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*Violence Against Civility and the Destruction of Fantasy: The Waning of the
Oedipus Complex in David Lynch's 'Blue Velvet'*

ABSTRACT

This paper elaborates Michel Chion's reading of David Lynch's *Blue Velvet* as a fantasy constructed by Jeffrey Beaumont in the wake of his father's collapse. Chion's critique of the oneiric metaphor in this film is further developed as identifying the basis for a diagenesis that upholds civility, and a locus of the mimetic strategies that Lynch employs in the service of the violent destruction of the fantasies that emanate from such civility. The confusion that Lynch thus generates in critics is discussed, regarding the politics and cultural impact of his work. The author suggests that the construction of *Blue Velvet* as dream provides a field, and the narration and demonstration of dreams in *Blue Velvet* serve as foci, for a transgenerational struggle in which civilisation is at risk. Thomas Ogden's reinterpretation of Hans Loewald's watershed paper "The Waning of the Oedipus Complex" is applied in the elucidation of this hypothesis, to which end Alessia Ricciardi's presentation of Pier Paolo Pasolini's polyvalent spectro-poetics is also brought to bear. The polyvalence of symbolic parricide, and the dis-ease resulting from it, is considered with respect to the co-existence of nostalgic traditionalism and the innovation achieved through destructive transformation in Lynch's *Blue Velvet*.

BIOGRAPHY

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VIOLENCE AGAINST CIVILITY AND THE DESTRUCTION OF FANTASY: THE WANING OF THE OEDIPUS COMPLEX IN DAVID LYNCH'S *BLUE VELVET*

In *The Universal Exception*, Slavoj Žižek defines civility as 'rules we are expected to obey without being ordered to do so.'ⁱ The practice of civility involves 'feigning that I want to do what the other asks me to do, so that my compliance with the other's demand does not exert pressure on him or her.'ⁱⁱ Civility mandates the keeping up of appearances, a practice opposed to that of the child in Hans Christian Anderson's "The Emperor's New Suit,"ⁱⁱⁱ the one who cries out that the Emperor is naked. The keepers of civility are those who silence such a child, in the interests of the maintenance of a common sense, a civil sense, of the sincerity and splendour of the ruler as the incarnation of community. David Lynch's stance on violence and its relation to civility is polyvalent, and consistent with that argued by Žižek in *Violence*. Žižek identifies 'a violence that sustains our very efforts to fight violence and promote tolerance.'^{iv} In this paper I will discuss the ways in which various authors have read the politics of Lynch's fantasmatically nostalgic constructions and the violence of their destruction in *Blue Velvet*. I will argue for the recognition of polyvalence in the viewing of this film, and advocate that the parricide that Lynch depicts in *Blue Velvet* is a necessary violence against civility, not merely a shocking morality tale serving conservative ideological ends. Such a reading of my argument depends on the susceptibility of the reader to its violence and the dis-ease that violence generates, opening the possibility of a mourning that is less nostalgic.

Mindful that such blindness as that afflicting the admirers of the Emperor will scotomatically stain my attempts to apply psychoanalytic methods to Lynch's film, I am otherwise encouraged by Alessia Ricciardi's view that 'one of the most important challenges that lies ahead of psychoanalysis is to find a way to give voice to a mournful ethical and political imagination that transcends the aesthetics of nostalgia.'^v I hope that the application of such a stance to the psychoanalytic criticism of Lynch's film might 'fulfil a political and critical function, encompassing not only the horizon of the past, but that of the future, critically dwelling in a condition of cultural belatedness.'^{vi} This involves the adoption of a polyvalent stance with respect to the image as repository of memory and keeper of tradition.

Riccardi attributes such a stance to Pier Paolo Pasolini, whose cinematic proclamations of heresy culminated in the violences of *Salò* and in his own brutal murder.^{vii} Ben Lawton, in his preface to *Heretical Empiricism*, writes of Pasolini's 'sodomasochistic attack against all forms of political correctness—those hegemonic abominations which are most nefarious when they purport to defend our most cherished hopes, dreams and aspirations.'^{viii} *Salò* mourns the death of the possibility of carnal pleasure. The film been widely misunderstood and is open to misinterpretation as nostalgic mourning of the passing of Fascism. It is with this potential problem in mind that I raise the spectre of Pasolini in the context of a critical response to David Lynch's *Blue Velvet*.^{ix}

Riccardi examines Pasolini's work from a viewpoint she constructs as a 'spectropoetics of film.'^x Her spectropoetics, derives from the Friulian director's statement of cinema as 'naturally poetic ... because it is dreamlike, because it is close to dreams, because a film sequence is a sequence of memory or of a dream.' Pasolini continues: 'things in themselves are profoundly poetic: ... a human face photographed is poetic because the physical is poetic in itself, because it is an apparition, because it is full of mystery, because it is full of ambiguity, because it is full of polyvalent meaning.'^{xi}

Riccardi cautions that psychoanalysis has often colluded with conservative political and cultural movements. This may be the cost of psychoanalysts' attempted enactments of fantasies of respectable civility and cultural authority. Similar criticisms have been levelled at Lynch—that he is not so much a cultural innovator as a manipulator of nostalgia in the interest of support for the kitsch Republican visions of Ronald Reagan.

While investigating the place of dreams in the work of David Lynch, I have found considerable confusion prevailing in the critical literature regarding the politics of Lynch's project. Is Lynch a keeper of civility, or is he its incendiary opponent? Is Lynch's work is the perpetration of serial assaults on such civility?

In *Pervert in the Pulpit*, Jeff Johnson argues that Lynch is the Manichean preacher and purveyor of a renewal of Puritanism.^{xii} According to Johnson, the wild ride on which Lynch takes us is a pilgrim's progress, in the course of which we learn that, however great our scopophilic pleasure in the Lynchian extravagances of cinematic sex and death, we should follow the advice given to Adam the director by The Cowboy in *Mulholland Drive*.^{xiii} We must fall into line with Ronald Reagan, accepting with as much grace as we can muster that it is not for us to question our masters, those who enunciate for us the will of the Other. Johnson's judgement of Lynch's moral stance is certainly to cast him as a keeper of civility, and as a sinister conservative.

By contrast, in *The Impossible David Lynch*, Todd McGowan argues counter-intuitively that Lynch, by saturating the viewer in fantasy, commits a radicalising violence against the civil conventions of Hollywood.^{xiv} Nicholas Rombes also considers what he calls the 'post-punk poetics'^{xv} of Lynch's *Blue Velvet* to be radically incendiary in nature, viewing the film as 'a subversive exposé of a kind of sham past, an exposé whose cultural logic is similar to 'Nick at Night' or other forms of ironic deconstruction.'^{xvi}

Considering such contradictory positions, I am drawn to the view that Lynch's art is ambivalently of the sustenance of civility, but also of its incendiary destruction. McGowan, in his latest publication on Lacanian film theory, seems to be coming around to such a view when he refers to Lynch's work as arising in a place of collision of fantasy and desire.^{xvii} Like Blake puzzling over the antics of the prophet Ezekiel, I find myself wondering of Lynch, 'why he eat dung & lay so long on his right & left side?'^{xviii} Why does Lynch so staunchly lie to the right in his sustenance of civility, then turn to the left in the most extreme acts of violence against it, juxtaposing one stance against the other in such a manner that these conflicting ideologies appear to meet with incendiary consequences? Nowhere in Lynch's project do I find this to be more so than in *Blue Velvet*, and especially in Lynch's exploration in that film of a transgenerational struggle, and in his exploitation, to that end, of the oneiric metaphor.

Michel Chion writes of Lynch's films as though they were dreams, but poses the question, 'whose dream am I in?'^{xix} Of *Blue Velvet*, he writes: 'The film is a dream, but a structured one.'^{xx} Jeffrey Beaumont (Kyle MacLachlan) is called back from college when his father collapses on the front lawn of the family home in sleepy Lumberton. I read this town as metaphor for civility, and Tom Beaumont (Jack Harvey), garden hose in hand, as its benign keeper.

As McGowan reminds us, 'immediately after Tom Beaumont's collapse, the tone of the film undergoes a dramatic change.'^{xxi} Lynch signals this by offering his extreme close-up view of the lawn, revealing its underside teeming with brutal vitality. From this point on, the film could be understood to be Jeffrey's fantasy, dreamed and conjured up to fill the hole that Tom's fall punches through the wall separating the civil world from its wild and violently desirous underside.

After visiting his stricken father at the hospital, Jeffrey finds a severed human ear lying in a field. Jeffrey initiates his own investigation of the crime, in the process becoming dually enamoured with Sandy Williams (Laura Dern), the daughter of a real detective, and with Dorothy Vallens (Isabella Rossellini), a nightclub singer whom he accurately intuits to be linked with the criminals. In the absence of paternal restraint, Jeffrey's curiosity drives him to break into Dorothy's apartment where he hides in the closet, fascinated by the strange and terrifying scene he witnesses as he peers out through the slats in the door. He sees Frank Booth (Denis Hopper) engaging in a violent stylised simulation of intercourse with Dorothy, whose husband's ear it is that Frank has severed. The grunting, snarling Frank screams 'Don't look at me!' and punctuates a series of bizarre movements with exclamations that 'Daddy's coming home!' and 'Baby wants to fuck!' When Frank has gone, Geoffrey in his hiding place is discovered by Dorothy and forced into further enactment of sadomasochistic fantasies. In the process, he falls for her, but finds himself bewildered and unable to meet her desire.

Chion suggests that this primal scene that Lynch shows us is the kind of fantasy of parental intercourse that a child might elaborate on the basis of what might be overheard by an ear pressed against the distorting filter of an intervening bedroom wall.^{xxii} It is imbued with all the ambiguity of Freud's primal scene fantasy, a concept derived in the process of his interpretation of his patient Sergei Pankeiev's wolf dream. The patient recounted this dream from early childhood: 'Suddenly the window opened of its own accord, and I was terrified to see that some white wolves were sitting on the big walnut tree in front of the window. There were six or seven of them. The wolves were quite white, and looked more like foxes or sheep-dogs, for they had big tails like foxes and they had their ears pricked like dogs when they pay attention to something. In great terror, evidently of being eaten up by the wolves, I screamed ...'^{xxiii}

This dream presented challenges to Freud's thinking as developed to that point in history, and it was the question of historicity that was spotlighted by the Wolf Man's dream. Freud's initial hypothesis was that Pankeiev, at a much earlier age, had witnessed and interrupted a 'primal scene' of doggy-style parental intercourse. Freud proposed that the dream was a fantastic reconstruction of these events, in which the little boy's fascinated stare had locked with that of an angry, erect father staring back at him. Freud later abandons this idea to postulate that the dream may be entirely fantasy, arising out of something phylogenetically constitutional, activated by the boy's longing for the attention of a virile father from whom he had been separated. This longing was fulfilled in the dream in a manner that Pankeiev as a four year old boy found overwhelmingly terrifying. Freud oscillated between these possibilities, in the process developing the concept of

the primal scene fantasy that holds its power and its position of psychic centrality by means of this very ambiguity with respect to historicity.

The primal scene, the castration complex with its implicit terror of absence and lack, and the negative Oedipus complex all are to be found represented in this dream by those imaginative enough to be susceptible to Freud's talent for the kind of biographical narration that Lawrence Johnson, in his discussion of Freud's relationship with Pankeiev, has described as 'improvisation.'^{xxiv} Sam Ishii-Gonzales has previously written of the link between representations of the primal scene in Freud's case history of the Wolf Man and those in Lynch's *Blue Velvet*.^{xxv} Further improvisation is required to conceive of a viewpoint from which the trace of such primal scenes might be followed in the film. The place in the diegetic construction of Lynch's film where suspension of disbelief in such things is possible is the place of dreams. In that place the eye of the viewer may meet a gaze in the film that wakes up an awareness of what is torn and what is lost in the process of primal coming into being.

Lynch's place of dreams is a locus of traumatic engagements, loss and mourning; a place of alternation between intense involvement in fantasy and its dispassionate obliteration; a place where the viewer is exposed to the radically disorientating reality of the gaps between binary opposites that become apparent when invested and disinvested positions explode as they collide. Lynch's film project is presented as one in which intergenerational succession comes as a result of incendiary encounters. Cultural innovation is born of the traumatic rupture and reconstitution of extant structures and forms, at the expense of subjective fragmentation, decentring and destabilisation.

When Lynch depicts dreams in his films, they are usually represented as the consequence of trauma, and as harbingers of its imminent and relentlessly repetitious catastrophic irruption. Lynch's dream sequences, while sporadically represented, often function pivotally in his films, acting as disorienting catalysts that disrupt the subjectivity of the viewer, cognitively and affectively. In this regard they serve as a special example of Lynch's techniques of the evocation of shifts in visual object and focus, away from the personal subject, towards the impersonal environmental realities, both animate and inanimate, in such a way that the viewer's sense of personal subjectivity is lost. Rather than being experienced as a singular and personal event, such loss is experienced as though it were originary. This loss has a destructive effect on the fantasies into which Lynch seduces the viewer's emotional investment, fantasies that serve to sure up illusions of unified personal subjectivity. The demolition of these fantasies and their replacement with the painful dissonance associated with such loss is aided by Lynch's use of affective juxtaposition of image and soundtrack as described by Chion,^{xxvi} evoking in the spectator the kind of viewing that Žižek has described as 'looking awry,'^{xxvii} as though looking into the wake of the departure of the ephemeral object of desire.

Within Lynch's film, there are two dreams depicted—Sandy's, diegetically drawing on the metaphor of nesting robins as primal fantasy, and Jeffrey's, mimetically as a series of fragmentary images, spoken words and terrible sounds, shown to the viewer from the viewpoint of the dreamer as the dream is dreamed. Jeffrey's dream arises as the consequence of trauma, after he becomes a participant observer in the sadomasochistic burlesque of Lynch's primal scene fantasy.

After Jeffrey leaves Dorothy's apartment, descending several flights of an external fire escape in chiaroscuro lighting, He steps out of the shadow, looks up towards the camera and is starkly flooded by light as the soundtrack builds to a loud monotonic dissonance. The scene segues to a distorted image of the face of Jeffrey's stricken father. The father groans something unintelligible, as though straining to communicate some vital piece of knowledge, something that causes the ear to strain after it lest it should be forever lost. His face dissolves into an image of Frank Booth in profile, opening his mouth, showing his teeth, with the soundtrack providing a roaring as though coming from a wild beast, but metallically distorted in timbre. The scene flashes into an extreme close-up of a candle-flame, with the roaring continuing—now more alien and inanimate. The flame goes out. The words 'It's dark' are spoken. A partial representation of Dorothy's face in extreme close-up appears, saying 'Hit me!' Frank's angry face appears again. The sound of a fist meeting a face accompanies Dorothy's scream as the scene cuts to Jeffrey waking from the dream in his bedroom at home. The camera's view tracks away from Jeffrey's troubled face up to a fitting on the wall, as Jeffrey (huskily) makes the utterance 'Man, oh man!'

The waking from the dream is unambiguous, but the viewer is left afterwards to suffer considerable ambiguity with respect to how much of that which has gone before has been dream. After the dream, Jeffrey takes Sandy for a drive and tells her what he has learned of the strange world of Dorothy and Frank, but not of his sexual adventure. He emphasises the trouble that Frank represents. He offers her the anguished questions: 'Why are there people like Frank? Why is there so much trouble in the world?' She responds, as the extradiegetic organ

music wells into a romantic anthem, by telling him of her optimistic dream of the robins returning in the Spring, bringing with them hope and love. Sandy's effort to wipe away Jeffrey's anguish, with such a reparative assault on the tear that violence of the primal scene has rent in Jeffrey sense the possibility of benign reality, takes civility beyond the cliché and on to its epitome, a tactic of Lynch's that McGowan identifies with a radicalising saturation in fantasy and Žižek calls *The Art of the Ridiculous Sublime*.^{xxviii}

In spite of his knowledge of Sandy's hopes, driven by desires that drag him along, away from such cloying stultification, Jeffrey visits Dorothy at her apartment once again. Just as he is leaving, Frank arrives with an entourage of sycophantic henchmen. They take him away to Ben's (Dean Stockwell's) house, a place of collision of fantasy and desire, of violence and civility. Ben—polite, effeminate, and suavely theatrical—is the captor of Dorothy's husband, and the caretaker of Dorothy's son. Lynch uses the scenes at Ben's to show the ambiguity of the relation of the keepers of civility to the symbolic and systemic violence upon which such civility depends. Jeffrey's minor breach of the rules of civility at Ben's results in a swift punch in the stomach from Frank, who gives voice to the superegoic command to 'Be polite!'

What Freud shows us of Pankeiev's drawing and tells us of the wolf dream from which it was derived,^{xxix} Lynch imposes on the viewer of the scenes at Ben's and those that follow. It is in Ben's place that mortality is realised. Lynch makes us into vicariously traumatised witnesses. In "Beyond the Pleasure Principle" Freud seems himself to have become such a witness as he describes his grandson's efforts to come to terms with his mother's death by means of a *fort-da* game with a cotton-reel on a string pulled back and forth behind a curtain. Lynch has the henchman Raymond (Brad Dourif) violently demonstrate the principles of this game when, holding Jeffrey at knifepoint then flicking the switch to retract his blade, he says: 'Here today, gone tomorrow!'

After Ben flicks on the stereo, picks up a stage light to use as mock microphone, and lip-synchs Roy Orbison's beautiful lullaby "In Dreams",^{xxx} the viewer is left with a new and terrible apprehension of this 'candy-coloured clown they call the Sandman,' and of what might be done when he visits the boy's room every night, 'just to sprinkle stardust and to whisper: "Go to sleep! Everything will be all right."' With this effect achieved, Lynch then has Frank and the henchmen leave Ben's to take Jeffrey on a wild ride into the countryside. When they arrive at their destination, Frank ensures that Jeffrey's neighbourly presumptuousness with Dorothy is punished with a brutally dramatised beating, one that she is forced to witness. As Roy Orbison's song is blares loudly from the car's sound system, Frank warns Jeffrey of the love letter that he intends to send straight to his heart and announces that they (Jeffrey and Frank) will 'be together forever in dreams.'

Lynch spotlights the civility thus violated in this oedipal theatre by soundtracking Jeffrey's intimidation, feminisation and brutal beating with Roy Orbison's soothing lullaby. Frank punches the lyrics home to Jeffrey, brutally eroticising the union such violence brings, covering his lips with candy-coloured kisses before putting out his lights. Lynch seduces and punishes his viewers, saturating us with the sweet civility of his cinematic dream, then brutally blowing up the fantasy that's we've taken in. Lynch leaves us irrevocably transmuted by our injuries, haunted by spectres of childlike innocence and lost integrity.

In a later reckoning, in the only scene in all his work that Lynch acknowledges as inspired by an actual dream,^{xxxi} when Frank and Jeffrey confront each other again in Dorothy's apartment, it is Jeffrey who raises a gun through the slats of the closet, and when he pulls the trigger, it is Frank who falls down. When we look into the eyes of Frank staring Jeffrey down, we find the eye of psychoanalysis—with its primal scene fantasy, castration complex and oedipal rivalry—embedded in Lynch's film staring us right back as we take aim.

If we return now to consideration of Sandy's dream of the robins nesting in springtime, the place of this dream within the diegesis may be seen to a polyvalent one, and much more than that of the artifice of the restoration of surface. The expense of such nesting—of the life that it takes away, and of the new life that it brings—is now obvious. Lynch also shows us that he is aware that civility can bring sinister fruit, and that civilisation may not always be the worthy end served by the sacrifice of desire. When Dorothy intrudes naked on the Beaumont lawn, Jeffrey's choice of Sandy, with her cloying promise of maternal propriety, over Dorothy's apparently darker sensuality, does not come soon enough to avoid the rupture of Sandy's civility. Sandy slaps Jeffrey's face in an act of violence against her own civility, knocking him back into his with a slap that sounds just like that of Frank's fist against Jeffrey's face, or the polyvalent smack of Jeffrey's hand striking Dorothy. When Dorothy bursts out of Jeffrey's fantasy and destructively in to Sandy's, she ensures that Sandy will never quite be able to enjoy Jeffrey in accordance with the cliché of her fantasy. Instead, Sandy's robins will nest mechanically, and that the naïve perfection of her love will be torn, so that she turns to snap and tear at Jeffrey and to clutch him like the writhing bug that he's become, tightly held between the jaws that grind her beak.

Dorothy points to Jeffrey and announces to Sandy: 'He put his disease in me!' But it is her dis-ease that she puts into all who encounter her in this film. Lynch has cast Isabella Rossellini in the role of whore-mother, in the process drawing as much flack from feminists of the time as Estela Welldon drew praise for *Mother, Madonna, Whore*.^{xxxii} In doing so, Lynch has put his dis-ease into Rossellini, and through the medium of her acting and Denis Hopper's, he puts it into his viewers, so that we shudder with excitement at the primal scene of which our witnessing is the origin of our desirous discontent, of Lynch's dis-ease in us.

In this film, Dorothy is never slapped publicly, and so we are left to fear for how she will fare, with Jeffrey so tightly in Sandy's hold, and Frank soon to be struck down by Jeffrey's hand. Now that Dorothy has provoked Sandy to give Jeffrey the slap that he has longed for, the kind of passionate response that he fails to imagine that his wooden mother could even conceive of, Jeffrey has no further need of Dorothy. By locating the disease in Dorothy, and allowing her to be taken away on a gurney, Lynch causes the civility of appearances to be restored. Now that Dorothy has served her vitalising function, her allure diminishes, and she is allowed to fade. Jeffrey has taken Frank's aggression into himself, and in the wake of the execution, Jeffrey and Frank remain 'together, forever, in dreams.' Now it is Sandy and Jeffrey who must carry the dis-ease inside them, and bear whatever fruit will come of it. After a viewing of *Blue Velvet*, the room that is left for speculative concern about what Dorothy now will do for kicks, and what it is that Sandy and Jeffrey have become, stands somewhat against Johnson's reduction of Lynch to a Puritan crusader for the Right, and of *Blue Velvet* to a nostalgically simple morality tale.

Chion has invoked the oneiric metaphor in his analysis of *Blue Velvet*, with his proposition that the dream begins as Jeffrey Beaumont's response to his father Tom's collapse. I side with McGowan in reading him as meaning that the film is Lynch's fantasy of what might arise in the mind of a young man in danger of losing his father. Lynch writes Jeffrey into a fantasy that takes him across the threshold into adulthood, one in which his gentle ailing father is replaced by the fiercely vital Frank Booth, whose presence is enough to guarantee disruption of civility. Lynch's conjuring of Dorothy as sensual whore-mother enflamed and imbued with life by Frank's exuberant violence contrasts with the desiccated acquiescence of Jeffrey's mother. Lynch gives Frank and Dorothy to Jeffrey as substitute parents who rise up in his time of need for a father who can be a force to reckon with, and for a mother sensual enough to spark the desire required to keep the rivalry alive. Frank and Dorothy serve their purpose. Then they are dispensed with, but something of them lives on inside Jeffrey and Sandy, who have been changed by the encounter. Lynch leaves the future open, open to what fruit their seed will bring.

Thomas Ogden reads Hans Loewald's paper "The Waning of the Oedipus Complex" as crucial in the decline of structuralist American ego psychology, opening the way to developments in psychoanalysis that more adequately addressed the fragmentation and deficits states manifest by the patients presenting in the late 1970s. Loewald's paper was written in response to Freud's similarly titled piece.^{xxxiii} Ogden argues that the decline of the Oedipus complex is an active process, and that symbolic parricide is a necessity of generational succession, a mandatory right of passage into adulthood. While emphasising the necessity of parricide, Loewald casts the oedipal battle as one in which 'opponents are required.'^{xxxiv} Ogden argues that 'the felt presence of parental authority makes it possible for the child to safely murder his parents psychically (a fantasy that need not be repressed). Oedipal parricide does not require repression because it is ultimately a loving act'^{xxxv} that transforms the assailant by means of what Loewald describes as 'a passionate appropriation of what is experienced as loveable and admirable in parents.'^{xxxvi} Neither Loewald nor Ogden view the Oedipus complex as a stage to be negotiated, or a phase that gradually wanes or passes away, but as a source of continuous regeneration.

Loewald argued that Americans (after Freud's thesis in *Civilisation and its Discontents*^{xxxvii}), had become excessively civilised. Youth culture, at the time that Loewald was writing, was becoming increasingly concerned with protest in the form of violence against civility. *Blue Velvet* was released just a few years after Loewald's paper, and its narrative and aesthetics (Rombes' 'Post-Punk Poetics') are consistent with Loewald's argument for the necessity that the children should rise up and kill the parents, at least symbolically, taking back into themselves the fragmentation and destitution resulting from this violence, but enabling a process of continuous restructuring of a decentred and destabilised subjectivities, those in which the rent is never entirely healed, and thence the impetus for creativity remains, radiating from the point where, repeatedly and always, integration fails.

In contrast to Freud's Oedipus complex, which is so centrally dependent upon castration anxieties, Loewald's oedipal narrative is one of the transgenerational containment of loving and hating as a creative process, with emphasis on appropriation, challenge, relinquishment and mourning. In this process, Ogden argues, the Oedipus complex must not merely be repressed or superseded, but actually demolished and destroyed, in a way that

significant psychic experiences never actually can be, so it continues to generate a tension ‘not unlike the experience of living with unresolved ... Oedipal conflict. It unsettles everything it touches in a vitalizing way.’^{xxxviii} To demonstrate this tension and its creative consequences, Loewald turns to the ancestors, invoking Shakespeare in a psychoanalyst’s self-conscious appeal to cultural authority. Citing Ariel’s speech in the *Tempest*, Loewald tells us that ‘nothing fades, “but doth suffer a sea-change into something rich and strange.”’^{xxxix}

Lynch demonstrates to us the terrible nature of the choices that confront Jeffrey and the transformation in the way he negotiates them, as well as the originary nature of the loss he suffers and the mourning he awakens when he kills off Frank, the mourning for a father fallen down. When the prevalence of benign authority is disrupted by Tom Beaumont’s collapse, an opportunity opens for Jeffrey to step outside the safety provided by the vitality that his father previously possessed. Jeffrey is egged on by the wooden deference the women of his household show him in the wake of Tom’s invalidation, but this places him in a rather frightening position. He finds himself at a loss and begins searching, knowing not for what. It is in from this void, in this state of deficit, that a primal couple, Frank Booth and Dorothy Vallens rise up, respectively, as worthy opponent and as prize for which to challenge. Both are intensely passionate, unlike his real parents, but neither is safe or enduringly strong. Taking them on, Jeffrey must face his own frailty, and be left with the knowledge of theirs in him.

Jeffrey’s seduction and the subsequent parricide are experienced ambivalently, and cast by Lynch as necessary violences, both in the cause of, and against, civility. When Frank Booth falls down, Tom Beaumont rises again from his sick bed. Jeffrey is no longer a child, but a man who has been changed. The father has not died, and the son has not taken the mother in his place. The Oedipus complex, although it has been smashed in fantasy, is not actually destroyed. It remains in Lynch’s mind and that of his viewer as a source of civility and order, but also as a structure of disquiet, disorder, or dis-ease, from whence a necessary violence is perpetually brewing.

The negotiation of the Oedipal situation, like Lynch’s narrative, can never be complete, but involves an increasingly complex and ambivalent awareness of what Ogden calls ‘a multitude of evolving forever-problematic aspects of the human condition.’^{xi} Loewald dubs it ‘the troubling but rewarding richness of life.’^{xii} The stultifying effect of civility and the necessity for a violent assault on it provide an answer to Jeffrey’s anguished question. Frank stands as the embodiment of both these things, and offers himself to the challenger as an opponent. When he is gone, Frank wakes up in the victor, who must bear the dis-ease put into him by the victory, and by the loss. Jeffrey mourns for his innocence, and for his idealised parents and their love. The political and cultural consequences of such a victory may depend on the kind of mourning that follows, and the extent to which the form of atonement chosen by the parricide constitutes an ossified return to tradition or else its spectro-poetic reinterpretation.

While the potential for a conservatising effect on the viewer is there in *Blue Velvet*, the activation of its other valence, a potentially transformative one, depends upon the extent to which the viewer is prepared to take on, and bear with, Lynch’s dis-ease. From such a position of dis-ease, it may be possible to respond to the parricide with a mourning that is less nostalgic, one dependent on what Ricciardi calls ‘greater openness and care on the singularity of the past.’^{xlii} Responding thus to Lynch’s film, and considering its violence against civility as necessity rather than as morality tale, it is possible to speculate on, and to conceive of, a future for the parricide beyond it. Lynch’s return, at the very end of the film, to the image of that animatronic robin clenching its beak firmly around a writhing black beetle, provides us with a key signifier of such returns and such futures, and of the places of violence within them, of which more will be seen in the films to come.

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