This is a reversal of what Fred must feel that Renee has done to him in waking life, though whether Renee actually cheated on Fred through her relationship with Dick Laurent and pornography or only had a sex life before Fred is uncertain.

With what we’ve learned from the mystery man’s TV, the examination of Sheila and Alice, and Fred’s murder of Renee in waking life, it should be clear that Fred wishes to punish the men involved with Renee’s perceived betrayal of Fred. As the mystery man’s TV shows Renee at Andy’s house with Mr.Eddy/Dick Laurent and on
display in pornography, likely produced by Andy, the two obvious targets for Fred’s
vengeance and punishment are Andy and Mr. Eddy/Dick Laurent. In the second
dream of *Lost Highway*, Fred’s wish for vengeance on Andy and Dick Laurent is satisfied
in several ways.

To begin with, let’s examine the ways in which Andy is punished by Pete/Fred. First, Pete/Fred kills Andy but, indirectly by pushing him into a coffee table that
incredibly, impales Andy through the forehead. This indirect murder satisfies at least
two of Fred’s wishes. First, he has punished Andy for putting Renee in porn. Second,
Fred wishes to deny or avoid the reality of him being a murderer. This wish is satisfied
with Andy’s murder by the double layer separating Fred from the actual event of Andy’s
death. The first layer of separation is the fact that Andy is killed by Pete and not Fred
and the second layer is that Pete doesn’t directly kill Andy but is the indirect cause of
Andy’s death by coffee table.

The second form of Fred’s punishment of Andy concerns the absurdity
surrounding Andy’s death. First, Pete uses a bronze statue of a woman with
exaggeratedly large pointed breasts as a weapon to knock out Andy. This, by the way, is
another element of dream reversal. Andy used Renee’s body, in pornography, in such a
way that it psychologically wounded Fred. Now, in Fred’s second dream, Pete uses the

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15 Renee and Alice both use the same dialogue to tell how they met Andy, wherein he gives her a
job which turns out to be acting in porn that Andy makes for Dick Laurent. Given that dreams are
made up of modified repetitions of memories from waking life, it is likely that this repetition of
dialogue from Renee and Alice is actually a fragment of Renee’s speech heard by Fred in waking
life and repeated in dream.
female body to wound Andy. Second, Andy wakes up seemingly still dazed from the statue and attempts to attack Pete. Pete falls backward and throws Andy off him, who then flies into the corner of the coffee table and dies. Between the statue and the coffee table Andy has met a rather absurd end. For Freud, absurdity in dreams marks the presence of “criticism, ridicule or derision” and in this case it seems obvious that the criticism or derision in question is the criticism or derision that Fred wishes to direct toward Andy for putting his wife in porn (Freud, *Interpretation*, 452).

As for Mr. Eddy/Dick Laurent, the mystery man’s TV suggests that Dick was sexually involved with Renee either during or before Fred and Renee’s marriage. If this wasn’t enough to suggest that Fred wishes vengeance on Dick Laurent there is also the repetition of Fred commenting that “Dick Laurent is dead” three times in the film (*Lost Highway*). This wish to punish Mr. Eddy/Dick Laurent is then fulfilled in at least three ways during the second dream. First, Pete/Fred gets into a relationship with Alice/Renee while she is with Dick Laurent, effectively stealing her from Dick. This act of theft and or betrayal is likely a reversal of what happened in waking life, with Fred feeling that Renee had betrayed him with and or been stolen from him by Dick Laurent. Second, one of the more humorous scenes in the film, containing Mr. Eddy’s/Dick Laurent’s pistol whipping and road safety speech, has Dick acting in an absurd manner. By making Dick act in an absurd way, Fred is able to indirectly express his criticism of and or derision for Dick Laurent. Third, and most importantly, there is the scene where

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16 Also, by turning the female form into a weapon and or threatening object Lynch has added a second femme fatale to that of Alice, but more on femme fatales later.
Fred and the mystery man kill Mr. Eddy/Dick Laurent. In this scene several wishes are fulfilled and several compromises are made between Fred’s id, ego, and superego in the construction of the scene; such compromises are a common occurrence in dream construction according to Freud (Freud, New Intro, 18).

In the scene there are two moments of compromise between Fred’s psychic agencies (the id, ego, and super-ego). First, Dick wrestles Fred to the ground and is choking him as Fred desperately feels with his hand for a gun that he had dropped. As he feels for the gun, the mystery man’s hand appears out of nowhere and places a knife in Fred’s hand. Fred then promptly slit’s Dick throat, though it doesn’t appear to be a fatal wound or at least not immediately fatal. This brief episode entails a compromise of wishes between the three agencies. Fred’s id wishes to punish Dick but also wishes to deny being a murderer. Fred’s ego wishes to continue sleeping and avoid the possibility of waking up from the shock of Fred being killed by Dick (Freud, Outline, 42/3). Fred’s superego wishes to punish Fred by making him kill and thus acknowledge his crime of murder. In the end, Fred’s id and ego seem to win out over his superego, but just barely.

The second moment of compromise is when Dick is actually killed. This takes place just after the mystery man shows him the handheld TV. In this moment the mystery man shoots Dick in the head and whispers something into Fred’s ear. In the next shot the mystery man has disappeared and Fred stands alone holding the gun in front of a dead Dick Laurent. With this episode the compromise only entails a contest
between the wishes of Fred’s id and super-ego. On one hand, Fred’s id wishes to kill Dick and yet deny that Fred is a killer. On the other hand, Fred’s super-ego wishes to punish Fred and make him acknowledge his crime of murder. In the end the compromise is that the super-ego kills Dick but then suggests it was Fred after all by disappearing and leaving Fred holding the gun.

As a feature of dream construction, compromise and or struggle between the wishes of Fred’s psychic agencies, is present with a few other important areas of the film as well. For instance, the element of compromise seems quite prevalent with Alice/Renee. As discussed earlier, the tension between id and super-ego is already present in Renee’s behavior within the sex scene between her and Fred in the first dream of the film. As for the second dream, the conflict between the id and superego over Alice is particularly evident in at least two scenes.

First, in the scene where Pete and Alice rob and kill Andy, Alice seems to switch between being controlled by Fred’s super-ego and Fred’s id. To elaborate, at first Alice seems to be fulfilling the wishes of the superego to punish Pete/Fred. This is evident when Alice corrects Pete by replacing “We killed him” with “You killed him” (*Lost Highway*). Alice also appears to be a puppet for and or serve the wishes of the superego when she threatens Pete with a gun, pointing it at him, pressing it against his head and asking, “What’s the matter? Don’t you trust me, Pete?” (*Lost Highway*). In both of these moments the superego appears to be using Alice to punish Fred by making her contradict the id’s wishes that she desire and be faithful to Pete/Fred. Yet eventually
Alice switches back to fulfilling the wishes of the id by returning to her normal seductive and loving behavior.

Second, in the last scene where Pete and Alice appear, they make love passionately on the desert ground in front of the headlights of Andy’s car. In this scene, Alice is everything Fred’s id wants Renee to be, full of desire for Pete/Fred, and aggressively active in demonstrating that desire through sex. However, in the opposite extreme, Alice concludes the scene pouring a superego poison into Pete’s ear, like Claudius to King Hamlet, by leaning over and whispering “You’ll never have me” (*Lost Highway*). Immediately thereafter Alice disappears and Fred reemerges from within Pete. Pete and Alice have both been rendered useless to Fred as vehicles of wish fulfillment through Alice’s declaration. Thus instead of suffering more punishment at the hands of the superego and Alice, Fred abandons Alice and Pete. Alternatively, one could read Alice’s disappearance as a further punishment of Fred by the superego as Fred does ask the mystery man where Alice is.

Before turning to examining *Lost Highway* from the perspective of mourning and melancholia, there is one final section of the film that is worth placing within the explanatory frame of Freud’s dream theory. The section in question is the final two scenes of *Lost Highway* where Fred returns to his home featured in the first dream and then flees from the police onto the lost highway. Fred visits his home in the morning. He walks up to his door and buzzes the intercom. When the intercom clicks to indicate someone inside is now listening, Fred speaks into the intercom saying, “Dick Laurent is
dead” (Lost Highway). He then walks away, noticing the detectives who have just arrived and then hurriedly flees in Dick Laurent’s car. This sequence of events perfectly matches the corresponding scene from Fred’s first dream where, someone buzzes his intercom and tells him that “Dick Laurent is dead” (Lost Highway). Even the timing and sound is right as it is morning in both scenes and Fred hears tires screeching and a police siren fade away as he walks to the window to find out who is at his door, only to find no one. Also, as Fred flees onto the lost highway, the same shot of the highway illuminated by headlights under a pitch black sky that opened the film now closes the film.

Between these two sets of scenes and dreams, I claim that Fred is talking to Fred, who, like the mystery man, is now playing his own trick of being in two places at once. With repetition and overlap between these two sets of scenes at the opening of the film/first dream and the close of the film/second dream it seems that the Fred is using the form of his dreams to indicate part of the meaning of his dream which is another common feature of dreams according to Freud (Freud, Interpretation, 347). In this case the form of the dream seems to indicate that time in the dream and the film has begun to loop. Fred in the beginning of the film and in an earlier dream is now being spoken to by another Fred at the end of the film in a later dream. This seems to suggest the potential fulfillment of at least two dreams in a cleverly economic fashion. First, by shaping the form of Fred’s second dream in to a loop that connects with his first dream in an earlier time, the ego’s wish that sleep should continue seems likely to be fulfilled by a dream that can go on and one forever in a loop (Freud, Outline, 42/3).
Second, the id’s wishes to escape the police and all the other wishes involving being with Renee seem likely to find fulfillment in another Fred who is able to live in his home with Renee as the police chase after the other Fred down a lost highway.

**Chapter 3: Section D – Lost Highway in light of Mourning and Melancholia**

Having examined *Lost Highway* from the perspective of Freud’s dream theory I will now attempt to supplement that reading by examining the film through the lens of mourning and melancholia and some related theory. To this end I will examine the Lost Highway in the following steps. First I will place the film within the terms of mourning and melancholia and outline what this explains about the film in addition to or in support of the dream reading. Second, as with the earlier analysis of Mulholland Dr., I will apply Judith Butler’s critique of Freudian theory, developed in her 1990 work, “Gender Trouble”, along with a brief examination of *Lost Highway* as film noir, in order to argue that Freudian theory is an appropriate lens through which to view *Lost Highway*.

To place Fred Madison amongst the varieties of mourning and melancholia discussed in chapter one, several criteria of mourning and or melancholia need to be examined. The first criterion of mourning and melancholia is that a love object has been lost. With Fred Madison the lost love object is undoubtedly his wife Renee. However, Fred may have lost Renee in the sense of being slighted or betrayed in love, such that
she no longer loved Fred, before the much more definite loss of Renee which occurs with Fred murdering her. The second criterion of mourning and melancholia is identification with the lost love object. Though the vast majority of Lost Highway occurs within Fred’s dreams, it seems likely that Fred has identified with Renee as the essential element of the object being resurrected within the mind of the mourner/melancholic is satisfied by Renee being resurrected within Fred’s dreams (Freud, Mourning, 209).

Third, if there is ambivalence toward the lost love object then the sufferer is either in pathological mourning or melancholia. Fred, couldn’t be more ambivalent towards Renee. This is evidenced by the fact that he murdered her in real life, resurrected her in dream one, then killed her again in dream one, and then resurrected her again in dream two. The final criterion distinguishing between pathological mourning and melancholia is whether the sufferer is aware of what they have lost. To this it seems obvious that Fred knows he has killed Renee. This is evidenced by the tape that shows him having killed Renee in dream one and by being in prison for murder in the waking world prior to his second dream. As such, Fred fits solidly within the diagnosis of pathological mourning.

As for what this diagnosis of pathological mourning explains about Lost Highway, there are at least two significant aspects of the film which are illuminated by mourning. First, the ambivalence of Fred’s pathological mourning explains how the first dream is capable of exhibiting qualities of both an anxiety dream and a punishment dream at the same time. Usually a dream is either an anxiety dream or a punishment
but not both. In the case of Fred’s first dream the third tape causes him a great deal of anxiety and wakes him up as an anxiety dream does (Freud, Remarks, 4039). This occurs because an anxiety dream fulfills a repressed wish from the id that the superego finds so objectionable that it wakes the dreamer up in order to halt the dream (Freud, On Dreams, 68). However, the first dream also exhibits the punishment dream quality of the superego contradicting or otherwise subverting the fulfillment of the id’s objectionable wishes in order to punish the dreamer (Freud, Remarks, 4040). Cases of this are Fred and Renee’s awkward sex scene and the third tape that ends the dream because the murder of Renee also contradicts the id’s wish that Renee still be alive and with Fred. With ambivalence toward Renee being used by both the id and the superego to shape the dream, wish fulfillments are sometimes pleasing to the id and displeasing for the ego and superego and sometimes displeasing for the id and pleasing to the super-ego.

Second, according to Freud, after the loss of a love object and identification with that object the ambivalent feelings that had been directed externally toward another person are now directed inwardly toward the mourner’s own ego wherein the lost object has been resurrected (Freud, Ego and Id, 144). As such, the super-ego of a pathological mourner often becomes overwhelmed with the hate, or Thanatos, that had previously been directed toward another and then directs that hate inwardly (Freud, Ego and Id, 144). This excess of hate with Fred’s superego is seen with the seemingly excessive hostility that mystery man shows toward Fred and Renee. For instance, as
discussed earlier, the mystery man/super-ego attempts to punish or torment Fred on several occasions, often visibly expressing anger through grimaces and even yelling at Fred at the cabin near the end of the film.

Next I will provide further evidence for the appropriateness of reading *Lost Highway* through a Freudian lens by applying Butler’s critique of Freud to the film. The degree to which *Lost Highway* is caught up in a heterosexual logic of desire, structuring gender and sexuality, will amount to evidence that the film operates on a logic which conforms with the logic that Butler identifies in Freud’s theory. By extension, this conformity of logic between Freudian theory and the film would suggest that the film is accurately understood through Freud’s theory.

As we saw in the preceding chapter, according to Judith Butler, Freud’s understanding of gender and sexuality incorporates an implicit taboo against homosexuality. Because of this taboo structuring gender and sexuality, a truly homosexual desire, wherein one could identify with the same sex in terms of gender and choose the same sex as objects of desire, is not an option (Butler, 61). As such, Freud’s understanding of the formation of sexuality and gender is caught up in a heterosexual logic of desire which disavows and erases the taboo against homosexual desire (Butler, 64).

However, a further consequence of Freud’s heterosexual logic of desire and its implicit taboo against homosexuality is that a set of heterosexual gender and sexuality

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17 For an extended examination of Butler’s critique of Freud see chapter two.
options are also disallowed (Butler, 61). In this case, Freud’s heterosexual logic of desire
also disallows heterosexual woman to be gendered as male or masculine and disallows
heterosexual men to be gendered as female or feminine (Butler, 61) As such, the only
options that are possible for heterosexuales is to take on the gender characteristics
properly identified as for men as masculine and for women as feminine. For Freud, in its
simplest form, masculine and feminine qualities or dispositions are defined through a
binary opposition where masculine equals active and feminine equals passive (Freud,
Three Essays, 1624). In addition to activity, the masculine also includes desire for
mastery, sadistic impulses, and sexual energy, or libido, itself (Freud, Three Essays, 1624,
1942). As for the feminine, in addition to the passive, the feminine also includes
masochism, shyness, modesty and a need for instruction and assistance (Freud, Three
Essays, 903)

The evidence that Lost Highway is caught up in the heterosexual logic of desire
described above is provided through Lost Highway’s use of the film noir genre. For
instance, Lost Highway utilizes a femme fatale that is characterized according to the
prohibitions of a heterosexual society and logic of desire that forbids her aggressive
masculine heterosexuality as both villainous and impossible. While David Lynch himself
labels Lost Highway as a film noir, it is worth going over a few of its noir characteristics
before turning to its primary example of noir genre conventions, the femme fatale (Lynch, *Lost Highway*).^{18}

As in the preceding chapter, I will rely on Borde and Chaumeton for identifying features of film noir in *Lost Highway*. First, Borde and Chaumeton identify in film noir, “qualities such as nightmarish, weird, erotic, ambivalent, and cruel” and a “peculiar oneirism” (Borde, 18/24).” The erotic, ambivalent, and cruel aspects of Lost Highway are presented in stark relief through Fred’s actions as a pathological mourner and the various manifestations of his love and hate toward his lost love object, his wife Renee and her condensations Alice and Sheila. Second, Borde and Chaumeton note that the most consistent elements of film noir are the presence of a crime and an obsession with death; “In every sense of the word a noir film is a film of Death (Borde, 19/20).” *Lost Highway* is obsessed with crime and death in the murder of Renee whose murder and dead body are presented on screen numerous times. Also, in line with Borde’s and Chaumeton’s observations on film noir is that the film is told from the point of view of the criminal, in this case Fred (Borde, 20). Beyond these elements from Borde and Chaumeton however, is the obvious notion that film noir is black. Lost Highway certainly delivers in terms of being black as its darkness of tone is matched or surpassed by the visual darkness of the film given that the majority of the film is shot at night and early morning with heavy shadow in frame.

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^{18} Lynch labels Lost Highway in a tagline at the beginning of the Lost Highway script (Lynch, *Lost Highway*).
As with the preceding chapter, I will use Zizek’s understanding of the femme fatale in order to provide evidence of Alice as the femme fatale in *Lost Highway*.\(^{19}\) According to Zizek, the femme fatale is a character “who ruins the lives of men and is at the same time victim of her own lust for enjoyment... who endlessly manipulates her partners... “(Zizek, 65). This description fits Alice/Renee as it could be argued that Renee ruins Fred’s life, by driving him to murder, and that Alice ruins Pete/Fred’s dream by ruining Fred’s wish to possess Alice through Pete. Furthermore, Alice skillfully manipulates Pete/Fred into going along with her dangerous and unnecessary plan to rob Andy. However, the aspect of Alice as femme fatale that connects with Butler’s critique of Freud is Alice’s aggressive “lust for enjoyment” (Zizek, 65). In Freud’s terms Alice’s possesses an impossible gender and sexuality given that she is heterosexual but gendered in a male or masculine way. To elaborate, Alice desires men but, desires them in a way that is very masculine as she is sexually quite aggressive, being physically active and seeking mastery or dominance during sex (Freud, *Three Essays*, 1624/1942). Thus within the heterosexual logic of Freud’s understanding of gender and sexuality Alice would be an impossible and taboo figure.

*Lost Highway* places Alice within the femme fatale role that associates her masculine heterosexuality with role of a threatening manipulator “who ruins the lives of men”, in short she is made a villain (Zizek, 65). By placing Alice within the femme fatale

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\(^{19}\) While Zizek also writes about femme fatales and *Lost Highway* in his essay “The Art of the Ridiculous Sublime” the Lacanian lens he uses to explain why femme fatales do the things they do is outside of the scope of this specifically Freudian project. However, Zizek’s astute observations of what femme fatales do is useful and cited above.
role that demonizes her Lost Highway extends this demonization to her masculine heterosexuality. This much is evidenced by how her aggressive masculine sexuality threatens and disturbs Fred/Pete when she uses sex, when Pete and she rob Andy, in order to distract Andy from Pete’s entrance to the house. Also, Alice’s confident possession of (a masculine) mastery over her sexual relationship with Pete/Fred is sufficiently disturbing to cause Pete to disappear and for Fred to reemerge when she denies Pete/Fred possession of or mastery over her, when near the end of the film she whispers into his ear, “You’ll never have me” (*Lost Highway*). Moreover, and perhaps most importantly, this final act of Alice proves that she is more sexually masculine than Pete/Fred himself, as Alice is in control and can have Pete/Fred when she wishes but, not vice versa. However, the cost of Alice’s masculine heterosexuality is that she is ultimately erased from Fred’s dream. She has succumbed to the impossibility of her sexuality because she has proven that Fred/Pete cannot “have” or master her (*Lost Highway*). In sum, *Lost Highway* demonstrates that it is caught up in the same heterosexual logic of desire that Butler faults Freud for through the character of Alice, who possesses one of Freud’s impossible and taboo gender/sexualities and is demonized and ultimately shown to be an impossible object of desire within Fred’s dream.

**Chapter 3: Section E – Lost Highway Conclusion**
In conclusion, I hope to have shown how Freudian theory and in particular Freudian dream theory renders a rather mysterious, and at points confusing, film clear and sensible. In addition, through appeals to the uncanny, morning and melancholia, Judith Butler, and film noir I hope to have shown the Freudian dream theory a useful lens for clarifying *Lost Highway*. However, it is worth summarizing what my reading claims *Lost Highway* represents and what it claims to have explained or clarified within it.

To begin with, let’s reiterate a brief explanation of *Lost Highway*’s plot. *Lost Highway* is comprised of two dreams and a brief period in the waking world in the life of the film’s protagonist and dreamer, Fred Madison, who is in pathological mourning after murdering his wife Renee. Fred’s first dream is a hybrid dream including elements of an anxiety dream and a punishment dream and begins with the opening shot of the film. Fred’s first dream continues until he watches the third video tape to show up on his doorstep and sees himself having murdered his wife Renee on tape. As a horrified Fred watches this shocking scene he wakes up in the custody of the police. The next few scenes show Fred having been found guilty of murder and sent to prison where he will be eventually executed by electric chair. Tormented by the memory of his crime and insomnia the prison doctor gives Fred sleeping pills. Upon returning to his cell Fred goes through a horrifying metamorphosis, becoming Pete Dayton. The sleeping pills plus this impossible event signal that the film has now returned to the dream world of Fred Madison, beginning his second dream within film. The film concludes with Fred fleeing
the police down the lost highway in the desert which leaves the viewer and Fred where we began.

The above Freudian dream reading also explains the more mysterious features of *Lost Highway* by placing them in a clear relationship to Fred and his dreams. For instance, the mystery man is clarified as being a part of Fred, his super-ego, which attempts to censor Fred’s dream wishes and to punish Fred for having committed crimes that violate the moral and social prohibitions it upholds. Another mysterious element of the film explained by the dream reading is Pete and his relationship to Fred. In this case, Pete is a condensation that merges Fred with the body, life, and name of another person, Pete Dayton. Pete is also a displacement onto which all of Fred’s id wishes are projected. The benefit of Pete is that Fred’s wishes are less objectionable to the super-ego censorship if Pete is the one receiving their fulfillment. The last major and mysterious puzzle piece to be explained by the dream reading is the relation between Renee and Alice. In this case, Alice is a thinly veiled condensation of Renee which only takes on the name and hair color of another person, while retaining the masculine and threatening sexuality of a femme fatale that we only glimpse with Renee via performance in porn viewed with the mystery man’s hand held TV.

Lastly, I hoped to have demonstrated that Freudian dream theory is a suitable tool for understanding *Lost Highway* by pointing out how several elements of the film suggest that it represents dreams. For instance, the presence of the uncanny with the mystery man suggests that Lost Highway takes place in an impossible or magical world.
This in addition to the irrational nature of dreams and the easy appearance of the uncanny therein suggest that Lost Highway is for the most part a dream. Also, Lost Highway’s adherence to Film Noir genre conventions, which is noted for its dreamlike and nightmarish qualities, suggests that reading the film as a dream is reasonable. Furthermore, demonstrating that Lost Highway shares the use of a logic of gender and sexuality that Butler observes in Freud, suggests that Lost Highway is appropriately understood through Freudian theory. Taking all the above into consideration, along with dream theory’s explanatory value, I hope to have shown that Freud’s theory, in particular his dream theory, is a useful lens for understanding Lost Highway.\(^{20}\)

\(^{20}\) However, I don’t doubt that there are other useful and appropriate lenses through which to view Lost Highway.
The goal of this project was simple in concept, to use Freud’s theory of dreams to interpret and explain David Lynch’s bizarre and mysterious films *Mulholland Dr.* and *Lost Highway*. The steps required to accomplish this goal however, were lengthy and complex. In order to conclude this essay I will provide a synopsis of the project in the following steps. First, I will outline the Freudian theory utilized throughout and examined at length in chapter one. Second, I will go over *Mulholland Dr.* and then *Lost Highway* by outlining the dream theory reading of each, including what happens in the films, why it happens, and what especially mysterious elements are clarified. Third, I will outline a few concluding points about David Lynch and his films learned via this project. Finally, I will consider some further applications of dream theory to film that may also bear fruit.

The first task with Freud’s theory was to set dream theory within the context of Freud’s theories of mind and its drives. Freud’s first models were developed simultaneously with his theory of dreams and consisted of the unconscious, preconscious, and pcpt.-conscious systems and the pleasure and reality principles. While Freud’s core dream theory remained largely consistent over Freud’s career the
theory of mind and the terms used in his writing about dreams changed with the
development of his later structural model of the mind (Freud, *On Dreams*, 4). In this
model the mind is structured by three agencies the primal irrational id, the rational ego,
and the moral censoring super-ego and these agencies are motivated by a basic and
opposing pair of drives, the sexual and life preserving Eros and the aggressive and
destructive Thanatos (Freud, *Outline*, 14/15).

Having covered a basic Freudian scaffolding I turned to his theory of dreams and
their mechanics and methods of representation. Dreams at the most basic include
three parts, manifest dream, the dream-work, and the latent dream thoughts and
wishes. The manifest dream is the dream as we remember it upon waking. The latent
dream thoughts and wishes are the psychic material that motivates the creation of the
dream, and are usually hidden in the manifest dream. The dream-work are the
processes by which the latent dream thoughts and wishes are transformed and
represented creating the manifest dreams we remember upon waking. The actual
process of dream creation, the dream-work, is then a work of compromises between
the three agencies of the mind as the id attempts to represent its wishes and thoughts
as fulfilled within the dream and the ego and super-ego attempt to censor the id’s
dream construction. The ego censors according to dictates of reason and the wish to
sleep and the super-ego censors according to the dictates of moral and social
prohibitions and the wish to punish the dreamer for transgressions.
With this basic picture of dreams in mind, using it to interpret a film required a few translations and assumptions. First, I assumed that the films I would look at were largely or completely the representations of dreams and that the film’s protagonist is also its dreamer. Second, I assumed that the films would mostly but not completely adhere to Freud’s dream mechanics and methods of representation. Third, in order to properly interpret dream without a dreamer one needs to know something of the dreamer’s real life relations. As such, interpreting film representations of dreams depends on being able to identify portions of the film that give access to the dreamer’s waking life. With these assumptions in mind, interpretation of the films becomes a matter of identifying the waking and dreaming sections of the film, inferring the dream wishes, and identifying how various characters and scenes fit in with dream mechanics and methods of representation.

In addition to Freud’s theory of mind and his theory of dreams his work on mourning and melancholia also seemed applicable to films that include loss and grief like Lost Highway and Mulholland Dr. Freud’s theory place those experiencing loss or grief in one of three categories, mourning, pathological mourning, and melancholia. The criteria for distinguishing these categories are as follows. All three include identification with a lost love object. Pathological mourning and melancholia include ambivalence toward this lost love but mourning does not. Finally, mourning and pathological mourning includes being conscious of what is lost but melancholia does not.
As for *Mulholland Dr.*, the first big interpretative question is something like, “What is going on in this film” or “what is being represented in this film”? Using dream theory the answer to this question is that the film represents three dreams in the life of Diane Selwyn, a pathological mourner who has killed her lost love object, Camilla Rhodes, and now resurrected her in dreams. Diane’s first dream is an anxiety dream that causes her to wake briefly. Her second dream is a normal dream constructed by Diane’s id to fulfill numerous repressed wishes that are objectionable to her censoring super-ego. Eventually Diane’s second dream transitions into a third dream, where her super-ego has taken control of the dream’s construction and punishes the dreamer for her crimes.

The second big question answered by the dream reading is why Diane’s dreams take the forms outlined above, that is, because of several interacting elements of the film concerning the dreamer Diane. First, sections of the film that reveal information from Diane’s waking life, like the remembering sequence during her punishment dream, in conjunction with the content of Diane’s dream allow the interpreter to infer the wishes that motivate Diane’s dream and that her id is trying to fulfill within her dreams. In turn much of the film becomes explainable in terms of how various film elements fulfill Diane’s wishes. Second, another big factor influencing the content of Diane’s dreams and contradicting the fulfillment of her id’s wishes is the dream censorship issuing from her ego, and its wish to sleep, and her super-ego, its wish to punish the dreamer. Third, the final element influencing Diane’s dreams are the dream-work’s
limits and methods of dream representation, such as converting logical connections into spatial terms, converting derision into absurdity, and using displacement and condensation to obscure objectionable wishes and circumvent dream censorship.

By interpreting the dreams represented in the film, while taking into account the factors shaping the dream, the payoff of the dream reading, in addition to providing a basic orientation to understanding the film as dreams, is its clarification of the particularly mysterious characters and objects in the film. For instance, the most interesting elements explained in the film, for this viewer, are the Bum, the ensemble of Mr. Roque, the Castiglione brothers and the cowboy, and the blue key and box.

The Bum is not just a homeless person living behind Winkie’s unrelated to Diane. Instead, the Bum, is a representation of Diane’s super-ego, a part of Diane, who haunts the scene of Diane’s crime and punishes Diane by making her, via Dan, look at herself as a filthy, horrifying wretch, a bum. On the other hand, Diane’s id attempts to deny this punishment and judgment of her super-ego by keeping him at a distance and out of sight behind Winkie’s and by dismissing the super-ego by labeling it as bum, a figure who is typically ignored and looked down upon in society.

Mr. Roque, the Castiglione brothers, and the cowboy are not just a crew of bizarre and absurd gangsters running Hollywood. Instead, these characters are representations of Diane’s id’s wishes to explain away why she isn’t a star in real life and to punish those who have hurt her in love and in her career. Mr. Roque in particular is a fascinating dream creation as his name, meaning swindler, and his visual presentation as
an immobile cripple both suggest his function as an external source of interference
keeping Diane from stardom.

Finally, the blue box and key(s) are explained as follows. The blue key in Diane’s
dream is a modified repetition of the blue key in Diane’s real life that signals her
contracted murder of Camilla has been successfully completed. As such, both keys are
symbols representing Diane’s crime of murder. As for the blue box, in waking life Diane
asks the hit-man what the blue key opens and he just laughs in reply. In Diane’s dream
her super-ego supplies an answer to that question by providing a box for the blue key to
open which turns out to be a punishment in itself as it is a portal transports her from the
happy wishing fulfilling dream world constructed by her id to a punishment dream world
constructed by her super-ego.

As for Lost Highway, the question of what is going on or being represented in the
film is answered in terms of dream theory with the following summary: a dream
containing elements of both a punishment dream and an anxiety dream, a brief period
of the dreamer in the waking world in prison, and a final relatively normal dream
containing many compromises between the dreamer’s id and superego. The dreamer in
question is the film’s protagonist Fred Madison, a pathological mourner who murdered
his lost love object and resurrected her in dreams, and repeats this process of murder
and resurrection in dreams. As with Mulholland Dr., what happens in Lost Highway is
shaped by several factors including, the dreamer’s waking life, his id’s wishes, the
censorship and wishes of his ego and super-ego, and the dream-work’s limits and

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methods of representation. As for the mysterious aspects of *Lost Highway* that dream theory clarifies the most important and interesting examples are the mystery man, Pete and his relation to Fred.

The mystery man isn’t just a nameless creep performing magic tricks at parties and moonlighting as a voyeur with his video camera. Instead, the mystery man is a representation of Fred Madison’s super-ego. His creepiness is a function of the uncanny fear he produces in Fred and the viewer by making the impossible seem possible which, is a form of punishment that undermines Fred’s enjoyment in and faith in the reality of his dream world. The mystery man’s voyeurism is just an extension of the super-ego’s role as observer of the ego/dreamer and products of this voyeurism, his video tapes, are further punishments for Fred that show him the reality and crime he seeks to escape via dreaming.

Pete Dayton and his relation to Fred Madison is extremely bizarre as Pete magically replaces Fred within his prison cell and later disappears only to be replaced by Fred again. Without an interpretative frame to make sense of these transformations, the film presents a narrative that seems confused and or a representation of madness as the film makes no attempt to explain why or how these transformations occur. However, with dream theory Pete can be interpreted via condensation and displacement as Fred Madison in the guise of another person who allows Fred to fulfill several wishes that his censoring super-ego would deny to the criminal Fred but not to the innocent Pete.
Having outlined the major points covered in the first three chapters of the project I will now offer a few conclusions on David Lynch and his films *Mulholland Dr.* and *Lost Highway* starting with a few points of comparison between *Mulholland Dr.* and *Lost Highway*. With *Mulholland Dr.* and *Lost Highway*, David Lynch has created a pair of films that in many respects mirror each other. Both films represent dreams, where the dreamer is a pathological mourner and murderer of their lost love object. Both films rely on the uncanny and film noir genre conventions. Also, both films utilize the same logic of desire that Judith Butler observes in Freud. With the critique of Freud that Butler outlines in her book *Gender Trouble* (1990), she notes that the formation of gender and sexuality for Freud entails an implicit taboo against homosexuality (Butler, 64). This taboo is felt most clearly in the limited set of possible identifications that one can possess in terms of gender and sexuality. In this set of options ones gender identification, identifying as a male/masculine or a female/feminine, while always be the opposite sex of what one picks for love objects (Butler, 61/64). So, if you’re a woman who loves women, the cost for Freud is becoming a masculine woman, effectively being gendered as a man (Butler, 61/64). The truly homosexual desire, being a feminine woman who loves women or a masculine man who loves men, is impossible in Freud’s understanding (Butler, 61/64). As such, while both films seem to represent the same type of things from the differing perspectives of a male and female protagonist, the consistent heterosexual logic of desire underlying the films effectively genders Mulholland Dr.’s lesbian protagonist as a male. In this sense, both films
represent the same kind of thing, dreams, from the same kind of person, a male
gendered protagonist who chooses female objects of desire, and who is a murderer and
mourner of “his” lost love object.

Another conclusion about Lynch’s films, at least with *Mulholland Dr.* and *Lost Highway*, is that while Lynch creates films that are often bizarre, confusing, and
mysterious they are not mysteries without solutions. To elaborate, it is easy for the
viewer or critic to give up on the difficult films of David Lynch and dismiss them as
confused and bizarre nonsense. However, as this project has demonstrated, while
Lynch’s films are often confusing and bizarre they do possess an underlying and
consistent sense or logic. In this case by patient application of Freud’s dreamy theory, I
assumed the underlying logic of the film was the logic of dreams, their mechanics and
methods of representation, and decoded the film from that starting point. Thankfully,
the *Mulholland Dr.* and *Lost Highway* obliged this interpretation by resolving into
narratives that make sense without significant signs, as far as my biased eyes can tell, of
being forced into fitting Freud’s theoretical frame. Moreover, the success of the above
dream theory readings not only serves as evidence to the coherence of Lynch’s films but
also serves as evidence of the fruitfulness of Freud’s dream theory as an interpretative
lens through which to view films.

Finally, I would like to propose a few further applications where Freud’s dream
theory may prove useful. The first obvious place to continue using Freud’s dream
theory is with the other films of David Lynch, such as *Blue Velvet* and possibly
Eraserhead and Inland Empire. Blue Velvet especially seems suited for interpretation using Freud’s dream theory. For instance, a nutshell dream reading of Blue Velvet could go as follows. The film’s protagonist Jeffrey begins the film waking and experience the death of his father and the discovery of a severed ear. The film then plunges into Jeffrey’s dream world by passing through the worm ridden hole of the severed ear. What begins as a normal id wish fulfilling dream for Jeffrey turns in to a punishment dream nightmare when all his illicit desires lead him into a terrifying film noir situation of seductive lounge singers and insane laughing gas sniffing gangsters. Eventually the improbable happens and Jeffrey’s nightmare has a happy ending passing back through the ear into an even more improbably idyllic suburban American life. Also, Blue Velvet may bear being read as a mourning or melancholic dream where the lost love object is the lost reality of the idyllic American dream neighborhood that Jeffrey lives in.

Beyond Lynch and Blue Velvet, Freud’s dream theory may prove suitable for interpreting films which possess a lot of uncanny elements. For instance, many horror genre films possess a great deal of the uncanny, a classic example of this being Stanley Kubrick’s The Shining. The films of other directors may also prove suitable for dream theory readings. For example, the films of Charlie Kaufman and in particular his film Synecdoche, New York seem promising for dream theory readings.
References


