

***Mulholland Drive* (2001): A self-psychology perspective**

Director: David Lynch

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Introduction

This film has been lauded by critics as original and insightful, while at the same time accused by many of being incoherent and meaningless. In teasing out its complex narrative, most would agree that the first two-thirds of the film represent the dream of its central character—Diane Selwyn—with the last third representing her reality (e.g. Bulkeley, 2003). This recognition explains the more bizarre features of the film, their bizarreness being attributable to the primary process that drives any dream. Furthermore, various elements within the dream narrative may be related to a more overarching narrative structure simply as a form of day residue. This helps solve the ‘mystery’ established by the film’s narrative. At best, however, this provides only a superficial understanding of the film, or rather the film’s central story, namely the psychological conflict of its central character.

As Lentzner and Ross (2005) have discussed, *Mulholland Drive* is best understood within the framework of dream analysis, where dreams are seen as unfolding in accordance to their own language and logic. *Mulholland Drive* is open to the same psychological interpretation as any dream, with its manifest content serving to reveal its latent psychological meaning. To this end, Lentzner and Ross (2005), McDowell (2005), and Tang [internet] have approached *Mulholland Drive* from a traditional Freudian perspective. Lentzner and Ross (2005), for example, characterize Diane’s dream as a compromise formation between her wish to destroy her competitor Camilla, and her guilt over the consequences of her murderous actions. McDowell (2005) emphasizes the role of unexplained oedipal conflicts in explaining Diane’s sadomasochistic behavior, with Camilla acting as a surrogate mother-figure.

Given the rich illustration of themes of narcissism throughout the film, it is striking that no psychoanalytic review has explored its cinematic content from a Kohutian perspective. We present here an analysis of the film from the perspective of self-psychology.

Synopsis

The story proper begins with a young brunette (Rita), dressed up as if on her way to a social engagement, being chauffeured along a dark Mulholland Drive. The car

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stops, unexpectedly, and one of the drivers pulls a gun on her. The hit, however, is thwarted by a group of drunken teenagers whose car slams into the limousine. Rita, the only survivor of the crash, and having suffered from a concussion, stumbles out of the wreck. She wanders down the hill to Sunset Boulevard where she falls asleep in the bushes in front of an apartment complex. The next morning Rita watches an older woman (Aunt Ruth) loading luggage into a cab and Rita slips into the woman's now empty apartment.

In the next scene, we see a young man (Dan) meeting with an older man (Herb) at a diner ('Winkies'). The young man relates a dream he had the night before about *the diner and an unspeakably horrific face appearing from behind it*. The older man leads the obviously anxious younger man out to the back of the diner where they are met unexpectedly by the appearance of a witchlike homeless woman, causing the younger man to collapse.

We next see a series of phone calls between various underworld types, transmitting Rita's disappearance, beginning with a sinister-looking elderly man in a wheelchair (Mr. Roque) and ending with a black phone next to a red lamp and ashtray.

At the airport, a bright-eyed young blonde, Betty, is arriving in Hollywood for the first time, accompanied by a gregarious elderly couple she apparently only met on the plane. Betty proceeds to her aunt Ruth's apartment building and is shown into her aunt's apartment by a friendly older landlady, 'Coco'. Betty's exuberance at having the large apartment to herself is broken by the discovery of Rita in the shower.

In subsequent scenes, Betty learns that Rita has amnesia, remembering nothing of her identity or past (she took her name from a Rita Hayworth poster in the apartment) save for having been in a car accident. Betty, we learn, is from Deep River, Ontario, having come to Hollywood to pursue an acting career.

A parallel storyline begins with Adam Keshner, a young film director, asked to attend a meeting with regard to the casting of his new film (the meeting being overseen remotely by Mr. Roque providing a tenuous link to the other storyline). At the meeting (overseen remotely by Mr. Roque), two underworld figures—the Castigliane brothers—insist that a 'Camilla Rhodes' be cast for the lead in Adam's new film ('this is the girl'). Adam refuses to submit to their demands and the meeting breaks down with one of the brothers telling Adam that the picture is no longer his to direct.

Back at aunt Ruth's apartment, Betty enthusiastically throws herself into helping Rita solve the mystery of her identity 'just like in the movies'. In Rita's purse, they find an oddly shaped blue key. In a series of intervening scenes, we see a young, rough-looking man in a leather jacket (Joe) on Rita's trail. Betty and Rita leave the apartment, and, at Winkies, Rita's memory is jogged by their waitress's nametag—Diane. She recalls that her real name is 'Diane Selwyn'. The two look up the name in the phone book and resolve to visit the address the next day (after Betty's big audition).

In the parallel storyline, Adam Keshner's life takes a turn for the worse. In addition to being told that the film set has been shut down, he finds his wife in bed with

another man before being thrown out of his own home. He subsequently takes up residence in a sleazy motel where he discovers his credit cards have been revoked and he is 'broke'. Adam's secretary tells him that he has been anonymously offered a meeting with someone referred to simply as 'the Cowboy'. Adam subsequently meets with the Cowboy in a darkened corral beyond the city limits. The strong, authoritative presence of the Cowboy gives one the impression that he is ostensibly in charge of all the underworld figures previously seen, at least with respect to Adam's film and perhaps with those after Rita. The Cowboy gives Adam a last chance to redeem himself by casting Camilla Rhodes as the lead in his film at an audition the following day.

The next day, Betty goes over to her own audition, where she is met by the producer of the planned film, Wally Brown, an overly gregarious older man whom we are also told is a friend of Betty's aunt. Betty, using seemingly natural talent, transforms the otherwise 'lame' scene, receiving high praise and accolades from everyone in the room, including the film's eccentric director Bob Brooker. Linney James, a casting director at the audition, is so impressed by Betty's skills as an actor that she takes Betty across the studio to introduce her to Adam Kesher who is in the midst of his casting session. It is here that the two storylines tangentially cross for the first time; Betty and Adam's eyes meet ominously, but nothing else is exchanged between them. Adam watches as Camilla Rhodes auditions, doing a song number, and as he has been instructed declares, 'This is the girl'. Betty rushes off, realizing that she is due to meet Rita.

Betty and Rita break into Diane Selwyn's apartment, where to their horror they find a rotting corpse of what is presumably Diane Selwyn in the bedroom. Back home, now fully realizing the gravity of the situation, Betty helps Rita change her appearance to better hide her from her pursuers, primarily by fashioning her with a blonde wig. The two decide to sleep in the same bed, and subsequently become sexually intimate. Betty tells Rita that she is in love with her. Rita awakens in the middle of the night from a dream containing the word '*silencio*'. This prompts Rita to take Betty to a back-alley theatre by the same name, where they watch the late-night performance, the theme of which is 'illusions'. Betty finds a purse on the seat next to her, within which is an unusual blue box. On returning home, Rita fits the blue key she previously found into the blue box found in the theatre. Both the box and the key fall to the floor in what is now an empty room.

It now becomes evident that everything seen and experienced up until this point has been a dream or a fantasy, specifically that of Diane Selwyn, who is in reality Betty from the dream. Diane Selwyn, a visibly dejected, embittered and trashier version of Betty, awakens to the reality of her gloomy, meager apartment. On a coffee table we see a plain blue key.

In a series of flashbacks, we see the harsh reality of Diane's life in Hollywood. We see Diane (Betty) involved in an intimate relationship with Camilla (Rita). Camilla, however, ends the relationship to pursue a relationship with Adam Kesher (whose film she is playing the lead in). Despite Diane's rage at Camilla's abandonment of her, Camilla invites Diane to a dinner party at Adam's house on Mulholland Drive. When Rita phones Diane to tell her the limousine has arrived, we see that

the black phone, next to the red lamp and ashtray seen earlier, in connection to the shadowy underground organization pursuing Rita, in fact belong to Diane. Diane is driven by limousine along Mulholland Drive, in a near repetition of the opening scene involving Rita. Instead of a thwarted hit, however, Diane is met by Rita, who leads her up the hill along a path to Adam's house.

At dinner, Diane tells more of her background, in response to a series of questions by Coco, now seen to be Adam's mother. Diane relates that she is from Deep River, Ontario, and became interested in acting after winning a jitterbug contest. She came to California with some money her aunt had left in a will (her aunt having worked in the movies). She met Camilla on the set of *The Sylvia North story*. The director of the film—Bob Brooker—had given the lead to Camilla, because he 'didn't think so much' of Diane, who had coveted the part.

Later in the dinner, Diane seems on the verge of a breakdown as she watches Adam and Camilla laughing with each other playfully. Among the guests at the party, we see various figures from Diane's dream. The woman appearing in the dream as Camilla Rhodes approaches the real Camilla Rhodes and gives her a tender kiss in front of Diane. Enraged, and in tears, Diane watches as Adam announces that he and Camilla are to be married.

In a subsequent scene, we see Diane hiring 'Joe', the man in the leather jacket, to kill Camilla. He indicates that, once the job is done, he will leave a blue key in her apartment. The transaction is witnessed by Dan, the young man seen earlier in the dream.

We return to Diane in her apartment with the key on the table. A Lilliputian version of her parents, released from a blue box held by the homeless woman behind Winkies, crawl under her doorway into her apartment. They come to full size and begin tormenting Diane, laughing and screaming, forcing Diane to retreat in horror into her bedroom and on to her bed (covered in red sheets). She pulls a gun out of her nightstand and shoots herself.

Discussion

Freud (1900) postulated that dreams or the 'dreamwork' functioned to disguise infantile wishes or impulses buried deep in the unconscious and threatening to surface into conscious awareness during the regression of sleep. Through the processes of condensation, displacement and symbolization, dreamwork transforms the latent content of such unacceptable impulses into the innocuous manifest content experienced by the individual, with a subsequent reduction in psychic tension. Dreams, according to Freud, first and foremost act as the 'guardians' of sleep, preventing the individual from waking up in response to otherwise threatening infantile wishes.

Subsequent analytic schools have broadened Freud's view of the function of dreaming to include a more active problem-solving capacity (Lansky, 1992). Fosshage, for example, describes the function of dreams as the 'development, maintenance (regulation), and, when necessary, restoration of psychic processes, structure and organization' (1992, p. 262). Even the distinction between the manifest and latent content of dreams has come into question. Kohut described what he referred

to as 'self-state dreams' (1977, p. 109), dreams functioning to give verbalizable imagery and circumscribed content to bind deeper, non-verbalizable and diffuse anxiety states such as that arising from a threatened dissolution of the self. In such dreams, 'archaic self-states are presented in an undisguised (or minimally disguised) form' (p. 110). Expanding on this view, Stolorow and Atwood (1992) have proposed that dream imagery functions to 'concretize' the dreamer's subjective experience, in order to validate and maintain its organization. As discussed by Gabel (1993) and in our recent review on the topic (Moller and Barbera, 2006), these psychodynamic views of dreaming are not incompatible with current neurophysiologic concepts of the multifaceted role of rapid eye movement sleep and dream consciousness in the processing of emotionally meaningful information.

With these perspectives in mind, and within a broader self-psychology framework (Kohut, 1971, 1977), Diane's dream in *Mulholland Drive* may be seen as a representation of her desperate attempt to maintain a cohesiveness sense of self in the face of overwhelming and severe fragmentation, precipitated (in part) by her ambivalence to have Camilla, her ex-lover and primary self-object, killed. Diane's attempt to maintain psychic equilibrium is specifically exhibited through the gratification of a number of self-object needs.

In the dream, Betty arrives in Los Angeles ostensibly for the purpose of fulfilling her ambition of pursuing a career in acting. When she first meets Rita, she debates whether she should strive to be a famous movie star, or a great (i.e. talented) actress, concluding that both are within the realm of her possibilities. Betty exudes an ever-smiling, perky demeanor, with an unwavering optimism in her future in Hollywood. Indeed, throughout the dream, we are left with little doubt that Betty's ambitions are congruent with her talents. Betty's/Diane's exhibitionist, grandiose self is mirrored by a number of characters in the dream, usually in marked contrast to their waking world counterparts.

Betty's arrival is accompanied by an elderly couple who may be taken to be Diane's real-life parents, but whom in the dream Betty apparently meets for the first time on the preceding flight (the transition between her old life in 'Deep River, Ontario' and her hopes and ambitions in the 'dream place' of Hollywood). In the dream, the couple appear as a friendly, gracious pair, their perpetual smiles reflecting Betty's own exuberance. Betty arrives at the airport, her arm locked with that of the older woman (Irene). She relates to Irene how 'excited and nervous' she had been, but how comforting it was to talk to her. Both Irene and her husband wish Betty 'all the luck in the world' in her new career and Irene hugs her before departing. Their warmth to Betty is in stark contrast to their reappearance in Diane's psychotic break, where the couple psychologically torment her to the point of suicide (the couple also appears with Betty in a flickering whitewashed image superimposed on the jitterbug sequence in the opening credits).

Next Betty meets 'Coco', the friendly and helpful landlady who shows Betty into her aunt's apartment. Coco continues the graciousness of the elderly couple at the airport, offering help and advice to Betty throughout the film, acting in a sense as Betty's surrogate mother in Los Angeles while Betty's aunt is off to Canada shooting a film. In particular, she seems to take a keen interest in Betty's acting

ambitions, to the point of enthusiastically delivering to Betty a faxed copy of the script for her big audition. Again, this is in contrast to Coco's real-life counterpart, Adam's mother, who is visibly irritated that the dinner at Adam's house is delayed on Diane's account, and who later grills Betty in a condescending fashion about her arrival in Los Angeles and the progress of her career.

Betty's most obvious mirroring experience occurs during her 'big audition'. Instead of what one would expect to be a hostile, critical environment, Betty is met by a room of collegial yet important Hollywood players. An absurdly gregarious Wally Brown (an older man and apparent friend of Betty's aunt) introduces Betty to everyone in the room as though he were her proud father. Earlier, when Betty was practicing the scene with Rita, she gives a competent performance earning Rita's compliments that she is 'really good'. In the audition, however, Betty transforms the scene, earning the praise of everyone in the room. Bob Broker, the director who in reality chose Camilla over Diane for the lead in a film (and who is presented in the dream as a ridiculously pretentious eccentric), is left speechless. Wally Brown describes Betty's performance as 'extraordinary' and tells her 'you've done your aunt proud'. Linney James, the casting director, is so impressed with Betty's skill that she resolves to take Betty across the street to meet Adam Keshner.

The preceding considerations point to a major characterlogic deficit on Diane's part, in the in the sector of the grandiose self, a fact most likely explaining her compensatory desire to be a Hollywood star in the first place. Thus, she attempts to create a 'perfect' yet false narrative that could be analytically understood as a manic defense, as described by Baruch (1997), against depressive anxieties rooted in her actually quite humble, if not squalid, origins.

Much of the dream, however, may be seen in the context of Diane's idealized self-object relationship with Camilla. Camilla is presented as superior to Diane in multiple respects, including appearance, demeanor and talent. The two, we are told, met on the set of a movie where the director, Bob Broker, chooses Camilla over Diane for the lead, despite Diane's desire for the role. This pattern persisted thereafter, with Camilla becoming a famous lead actress and helping her 'friend' Diane get various bit parts in her films, including Adam's. Diane, in effect, lives out her Hollywood dream of stardom through Camilla. The ultimately sexualized relationship between Diane and Camilla (replayed in the final stage of the dream) may be seen as a direct manifestation of Diane's intense need for merger with the idealized self-object of Camilla. It matters not to Diane that the relationship is largely one-sided, Camilla being portrayed as a manipulator of Diane's genuine affection for her.

The depth of Diane's idealized self-object relationship with Camilla is truly revealed in Diane's reaction to its disruption. When Camilla suggests to Diane that they should no longer be intimate, Diane becomes enraged, even physically aggressive. After Camilla has finally left Diane for Adam, Diane engages in a thwarted attempt at self-soothing with a session of aggressive masturbation. During the masturbation scene, the camera angle representing Diane's perspective moves sharply in and out of focus, suggesting that a fragmentation or dissolution of Diane's self has already begun. Similar camera work is also employed at Adam's party to indicate Diane's continuing fragmentation.

Diane finds respite in her descent when, on her way to Adam's party, the limousine is stopped, and she is surprised by Camilla appearing from out of the dark greenery. Camilla leads Diane, by hand, up the hill to Adam's house, along a 'secret path'. In this poignant scene, Diane seems to experience a brief, albeit ephemeral reunion with her idealized self-object.

At Adam's party, however, Diane once again exhibits distress as she recounts her history in Los Angeles, and as she witnesses Camilla not only socializing with Adam, but exchanging a sensual kiss with another woman (the woman who appears as Camilla Rhodes in the dream). It is Adam's announcement of his engagement to Camilla that for Betty represents a final, intolerable narcissistic injury, exacerbating Diane's narcissistic rage and intensifying it to the point where she literally arranges to have the failed idealized self-object of Camilla destroyed. It is no coincidence that in Diane's dream the attempted hit on Rita/Camilla occurs in proximity to where Diane experiences her final narcissistic blow—on Mulholland Drive, the movie's namesake. Finally, it is Diane's realization that Camilla has been killed at her hands which leads her to a state of complete fragmentation, psychosis² and ultimately her suicide.

Diane's dream, which takes place sometime between her hiring of Joe to kill Camilla, and the subsequent confirmation of Camilla's death (via the blue key), reflects her profound ambivalence at eliminating what is for her a central self-object. In the dream the hit is thwarted, and Diane, as Betty, instead of persecutor, becomes Camilla/Rita's savior. Diane's idealizing of Camilla in the dream is initially seen in its reverse: Rita/Camilla in the dream in the helpless amnesiac who is reliant on Betty's/Diane's skill, talents, and goodwill, to help her solve the mystery of her identity. Rita in fact doesn't have any identity save for what Betty helps determine for her. This relationship also suggests a fantasized merger on Diane's part with Camilla, either as the idealized self-object, as an extension of Diane's grandiose self, or both. Ultimately, the waking-life idealizing of Camilla reasserts itself as the dream unfolds. Soon after Betty and Rita find the rotting corpse of 'Diane Selwyn' in her apartment, Betty declares to Rita that she loves her and the two become sexually intimate, thus re-establishing the merger with the idealized self-object Diane previously had with Camilla in waking life.

Alternatively, or additionally, Betty and Rita's relationship may be seen as being indicative of a twinship self-object need on Diane's part. Betty and Rita, throughout the dream, work hand in hand to discover who Rita truly is and to thwart her pursuers. Their sexual union is tender and mutual, in contrast to the competitive and even cruel relationship we later see between Diane and Camilla in reality. The presence of a twinship need, however, is best exemplified when Betty, after the discovery of Diane Selwyn's corpse, helps Rita disguise herself, primarily with the

²Kohut (1971) describes the steps to psychosis as: a) the disintegration of higher forms of narcissism; b) regression to archaic narcissistic positions; c) the breakdown of the archaic narcissistic positions; and d) delusional reconstruction (restitution) of the archaic self and archaic narcissistic objects. In this schema, Diane's dream may be seen as constituting steps b) and c) and to some degree even d), although her final, irreversible psychotic break occurs afterward as the result of her dream's failure to otherwise restore psychic equilibrium.

use of a short blonde wig. The end result is that Rita literally looks like Betty's twin as the two stare into a mirror at the transformation, the similarity continuing as they proceed to the Silencio Theatre. In the theatre, the two are moved to tears in unison, as they watch Rebekah Del Rio sing a Spanish version of Roy Orbison's 'Crying', a moment of affective synchrony that in many ways represents the culmination of the dream.

The meaning of the Cowboy and his network is more ambiguous, owing of course to Diane's conflict over having Camilla murdered. The network may be seen as the manifestation of Diane's narcissistic rage (as she is ultimately in charge of it as the person at the end of the black phone and red lampshade), with elements of her grandiose self and idealized parental imago. The network is portrayed as a pervasive, nearly omnipotent organization, capable of getting whatever it wants, and destroying anyone who gets in its way. The Cowboy in particular is a soft-spoken, but strong, authoritative figure, able to bend Adam to his will by his presence alone—a likely idealized figure for someone from 'Deep River, Ontario' (it is the Cowboy, notably, who tells Diane that it is time to wake up from her dream). A similarly strong figure is seen earlier in one of the Castigliane brothers, whose fastidious obsession with espresso is in contrast to Diane's waking-life use of a well-worn drip coffee-maker in her dingy apartment (the appreciation of coffee as an indicator of character is also seen in Special Agent Dale Cooper in Lynch's *Twin Peaks*). Interestingly, in the dream, these figures are not drawn from significant persons in Diane's waking life, but rather figures she only sees peripherally at Adam's party, suggesting a lack of idealizing relationships in Diane's life.

The role of the network in persecuting not only Rita, but also, by extension, Diane, is reminiscent of the 'gang' state of mind discussed by Canham (2002). Similar to Canham's post-Kleinian interpretation of the term, the gang state of mind in self-psychological terms may be seen as the more destructive or archaic parts of the self working against the more vulnerable parts of the self and its self-objects. It is reminiscent of Kohut's description of the delusionally reconstituted omnipotent self-object: 'the all-powerful persecutor and manipulator of the self ... the influencing machine whose omnipotence and omniscience have become cold, unempathic, and nonhumanly evil' (Kohut, 1971, p. 8).

Much of the network's activity is also directed toward Adam in particular. The network works to systematically destroy Adam's life, Adam deserving no less of a revenge fantasy since he has essentially destroyed Diane's life by taking Camilla away from her. The role of the network, however, is more complex than the mere elimination of injurious self-objects. It also works to advance its own archaic self-object needs. The network's persecution of Adam, after all, is still secondary to its main goal of having the dream version of Camilla Rhodes obtain the lead in Adam's new film. The dream Camilla is an elegantly maintained blonde, suggesting in physical appearance a representative merger between the real Camilla and Diane. Thus, Camilla's success continues to be Diane's, derived from her merger with Camilla as an idealized self-object. While the network functions to fulfill Diane's desire of eliminating Camilla, it equally functions to maintain their union, or more specifically Diane's fragile sense of self as derived from her relationship with

Camilla. In a similar manner, while the network seeks to eliminate Rita/Camilla, the result of its activity is to bring her closer to Betty/Diane.

Ultimately, it is the inability to resolve this conflict that results in Diane's failed attempt vis-à-vis her dream to re-establish psychological equilibrium in the face of multiple narcissistic injuries, and to maintain her already precarious sense of self. Diane, following the confirmation that Camilla has indeed been killed as per her instructions (via the presence of the blue key in her apartment), has a brief hallucinatory vision of Camilla, causing her to exclaim, 'Camilla, you've come back to me'. What proceeds, as noted, is a complete fragmentation of Diane's self and a regression into psychosis, with suicide as the only means to escape her intolerable distress. Diane's complete fragmentation may also occur in response to the realization that her idealized self-object is not in fact perfect, readily destroyed by Diane's own hands with a simple exchange of money. With Camilla's death, Diane is left with nothing to support her already depleted self.

While Diane's dream and subsequent psychotic break suggests widespread deficits in the narcissistic configurations of her self, the origins of such deficits are never fully elucidated. The genetic basis of Diane's pathology is suggested by the reappearance of her parents during her psychosis, and the fact that they are screaming and tormenting her to the point where her only escape from them is to kill herself. There is also a suggestion of an idealizing, and potentially healthy or compensatory, relationship between Diane and her aunt. Diane's aunt, a former success in Hollywood, would seem to have provided Diane with the impetus for Diane's move to Hollywood with the dream of becoming a movie star in the first place. It is also noteworthy that the scene Betty masters for her audition involves an older family friend making sexual advances to a younger woman. Her interpretation of the scene, which involves the female character taking control of the situation, earns the praise of Wally Brown, whom we are told is a friend of Betty's aunt. Wally is later devalued by Linney James as a 'poor old fool'. Diane's simultaneous devaluing of Wally, while demanding a mirroring response from him as regards the dream, suggests a conflicted, potentially abusive self-object relationship with the older man.

It is noteworthy that the structure of the film generally echoes Diane's state of mind, in particular her progressive fragmentation. This is particularly seen in the dream sequence which becomes more incoherent, if not perplexing, as it progresses, indicating Diane's failed attempts at maintaining her cohesiveness. This incoherence occurs not only at a content, but also an emotional, level. The emotions expressed by both Diane and Rita are frequently incongruent with their situation, with Diane (as Betty) generally expressing an inappropriate perkiness and optimism throughout, while Camilla (as Rita) seems strangely indifferent to, or at best perplexed by, the dangers she faces. In fact, the only real genuine emotion expressed by the pair is their mutual tearfulness in the *Silencio Theatre*. At the same time, any unease or confusion experienced on the part of the viewer during the dream may be a reflection of Diane's underlying fragmentation, despite the portrayal of herself as Betty in the dream. Even the post-dream sequence is portrayed in a fashion that is at times as surreal as the dream sequence, the reality portrayed being through the lens of Diane's experience (the culmination of which is her psychotic break).

Lynch makes use of a markedly non-linear narrative which includes placing the dream sequence before reality, the use of a dream within a dream (Dan's dream), and multiple flashbacks which at times have the effect of further disorienting the viewer. The subsequent effect, in reflecting Diane's experience across multiple periods of time, is to create a sort of timelessness for her, in keeping not only with the primary process of dream but also her waking state of mind. Kohut (1977) emphasized the importance of maintaining the cohesiveness of the self not only in space, but also in time, i.e. to maintain a sense of 'oneness' and 'sameness', despite a multitude of changes in body, mind and environment that the progression of time entails. The non-linearity of the narrative may thus be seen as representing Diane's temporal fragmentation. Alternatively, the timelessness, or the telescoping of time into the present, she creates for herself may paradoxically be seen as a means of protecting herself from loss and change (a notion discussed by Birksted-Breen, 2003), a last-ditch attempt to maintain some temporal cohesion and constancy in the face of her impending psychosis.

One remaining question is the meaning of the character 'Dan' in Diane's dream, the young man relating his own dream within the dream to what appears to be his therapist if not a close confidant (Herb). Dan's dream, like its telling, occurs at 'Winkies'. In the dream, it is 'not day or night' but rather a 'half-night', suggesting ambivalence, conflict or simply ambiguity. Dan relates that in the dream he is 'scared like I can't tell you'. He sees Herb by the counter, who appears to be scared, and Dan states, 'I get even more frightened when I see how afraid you are', suggesting an idealized self-object function of the older Herb for Dan. Dan then realizes that the source of their fear is the figure behind the diner, with a face he can only speak of in horror, hoping to 'never see that face ever outside of a dream'. When Dan, in his waking life (but still within Diane's dream), confronts his fear behind the diner (accompanied by Herb), he collapses as he sees the blackened face of a homeless woman. The same figure reappears in Diane's psychotic state. In reality, i.e. Diane's waking life, the horrific face that Dan is witness to is Diane's, Dan being a stranger who happens to be looking in Diane's direction as she is hiring Joe to kill Camilla (at Winkies). The stranger cannot possibly know what is truly occurring between Diane and Joe, but nevertheless he is incorporated into Diane's dream as a witness to the darker aspects of herself.

Dan, and the telling of his dream, seems to function as a disguised acknowledgment that Diane's dream is indeed a dream, as well as Diane's complicity in the events that gave rise to it, perhaps by the healthier, reality-oriented sectors of her personality. Alternatively, the blackened woman, as revealed in the dream within the dream, is an attempt to concretize the otherwise non-verbalizable fragmentation of Diane's core self; or, as Kohut puts it, the 'uncontrollable tension-increase or ... dread of the dissolution of the self' (1977, p. 109) that gives rise to the self-state dream in the first place. It is this fragmentation of Diane's core self that gives rise to her dream, diffusing it with what for Dan is an unspeakable fear, and a fear that lies beyond even that endangered by the Cowboy and his underground network.

Along admittedly much more speculative lines, Dan could be seen as representing the author of the film himself. Dan is a witness to Diane's psychological struggles, and Diane herself, along with all the characters in the film, is ultimately the product of the author's mind. The film, like any work of art, may be seen as structured fantasy of sorts, with its own unique meanings to its creator. We would, however, not care to speculate beyond this; since, as Kohut (1960) has outlined, determining the relationship between the artist and his work can be problematic.

In summary, while *Mulholland Drive* works quite well as an atypical suspense thriller, a psychodynamic analysis of its elements reveals a deeper story. Within the framework of self-psychology, *Mulholland Drive* is the story of a woman with several major deficits in the narcissistic configuration of her self. When Diane's acting ambitions become frustrated, she develops an idealized self-object relationship with Camilla Rhodes. The disruption of this relationship serves as a significant narcissistic injury for her, sending her into a narcissistic rage that leads her to have her ex-lover killed. The conflict of having her primary self-object destroyed drives her toward a complete fragmentation of her self. Diane's dream represents her last attempt to maintain psychic equilibrium in the face of overwhelming trauma, and it is within this dream that we see the full scope of her psychological struggles, as revealed within a matrix of self-object relationships.

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