VISUALIZING LEVINAS: EXISTENCE AND EXISTENTS THROUGH MULHOLLAND DRIVE, MEMENTO, AND VANILLA SKY

Holly Lynn Baumgartner

A Dissertation

Submitted to the Graduate College of Bowling Green
State University in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY
May 2005

Committee:
Ellen Berry, Advisor
Kris Blair
Don Callen
Edward Danziger
Graduate Faculty Representative
Erin Labbie

ABSTRACT

Ellen Berry, Advisor

This dissertation engages in an intentional analysis of philosopher Emmanuel Levinas's book Existence and Existents through the reading of three films: Memento (2001), Vanilla Sky (2001), and Mulholland Drive, (2001). The "modes" and other events of being that Levinas associates with the process of consciousness in Existence and Existents, such as fatigue, light, hypostasis, position, sleep, and time, are examined here. Additionally, the most contested spaces in the films, described as a "Waking Dream," is set into play with Levinas's work/ The magnification of certain points of entry into Levinas's philosophy opened up new pathways for thinking about method itself.

Philosophically, this dissertation considers the question of how we become subjects, existents who have taken up Existence, and how that process might be revealed in film/ Additionally, the importance of Existence and Existents both on its own merit and to Levinas's body of work as a whole, especially to his ethical project is underscored.

A second set of entry points are explored in the conclusion of this dissertation, in particular how film functions in relation to philosophy, specifically that of Levinas. What kind of critical stance toward film would be an ethical one? Does the very materiality of film, its fracturing of narrative, time, and space, provide an embodied formulation of some of the basic tenets of Levinas's thinking? Does it create its own philosophy through its format?

And finally, analyzing the results of the project yielded far more complicated and unsettling questions than they answered. These far more interesting speculations had seemingly

little to do directly with the book or the films under discussion, and instead challenged certain understandings of genre, method, and theory. The purpose became a voyage through a *vesica piscis* of multiply contested spaces: philosophy, film, ethics, and the processes of theory-making.

This dissertation is for my grandmother,

Viola Bussell,

how I wish you were here,

and for E. L.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

It is rather ridiculous to think we can ever really thank people who have given us years of support, belief, or hands-on help. But, of course, we eternally try. First, I must thank my committee to whom I am so grateful that I actually get to write these words. I thank Kristine Blair, who surely had her patience tried, but still allowed my study of rhetoric to spill over into philosophy. I thank Edward Danziger and Erin Labbie for serving on my committee and showing interest in spite of the meandering path my work took. Most of all, I thank Ellen Berry and Don Callen who have been so generous with their intellectual gifts, listening as I revised my *self* over and over, never overturning my thinking, just nudging me a bit to keep me working through my materials. I thank you also for being encouraging even when I absolutely hated this project, helping me keep faith until I learned to love it again.

I also thank Mercy College who financially supported my doctoral work and valued me enough to see it through along with me. I thank my family are, I'm sure, just glad it's over.

Finally, I thank the friends who came along for the ride: Sally Bayley and Joyce Richards for listening to me vent – both frustration and ideas; Doreen Piano for walking every painful step with me; David Hawes for reading the whole bloody thing; and Jesse Duran for the loan of his mother. And then there's Susan Duran: friend, sounding board, pseudo-therapist, diva. (Susan, who now claims she understands Levinas as if she'd actually read him.) Without your help, your insane amount of help – faith, comments, insights, brainstorming – without your elegant eye, without you endlessly repeating, "almost there, almost there," I wouldn't be "there." And every dissertation writer needs to thank that shoulder s/he cried on.

The Silent Screen

Grey sparks of celluloid
that convulse:

a couple of well paid
silent screen stars
flicker into life -
grimace and grin
extortionately –
then die.

This is the silent screen:
plays all day,
and all night –

A story of love and grief.

Like gazing into
Munch's scream,
you long for someone
to turn the volume up,

To come out and say it
like it is.

Lately,
I sit afternoons
and watch Hitchcock films,
hoping that the suspense
will kill me -

waiting for the murder to strike,
for the noise to be let out:
those huge splinters of sound
like a knife hitting the screen –

then falling away:

the victim's body
spinning down a gorge -

the oblique silence
that marks the end -
the curtain falling down
over your eyes.

-- Sally Bayley

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION:

A Claim to This Subject [ivity]

This dissertation begins and ends in violence. My first committee meeting with my dissertation chair, Dr. Ellen Berry, was at 11 AM on September 11, 2001. How to even discuss something so trivial-seeming as a paper when the Twin Towers were burning, and no one knew where the tragedy was leading or what it meant? However, Dr. Berry pointed out that it had everything to do with my, at that time, (undefined) interest in subjectivity and the other. The 9/11 catastrophe kept me circling the questions of subjectivity and otherness as my research took shape. The images and rhetorics of the Second Gulf War repeated endlessly: the pale-drifting ashfall and thick, white coating around Ground Zero suggesting new beginnings – its strange beauty the potential in a winter landscape, all in horrifying contrast to the shocked and ravaged faces of the victims; the eerie silence of still photos covering every media source was in stark juxtaposition with the nauseating thumps of contact from people preferring to leap to their deaths rather than to burn alive. As a writer, literary images immediately insinuated themselves into my sense-making processes: the torn and bleeding city presented a landscape straight from H. G. Wells or H. P. Lovecraft. Throughout this tragedy, I was struck increasingly by how the visual influenced my conception of the philosophical. The event itself brought to the fore the American "we" – a "we" representing the country as a whole and a "they" of an amorphous enemy. On the other hand, the narratives of individual people, survivors, witnesses, those reflecting on a single loved one among the more than 2,000 dead, were an imperative not to forget the personal, the Subject. The singularized faces made the tragedy a real and felt experience, prompting response going far beyond the meaning of terms like "charity" or "sympathy" toward a spontaneous outpouring of what can only be called true compassion.

The violence of the event and the response, the violence of the images impacted me in such a way that writing my dissertation itself became a kind of violence, a wrenching of meaning from texts, from words, an imposition of intent on the paper. A dissertation finally ends in the "defensive gesture," the war-like defense of the work as a whole. The events that began on that first day of my research shaped how I approached my project. My paper became a confluence of reflection and visualization, philosophy and film, brought together through the theme of subjectivity. And one twentieth century philosopher in particular shaped my meanderings in his emphases on the ethical, on otherness, on the power of the face. Reading Emmanuel Levinas led me to draw on the visceral impact of film, and film, inescapably, circled me back to philosophy with its own rhetorical landscape and the power, even visually, to persuade and shape our conceptions of ourselves as subjects.

Contested Spaces

My approach, tainted by violence, forestalled any clean attempt at creating a unified thesis. During the writing of this paper, what I thought was my purpose was cracked open again and again, not from lack of focus, but as if, like the texts under review, it was undoing itself, disrupting any coherence that thematized or claimed mastery. My purpose fractured into purposes which corresponded (like time) to the before, during, and after stages of writing and mapped out an admittedly ambitious argument: that a magnification of certain points of entry into the work of philosopher Emmanuel Levinas may open up new pathways for thinking about method itself.

The initial entry points begin with the possibility of re-envisioning film, suggesting the benefit and potential of reading films through a Levinasian lens. Using the medium of film, in turn, makes Levinas's writing, in particular his first book, Existence and Existents, and his

version of subjectivity more accessible while prompting expansion into my own concept I call the Waking Dream as a way of nuancing the existents of these films. Philosophically, this dissertation considers the question of how we become subjects, existents who have taken up Existence, and how that process might be revealed in film. The challenge, of course, is that cinema cannot "show" such a moment, an instant that can barely be expressed in words. Levinas writes an entire book, Existence and Existents, to describe this instant. However, since his description lies at the very limits of language, the visual landscape of film might actually prove less of a struggle to facilitate an awareness of Existence itself as well as providing a space to reflect on our own existences. Film can only approximate how Levinas approaches subjectivity, but, at the same time, contending with Levinas through film actually opens up these films and gives credence to their ambiguities.

Additionally, through the writing of this paper, I reaffirmed the importance of Existence and Existents both on its own merit and to Levinas's body of work as a whole. I remain continually surprised at how much he foresaw the ethical implications of his philosophical project at the time of the writing of this book.

Underlying questions arising out of the writing process of this paper became a second set of entry points, in particular how film functions in relation to philosophy, specifically that of Levinas. What kind of critical stance toward film would be an ethical one? Is it even possible to discuss the "ethicity", if you will, of characters or content of a film, without making the film itself a kind of philosophy and thus its makers philosophers of sorts? Does the very materiality of film, its fracturing of narrative, time, and space, provide an embodied formulation of some of the basic tenets of Levinas's thinking? Does it create its own philosophy through its format? The concept of using film as a site for philosophizing or reading it as a form of philosophy is not a

completely new idea although it is still a fertile and young area for exploration, especially given the dominance of *auteur* theory with its specious claims of authorship and generation of ideas. Stephen Mulhall writes that films "can be seen to engage in systematic and sophisticated thinking about their themes and about themselves – that films can philosophize" (7). I believe, even given the above questions, that this is true, or, at the very least, they reflect philosophical stances and therefore hold rhetorical power.

And finally, analyzing the results of the project yielded far more complicated and unsettling questions than they answered. These far more interesting speculations had seemingly little to do directly with the book or the films under discussion, and instead challenged certain understandings of genre, method, and theory. The purpose became a voyage through a *vesica piscis* of multiply contested spaces: philosophy, film, ethics, methodology, and the processes of theory-making.

Many of the modes of existence and the terms Levinas associates with the process of consciousness in Existence and Existents, such as fatigue, light, hypostasis, position, sleep, and time, are particularly suited to the three films examined here. These films are Memento (2001), Vanilla Sky (2001), and Mulholland Drive, (2001). Levinas provides greatly detailed analyses of our relationship with Existence and continues refining them throughout his text and his later works. His descriptions, relevant to all three of the chosen films, are also tied together through themes of what I call the "Waking Dream," giving contour to the most contested spaces in the films. I will set both my terms and those from Existents and Existence, as well as the three films, into play with each other rather than reading them separately. These points of intersection will be the basis for a Levinasian read.

A Word on Vocabulary

Working with his own disciplinary overlaps, Kenneth Burke, in A Grammar of Motives, states that "A perfectionist might seek to evolve terms free of ambiguity and inconsistency" while instead he endorses the view that

> as men cannot create the universe, there must remain something essentially enigmatic about the problem of motives, and that this underlying enigma will manifest itself in inevitable ambiguities and inconsistencies among the terms for motives. Accordingly, what we want is *not terms that avoid ambiguity*, but *terms that clearly reveal the strategic spots at which ambiguities necessarily arise*. (xviii, author's emphasis)

Both Jacques Derrida and Richard A. Cohen have compared Levinas's thought to waves, "each wave pushing a bit further than the last, each venturing a more radical interpretation of alterity" (Cohen 3). However, it is not simply that each *book* Levinas writes pushes farther up the high tide mark, it also that his *terms* do inside each text, and Existence and Existents is no exception. Such wave action creates ambiguities, intentionally on Levinas's part, right where we most attempt to pin down meaning. He attempts to write at the boundaries of language and to keep his descriptions from becoming totalized or thematized. Because of this tendency, I have tried to be consistent in my word usage for readability's sake, but also open enough to allow for some of the slippage that makes this book both interesting and profound.

As Burke goes on to point out that "it is in the areas of ambiguity that transformations take place; in fact, without such areas, transformation would be impossible" (xix). Ambiguities in this paper exist within the films, between the films, in the purpose of this dissertation, and in the terms used throughout the paper, partly due to Levinas's writing style. However, these sites

are also markers of transformation – of Existence into an existent, of lived experience into philosophy, of philosophy into filmic dialogue.

Although key terms will be explained more fully later, a quick rundown of some of the more confusing spellings or multiply invested meanings is here provided. "Other" is used here to refer to the other person outside of the subject, while "otherness" or "alterity" may also refer to the otherness of death, infinity, and radical, non-totalizable difference.

The Other

Many theorists have explored the relationship between self and other. Stephen Riggins defined the discourses used to consolidate power by the dominant groups or even used just to talk about those who are different or outside the dominant group as a "rhetoric of othering." In this rhetoric of the self, the Subject is defined by what it is not through an ambivalent blend of "derision and desire" (9). The other is someone who is taboo, but is also someone the self wants to possess, to master, or to be. For some theorists, individual identities rely on social interaction for formation in a great deal of postmodern theory,[1] creating numerous definitions and explanations of the term "other." Although some of these threads may seem to intersect with Levinas, these conceptions still do not carry the particular resonances of the Subject or Other described by Levinas. In Existence and Existents, Other is a force of disruption to the Subject, moving the Subject "on the way to time," to use one of Levinas's final chapter headings, as well as holding out the possibility of hope and pardon.

The Subject

The words "a being," "beings" or "existent/s" in this paper always indicate a human Subject. As an analysis of subjectivity more than anything else, this paper involves a confluence of several versions of the Subject including the philosophical subject taking up Being as posited by Emmanuel Levinas, and the cinematic subject as both psychoanalytical character and as spectator. "Spectator" here is not just another word for "audience". It is more closely aligned to the traditions of Apparatus theory, stemming from the work of writers such as Christian Metz in the mid 1970s. As Toby Miller explains, "'The apparatus' in film theory refers to the interaction between spectators, texts, and technology" (403). This particular form of film theory "inquires into the impact of the technical and physical specificity of watching films on the processing methods of their watchers," and it "make[s] cinema's actual conditions and forms of meaning available for critique, rather than remaining caught in their power-pleasure dynamic" (403-4). "Spectator" suggests more than a passive spectator since a matrix of relationships is subtly implied in it.

This explanation is not an attempt to unify these subject positions into a whole, but indicates they are imbricated understandings or explanations of subjectivity that inform and open up each other.

---

[1] See, for example, Stuart Hall's Representations: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices; Homi Bhabha's "The Other Question: Difference, Discrimination, and the Discourse of Colonialism"; Stephen

Existence

"Existence," with a capital E, or "Being," with a capital B, is used to refer to Being in general, the *there is* or *il y a* posited by Levinas. "Existence" with a small "e" or "being" refers to the existence of an existent, a Subject's own existence.

In this paper, each term accrues meaning like the wave making progress up the shoreline. The epistemological effort, then, lies in suspension, waiting for a metonymy of understanding: By describing the terms almost as discrete markers, the path of the argument, its motion, only becomes graspable as a whole. The telos, or, in terms of movement / time, the telotaxis, of this dissertation is in reaching the paradox of "hypostasis," which Levinas defines as "the upsurge of an existent into existence" (Existence 25). Sounding simple enough, even that "achievement" is still only a beginning.

Another difficulty with vocabulary lies in bringing together different fields of inquiry, requiring that each be dealt with separately, even though I strongly contend that they are tightly imbricated in practice. Some overlap between the sections and definitions, then, is intentional because it reinforces the points where these fields intersect and come into play with each other, bumping and brushing against the artificial barriers erected to contain them.

Who is Emmanuel Levinas in (Not Quite) Ten Words or Less

Jewish theologian, scholar, teacher, phenomenologist: Emmanuel Levinas wore many hats in his life. Born in Lithuania on January 12, 1905, he died in Paris, France on December 25, 1995. As philosopher Simon Critchley writes, it is conceivable to envision "writing a history of French philosophy in the twentieth century as a philosophical biography of Emmanuel Levinas" ("Introduction" 1). However, he has not been a well known figure in spite of his numerous awards, his influence on thinkers as diverse as Jacques Derrida, Jean-Paul Sartre, Tina Chanter,

---

Greenblatt's Renaissance of Self-Fashioning.

or Homi Bhabha, and his friendships or professional interactions with thinkers such as Maurice Blanchot, Jean-François Lyotard, Jean Wahl, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Paul Ricœr, Jean Baudrillard, Hannah Arendt, and, of course, Edmund Husserl and Martin Heidegger. He is credited with introducing the works of Husserl and Heidegger to France through his dissertation on and subsequent translations of Husserl and his essays on the phenomenology of both Husserl and Heidegger (Peperzak, "Preface" IX). Still, he did not begin to receive recognition outside of a comparatively small group of French thinkers until the 1960s.

Adriaan Peperzak posits 1961 as the year all began to change when Levinas's first major work, Totality and Infinity, was published ("Preface" IX). Simon Critchley adds that "a certain reticence, even diffidence, on Levinas's part, his professional position outside the French university system until 1964, and his captivity in the *Stalag*[2] between 1940 and 1945" contributed to the unfamiliarity with his thinking ("Introduction" 1-2). Additionally, there was the obscure nature of his texts, his well-known unreadability in the usual sense and with the usual approach. Even fellow philosophers are sometimes disgruntled or dismissive of his writing method. Dermot Moran, for example, in his Introduction to Phenomenology, states that "Because of its dense style and apparent abandonment of rational argument and justification in favor of repetitive, dogmatic assertions which have the character of prophetic incantations and quasi-religious absolutist pronouncements, Levinas's work is largely ignored" (352). With that description, it is not so unusual to find that even currently, most writers working with Levinasian texts tend to offer some sort of comment on the problematics involved with interpreting his ideas. With all of these things in mind – his subject matter, his unclear place in the philosophical

[2] Not only was he affected by the events of World War I, when his family became refugees in September 1915 after the German occupation of Lithuania, he was also deeply impacted by the events of World War II. After being drafted into the French army, he became a prisoner of war in Rennes in 1940 doing forced labor. Most of his family

tradition early on, and the sheer difficulty in reading him – it is not surprising he did not gain widespread recognition until relatively recently.

Critchley sees his rise to fame as really beginning in the 1980s with the renewed interest in ethics and phenomenology, among other factors ("Introduction" 2-3). Levinas is central to discussions on these topics, especially given that his most uncompromising and fundamental contribution was to place the ethical before ontology, ethics as first philosophy. "The question par excellence or the question of philosophy" for Levinas is not "'Why being rather than nothing?', but how being justifies itself" (qtd. in Hand 86). His question demands whether we have the *right* to be. Rather than asking the ontological question of "what is being?", Levinas asks "if ethics is *better* than being" (Cohen 8). Ethics, then, will "undo identities" precisely because it can disrupt "the complacency of being" (10). The ethical is found in the face of the Other, the other that disturbs *my* being.

The turn in postmodernism to discussions of the ethical also calls forth Levinas's other contributions, contributions impossible to distill into a paragraph, but which I will do anyway as a mere hint of the complexity of his thinking. He is known for his often controversial analyses, including those on "fecundity," "eros," and "voluptuousness" – terms that have prompted response from thinkers such as Simone de Beauvoir, Tina Chanter, Jacques Derrida, and, of course, Luce Irigaray. C. Fred Alford humorously comments that, although Levinas "Sometimes sounds like Kant. . .Kant didn't write twenty-five pages on the phenomenology of the nude woman. Levinas did," signifying that "A passion is present in Levinas that has nothing to do with Kant" (1).

---

members were murdered, including his two brothers, his mother, his father, and his mother-in-law. His wife and daughter were hidden by French friends such as Maurice Blanchot for part of the war.

However, some of Levinas's narrowed yet organic explanations of terms are most notably developed in Totality and Infinity, such as "responsibility" as an answerability to the Other before Being, a limitless responsibility even to death; the "face" of the Other or otherness as the very possibility of ethics, a radical alterity that 'calls' the self into question; or In Otherwise Than Being or Beyond Essence, terms such as the "third" who also poses infinite possibilities for the self, creating an impossible choice and the demand of "justice"; out of the "trauma" of the self exposed to and interrupted by radical alterity emerges "substitution," "the willingness of the subject to substitute the self for another" (Wyschogrod xvii), to become the Other's "hostage". Levinas's vision of the trauma of our responsibility to the Other stretches the whole concept of ethics in impossibly difficult directions[3].

By the 1990s, Critchley states Levinas had become an "obligatory reference point" in the theory of fields outside of philosophy, including "theology, Jewish studies, aesthetics and art theory, social and political theory, international relations theory, pedagogy, psychotherapy and counseling, and nursing and medical practice" ("Introduction" 5). Notably, film studies is absent from the list. During my research, when I first started studying for my preliminary examinations, I discovered some of his primary works, a handful of commentaries on him, and references to him in a few other texts. However, by the time I began this paper, Levinas had exploded onto the academic scene. The OhioLINK databases suddenly turned up hundreds of sources and references. It truly seems as if the impact of his work is only beginning to be felt. My hope is that this paper will encourage the continued discussion of more of his works, especially in cinema.

[3] His extremely gendered positioning of self and other also has prompted feminist inquiry into his philosophy posing questions that fuel feminist scholarship as well. There are also feminist questions raised by his texts. It is sometimes disheartening to find apparent patriarchal dissonances in texts otherwise so careful of and disdainful of the egology

Scope: Existence and Existents

With more than 20 books and as many articles, the Levinasian corpus is quite extensive, so any paper obviously must limit what may be examined. Therefore, his lesser known work, *De l'Existence à l'Existant* or Existence and Existents, is the foundation text for this paper. Published in 1947, this early text focuses on anonymous Being leading to the emergence of an existent. Levinas's first, full, original text[4], it was written while he was a prisoner of war and was dedicated to his daughter Andrée Eliane who died only a few months after her birth. Part of the book was first published in Jean Wahl's journal Deucalion. A mere 106 pages, its complexity offers rich potential for the cinematic space.

Existence and Existents falls between "De l'évasion" ["On Escape"], published in 1935 in Recherches Philosophiques, and Le Temps et l'Autre [Time and the Other], from 1947. All three of these early texts work well together to elucidate not only the distinctions between Levinas's philosophy and that of Martin Heidegger's in Being and Time, but to also initiate Levinas's key moves elaborated on in later texts, such as the distance between a being and Existence, the desire to suspend Being, the need for the Other to disrupt Being, and the radical alterity of time.

In On Escape, Levinas introduces what John Llewelyn says will occupy all of Levinas's writings: "the issue of the issue from ontology" (9). Escape, Levinas writes, is a "world-weariness, the disorder of our time" (On Escape 52). He explains that upon recognition of the "The eternal truth that *there is being*," then "life ceases to be just a game." The suffering we experience in life isn't the problem, rather the experience of being is "the impossibility of

---

of the Western tradition. Although I am attendant to those concerns, they are better answered by others, including Luce Irigaray's much anthologized response to Levinas.

interrupting it, and of an acute feeling of being held fast" (52). This feeling of being riveted to Being prompts a desire to escape; "it aspires to break the chains of the I to the self. . . It is being itself or the 'one-self' from which escape flees," (55) he states. "Therefore, the need for escape. . .leads us into the heart of philosophy. It allows us to renew the ancient problem of being qua being" (56). These critical insights become the basis, the central questions, of Existence and Existents.

Likewise, the lectures composing Time and the Other expand issues introduced in the last third of Existence and Existents: the significance of time, its relation to being, and the importance of the Other to the Subject. "The aim of these lectures," Levinas states in part I of Time and the Other, "is to show that time is not the achievement of an isolated and lone subject, but that it is the very relationship of the subject with the other" (Time 39). In this book, he also pushes the envelope of the radical alterity of the Other and of Time.

However, Existence and Existents is not simply the middle of a trilogy of close-knit texts nor valuable because of the way it informs his later thinking. "What makes Existence and Existents a classic in its own right," Robert Bernasconi writes in the Foreword to the book,

> is that it is one of the boldest instances of one thinker finding his voice by turning to a description of experience in order to contest the vision of another thinker. The fact that it has taken so long for readers to recognize that already in this book a decisive contestation of Heidegger – perhaps the decisive contestation of Heidegger – was taking place does not make it any less true that it happened here. (XV)

---

[4] Although Levinas points out to interviewer François Poirié that his first book was Theory of Intuition in Husserl's Phenomenology which was his doctoral thesis. It was his first book, written when he was 24, but it was not published until 1963.

A Note on Heidegger

Although it is not my intention to contrast the philosophies of Levinas and Heidegger, it is, as Bernasconi alludes to above, impossible not to give a nod to at least some of the major points of difference in any discussion of Existence and Existents. Still, as much as Levinas wants "to leave the climate of" Heidegger's thinking, he also uses it as a jumping off point for his own thinking, acknowledging that he "cannot leave it for a philosophy that would be pre-Heideggerian" (Existence 4). After reading Heidegger's magnum opus Being and Time, Levinas said he "knew immediately that this was one of the greatest philosophers in history" ("Interview" 32), especially admiring Heidegger's practice of phenomenology in spite of his former teacher's belief in Hitler and National Socialism. Since Levinas describes his memory of Heidegger's involvement as the "blackest of my thoughts about Heidegger [where] no forgetting is possible" (36), it is not surprising to find differences in the way the two perceive the role of the Other. Even in one of Levinas's final interviews, the effect of Heidegger's involvement remained visible: "The absence of concern for the other in Heidegger and his personal political adventure are linked" (cited in Critchley, "Introduction" 13), he states firmly.

Simon Critchley writes, "For a philosopher like Heidegger, the other person is just one of many: 'the they,' the crowd, the mass, the herd" ("Introduction" 12). The other is "part of the mass that surrounds and suffocates me" (12). Michael J. Hyde and Craig R. Smith consider similar points in their essay, "Aristotle and Heidegger on Emotion and Rhetoric." They characterize the Heideggerian "they" as a world of "standardized, ritualized, and institutionalized behavior" (90) where responsibility is about "affirming one's freedom through resolute choice" (91). Sociality, for Heidegger, "conditions us to be average, to be self-forgetful. . .to live a tranquil but cowardly existence" (91). Critchley adds that there is nothing "challenging" or

"traumatizing about the other person," and the other is not "the source of my compassion" ("Introduction" 13).

However, for Levinas, the focus is on the singular. The Subject does not gain authenticity through choice, but through obligation. In the Other is found meaning. Levinas speculates, "I think it is the discovery of the foundation of our humanity, the very discovery of the good in the meeting of the other" ("Interview" 46). The face of the Other is the ethical – relation and encounter – and linguistic. Simon Critchley writes:

> For Levinas, this relation to the other irreducible to comprehension, what he calls the "original relation" (BPW 6), takes place in the concrete situation of speech. Although Levinas's choice of terminology suggests otherwise, the face-to-face relation with the other is not a relation of perception or vision, but is always linguistic. The face is not something I see, but something I speak to. Furthermore, in speaking or calling or listening to the other, I am not reflecting upon the other, but I am actively and existentially engaged in a non-subsumptive relation, where I focus on the particular individual in front of me. I am not contemplating, I am conversing. ("Introduction" 12)

The Other puts the self in question (Levinas, Totality 195). Encountered in the face of the Other, Levinasian responsibility, which is "not pleasant" ("Interview" 47) but good, "arises in the strangeness of the other and in his misery. The face offers itself to your compassion and to your obligation" (48). Levinas's sense of sociality is also ethical. He adamantly believes, "unless our social interactions are underpinned by ethical relations to other persons, then the worst might happen, that is, the failure to acknowledge the humanity of the other" (Critchley, "Introduction" 13), as evidenced in events as earth-shattering as *Shoah* or as close to home as 9/11.

More relevant differences occur between Levinas and Heidegger's understandings of anxiety, Being, and beings. Originally Existence and Existents was "published with a red banner around it with the words 'ou il ne s'agit pas d'angoisse' ('where it is not a question of anxiety')" (Critchley, "Disparate" xxii), or anguish as it is sometimes translated.[5] From Søren Kierkegaard to Heidegger, Levinas explains, "anguish is analyzed as the emotion of not being, as the anguish before [the] nothing" ("Interview" 46). Death is a nothingness, and beings experience anxiety in contemplating it. Levinas replaces anxiety with horror – but not a horror over death, "it is the 'too much' of oneself" (46), horror over the very fact of Being: "Is not the fear *of* Being just as originary as the fear *for* Being?" (Existence 5), he asks. Nothingness is not death, the end of a being. Rather, Being itself is a nothingness, what, in his most important contribution from Existence and Existents, Levinas calls "*il y a*," or "*there is*." In English, "there is" is an interesting grammatical construction since the "there" never signifies the subject of a sentence. In a similar vein, Colin Davis writes that in French, the "*il* refers to no identifiable subject" (23). There is no consciousness to experience this nothingness. It is what Levinas terms "the phenomenon of impersonal being: 'it'" (Ethics 48), horrible and "independent of me" (Ethics 49). Levinas describes it in various ways such as the sound of conch shell held to the ear, to insomnia, to monotony, to a child left alone in his/her bedroom after the adults have closed the door for the night, to the sound of silence. However, the existent and Existence itself are not opposite ends of the spectrum either. Rather, Existence is "Neither nothingness nor being. . .the excluded middle" (Ethics 48).

On the other hand, Heidegger uses the term "*Dasein*," which literally translates as "being-there," to indicate a being "thrown" into the world. Heidegger uses the phrase *es gibt*, "it gives," as it is usually translated, to signify Being giving itself, a radical generosity. His

[5] As by François Poirié in his interview with Levinas.

expression of Being finds an ecstasy in existence in the world, an ecstasy that also always contains an element of tragedy in its finitude, its mortality, a being-toward-death. When Dasein experiences anxiety, fear or fear of death, its anxiety can lead to taking charge or becoming responsible for its own being, leading to a more authentic self. Unlike the "thrownness" of Dasein, Levinas speaks of taking position and the ex-cendence from the *il y a*, from Being to a being, where "rather than the generosity of a radical Giving, *il y a* is the name of a dark and chaotic indeterminacy that precedes all creativity and goodness" (Peperzak, Beyond 3). The existent emerges from Existence, where Existence is "a burden to be taken up" (Existence). Instead of Existence *and* Existents, a French translation of his first book's title better reflects this emergence, translating as "*from* Existence *to* the existent."

Existence in a Nutshell

A dominant question in metaphysics has been the question "What is Being?" Instead of answering this question, Levinas approaches it from an oblique angle. He states that "The questioning of Being is an experience of Being in its strangeness. . .The question is itself a manifestation of the relationship with Being" where Being is "alien" and "does not respond to us" (Existence 9). Taking up Existence "permits going beyond this question. . .not because it answers it," but because beyond the question is "the good" (9). Although the "good" is *beyond*, it is also about what it means to live a good human life.

Still, in Existence and Existents, Levinas focuses less on material existence in the world, in spite of its importance to the Subject, than on Existence itself. The material world for Levinas "affirms that what is essential in human spirituality does not lie in our relationship with the things which make up the world, but is determined by a relationship, effected in our very existence, with the pure fact that there is the Being, the nakedness of this bare fact" (Existence

3). Existence is larger than any one subject, cannot even be the totality of "persons and things" (Existence 8), and is prior to the world. Any consideration of the Subject, therefore, begins prior to subjectivity with Existence itself and how a being emerges from it to become a solitary existent.

Therefore, in Existence and Existents, Levinas introduces what will be a major theme of all of his work: this movement of a being/existent from Being/Existence, what he calls "*ex-cendence*" (xxvii), emphasizing the "ex" in later works in order to reveal it as an "opening" produced through a relation with the Other, an ethical relation. In order to realize this more ethical movement toward the Other, however, the immersion in Being must first be discussed, and that immersion is the 'experience' of the "there is" or the "*il y a*" which is explicated in Existence and Existents. Positing a difference between that which exists, a being, and Existence itself, Being, or the *il y a*, is a difficulty, for a being cannot be thought of separately from Being; the link between the two involves *time*.

Using intentional analysis, Levinas asserts Being as outside of time or beyond it, something only *occurring* in the movement from Being to being. A being dominates Being in the instant, in "the very *stance* of an instant," which, Levinas writes, is the event where "a being is posited" (Existence 2), where a subject takes up a position and masters its existence, if only for the instant. The instant signifies a beginning, a beginning that is already a "possession," since the existent "imposes on it . . . an act over its Being" (2). It might be expressed as trans-cendent, a crossing over from Being, Existence, to being, an existent, through hypostasis. On the other hand, Existence itself remains "foreign to events," outside of time, impersonal, in spite of *belonging* to beings through the moment of the present, the instant.

In order to delve more deeply into the relation a being has with Existence, Levinas also examines additional "modalities" of being, including fatigue and indolence, where we also find "the shadow of the 'there is'" (Ethics 51). Using the term "hypostasis" to explain the "passage going from *being* to *something*," he continues his description of this journey stating that in becoming something, being is "saved" (51). An existent's first mastery is in a "love of self" that Levinas states is "an egoism which founds a being and constitutes the first ontological experience" ("Proximity" 212). A being's first awakening to consciousness is the delight in self-mastery and possession. However, a being *can* move past the hypostatic moment toward the Other, be obligated by the Other, and open to exterior possibility. At the same time, however, we can still kill the other. Levinas tells us that "Ethics, is, therefore, against nature because it forbids the murderousness of my natural will to put my own existence first" (Levinas and Kearney 24).

The ethical, for Levinas, involves deposing the sovereign ego found in "the social relationship with the Other" (Ethics 52). Instead of the Subject, a being invested in its interior mastery, this experience induces a "decisive stage in which the subject, despite its satisfaction, fails to suffice unto itself" ("Proximity" 212). The Subject seeks a delivery from not just the *il y a*, but from itself, through "the responsibility for the Other, being-for-the-other" (Ethics 52), where its "I" is "subordinated to the other" ("Interview" 46). This delivery involves an obligation, and "every departure from self represents the fissure that is installed within the same in relation to the other" ("Proximity" 212).

In other words, Levinas attempts to describe the movement of escape from the impersonal *il y a* to consciousness, a hypostasis, where the Subject comes face to face with a *radical alterity*, an Other not to be mastered, assimilated, or made into an object for possession.

For him, it is a "Desire metamorphosed into an attitude of openness to exteriority, openness that is a call and a response to the other: the proximity of the other is the origin of every putting into question of the self" ("Proximity" 212). Oddly enough, it is his expression of the horror of the *il y a* that lays the groundwork here for a closer examination of what Levinas means by "Other" and what this "openness" signifies for the Subject as an ethical possibility later.

Although Levinas's ethic is most ascertainable in his celebrated exegesis of the face, this is no simple plea to make the world a better place by putting others first. As Alford sums up, "He defined the subject as persecuted hostage to the other in such a way that they can have no real relationship except what Levinas calls substitution: I suffer for your sins" (1). Alford's characterization points to the horror that the alterity of the Other can invoke as well as the depth of responsibility demanded of this relation. Edith Wyschogrod elaborates, "…Levinas argues that meaning can exhibit itself as the strangeness of the Other's face. It inheres in the human countenance not as a form to be apprehended in perception but as an ethical datum exuded, as it were, from the exposure and defenselessness of the Other" (xi). The radical alterity of the other provides an ethical opening to the subject in its very passivity. Though this is the thrust of the majority of his other writings, the seeds of it are evident in Existence and Existents. I believe, however, that such an ethical opening would not be possible without his decisive separation of Existence itself from the being of existents, with his foregrounding of subjectivity as hypostasis, and his crucial introduction of the Other as vital to the subject.

Film

Film and Philosophy

A distinctive literacy on its own, the visual is arguably our most significant means of communicating, and students and audiences today must negotiate and maneuver among

thousands of visual messages and texts daily. Visual literacy is increasingly integrated with traditional concepts of literacy in the composition/rhetoric classroom, with such textbooks as Donald McQuade and Christine McQuade's Seeing and Writing, Lester Faigley, Diana George, Anna Palchik, and Cynthia Selfe's Picturing Texts, or Faigley's chapter on visual literacy in The Penguin Handbook. Although film has been in use for a number of years in composition and rhetoric classrooms, it is still a relatively new resource in philosophy but continues to gain in popularity. Nathan Andersen, in "Is Film the Alien Other to Philosophy?", states that

> there is a growing trend in academia to use films in introductory philosophy courses precisely as illustrations of philosophical themes. In the past few years, a number of recent textbooks have appeared to serve this trend. . . .For these purposes, accessible films are extremely useful insofar as they provide a reference point for drawing an audience fed on popular culture into a discussion of the more standard texts on classical issues. (par. 5)

Film has a profound impact on American society. It influences many people's attitudes towards various subjects, their style of dress, their language, even their political inclinations. Even a surface reading of film already reveals that, as Todd Davis and Kenneth Womack's state about their work on Pulp Fiction, a director, and hence the film, "employs the characters in the service of 'exploring ethical and philosophical questions regarding faith, morality, commitment, and the human community'" (qtd. in Ritter 287-288).

As arguably the most important visual medium of our time, film, in all of its incarnations, is one of the most powerful purveyors of culture, its mores, customs, and manners, that we have. On a deeper level, the film as a whole is a potentially important place for philosophy, especially because of the philosophical stances "directing" it. Granetta Richardson emphasizes that

> Because film can be defined as a type of prelocutionary act (a form of communication designed to convince, persuade, or mislead), it is possible to examine its ethical nature . . .Filmmakers 'persuade' audiences to react in ways that correspond to distinctly political and ethical stances, rather than moral positions because a spectator's response to film need not be positive, even if a film does coax a change of attitude and thus, potentially, a predisposition to act. (272).

Because of its importance and accessibility, it is a logical site for analysis when attempting to move a difficult and relatively obscure philosophy into the foreground of academic consciousness.

Indeed, the film as text provides a particular setting, a way of stepping outside the limitations of a philosophy and attempting to move beyond the confines of language in its descriptions but bound by those limitations all the same. The nature of Levinas's writing makes it challenging to ask how we can visualize the moment/movement of subjectivity when it is invisible, transcendent, outside of language, in order to better discuss, access, or critique it. Although there are no easy answers to these questions, perhaps no "answers" at all, film may provide a fluid vehicle to enter into a closer engagement with Levinas's work. To discuss something prior to language, we must use language to do it, and the visual as well as the verbal text of film is an excellent medium and space for that discussion. Film, in its technical emphases on narrative, duration, and space, is a suggestive counterpoint to a philosophy that also emphasizes time, space (as position), and the Subject. The language of film, in its close ups and withdrawals, speaks to us of interiority and exteriority in its very construction.

The Art of Film

A phenomenologist often seems much like an artist. Simon Critchley points out that "Philosophy is the work of reflection that is brought to bear on unreflective, everyday life" ("Introduction" 7). He goes on to define a phenomenologist as someone who "seeks to pick out and analyse [*sic*] the common, shared features that underlie our everyday experience, to make explicit what is implicit in our ordinary social know-how" (7). The everyday things of the world are so often put to use or made to work that they no longer are recognizable for their differences. Like phenomenology that makes our shared experiential features "explicit," so does art. As Levinas explains, "Art makes them stand out from the world and thus extracts them from this belongingness to a subject" (Existence 45). A work of art is its own signifier, and like other signs, is able to replace or stand in for a referent. Such action, Levinas maintains, intercedes between the spectator and the referent, "extracting the thing from the perspective of the world" (46). It is modified or changed by the action. This transformation is not caused by form or technique, but by our relationship with the works of art – "to their exoticism" (46). They are still objects of this world but ones that do not refer to an interiority: they are removed from the immediacy of our world. This removal unveils a radical difference, or alterity, for Levinas. For him, this alterity is possessed of even the most realist-based art, such as photographs or paintings that are exact copies. These works are captured in their "nakedness . . .The forms and colors of a painting do not cover over but uncover the things in themselves, precisely because they preserve the exteriority of those things" (46). Art, therefore, may reproduce or "imitate" nature, but also may create the greatest distance from it.

Perception presents reality to us through sensory impressions of objects; perception doesn't present the objects themselves. It acts as an intermediary where "sounds, colors, words,"

for example, "cover" over the object (47). Aesthetics, according to Levinas, refers to becoming "lost in the sensation" (47) through art rather than reaching or discovering the object itself. Sensation imposes itself between the spectator and the object. His best example of this is music, where music is no longer a noise but the experience of sensing it, perceiving it, and is an object in itself. The aesthetic effect is not wholly exterior or interior (48). It is positive in its effect in that it brings about the "coexistence of worlds that are mutually alien and impenetrable" (48). It could be said that art creates a kind of otherness. Of film, obviously the most important art at stake here, Levinas writes:

> Effects of the same kind are obtained in cinema with close-ups. Their interest does not only lie in that they can show details; they stop the action in which a particular is bound up with a whole, and let it exist apart. They let it manifest its particular and absurd nature which the camera discovers in a normally unexpected perspective – in a shoulder line to which the close-up gives hallucinatory dimensions, laying bare what the visible universe and the play of its normal proportions tones down and conceal. (49)

Likewise, Levinas posits that artworks have their own "inner life," where a landscape may be a "state of mind," have its own "soul" which its material form expresses. In addition it "expresses what we call the world of the artist" (49). The spectator's "sympathy" with the art allows it to be "integrated into our world." These are the same terms he will later use to elucidate the relation between the Subject and the Other and what may be his most important point about art: "the alterity of the other remains an *alter ego*, accessible through sympathy" (49). Through alterity, the Other remains exterior to the Subject and is not consumed or made part of the same. Although art cannot replace the relation with the other person, it can produce its own sense of

alterity. Film may reveal some of the most important processes which Levinas describes through phenomenology since both film and philosophy highlight them and allow them to exist apart.

The Films

Many films are closed narratives, meaning that they, at least on the surface, appear to offer only one specific way of reading them. Certainly many films of this nature may be problematized by alternative readings, reading "against the grain," but the general reception of the film tends to be uniform. A typical example might be the "happily ever after" ending that is (through code restriction, directorial or studio intent) intended to please its audience. However, other films are more ambiguous or even unstable, crossing over into enigma in that they create a discursive relationship with the audience rather than "presenting" a message, a pay-off. No distinct message is given, often causing audience disturbance. Sometimes an audience may even be angry at this lack of closure or "answer." Mulholland Drive, Memento, and Vanilla Sky are considered three of the most obscure and confusing mainstream Hollywood films of the past few years, and perhaps that is part of their fascination for audiences. Jean Mitry states that:

> However many times it goes off on a tangent, a film must constitute a well-defined *global unity*, i.e., with its axis and orientation not necessarily centered on a final end or purpose but on a final *meaning*. It denies this obligation only at the risk of dividing the audience's attention, thereby destroying the interest it claims to present. (335)

These films take that risk, but rather than "destroying the interest," they stimulate, drawing spectators in for repeated screenings. Their plots are endlessly diverting and have generated labyrinthine debates on their meanings. I chose them for their risk-taking and their ability to function as art, that is, instead of being objects of simple consumption, easily forgotten,

they require active engagement of the audience, opening up dialogue and setting the films just beyond assimilable reach. These films endorse ambiguity rather than closure, thereby questioning whether there is really any "grain" to read "against."

David Blakesley states that "cinematic treatment of cultural movements as indicative of ideological anxiety" in that "Hollywood films reflect their times," but they can also "shape the sentiments of the public who view them" (125). These three films do not really delimit a particular cultural trend, such as an increase in patriotism, or movement, such as a shift to the right, but they perhaps indicate something more subtle – an increasing anxiety over Existence itself.

The ambiguities of these films, and the anxiety they generate, also reflect the *directors'* desires to explore what Richard Maltby, in his classic text Hollywood Cinema, calls "contradictions, silences, and equivocations" (522), usually the job of the serious film critic (discussed below). Director David Lynch says that in Mulholland Drive, he hopes "intuition kicks in." He describes it as a "machine that we have for sensing something that we're not necessarily able to articulate. Abstractions can exist in cinema and that's one of the powers of cinema to me" (qtd. in Hartmann par. 2). Christopher Nolan, Memento's director, agrees, stating he and his brother Jonathon (writer of the short story that inspired the film) were "both trying to escape the boundaries of the particular medium that we're choosing to tell, because we really want to create an experience that doesn't feed into your head, that bleeds around the edges." He adds, "I was going for something that lived in its own shape, that was slightly built from that standard linear experience" (Bodnar par. 5), also noting in a BBC interview with David Wood that "Film makers should be able to experiment with narrative without alienating the audience" (Nolan par. 4).

Besides the director's intent, there is also the effect of films as discrete texts. These particular films foster a dialogue by engaging audiences on multiple levels. Christopher Bodnar, in his article "The Database, Logic, and Suffering: Memento and Random-Access Information Aesthetics," explains "The viewers confront the database, creating their own mental databases of images, sequences and ideas required in reconstructing the fragmented narrative of the film. In recognizing this relation, Nolan engages his audience by inviting them into the medium as an interpreter and participant" (par. 2). Oliver Berry's review adds that Memento is "a film that makes you work and makes you think. . . .The film is a kind of narrative test of alertness." Another reviewer, Dave Clayton, states that it "demands the active participation of the spectator," requiring vigilance "rather than getting it predigested on a celluloid platter" (par. 3).

More interesting are the commentaries concerning Vanilla Sky, which was widely panned by critics; more than 45 major newspapers or magazines gave it either mediocre or negative reviews. Part of the problem is that the movie, on first viewing, feels like two different films. The first two-thirds seem like a murder mystery while the last third suddenly feels like science fiction. However, a second viewing reveals a great deal more depth than the first. Nathan Anderson has pointed out that a reappraisal of films sometimes has "the capacity to reveal careful thought behind what may initially appear as either sloppiness or, at best, mere technique" (par. 2). This is true of Vanilla Sky, a movie definitely requiring work. Director Cameron Crowe in his film production notes explained, "We constructed the movie . . .to reveal more and more the closer you look at it. As deep as you want to go with it, my desire was for the movie to meet you there." Critic Mark Savlov comments that it is "a film that you can take home and chew over later, both abrasive in its loudness and reflective in its fleeting, feminine moments of silence" (par. 1).

Crowe wrote in the Guardian, "Vanilla Sky is a feeling, a state of mind, a dream of a life that may or may not actually exist" (par. 6). David Lynch also strove for ambiguities in Mulholland Drive, as Ebert comments, "This film doesn't feel incomplete because it could never be complete --- closure is not a goal" (par. 7). In a similar fashion, Levinas's writing is deepened by the enigma presented in these three films while the audience is disturbed by it. These are films that exact response.

Methodologies

Film Methods

The film method here is not straight film criticism, nor is it straight film theory. Richard Maltby differentiates between the two in that theory is "properly concerned with the properties of cinema as a whole" while in film criticism, its "primary object of investigation is the individual movie, a group of movies, or the study of particular techniques" (521). Chris Darke, in his book Light Readings: Film Criticism and Screen Arts, suggests that "there is something inherent and incommensurable in the task of *writing* to convey the experience of the moving image" (4). In its very construction, he explains, "film criticism is always several steps behind the fact of experiencing a film, marked by the need to try and catch up with the memory of its initial impact" (4). As a critic, he sees his own work "as the chronicle of a set of encounters between the screen and the writer, the image and the page" and defines film criticism as "an act that comes into being with the encounter and is continually shaped by it" (5).

However, Maltby does go on to claim that "A criticism that takes Hollywood seriously should aim not so much to discover profound meanings or concealed purposes in its movies as to explore the ambiguities, contradictions, silences, and equivocations on their surfaces, and consider how these features express aspects of culture to which the movies belong" (522-523).

Although this paper does look at some of the effects of film as a whole, it is this latter definition that is of greatest concern here. This approach, with its emphasis on the ambiguities and "gaps," is a fertile entryway for the questions at hand, as discussed above. It is both a hybrid of theory and criticism that also pushes against the lines separating the two.

Rhetorical Method

The medium of film is a rhetorical medium, that is, films present (to a greater or lesser degree) a particular kind of argument, a way of seeing the world and persuading the spectator to do the same. In fact, as Marc T. Newman, author of A Rhetorical Analysis of Popular American Film, explains that, "it is the express purpose of some film makers to 'make a statement,' or to persuade audiences to adopt certain ideas or mindsets" ("Introduction ix). Other films "become expressions of cultural experience, both reflecting and perhaps campaigning for the adoption of certain political, moral, and spiritual constructs" (x). What he indicates is that film is a rhetorical medium in that "it seeks influence over the thoughts and emotions of its audience" (x).

Newman, like noted film theorist Richard Maltby in regard to film theory and criticism, seeks to begin to fill the "gap" (xi) in the rhetorical tradition that, as Thomas Frentz points out, has tended to position analyses of mass-mediated events "on the periphery of the rhetorical tradition" (qtd. in Newman, x). Newman points out that rhetorical strategies and methods often have to be constructed as analytical frameworks drawn from diverse fields ranging from philosophy to religion to psychology. Although he is specifically interested in myth and film, one of Newman's implications for rhetoric film analysis provides, is "the notion that mass-media and society exist in a symbiotic relationship" ("American" 320). In other words, "society presents exigencies to which film responds and suggests a variety of choices" (321). If a single film presents multiple choices, its text doesn't just create a dialogue with the spectator, the text

includes the dialogue. Multiple choices can also challenge the ideological structures the film medium supposedly reinforces.

It is more difficult to imagine examining Existence and Existence rhetorically, given Levinas's views on the topic. However, any dissertation, by its very intent, is rhetorical, a motivated use of language. An examination of his book involves an argument. Therefore, it is important to state just how implicated Levinas is in rhetoric, especially since Levinas himself rejected rhetoric as a practice to some extent, at least a rhetoric that manipulates or dissembles. His thoughts on a rhetoric of this nature are clear. For example, he states in one interpretive lecture, "We are being given a lesson in rhetoric, a lesson the Devil has learned well: to lie efficiently, start by telling the truth in order to give credibility to your lie" (Nine 64), or, in reference to rabbinical literature, he introduces a new book by stating, "It is wary of rhetoric, which, from the depth of all language, throws up its bewitching illusions and warps the woof of a text" (Nine 91). Still, though he may be indifferent, even antagonist, to rhetoric per se, as a teacher and a writer, his own *practice* is rhetorical. Steven Smith writes that "It is precisely to the problematic appreciation of rhetoric that Levinas makes a great contribution, for his entire philosophy is deliberately and self-consciously 'rhetorical'" (68).

Rhetoric coupled with philosophy is not an either/or choice. Even Plato, in the Phaedrus, portrayed "philosophy as relying on eloquence in order to meet its pedagogical goal, and rhetoric as needing the precision of logical and psychological distinctions in order to persuade audiences of the truth" (Poulakos and Poulakos 73). Indeed, eloquence is a skill with which Levinas is well acquainted. In the Antidosis, Isocrates gives one of the more succinct definitions of rhetorical activity: "With this faculty [of speech] we both contend against others on matters which are open to dispute and seek light for ourselves on matters which are unknown; for the same arguments

which we use in persuading others when we speak in public, we employ also when we deliberate in our own thoughts" (50). This definition is interesting in that "seeking light" plays a role in Levinas's phenomenology of consciousness in this text. Isocrates also captures the link between the personal and the public. Levinas, in his public text, uses first person. Although there are elements of the autobiographical in his work, first person functions more as testimony and sets up a substitution between reader and writer, a link which becomes increasingly important to his later thinking and writing on the ethical.

It is important to recognize, however, that, even though Levinas's primary concern is with the ethical, he does not *advocate* particular actions. In other words, the reader will not find anywhere prescriptives, a model, or guidelines, which is more in keeping with rhetorical activity. Levinas himself states that his task "does not consist in constructing ethics; I only try to find its meaning. In fact, I do not believe that all philosophy should be programmatic. . .One can without doubt construct an ethics in function of what I have . . .said, but this is not my own theme" (Ethics 90). Still, as Simon Critchley writes, ". . .much Continental philosophy is concerned with giving a critique of the social practices of the modern world, a critique that aspires towards a goal of individual and societal emancipation" (Continental preface). How does it meet that goal? How then does one apply a philosopher's work who does not advocate an ethics per se? When Levinas was giving a speech to a group of South American students, the very same kind of questions were asked of him. He said that they were doing it, applying it, right there in that room. While such an answer may be dismissed by some as naïve and idealistic, I think they miss the point of his answer. Sometimes beginning the discussion, asking the questions, itself becomes a kind of praxis.

Phenomenology

Simon Critchley describes phenomenology as a critical analysis of "the common, shared features that underlie our everyday experience," with the goal "to make explicit what is implicit in our ordinary social know-how" ("Introduction" 7). Although Levinas distanced himself from Husserlian phenomenology as theoretical contemplation, he did still use it as a method. Edith Wyschogrod hesitatingly describes his method as "an attentiveness to the life world, a fidelity to descriptive accuracy . . . He retains the structure of intentionality itself" (51). In his book Difficult Freedom, she contends, he "sees phenomenology as a path that opens up a way for thinking about experiences in a manner irreducible to the language of subject and object" (52-53, n. 1). Levinas considered himself a phenomenologist practicing, as he writes in Totality and Infinity, "intentional analysis" or "the search for the concrete" (28). I try to deepen even more the strange and beautiful analyses conducted by Levinas. Although it is not phenomenology as such, it is very much in keeping with Levinas's own "intentional analysis."

Further, as Mary Alemany-Galway writes in A Postmodern Cinema, to film theorist and critic André Bazin, "it is the indexical and iconic nature of the film medium that allows the filmmaker to let the ambiguity of reality become a part of the film's message as experienced by the viewer" (56). It is this "ambiguity of reality" that permits a close reading in conjunction with Existence and Existents and also pointed to the parallels with the Romantic poets suggesting the idea of the Waking Dream in the section on "Fatigue." "Merleau-Ponty says of phenomenology and film, 'contemporary philosophy consists not in stringing concepts together but in describing the mingling of consciousness with the world, its involvement in a body, and its coexistence with others; and. . .this is movie material *par excellence*" (qtd. in Robinson 76).

Coloring Outside the Lines

Robert Bernasconi, acknowledging the "impenetrability" of one of Levinas's core intentional analyses in Existence and Existents, the *il y a*, states that one of the compensations of the text is "its wealth of literary references to Homer, Shakespeare, Racine, Rabelais, Baudelaire, Rimbaud, Valery, and Blanchot," along with his wide "range of philosophical references" (xv). Given Levinas's penchant of drawing from numerous artists, writers, and thinkers, I follow his lead, but not just from the "classics"; I also weave together sources more appropriate to this paper – music lyrics and poetry, literature ranging from the fiction of Joseph Conrad to the autobiography of Kathleen Norris, and other films as textual references, such as Sunset Boulevard. I also use his model to pattern my own engagement with film, including the concept of the Waking Dream, where each "dream" is also constructed from a wealth of popular culture references.

Emphasis

"Emphasis," Levinas contends, has the same roots as "phenomenology." I think that emphasis points to the intentional aspect of phenomenology in his work. When it comes to methodology, Levinas is restrained about it, "admitting that he does not believe that there can be transparency in philosophical method or indeed in philosophy as a whole. If we press him to give us his formula," Llewelyn concedes, "the most he will say is that his method is the method of emphasis." I keep the "method" of emphasis firmly in sight; I have not engaged with every possible point or idea in Levinas's book, instead emphasizing what I believe to be most original or important to his later work. Additionally, I also emphasize my own engagement, importing my own metaphors for some of his "modes of being." In French, Levinas adds, "this word can mean provocative and exasperating exaggeration. 'Exasperation as philosophical method!' he

exclaims" (qtd in Llewelyn 33). To end on a note of humor, I would have to add that I quite understood his "methodology" after a few readings of Existence and Existents, especially the exasperating part.

Approaching Levinas

Hospitality to the Other, welcome, is a Levinasian theme; as Derrida said in his Adieu, Levinas "has put his mark upon it, having first reinvented it" (16). Although to read Levinas is to be welcomed to engage in his text, to attempt to move from abstraction to praxis is challenging enough in and of itself; to do so with Levinas is to wrench meaning from his text. And here is my disclaimer. I approach Levinas's text in the same way he approached the Mishna and Gemara. He explains his idea of the act of interpretation as knowing "*in what spirit something is borrowed*. Given this, in seeking a foundation for borrowing in the letter of a past which is not its own, the borrower links what he is borrowing to a tradition and formulates, beyond the similarities of structure, the meaning he is giving to what he is borrowing" (Nine 75). The *spirit* here is delimiting the responsibility, in Levinas's sense, in light of the "call" of his work. It is an act of violence. Levinas himself describes the act of interpretation in this manner as one of his translators, Annette Aronowicz has pointed out: he "stresses that it is an exertion, a battle, a tearing or wresting of meaning from the text" (xvii). At the same time, Levinas attempts to safeguard such violence with his caution to be "attentive to the whole from which the excerpt is taken" (Nine 75), which I respectfully attempt to do.

However, this paper is not simply a critical interpretation or a work of philosophy solely. As stated earlier, it is an effort to use film to make Levinas more accessible at the same time that it uses Levinas to uncover new ways of looking at film, as well as questioning that "looking." As psychoanalyst C. Fred Alford writes, "One sees how difficult it is to gain a little distance on

Levinas. . .when one observes how many who write about Levinas adopt his language, as though to understand Levinas means being able to write in the style of Levinas" (2). I have tried to restrain this impulse. Still, sometimes it is impossible to avoid it altogether, especially since the difficulty of his style is due to his desire to write at the limits of language in order to express the impossible: that which exists *outside* of language. Alford also states that most writers, "accepting the limits of [Levinas's] project. . .try to show where Levinas goes too far, or where he becomes involved in self-contradiction. What proves so terribly difficult is approaching Levinas from outside his project" (2). But that is what this paper is about – approaching, coming closer to, Levinas from outside his project.

FILM SUMMARIES:

"I'LL MEET YOU ON THE DARK SIDE OF THE FILM"[6]

Film theorist Warren Buckland states that "The initial stage of the theoretical activity involves the simplification (abstraction and idealization) of the domain under study" (143). Although the question of genre will be revisited later, constructing a theory seemed dependent on grouping the films into a genre, especially since their lines are so ambiguously drawn. These three films, Memento (2001), Mulholland Drive (2001), and Vanilla Sky (2001), feature many elements of classic film noir – or perhaps more properly fit into the category film critic Foster Hirsh, author of The Dark Side of Film, characterizes as "neo-noir." In his 1999 book, Detours and Lost Highways, he identifies these elements as "masquerade and multiple identity. . . a battle with an implacable destiny, an investigator on the trail of a killer. . .amnesia, characters haunted by traumatic events from the past. . .mischance, seduction and entrapment," to name but a few (312-313). "The significance of recurrent fragmented images" that are not revealed until the film's denouement, he writes, create in neo-noir a "Möbius strip universe of dissolving and doubled identities" where "time and space are unreliable," resulting in a "self-enclosed puzzle" for which there are no easy answers (314).

It is precisely these qualities – and the difficulty and perseverance that make them by turns frustrating, fascinating, obtuse, endlessly thought provoking but ultimately satisfying – that make them perfect vehicles for illustrating and illuminating the concepts Emmanuel Levinas challenges us to struggle with in Existence and Existents. The films, though seemingly worlds apart in style and theme (writer/director Cameron Crowe of Say Anything and Jerry Maguire fame, for instance, does not necessarily jump to mind as a natural bedfellow for David Lynch, writer/director of such films as Blue Velvet and Lost Highway) are all puzzles, inquiries,

philosophies, and quests. Above all, like Emmanuel Levinas, they ask for our forbearance, faith, and patience in the journey they ask us to take with them.

Memento

On the surface, Christopher Nolan's Memento (2001) is a story of a ruined man with short-term memory loss caught in the grip of the present. The protagonist, Leonard Shelby (Guy Pearce), used to be an up-and-coming, happily married insurance investigator until a tragic home invasion changed his life forever. During the invasion, we are told, his wife was raped and murdered by one man while another delivered the blow to Leonard's head that caused him to fall into a state of semi-amnesia. "Anterograde memory loss," as his "condition" is called, means that he can supposedly remember the past accurately but lacks the ability to "create new memories." Lenny, as he is now known, tells everyone he meets about his "condition," taking Polaroids and labeling them with the information he cannot retain, living in sleazy motel rooms and single-mindedly searching for "John G.," the man he is sure "raped and killed his wife." In his search he his helped by Teddy (Joe Pantoliano), a shifting figure who sometimes appears to be helping Lenny, while at other times seems to be using him. What is clear, though, is that he has a vested interest in Lenny's case. Similarly, Lenny is befriended by Natalie (Carrie-Ann Moss), a bartender with murky motives whose role in helping Lenny becomes increasingly suspicious. She makes fun of him, then seems sensitive to his plight to the point of sleeping with him. At one point, both Teddy and Natalie's Polaroids are marked by Lenny, "Don't believe [their] lies," a phrase that is in due course amended or altered. Lenny's sense of identity seemingly lies in the past when he was Leonard Shelby, but he appears to have taken on many identities between the onset of his memory loss and when we first see him.

---

[6] Pink Floyd, Dark Side of the Moon

In order to make his life "manageable," Lenny develops a "system" to keep track of who he is and what he knows. In addition to his Polaroids, he has endless notes, maps, files, a bag of *memento mori* from his late wife, and tattoos of his investigative breakthroughs written on his body. One of the tattoos he refers to most often reads, "Remember Sammy Jankis." Throughout the film, Lenny asks everyone he meets, "Did I ever tell you about Sammy Jankis?" One of the last insurance cases he remembers investigating before the onset of his condition, Jankis had the same condition as Leonard now does, but the insurance company, based on Lenny's review of the case, turned down Jankis's claim, basically declaring it a psychosomatic condition. Jankis's story becomes a litany or refrain that Lenny recites to orient himself throughout the film. As Teddy tells him, "It gets better ever time you tell it," indicating that some embellishments to the story have been added along the way.

Despite what he considers his foolproof "system," Lenny's record of his "experiences" is often faulty, with truth eluding him across a shifting landscape of memory and time. As such, Leonard's movement from the anonymity of total short term memory loss to a constructed world existing entirely in the present is the closest of the three films in portraying a subject's coming to consciousness through hypostasis. Yet Lenny's is a failed position, one forever limited to a self that he cannot get beyond.

Still, the truly original element of the film is the way it is portrayed materially. Nolan tells the story in pieces where each time segment is unspooled backwards, essentially telling the story in reverse order in a framework of "revisitation, revision and reconstruction" (Berry Para. 4). Many critics have lauded the film's narrative technique, drawing on theorists such as Todorov, Barthes, and Levi-Strauss. Understandably, the focus has centered on the faultiness of memory and the politics of identity. However, this movie also reveals a lot about a being's

relation to Existence and the effort required to take on being. In all of these senses, Lenny is the poster-child for questions of subjectivity.

In terms of traditional plot, it is important to note that we meet Lenny at some point of distress. He is involved with Teddy and Natalie, lives at the Budget Inn, and drives a Jaguar, which he has no idea how he acquired. As the film unfolds, we find out Natalie's boyfriend Jimmy has just been killed, that the suit Lenny wears, as well as the car, were once Jimmy's. Natalie involves Lenny in a plot to get rid of a man named Dodd, whom she alleges beat her and will probably kill her. Dodd, Jimmy, Natalie, and even Teddy, it seems, are implicated in the local drug trade, and something has gone wrong. One of Lenny's tattoo "facts" also states that the John G. he seeks was involved in the drug trade.

Teddy is a cop as well, one who often rescues Lenny and distrusts Natalie. He claims to have been an investigator on the original home invasion case and has given Lenny the police file of the investigation, but pages of the file continually seem to disappear. There are also black and white segments in the film featuring Lenny telling a detective, most likely Teddy, his backstory from his hotel phone. These black and white sequences also provide most of the narration of the Sammy Jankis story. Sammy, unable to develop a system to "make his life possible," did not respond to "conditioning" or any other memory method. Eventually, his wife, after having spoken with Leonard Shelby and confirming that Sammy's condition was all psychological, gives Sammy a "test" to check the veracity of his memory loss. She asks him to give her her regular insulin injection, but she asks him every five minutes, thinking that rather than killing her with insulin, he will regain his memory or, if he is faking, have a sudden "breakthrough." She is wrong. Sammy does indeed kill her with insulin and ends up in a mental institution.

The "Extras" section on the Memento DVD features a front page "newspaper" article about the hunt for a serial killer who is believed to be an escapee from a mental institution. The article also notes that the manager of the Budget Inn, Lenny's latest "home," had notified police of the presence of the killer. Between this clue and the information that Teddy finally gives Lenny in the film, it is clear that Lenny has elided the Sammy Jankis story with his own. Sammy Jankis wasn't married and was, in fact, a fraud. Lenny is the one who had had a diabetic wife, and his wife had survived the home invasion. Lenny, who has repeated flashbacks of pinching his wife's thigh, finally remembers why he was pinching her – to give her an insulin shot. He then immediately erases this memory and returns to his "false" remembrance of it as a loving little tweak, denying her diabetes to Teddy.

Lenny's use of the term "condition" accrues layers of meaning throughout the film besides the physical specification. It also comes to represent the "human condition" positioning the audience in the same confused space as Lenny and calling into question our belief and reliance on memory and "facts." In the end the film ironically suggests that Lenny's memory loss is "conditional." Thus, Lenny's loss of memory of the past is put into question as well, and like the constantly shifting instant of the present, exists only as a negotiation through a dark labyrinth of lies and half truths. His wife, or at least *his* story of his wife is the one thing he says he "can't remember to forget," and even that story contains minefields he has planted himself. Memento, as well as the three other films, takes up the question of distortions of memory and time, the radically unstable nature of "truth," and ultimately, the ethical difficulties of living as a constantly "beginning," self-creating being.

Vanilla Sky

Cameron Crowe's Vanilla Sky (2001), based on Alejandro Amenabar's 1997 Spanish film Abre los Ojos (Open Your Eyes), is on first viewing a very different type of film. Many people found it disjointed, bifurcated, as if it were two entirely different stories sewn together, half drama and half science fiction, something Crowe encourages so that the spectator, like with Memento, experiences the feelings of extreme confusion facing the protagonist. Since the film is so laden with natural-seeming verbal and visual "clues," it takes several close, slow readings of the text to begin to appreciate the complexity of the text and the value of Crowe's achievement. There is not, for instance, a single phrase or image in David Aames's (Tom Cruise) Lucid Dream that does not have a referent somewhere else in the film. Though often dismissed for its "sci-fi" ending, it should be noted that, in the words of Foster Hirsh, "in science fiction, threat usually comes from the world out there" while in thrillers and noirs, "threat comes from within," from the "private, domestic, psychological" landscape that the character inhabits (114). In Vanilla Sky, David's torment certainly comes from within. Though Life Extension's process of cryogenic suspension (especially the Lucid Dream) is certainly semi-futuristic science, it is something David chooses as a respite from his life, not from an outside threat. Cryogenic suspension, as the science fiction marker in Vanilla Sky, is a legitimate business in a high rise office complex, whereas the markers in other films, such as the futuristic X-Men or the fantastical Von Helsing, often are an underground or hidden setup, and it is an option for the very rich even now.

At the beginning of the film, David Aames is a young, handsome, charismatic figure who has reached the heights of success after inheriting his late father's publishing empire, yet, as director Cameron Crowe points out, he is a "guy who fears the heights that he reached"

("Director's"). The movie is recounted as flashbacks through a narrative David delivers to a sympathetic psychologist, McCabe (Kurt Russell), within the confines of a prison cell. David wears a blue prison suit and a waxy, white, "phantom of the opera" mask that McCabe continually encourages him to remove. David refuses (we only see his face in the flashbacks as he tells his story). As his story opens, David is in bed with a beautiful, adoring sexual partner, Julie Gianni (Cameron Diaz), to whom his best friend Brian Shelby (Jason Lee) variously refers as his (Brian's) "dream girl" and David's "fuck buddy." Julie, quite obviously enamored with David, tries to nail him down on exactly when he'll call her again, excitedly calling her girlfriend from her cell phone to report her exploits and cancel her morning modeling audition. David, conversely, is very callous about the night's events, as if he sleeps with a different "model" every night (which is not much of a stretch given his money, looks, and social status).

That night Aames's has a birthday party at his spectacular apartment, and Brian brings a female guest, Sofia Serrano (Penelope Cruz). David immediately sets his sights on her, even though, at one point, he goes upstairs to find a naked and (rudely) uninvited Julie waiting for him. Rebuffing Julie, he later tells Sofia that she is a "stalker" and takes Sofia to an upstairs den where they engage in playful verbal repartee, their attraction obvious. Brian follows them and, while Sofia fetches drinks, tells David she is his "dream girl," but also that if David is really interested in her, he is okay with it. Launching into one of his oft-repeated "can't have the sweet without the sour" speeches, Brian refers to the "exquisite pain" of leaving a party alone, telling David no woman will ever come between their friendship. David takes Sofia home, immediately igniting the sensation of love at first sight. After talking all night, David leaves the next morning, a new man energized and changed by his first experience of real love. However, Julie pulls up, having followed him, and asks him to take a ride with her. David makes the fateful choice to get

in her car, and, after an emotionally charged verbal exchange, Julie drives the car off an overpass, committing suicide. David, though he lives, is dreadfully disfigured. The last point of the first act shows David's attempts at physical recovery and reconciliation with Sofia, his "reaching back for love" as Crowe describes it ("Director's"). Sofia, despite her excited anticipation that first night with David, flees the emotional pain of his disfigurement – both his and hers. This section of the film ends with David, after a disastrous night at a club with Brian and Sofia, completely inebriated on liquor and pills, collapsing on the edge of a New York City street while imagining Brian and Sofia kissing in a nearby alley.

As the second act commences, it is daylight and Sofia gently helps David up, taking him home and loving him again. David is miraculously healed of his wounds through a new and elaborate form of plastic surgery, and he and Sofia enjoy a blissful romance. Even he and Brian reunite, as close of friends as ever. However, something intrudes on David and Sofia's happiness. David begins to experience elisions between Julie and Sofia which accelerate with frightening rapidity, leading to his supposed murder of Sofia. David, in jail, keeps insisting, "There was no murder," though he is plagued by flashes of Julie's car plunging off of the overpass while Julie watches, laughing. Is he going crazy? Is Julie really alive? Is it all a conspiracy of the "seven dwarves" (his company's board of directors) attempting to wrest control of Aames's publishing firm from David's hands?

These questions are finally answered by a mysterious stranger whom we have seen lurking in the background of David's life – observing his surgery, showing up at a pub, etc. The stranger is a tech support representative for a company called Life Extension (LE), alluded to numerous times through the symbol of Benny the Dog, a formerly cryogenically frozen canine who makes frequent appearances on various television sets throughout the film. David, it seems,

not long after his accident, could no longer bear the agony – both physical and mental – that beset his life, so he had purchased the new "Lucid Dream" option from Life Extension. Through this option, at the point of death, LE was able to put him into cryogenic suspension, with an alternative dream life spliced in at the moment of his choosing. For David, this was the moment of waking up in the street, now altered with Sofia hovering over him, willing to begin again. After an ever-increasing series of horrific "interruptions" to his Lucid Dream, David summons the tech support liason, Edmund Ventura (Noah Taylor), who explains everything to him – even the fact that it is now 150 years after David's "real life" ended. David is left with a choice: to return to the forgetfulness and happiness of the Lucid Dream, now free of technical "glitches," or to wake up, to "open [his] eyes," and take on a real life. And, indeed, David takes the plunge into the real and the present.

Vanilla Sky explores a plethora of themes through what Crowe calls the "exploration of both the sweet and sour in life" ("Director's") which seems most apt for the purposes of this dissertation. In Levinasian terms, it might be seen as representative of the joy and horror of Being as well as the suffering of the present and the hope of reparation in the future. In this sense, Vanilla Sky is also about solitude, loneliness, the suffering of aloneness. Time is also a theme: what it signifies and how we come to it. The movie is ultimately an ethical one in that it deals with "the real ramifications of love, life and death" through a man "realizing the mistakes he made. . .and the crazy choices he made to sort things out" (Crowe, "Director's"). These choices also reveal an important Levinasian thread – that of compassion – something Crowe says is "a tough thing to see, let alone feel," perhaps because we need an other in order to move from the obsessive attention to one's own needs into the realm where compassion becomes visceral and tangible.

This film might be divided into three sections for the purposes of discussion: David's life-as-dream/life-as-nightmare, which gives a polarized view of the sweet and sour theme; David's dream-as-life, which provides the images of what David imagines for himself as a perfect life even as the sour inserts itself into this dream in spite of the interventions of Life Extension; and finally, the moment of choice between both versions of the life he has constructed – the real and the dream. This choice, a choice all three protagonists are asked to make, will, as we shall see, ethically position each film differently along a spectrum of responses.

Mulholland Drive

Director David Lynch again brings one of the more disturbing and difficult texts to the screen in his film Mulholland Drive (2001). It is a challenge even to summarize. Film critic Roger Ebert in his review of the film writes, "It tells the story of . . .well, there's no way to finish that sentence" (para. 2). There is some truth to his amusing attempt to summarize it, but in my summary I have tried to pare down some of the plot complications and stick with the threads most impacting this paper.

Mulholland Drive explores the relationship between two actresses and their searches for meaning in the vast and corrupt world of modern Hollywood. Fresh-faced "Betty" (Naomi Watts) has come to town from Ontario to "make it big." Arriving by bus, she says her good-byes to the old couple she befriended on the trip and takes a cab to her Aunt Ruth's condo where she is to live while her aunt is away. There, she discovers an uninvited guest, a beautiful, dark haired woman who calls herself Rita (Laura Elena Harring). Rita has been in a car accident on Mulholland Drive and taken shelter in the empty condo. She has no memory of who she is or what exactly happened to her. Betty takes her under her wing, and the two seek to unravel the mystery of Rita's identity, despite the fact that Rita regularly protests, incredibly afraid of

something or someone in her past. At the same time, a hot young director, Adam Kesher (Justin Theroux), is told by a small but seemingly powerful group of businessmen that he will use a specific actress, Camilla Rhodes, in his current film or else have it shut down. Adam, in a rage, attacks the men's expensive car with a golf club that he regularly carries with him. His life is further turned upside down when he discovers his wife in bed with the "Gene-Clean" pool man, his credit cards cancelled, what he thinks is his safe "hideout" discovered, and his movie set shut down. Summoned to the remote ranch of the mysterious "Cowboy," a man who seems to be pulling strings behind the scenes, he is lectured on values and told that the film is no longer his because only one person "drives the buggy." Camilla Rhodes will have the lead and that is all there is to it. Like the other Hollywood heavyweights, the Cowboy gives no explanation other than "This is the girl," with the strong suggestion that Adam's life will only get worse if he refuses to acquiesce. Needless to say, he does.

The twisted and elusive path of investigation the girls follow eventually leads them to Adam after Betty brilliantly auditions for some old friends of her aunt who are making a film. The path of clues also leads to the apartment of a Diane Selwyn whom the girls think might be the possible roommate of Rita, only to find a dead girl in the apartment. Rita's terror increases, and she disguises herself with a wig to, oddly enough, look like Betty. She and Betty become lovers on Aunt Rita's bed, only to have Rita awaken in the middle of the night whispering something about a place called "Theatre Silencio." The two girls jump in a cab and visit the mysterious and frightening place where, essentially, what we come to discover has been Betty's "Waking Dream" begins to unravel. When the girls rush back to Aunt Ruth's condo, Betty basically disappears into thin air.

The "real" story, it appears, is that Rita is Camilla Rhodes, the "This is the girl" who wins not only the lead in Adam's movie, but also becomes his girlfriend. Betty is Diane Selwyn, a girl who did come to Hollywood from Ontario, but her actual Aunt Ruth has died, leaving her the money she uses to pursue her dream. Aunt Ruth may never have had a posh Hollywood condo (her connection to Hollywood remains ambiguous). Diane is nowhere near as bright, shiny, or pretty as Betty. Her teeth are crooked, she has dark circles under her eyes, and she is apparently *not* a brilliant actress. She has been Camilla's lover, though, and is unable to cope with losing Camilla to Adam.

Taking the rest of Aunt Ruth's money, Betty hires a hit man to kill Camilla. With Camilla gone, her money spent, and her Hollywood dream in ruins, Diane, like David in Vanilla Sky, constructs a fantasy world out of idealized memories and old movies like Sunset Boulevard. She is also, however, unable to sustain this fantasy, and, in a final act of desperation, kills herself as well.

Though the film leaves room for many interpretations and is not, like Vanilla Sky, clearly explained through a *deus-ex-machina* such as the lecture given by Edmund Ventura, the tech support from Life Extension, it seems clear that Mulholland Drive is a variation on the same theme. This time, however, the spectator is shown the Waking Dream first and the tragedy of Diane's "real" life second, a move leaving the spectator even more off balance and unsure. Lynch also throws in myriad amusing and peripheral subplots, some of which seem to have arguably little to do with the major themes of the film. It is, nevertheless, like Memento and Vanilla Sky, at its core, a heartbreaking search through the rubble of the past, an exploration of the desire for connection, and a beautiful illustration of the monumental effort to take up and sustain being.

The Transformative Event: "A Personality Crisis…Frustration and Heartbreak"[7]

The most important point of connection between these films is the event that transforms each character. An event that constitutes the major physical violence of the films, it is important in that it forces a confrontation of the relationship between the character and the nature of his or her existence. As a prompt for their Waking Dreams, though, the characters have to be forced into an awareness of their own existence. All three of the main protagonists have in common lives that should, on the surface, seem fulfilling and still open to possibility. In this sense, they have "successful" lives. Leonard Shelby has a job as an insurance investigator, a job he seemingly enjoys. He has a wife he loves. David Aames has inherited his father's corporation and is at the top of his game. He has a beautiful lover, a penthouse apartment, friends, an extensive art collection – all the trappings of the perfect American Dream. Of the three, he most represents the typical description of the successful life. Lastly, Diane Selwyn has inherited a decent amount of money, is pursuing her goals, and has supportive parents she respects. This is gathered from the background of the opening credits where silhouettes of dancers in a jitterbug contest flash across the screen while a black and white photo of her parents' smiling faces flanking hers is superimposed over the dancers. Additionally, her mother appears as the benevolent and comforting passenger, Irene, on the bus she takes to Hollywood. And in the end, it is her parents' imagined reappearance, like Banquo's ghost, that prompts her suicide.

All three characters have relationships with others who care for them, are materially comfortable, and have the potential for even greater good in their lives. These things give the appearance of stability to their identities. However, an event will forever change each of their lives, make each aware of how alone he or she is, alone except for the brutality, the encumbrance, of Existence itself. The event marks a point of destabilization leading to the

[7] New York Dolls, "Personality Crisis"

intense desire to escape Existence, to flee from Being that will eventually begin their Waking Dreams. In all three films, these pivotal events, which are also exigencies for the plot, do not happen at the beginning of the films nor are they necessarily revealed as overt occurrences.

For Leonard, the event takes the form of a break-in at his home. Early on in the film, Burt, Leonard's hotel manager, asks him, "What's the last thing you remember?" Leonard answers, "My wife." This is the first clue to the devastation caused by the home invasion and an indicator of the great loss and grief Lenny feels for his wife. As the movie progresses, we have visual flashbacks, Lenny's memories of that moment. We see a woman's face wrapped in a water-beaded, clear plastic shower curtain lying on a tiled, bathroom floor. Leonard has been hit over the head and lies bleeding beside her. From this moment, he is supposedly unable to make new memories. This "condition" will force him to ask himself the pivotal question, "Who are you?"

For David Aames, the moment comes when he makes the choice to get into the car with Julie after spending the first night with Sofia. As described in the summary, this decision will lead to Julie's death, David's horrific disfigurement and attendant personality changes as well as the loss of possibility with Sofia.

For Diane, the moment occurs not when she hires the hit on Camilla, which is destructive enough, but when she finds the blue key on her coffee table indicating the murder has been completed. This event, which happens near the film's end, actually marks the point where her revisionist dream begins.

Levinas states in his introduction that Existence and Existents examines that "which philosophical analysis habitually leaves to psychology" (4). These three films, grouped as neo-noir suspense films, are also psychological thrillers, that is, are about the psyches of Lenny,

David, and Diane, psyches fractured by memory and therefore time – a key element of Existence and Existents. As such, if someone were asked to make a movie depicting the elements of Existence and Existents, these films might very well be the result. On a material plane, Levinas opens Existence by saying that the feeling of a "'world in pieces'" (7) is authentic, and the actual presentation of the films is exactly that – a story of a world, the characters' worlds, told "in pieces." Due to these horrific events in their lives, they run up against their own existences, and their lives, as they know them, unravel. The films explore "the rift between the material order and events," the things they run "up against in the twilight of the world" (7). Indeed, dreams are a kind of twilight space between waking life and the sleep that slides away from dreamtime. It is out of these events that the characters react to Being, to their existences, their irrevocable pasts and ends of the world as it has been, and struggle with Being itself. "In the situation of the end of the world the primary relationship which binds us to Being becomes palpable" (8), Levinas states.

THE *IL Y A* OR *THERE IS*: "HELLO DARKNESS MY OLD FRIEND"[8]

"When we experience pure being in the anguish and despair of nausea as internal antagonism, or when in shame we are unable to hide from ourselves, what we discover is a self riveted to its being," Robert Bernasconi writes (x), expanding on one of the most profound and poetic aspects of Existence and Existents. Levinas's most fascinating expedition into the ontological realm is his explication of the *il y a* or *there is*, which provides a crucial foundation for his later, more widely read works. The *il y a* is Existence itself, horrific in its indeterminacy. It hints at violence in the menace it suggests. An existent has an existence, our existence, an individualized existence which must be differentiated from Existence itself. However, these two "existences" are not distinct, that is separate, despite the attempt to differentiate them. Actually, to differentiate means "to undergo a progressive developmental change to a more specialized form" ("Differentiate"). When Being, Existence, becomes "specialized," *it* has become a Subject, a specialized form of Existence. The roots of existent and Existence are the same; for Being and being, they are the same word. These connections, the near inseparability of their linguistic specificity, is the link that cannot be broken, a paradox.

Contrary to a more Heideggerian philosophy, we flee not death, Levinas proposes, but Existence, its magnitude, its unboundedness. By becoming an existent, Existence is given boundaries, limits. Being is personalized or subjectivized. Personal anxiety is an anxiety over this maddening presence even within absence, its anonymous rustling in the night where nothing, *no thing*, has shape, clarity, nor can be put into words. Levinas can only approach Existence through language, not define it, and not say *what* it is, when it isn't *any* thing. It is undefinable, exceeding all limits. We want to evade its obsessive hold and suffocating embrace which envelops us.

---

[8] Paul Simon, "The Sound of Silence"

Because *il y a* has to be discussed in language, even though outside it, explication relies on description – similes, metaphors, analogies – to give it form. With that in mind, one approach to Existence is to liken it to "acedia," a word drawn from the Greek, *akedia*, meaning absence of care. To care is to *already* be a subject with focus and intent. Acedia, though, is a losing of one's purpose. Writer Kathleen Norris, in Cloister Walk, describes this mental state as a kind of dragging on that "becomes a death-in-life" where she must "die down to the roots to wait it out." In this state, she will "feel nothing at all" (130). Acedia, according to Norris, is a "plunge into the waters of pure realism" and comes out of the "rhythms of daily life, and of the universe itself" where "all the 'present moments' in between seem a disgusting repetition that stretches on forever" (131). Her brother, who is a pastor, approaches it in another fashion. In one of his sermons, he asks, "God's language is silence; how do we translate it?" (133). How do we translate this silence outside of discourse? The answer is that we cannot translate the *there is*.

In film, such vast silences, the horror of Being's anonymous non-sense, also relies on metaphor, through *some*-thing we grasp at the limits of conscious understanding, like the flick of something moving just beyond the line of sight. Showing nothingness itself is a challenge in film. Outside of the blank screen, the closest presentation of all, where a subject is painted and contoured in the emptiness of Cinema itself, the avant-garde film makers of the mid twentieth century came close. They used image without dialogue to convey *something* below the limits of conscious thought, such as Maya Deren did in what she called her "cinematic poems" (Ellis and Wexman 397). Deren created "non-sense" work in films like Meshes in the Afternoon (1943) with its slowly closing eye, dimming and shadowy screen, and cloaked figures with blank, white areas in place of the face, and Ritual in Transfigured Time (1946) with faces shattered like mirrors that are then washed away by the sea. Her techniques tied to her belief that for

spectators, "What is happening is more important than what is" (Kudláček), finds echoes in the work of David Lynch, especially the soon-to-be-discussed Theatre Silencio. But what in Deren's films causes uneasiness at most, becomes in Lynch, as well as in Crowe and Nolan, a far more distressing experience.

The experience for the characters in these films reveals being backed up against Being, the awareness of being riveted to Being, riveted being. It is in evasion of this horror of Being that the characters construct Waking Dreams where they can defer real life existence with new and better dream existences that might stave off immersion in the *il y a*. Each director presents a different image and his own style to portray the moments of immersion and its overwhelmingness; however, in these liminal spaces, the characters are in one sense face-less, signaling a kind of depersonalization or loss of subjectivity. To clarify this ambiguous but crucial point, I will turn to the films themselves. For each film (dealt with individually in this section to better nuance the reading), I select particular scenes that seem to represent some facet of the *il y a* and explicate them through a Levinasian lens. I then briefly bring the three films together to draw some connections between them.

Memento: "You Can Check Out Anytime You'd Like, But You Can Never Leave"[9]

Memento opens with what the spectator will come to discern as Lenny's voice, disembodied, while the camera plays across his features and his surroundings. The voice murmurs, "So where are you? You're in some motel room. You just wake up and you're in a motel room. There's the key. It feels like maybe it's just the first time you've been there, but, perhaps, you've been there for a week, three months. It's kind of hard to say. I don't know. It's just an anonymous room." These words take on significance when it is later revealed that he has a "condition" that prevents him from making new memories. His waking moments are literally

and repeatedly the taking on of a created consciousness. However, it soon becomes apparent that it is not necessarily sleep that he is waking from; more often it is a form of non-consciousness, of Existence without language or memory.

In these 'waking-up' moments, Lenny moves from the anonymity of the *il y a*, of Existence, to the position of a speaking Subject. In this opening monologue, he begins with the pronoun "you" and then hesitatingly shifts to "I," an I that "doesn't know." The *il y a* is "before the constitution of the individuated human subject" (Davis 23). What is important for this discussion about *il y a* is the desire to escape this "anonymous 'nonsense'" (Levinas/Poirie 45), what Levinas calls a "process of being" (Levinas/Poirie 45). In Lenny's continual moments of awakening, the process of becoming *a* being marks a clear shift where his struggle to be a "determinate being" offers him an escape: "the emergence of consciousness from the anonymity of the *il y a*" (Davis 23). Lenny moves restlessly in his anonymity, his "you" moments, casting about and trying desperately to "find" *his* consciousness, to take on a position, and escape an Existence that is slippery and indeterminate. His awakening here and throughout the film is always embryonic: A rebirth again and again.

After Lenny wakes, he searches for the clues that will help him figure out who he is and why he is there. The first object he names is, symbolically, a key: "There's the key," he intones, his consciousness, linked to that key, coming *after* or *from* the *il y a*. In other words, the *il y a,* like Lenny's case, has "no subject to experience it. . .and no language in which to speak of it" (Davis 130) since subjects are confined to language in order to communicate or give expression to experience. Once Lenny awakes, his entire ability to exist depends on a key, consciousness, which imprisons his subjectivity by confining Being through language.

---

[9] The Eagles, "Hotel California"

Levinas further explains that the *il y a* is pre-moral and non-ethical. This pre-moral [non]space is eerily suggested in Lenny's movements throughout the film. He wakes in what to him are strange places with bruises on his face and body and blood on his clothes without ever knowing how he got them. Each step in the film takes us to darker revelations about his actions. With a clear moral motive, justice for his dead wife, he seems to be a sympathetic and justified character. However, his actions do not ethically speak to us of how he achieves that justice. During the opening credits and in the closing scene, he commits what is later understood to be a pre-meditated murder. That it is not recognized as such until the end does not disguise the tension suggested in his struggle with the ethical. Due to his brain damage, his wife's death, his desire to help Natalie, and his manipulation at the hands of others, he evokes great pity. Though we are initially sympathetic to his condition and are as confused as he is about who he is, what he is doing, and why he is doing it, we become less convinced of his motives as the film progresses. Each emergence from his "blackouts" provides him with a clean slate and a chance to become responsible for and to his choices. It is as if he must decide on and rebuild his plan of action and own moral code upon each emergence, each previous one dissolving, like his memory, in his immersion in Existence itself.

Even though Lenny is really at the mercy of the whims of others and is the most powerless of the three main characters, he, oddly enough, acts as if he has the most control over his life. Likewise, David Aames in Vanilla Sky, who, with his money and prestige, is the most powerful of the three, appears to feel as if he is the least so. He projects the feeling of being impacted the most by his approach to *il y a* of all the characters in the three films.

Alford writes that "The temptation to treat 'there is' as a psychological phenomenon is almost irresistible" even though Levinas pointedly separates them. However, "We should not

resist the temptation," Alford qualifies, "to see the experience of 'there is' as a subjective experience, albeit one in which it is subjectivity itself that has fled" (57). He provides a good framework for how I interpreted *il y a* in these films. Many writers have made strong connections between Levinas and psychology, highlighting the difficulty of avoiding the language of psychology altogether when writing about experience in whatever its form. Because this is film, these "experiences" will be actualized subjectively, especially in Vanilla Sky.

Vanilla Sky: "It's the End of the World as We Know It"[10]

In Vanilla Sky, there are three major instances where David Aames experiences something that can be likened to the *il y a*. They parallel and foreshadow each other. One occurs in his "lived" life at the beginning of the movie, another occurs in a nightclub right before the "splice," and the last occurs near the end of his "Lucid Dream." In all three cases, David circles or spins around suggesting the dizzying disorientation of the moment as well as the panic and horror of it. Each "dance" becomes more and more distorted as the sequences shift from his real life to his Lucid Dream life, with the distortion itself suggesting David's closer and more traumatic riveting to Being. These scenes work together to highlight David's absolute terror of *not* being, of not being someone, not being David Aames.

In the first instance, after the opening credits have rolled, the spectator sees a man, David Aames, awakening in the morning to the sound of a voice on his alarm clock repeating, "Open Your Eyes." When David awakes, his movements are all about contained energy. He turns off his TV, and the flat screen recedes smoothly into the floor paralleling David's own soon-to-be-revealed submersion into the netherworld of the *il y a*. Interestingly enough, the TV is playing the Billy Wilder film Sabrina (1954). Sabrina is about a young woman who reconstructs herself from shy, drab girl to glamorous young woman. However, her transformation is dependent on

the men in her life. She is unnoticed and undefined without their attention, but when they focus on her, she blooms. It is the *people* who give shape to her life. Sabrina already alludes to David's fear of being alone, his need and desire for people around him. David had obviously fallen asleep with the TV on, providing the illusion that he is not alone. These fictional characters offer no challenges to him, and by controlling the remote, he controls them. Bouncing toward the bathroom, he scrutinizes his handsome, near perfect face, glowering at the discovery of a single gray hair on his head. He quickly plucks it out with a pair of tweezers. This gray hair is "a symbol of wanting to live forever," according to writer/director Cameron Crowe, a gesture that begs the question, "Is it really possible?" ("Director's").

Mirrors dominate David's apartment, all reflecting a subject back that David wants to see. In some ways they give a sense that he is not alone, but, importantly, are all views of himself, a subject over which he seems to have control. These details not only help the spectator build an image of David's personality, but also confirm his self-mastery. Levinas points out that "To be conscious," in this case, focused, "is to be torn away from the *there is*, since the existence of a consciousness constitutes a subjectivity, a subject of existence that is, to some extent, a master of being, already a name in the anonymity of the night" (Existence 55). And David Aames is all about his name. In a sense, it is David's very self-absorption that gives him definition and shape.

The first take of this scene is in direct contrast to the second, which suggests that the first may have been a very realistic and horrible nightmare, an illusion. In both takes, Radiohead sings "Everything in Its Right Place" in the background. But that is just it. Everything *is* in its right place, but those places in the first take suddenly become surreal and disturbing. Levinas so often describes the *il y a* in terms of darkness or night that is easy to forget that Existence is always

---

[10] R.E.M., "It's the End of the World"

there, even in the day. The horror of indeterminate Being is not limited to the night. Even in the day, we can be confronted with the surreal or "twilight" shapes of things, where something alien or strange transmutes the everyday character of things. Levinas likens this strangeness to returning exhausted from a trip where everything familiar suddenly appears different. The slow-building horror David experiences in this first opening is somehow a movement that will strip his consciousness of its very subjectivity, not by "lulling it into unconsciousness, but in throwing it into an *impersonal vigilance*, a *participation*" (55, author's emphasis).

This "throw" begins as David drives up out of an underground parking garage into the reassurance of bright sunlight. The contrast in his emergence is a reminder of what lies beneath an individual's existence, challenging all reassurances. David faces a completely empty New York street. It is full of the normal, everyday objects - cars, signs, garbage – but is empty of people. The emptiness is an impossibility; it is, after all, New York City. He checks his watch. Rush hour. He becomes increasingly disconcerted and time slows down as he drives. His dazzling and polished smile fades, energy visibly draining from him until he finally exits his car, running across eerily deserted but still fully lighted Times Square in panic as if he is trying to run away from himself only to have it all close in on him. He is bombarded by the signs and technology of popular culture, all of which are seductively "selling a solution to his loneliness" ("Director's"). Crowe says that, for David, "Everything is a quick fix for what he is longing to have in his life": intimacy, acceptance, and love.

David stops suddenly, screams with his arms in the air, spinning in a dizzying circle as the camera draws his surroundings closer and closer, faster and faster. C. Fred Alford describes the *il y a* as "an experience of condensed being, as though one were a dark star sucking in all the matter in the universe" (61). Crowe's camera techniques convey such a terrible, weighted

magnetism. As the objects pull closer and closer, spinning like a carousel out of control, lights whirr past in an endless nightmarish spiral, bringing to life Levinas's "inverted city" where our surroundings "strike us as though they no longer composed a world, and were swimming in the chaos of their existence" (Existence 54). Surrounded by nothing but buildings and signs pulsing the same familiar but impersonal messages at everyone, he is engulfed in the anonymity of New York's icy neon. As Crowe notes, New York, the city that is always watching, is "the most populated place in the world, in many ways. A guy who fears being alone *would* have a nightmare of being alone in Times Square" ("Director's"). It is a terrible nightmare. The horror of it, for Levinas, is a horror of "being prey to, delivered over to something that is not a 'something'" (Existence 58). The city that never sleeps, but always watches, offers its lurid promises, that when delivered, tap into David's deepest fears and fear itself.

In the second take of the opening, David awakes again, but in the bright morning light, his horror is relinquished as his fear of that "'something' appears to be 'nothing'" (58). The voice crooning "open your eyes" on his alarm is that of his lover Julie Gianni. This time around, however, he is not as brash and lively. Something has changed. This time, he is aware of what awaits below the surface. An uneasiness remains, following him throughout the rest of the film, as if the nightmare is now inside of him, not easily shaken off by the distractions of his surroundings. He has discovered there are two trajectories to waking up.

In the second instance where the film paints an "image" of the *il y a*, David joins Brian Shelby, his best friend, and Sofia Serrano at a dimly lighted, crowded dance club. It is his first time out with them since the crash which disfigured his face and body. He wears a prosthetic unit, a plastic "face" that appears as a smooth, blank mask with openings for eyes, nostrils and mouth, not unlike the Phantom of the opera except David's mask stretches ear to ear. His friends

are unnerved by it with Brian even complaining, “Take off the mask. It’s freaking me out.” David’s response is, “It’s my face.” It is a face, but devoid of anything that would make it “personalized” or “specified.” The “mask” face belongs to the *il y a* in that it masks all of his pain, loneliness, grief, bitterness, and rage, covering up his scars, everything that makes him human and individual. It reflects Being, but not *a* being. Removing the mask, David reveals some of the emotions when he begins to slam tequila at the bar, alone, kicking back handfuls of pain pills while he watches Sofia dance, hypnotized and enraged by the beauty and grace he once also possessed. It doesn’t help matters that he assumed he was meeting her alone.

The film quickly cuts away to a shot that is uncannily reminiscent of the first scene; David is staring in the nightclub’s bathroom mirror at his ravaged face, one side stretched taut and misshapen. An entering patron hurls an insult at him, “Dude, fix your fucking face!” Instead of the pride in being someone, being David Aames, he now stands raw and hopeless, literally de-faced, the physical markings of his previous self erased. With mask removed, he faces deeply etched scars, a swollen eye, a melting mouth, mimicking his disintegrating life. The mirror may show a face, a Subject, but it also mirrors back a more horrific question than simply “Who am I now?” In David’s case, the question may be, “How do I get away from myself? How do I escape Being?” He ends up staggering onto the dance floor, rotating to the beat, hand in the air. The camera is in an overhead master shot. Like the frenetic energy of his first experience of the *il y a,* David is never still. We are offered only glimpses of him as lights radiating out like the spokes of a wheel create alternate layers of shadow and illumination augmented by dry ice fog. Light and dark, light and dark. This is the dance floor. This is David, his mask fastened tightly to the back of his head, his face a twisted ruin. Each circle he makes exposes a different face, both frightening, both abject. As strobe lights skip over the heads of the crowd, their hands cross

through the light, reaching for something that is not there. The violent interplay of light and movement emphasizes the anonymity and nightmarish quality of the experience. David is no longer a Subject; his "*private* existence" is submerged into a generalized, indistinct Existence, melting into the ambiguity and anonymity of the crowd.

The combination of alcohol, drugs, rejection, and the mind-numbing music provide a few moments of escape, lifting him outside of himself onto a plane where thinking is impossible. It presages the moment, later that night, where he will again part from Brian, running along empty streets, as he did in Times Square, until he collapses on the wet sidewalk in the deep end of the night. At the end of the movie, the spectator will discover this is the moment of the "splice." This is the place where he will begin his Lucid Dream: an ironic reversal of the shifts in the opening scenes. In other words, up to this point all has been his real life, which has become a nightmare. His horror is not about an anxiety over mortality, over death, as he tells Brian, "Tomorrow I'll wish I was dead." Death is not his fear; perhaps it is even his hope. His horror is a recoiling before Being itself. The escape of his Lucid Dream, using Levinas's descriptions, "aspires to break the chains of the I to the self. It is being itself or the 'one-self' from which escape flees" (Existence 55). He does not want to be alone, nor does he really want to be lucid or sober. However, no matter what he does, whether he is immersing himself in a crowd or drowning his pain in an attempt to repudiate this existence, the "*there is*. . .returns in the heart of every negation," which Levinas expresses as the impossibility "of death, the universality of existence even in its annihilation" (56). Part of the horror, perhaps, is the realization that even after any individual's death, Existence itself continues.

David's last instance of the *il y a* comes when he returns to Life Extension headquarters with McCabe. As he talks to the Life Extension representative, Rebecca Dearborn (Tilda

Swinton), he puts the final pieces of his life puzzle together. Recognizing that his "life" has, for some time, been a scientific invention, (Existence without an existent to live it), a mental "scrapbook" of memories and wishes, he rips off his mask to reveal the scarred and melted face seen in the club mirror. He breaks out of Dearborn's office and races to the elevator screaming, "I want to wake up!" Mimicking the Times Square scene, this climactic moment is also in a dream state. As in the earlier dream, he is completely alone, emerging from the elevator into a huge, empty lobby rimmed with mirrors. The Beach Boys' song "Good Vibrations" plays loudly and jarringly in the foreground, its signature theremin, now creepy and frightening, adding to the extreme distortion for both David and the audience. Alarmingly rapid jump cuts of his panicked face provide the illusion of rapid spinning. Like his original nightmare, he appears to stagger in slow circles, arms wide, screaming, "Tech Support! It's a nightmare!"

David has already died once in order to enter this hyperreal dream world, but the horror it generates is the horror of being unable to leave it. His "life" has become an endlessly frightening duration. Levinas muses, "Perhaps death is an absolute negation wherein 'the music ends' (however, one knows nothing about it)" (Cohen 49). For David, a real death would have ended everything. It would have been a decisive choice, irrevocable, a renunciation. However, Levinas continues, "in the maddening 'experience' of the 'there is,' one has the impression of a total impossibility of 'stopping the music'" (49). And certainly in all three of these moments, music distends the boundaries of each experience. Limits dissolve leaving David powerless, in a sense at the mercy of the music. Each song from these three scenes "haunts" his experience, conveying the spirit of the scene and returning full force upon both him and the audience.

Mulholland Drive: Is it Live or Is It Memorex?

Mulholland Drive continues the feeling of being unable to stop the music, as if it will continue on an endless playback loop regardless of whether anyone is there to hear it. If everything were to return to nothingness, what would it be? Perhaps it would be the haunting, isolated, surrealistic world David Lynch devises in Theatre Silencio. The Theatre Silencio, read as a representation of the *il y* a, is one of the most mesmerizing and poignant scenes in cinema history. A haven for insomniacs, its gilded interior suggests the shabbiness of bygone glory, with anonymous people endlessly, silently watching the stage. The relationship between the acts on stage and the people in the theatre is almost disconnected, evoking a kind of despair, a suffering so continuous it has become the kind of numbness arising from too much grief. Levinas writes in On Escape, "It is not that the sufferings with which life threatens us render it displeasing; rather it is because the ground of suffering consists of the impossibility of interrupting it, and of an acute feeling of being held fast" (52). This is what it means to be in thrall to Being – no escape, an endless desolation so engulfing that there is no room for any other sensation at all.

This complex sequence begins with Rita and Betty asleep on Aunt Ruth's bed, hand in hand. Rita awakens and, glassy-eyed, whispers "*silencio*" over and over building to an insistent culmination in the phrase, "*No I bande*" (There is no band.) Highly agitated, Rita begs Betty to "go with me somewhere," even though it is 2 AM. As they hail a taxi, the screen images begin to blur. City lights melt into each other like watercolors, sound is reduced to a muted, unidentifiable roar, and the images on the screen jiggle as if we have entered a disquieting hallucination with them.

The taxi deposits them in a shadowed, silent, and empty alley where the only light comes from a blue neon sign reading "*Silencio*" shot from the other end of the alley almost

voyeuristically. The camera rushes toward the door at the end of the alley in a movement reminiscent of a stalker film. The audience is suddenly made aware of the camera, abruptly inserted into the narrative, yet cannot see who is behind the lens. For a moment the audience can no longer identify with either Betty or Rita but must view the shot as the anonymous presence behind the camera. As film philosopher Daniel Coffeen asks, "Who, or what, is watching?" (par. 21). His own answer is "Cinema is watching" (par. 22). Cinema's relation to a film is similar to the relation between Being and being. Like the *il y a*, cinema is unspecified, unbounded, and seemingly infinite. A film, on the other hand, is specific, limited, personal, yet it is always cinema. A film can never be disconnected from cinema. And so the absent presence behind this shot, where, Maya Deren says, "the camera is the partner," is an endlessly riveted opening, in Maya Deren's words, an aperture descending on the young women and dragging the audience along in its wake.

From this disorienting clip, the scene shifts abruptly to the inside of the vintage theatre done in gaudy red velvet, tarnished by its shadowy interior . The girls uneasily take seats while, from the stage, the apparent master of ceremonies announces with increasing urgency, "*No I bande*. There is no band. *Il n'est pas d'un orchestre*. [There is no orchestra.] This is all a tape recording. *No I bande,* and yet we hear a band. If we want to hear a clarinet, listen. . ." A clarinet plays a few notes. He states the same for a trombone, and again music plays. When the master of ceremonies says, "A muted trumpet," a trumpeter comes out from behind the curtains but withdraws his hands from the instrument as the music continues. The master of ceremonies repeats insistently, "It's all recorded. *No I bande*. It is all a tape. . . It is an illusion." Coffeen comments that "The line separating the real from the recorded has always already been erased," equating it to cinema where

> The camera captures what has already been recorded. . .the presence is precisely *on* screen; it is the screen itself that watches, the screen folded back on itself, at once watching and watched, recorded and recording, a cinematic circuit of endless mobility, a mobility that wrinkles the sign. (par. 22)

Just as for Levinas, being and Being cannot be thought separately. The endless loop of cinema, for Coffeen, is like a Mobius strip, ever twisting back on itself (par. 16).

The power and play of signs continues as the master of ceremonies throws his hands in the air, and thunder and lightening strike inside the theatre. Betty convulses in fright while Rita stoically holds her. Betty's shaking stops only as the storm dies away and the master of ceremonies vanishes in a plume of smoke. Her seizure-like state calms as Rebekah del Rio is introduced singing a heart-wrenching *a capella* rendition of Roy Orbison's "Crying" in Spanish, her anguished voice filling the theatre. The camera holds close on her face where a single diamond tear is glued beneath one eye, her mascara hopelessly smudged, and her lips, like Rita's, painted siren red. Rebekah collapses and is dragged from the stage; however, her song continues, every emotion intact. Theatre Silencio holds within its walls the hollow ache of a life of gestures, sounds, words, and actions that are all illusion. There is no band, no singer – nothing is signified. Defined by its absences, Theatre Silencio offers only a dark, inexplicable pain, the phantom of a psychic bruise that cannot be seen or accessed. We do not hold the keys to its secrets. Seated before the empty stage with Rita clutching her arm, Betty, eyes flooded with tears, catatonically reaches into her purse and withdraws a blue, plastic box that had not been there before – a box only Rita's mysterious key can open. It is, we later find out, literally a Pandora's Box. Once it is opened, it will pull Betty out of her dream life and into the screaming darkness and menace of her reality.

Part of that reality is, of course, the ubiquitous knowledge of mortality, the anxiety that anticipates death. Betty will have two deaths to deal with – Rita's and her own. Levinas, however, plays against this anxiety. Our true fear, he believes, is the horror of *immortality*, of infinity, of continuous existence, the "necessity of forever taking on its burden" (Existence 58). Theatre Silencio, the ironic Theatre of Silence where the music continues endlessly, is like the darkness of Being in general, of the *il y a*, a "field of forces," where "darkness is the very play of existence which would play itself out even if there were nothing" (59). It is a paradox and, as Levinas proffers, "beyond contradiction" (60).

The "indeterminate menace" (Escape 54) of the endless nothingness of Theatre Silencio can be thought as "interval and interruption" to being rather than Being itself (Existence 60). Certainly here the Theatre scene is the pivotal interruption to Betty's dream world if it is imagined as an interruption of a Subject since *il y a* is too "indeterminate" (52) to even be a "something." It is the "it" of statements like "it rains," a pronoun with no antecedent, refering to no concrete person or cause. It is the pulling back of the curtain in Oz to find that there is no one at the controls. Levinas's "being in general" (52) is neither an exteriority nor interiority. It is anterior to and transcending all distinctions between the Subject and object, self or Other. There is no light, no way to give shape or clarity to Being. Night is a surrogate for the "very experience of the *there is*" (52). Form disintegrates, where the depth of night "invades like a presence" (52). This invasion is illustrated in the abrupt rush of the camera down the dark alley at the beginning of the Theatre sequence. Absence becomes presence, the "immediately there" of presence (52). Like Theatre Silencio, silence itself takes on a voice outside of discourse, outside of the symbolic, albeit an anonymous, impersonal voice. What is left is what "cannot disappear, the sheer fact of being in which *one* participates, whether one wants to or not, without having taking

the initiative" (53). Being, like Theatre Silencio itself, is "universal, returning in the midst of the negation which put it aside" (53).

Il y a Triangulated: "But I Don't Really See Why We Can't Go On As Three"[11]

Although these scenes all seem to contain nightmarish elements, saturated with the uneasiness one feels before the coming of full darkness, Levinas is careful to explain that the *il y a* is not negative in the sense of the reverse or polar opposite of the light and the clarity of the world, which is why David Aames's first brush with the *il y a* is able to happen during the day. The *il y a* is more ambiguous than either day or night. Levinas uses the term "insecurity" to signify the uneasiness and horror of the absence of presence, of nothingness, where "nothing comes" (53). There is no sensation, hence no perception, and its very ambiguity is threatening: "Before this obscure invasion, it is impossible to take shelter in oneself, to withdraw into one's shell. One is exposed. The whole is open upon us," he writes, and we are consigned "to being" (54). Ultimately, for each main character in these films, the way out of the *il y a*, the way to break the stranglehold of Existence, is to find a key, the key to their own, *individual* existences, their own subjectivities. Significantly, each scene chosen to exemplify the *there is* features a key or the idea of a key: Lenny's hotel key on which his focus sharpens, Betty's box requiring Rita's key, and the contract with Life Extension which functions as David's key to his "prison". These "keys," along with other ones arising out of "effort," will be discussed later, but they mark the passage from Being to a being in all three films.

Death, murder, and I would add, suicide, may be attempts to "escape Being"; however, for Levinas, "horror is the event of nothing which returns in the heart of this negation, as though nothing had happened" (56). Drawing on Shakespeare, Levinas explains that a "corpse...already bears in itself its own phantom, it presages its return." We cannot escape the anonymity of the *il*

y a, of Being in general, for good because presence returns in absence, in negation (57). Coffeen suggests that the "Sign is predicated on a movement between here and there. But where is there? The presence of this 'there' haunts film" (par.16) in the general sense, such as film theorist Jean Mitry implies where cinema is a "presence (which is really an absence), …quasi-presence" (378). Cinema does not actually exist except in its playing, nor does its fictional world, no matter how real. It also is specific to these three films. All three protagonists are absences, even at the beginning of the films: corpses, phantoms, or dead in some manner. Leonard Shelby, the insurance agent and good husband, has been effaced by Lenny, the drifter he becomes after the onset of his "condition." The Lenny that might, just might, remember Leonard, remember what it was to be something other than what he has become, is "killed" off willingly, wiped out, deliberately erased by Lenny himself. He no longer exists. David Aames's story relayed in his prison cell to McCabe has all happened after his suicide and subsequent resurrection. Diane Selwyn is already dead. Yet through their stories, their dreams, they return as spectral presences which denote the "limit between being and nothingness where being insinuates itself even in nothingness" (Existence 57). Their deaths are attempts to escape Being, not death. They are not horrified or anxious about death, only about the prospect of being wedged in between consciousness and Existence itself.

In fact, the insight of the "impossibility of death" becomes the "eternal responsibility of. . . being," a weight and a burden to which we have an "unbreakable commitment" (58). The *il y a* is the ultimate Other to the Subject, that union to which we owe the indissoluble responsibility, the fundamental alterity irrevocably tied to the existent.

---

[11] David Crosby, "Triad"

INSOMNIA: "I'M SO TIRED, MY MIND IS ON THE BLINK" [12]

Levinas further clarifies his use of the term *il y a* through his explication and description of insomnia. He brings it into play as an example of what he calls a mode of being where we come close to recognition of our contract with Existence, where we experience Being in all of its weight and horror. However, even to express this statement is to run into difficulties since as soon as we have an awareness of our insomnia (or any other mode), our sensing of it is an indication that we are slipping away from that mode of being. Levinasian insomnia has no direct cause. Our attention is focused on nothing. If we are sleepless due to stress, worrying about bills, work, family, or any number of other things, our attention is already focused on that cause. Obviously, the films under discussion wouldn't have much of a plot if the characters weren't concerned about *something*; however, the limits of the characters' concerns are pushed to a point where a truer, Levinasian kind of insomnia is occurring. Here, the endless loop of grief and monotony that they encounter when trapped in an irreparably damaged body and/or an inescapable existence propels them into the very specific type of insomnia Levinas describes.

The place where it is most difficult to tear away from the "anonymous rustling of existence" (Existence 61) is during bouts of insomnia. Perhaps this is because insomnia is a sort of liminal space where one is neither pure Being nor completely conscious Subject. In this space Being and being comingle in such a way as to be closer to the surface of our perception, close to "sensible". Levinas describes it as "the place where sleep evades our appeal" (61). That which we desire most eludes us. We plead with sleep to overtake us and relieve us from the horror of Being and the night, yet we become one who "watches on when there is nothing to watch" (61) even when there is no call or exigence to watchfulness. An ideal illustration of this is the image of a television spectator deep in the night when the standard channels have turned to

[12] The Beatles, White Album

white noise, snow, and static, invisible radio waves powering the glow of the blank screen. The spectator cannot sleep, cannot move, but instead remains glued, riveted to the screen that endlessly plays nothing, *no thing*, much like Theatre Silencio. It is in moments like this that Being becomes oppressive and grips us in a stranglehold which signifies its presence in nothingness. As Levinas explains, "This presence which arises behind nothingness is neither a *being*, nor consciousness functioning in a void, but the universal fact of the *there is*, which encompasses things and consciousness" (61). Robert Manning elaborates on insomnia as when "consciousness is present to itself as conscious of something it is not, some something out there, but which it cannot identify. Something is present to consciousness in an absent form, present without identifying itself. It reveals that it *is*, not *what* it is" (Interpreting 43).

Levinas clearly designates a difference here between "attention," where there is a focus on things, objects, interiority, exteriority, and the "freedom of the ego which directs it" (Existence 62), and "vigilance" where "the ego is swept away by the fatality of being" (61). Fatality suggests the unavoidable, the eventuality of something intended, as well as the connotation of death, all suggested by the framing of Diane's real life sequences in Mulholland Drive where she sits unmoving in the morning at the beginning of the sequences, and is still there, still stone-like and frozen in the evening. Her "vigil" ends when she suddenly focuses sharply on her table and its contents. Vigilance effaces the distinction between interior and exterior (61). It has no focus, nor is it followed by a preposition like "of"; it is objectless. Levinas writes, "It is the very return of presence into the void left by absence – not the return of *some thing*, but a presence" (62). The very idea of void is shattered in this "the work of being," the constant return of Existence haunting the Subject.

After David Aames's car crash in Vanilla Sky, he is comatose for weeks. Later, he describes the coma to his court-appointed psychiatrist, McCabe. In voiceover, he says: "Here's what you remember from a coma. Nothing. . . You can't feel darkness or numbness," over scenes of him staggering listlessly down the hallways of his apartment, lying in bed, sitting *aimlessly*. These are the moments of insomnia, moments that are, for him, preferable to the kind of subjective feeling he experiences when he does sleep, because in his dreams of Sofia, he has a subjectivity to contend with. Even when he stalks Sofia on the streets of New York, he is anonymous and silent. These are the moments in which he can't escape himself, his being, the fact that he has Being. He ricochets back and forth between the pain he feels as an individualized Subject, and the horrible, empty nothingness of Being in general. Neither can satisfy; neither can offer escape. Director Cameron Crowe, like Memento's Christopher Nolan, uses flashes of black to indicate these kinds of moments. Lenny's extreme attention to detail when he is awake (such as his long phone conversations or his focus on his leg as he performs a self tattooing ritual, carefully shaving his leg, preparing the needle from a syringe and a ballpoint pen, for example) is a bleak contrast to David's deep desire for oblivion. After the harrowing evening at the nightclub, for instance, David confronts Brian Shelby. Brian, exasperated, retorts, "You just need to sleep." David is obviously very close to the edge, and his friend's response indicates David's post-coma life has included very little sleep. His edginess and despair are not just the products of sleep deprivation, though. They are rooted in a more long term lack of rest, the absorption of vigilance. . .insomnia.

Nonetheless, the Subject, the existent, can escape insomnia's tenacious hold, *its* own insomnia, in sleep, unconsciousness, and relaxation – those states that run contrary to the vigilance of insomnia. Levinas affirms that one can "take refuge in oneself so as to withdraw

from being" (62), offering an interesting twist – consciousness as wakefulness instead of the other way around. In wakefulness, an existent is already conscious of insomnia, of Being. He describes it as "participating" in wakefulness where the very night watches. "*It* watches," he says (63, italics mine). The "it" is not a Subject, but is impersonal. "Completely exposed to being" (63), stripped naked of all content, it is the bare bones of Being. Thought is divested of focus. We become "the object rather than subject of an anonymous thought" (63). Though we are still conscious *of* this anonymous state, the presence of this absence, it is a depersonalized awareness, where no particular qualities of the self exist. If they do, if one were to "catch sight of a subject" (63), then this site where "being belongs to no one" (64) has lifted. Unlike sleep, which offers an escape from the burden of Being, insomnia disrupts the subject and annuls it until the Subject arises again in consciousness.

CONSCIOUSNESS AND THE UNCONSCIOUS:

"One Man on the Chess Board, Get Up and Tell You Where to Go"[13]

Prior to exploring the crucial concept of the Waking Dream – an idea that permeates and dominates each of the films and ties them directly to the phenomena Levinas explicates in Existence and Existents – it is important to look at the unique way he uses the familiar terms "conscious" and "unconscious," since, in our post-Freudian world, they have become so semiotically burdened. Levinas finds a "contradiction in terms" for the phrase "*discovery of the unconscious*" (Existence 28) since, he points out, we tend to conflate the unconscious with consciousness instead of discerning its own imbrication with Being. The terms are also vitally important because they act like a DNA double helix, conjoined but separate, winding their way through and linking up with the other ideas under discussion. In Levinas's explanation, both belong to the Subject. He considers consciousness as one of many "modes" of being. A Subject has the ability to "forget" the *il y* a, or its proximity as discussed in insomnia, by "interrupting" it with sleep. Robert Manning augments Levinas's explanation, stating that "The formation of a being occurs within Being itself, as the rupture of Being itself as it breaks up into beings. This rupture is the very fact that consciousness becomes aware of its separation from Being itself. This consciousness of separation is the awakening of consciousness" (Interpreting 44). In other words, consciousness interrupts Being, just as Being disrupts it, again with such moments as are found in insomnia. In the process of "taking up being," that is, forming a consciousness, the interruption of Being causes "a hesitation" which provides for a kind of "retreat" (Existence 64). Sleep, for instance, becomes an enclave for consciousness, a short-lived safe haven, since "Sleep is only an illusory form of the detachment of the ego from the self" (Bernasconi xiv). Indeed, the

[13] Jefferson Airplane

action of sleep, the slide into an unconscious domain, provides the protagonists of these films the ability to form their very dream landscapes and effect an escape from Being's embrace.

Levinas chooses the Biblical figure of Jonah[14] as an example illustrating this retreat. He asserts that when Jonah, "the hero of impossible escapes," realizes "the failure of his flight and the fatality of his mission, he climbs down into the hold of the ship and goes to sleep" (Existence 64). Similarly, in more recent literature, Joseph Conrad's hero in the classic novel Lord Jim also relies on this strategy when faced with a comparable sense of futility.

The infinitive "to sleep" invariably is paired with an auxiliary form of the verb "to go," rendering the ostensible inactivity of sleep a misnomer. It is actually an active state, a Subject's moving or fleeing to the haven it provides. David in Vanilla Sky, Diane in Mulholland Drive, and Lenny in Memento, all seek escape through a very particularized form of sleep as a way in or out of the rabbit holes their lives have become. Their sleep *is* active, rich with their alternatives, and the only way for them to approximate the "impossible escape" suggested by Levinas's reference to the Biblical Jonah.

This impossibility is reflected most in Memento where Lenny literally blacks out due to the narcoleptic component of his "condition" and then just as suddenly awakens; however, the site of the triggers or imperatives that cause the change are never quite explained. These mental disappearances are probably best allied with moments when he would most like to escape, often when he is in the most desperate of straits. In one particularly poignant, pivotal blackout, Natalie has cursed him, hit him, forced him to hit her back, then left him alone in her house. He desperately attempts to find a pen to record the event, but knowing the "keys" to his "system," she has cunningly taken them all. As she predicted, Lenny slips away within seconds, unable to remember her cruelty. In another instance, Lenny lies in wait for Dodd in Dodd's unoccupied

hotel room. His "stakeout" involves sitting on the toilet seat holding a liquor bottle, ready to strike. Again, he slips away unable to come to terms with who he is or what he is about to do.

Instead of thinking of the unconscious "as something repressed" (28), or as a second consciousness, which belies their "ontological function" (28), Levinas separates the terms, making them foils for each other. Consciousness, its sincerity, its intentionality, its light are played against "the obscurity, depth and ambiguity of the unconscious" (28). Levinas distinguishes the two even more finely in that the advent of the world for consciousness is an "intention," a "field of a consciousness" where "consciousness governs and gives meaning to all the infiltrations of the unconscious in the world" (29). On the other hand, the unconscious has its own part to play prior to this "event" (29), the emergence of consciousness. Sometimes the unconscious or the state of unconsciousness serve as a retreat from and for consciousness, but in Levinasian terms, they are not the same thing. They also, however, do not function in opposition. Levinas, rather than polarizing the terms, describes their difference or "opposition" as being in "communication" through their "proximity," both terms he will return to in subsequent work to describe the Subject's relation to the Other. When consciousness itself "becomes fatigued and interrupts itself, [it] has a recourse against itself," he explains, an opening to an "underlying depth" (64). Levinas quotes Romains, where his poet Vorge states that it is the strength for "'getting the hell out from the inside'" that drives both (64). In Mulholland Drive, we do not see Betty/Diane outside of her dream world until nearly the end of the film. The point where she moves from "reality" to her Waking Dream remains unclear. Consciousness bleeds into unconsciousness and vice-versa. Certainly Lynch provides numerous "clues," as to which is which, but keeps them ambiguous. Seemingly, transitions occur at Winkie's Diner during Diane's meeting with her hired hit. Other commentators, (including Naomi Watts, the actress

[14] Levinas uses "Jonas" (64), but Jonah is the more familiar name and spelling.

who plays Betty/Diane), also have located the "break" as occurring during this scene, specifically when Diane notices that the waitress's nametag reads "Betty" at the same moment she is taking the final, irrevocable step to destroy her beloved Camilla. Another shift happens as she stares at the key which indicates the hit's completion.

Lynch intercuts and distorts time, identity, and setting, scrambling diegetic, extradiegetic, and metadiegetic information and spaces to such an extent that clearly pinpointing the moment of Diane's entry into her Waking Dream may remain eternally debatable. That, however, may be precisely his point and also why Mulholland Drive offers such a rich opportunity for a Levinasian reading. The recognition of the horror and burden of Being and the fleeing from it through sleep, unconsciousness, or other modes, are so woven into our lives that fixity of such moments, or a specifying of a particular moment in time or a particular meaning, is impossible, or as T. S. Eliot writes in "East Coker" of "The Four Quartets": "I am here / or there, or elsewhere" (I,). Likewise, once the illusion of being beautiful, innocent Betty dissolves, Diane Selwyn cannot bear the burden of Being, its endless continuance, for very long. Unable to escape, she begins a rapid disintegration of subjectivity with the shifts between consciousness and unconsciousness rapidly increasing.

As spectators, we experience many of her unsettling transfers, her proximal brushes between the distraught, disheveled woman we see and what Diane had imagined herself to be. The extremely traumatized version of Diane, for example, standing in a ratty bathrobe in her dingy apartment, turns around with a teary smile to envision Camilla, shiny and beautiful. "You've come back," she says, only to have the apparition fade. In another moment, Diane happily leaps over the couch to caress a glamorous, topless Camilla. The two begin foreplay that rapidly turns ugly as Camilla rejects Diane, leading into another disjuncture where Diane appears

on the couch alone, masturbating frantically. In each instance, Diane tries in vain to escape her conscious self but can only withdraw a few seconds. Even hoping to achieve *la petite morte*, a prelude to a larger and more sustained one, with its own ironic and foretelling escape from Being only approximates departure, the almost-space of forgetfulness before she is forced to surface again. Her sustained periods of escape become more elusive and beyond her grasp even as she desperately reaches for them.

The slippage from consciousness to unconsciousness occurs simultaneously: these are parallel activities. In terms of time, the slippage happens in the space of the present. The space is created because the effort of the present isn't quite in step with the present. As Levinas explains, "It catches up with itself but with a lag behind itself, or effects a retreat, a rebound, in the simplicity of its stroke" (65). It is not, however, as if there were another consciousness, identical to the conscious one, but existing "under cover of the night" (65). Instead, Levinas explains, the unconscious is consciousness "fainting away at the very focal point of its luminousness" (65). Mulholland Drive, in particular, gives us a cinematic approximation of this "lag," this "fainting away," as the spectator attempts to keep up and make "sense" of Diane's experiences even though they are not clearly dual, not two distinctly separate filters explicating her story. There is no voiceover, no narrative guide, just shadows, smoke, and mirrors. When Diane dies, for instance, the plume of fog from Theatre Silencio rises behind her bed. Even though this is one of the closing scenes, we have seen her dead body, decomposing, twice before. All linear time is suspended, and, just as we seem to grasp the meaning of any given shot, it "faints" away, just as it seems to faint away for the disintegrating Diane.

In Vanilla Sky, the movie opens with quick, drifting, aerial glimpses of New York City interspliced with black screen while the voice we come to know as Sofia's whispers, "Open your

eyes." Cameron Crowe states he wanted spectators to feel as if they were "with a spirit coming down to earth" ("Director's). This floating, spiraling effect is disembodied, the invitation to open the eyes, to awaken, fraught with tension – the sterile, neutral, objective, limitless disengagement of depersonalized Being thrust sharply against the call of the beloved to inhabit a very personal being, become a subjective, limited, engaged body on the bed. The imperative to do this, to open the eyes and take up being and establish a position, feels, on film, like a sudden, weighted landing. The impact of this "landing" brings the realization that we have moved from disembodied to embodied in the form of David Aames. As an opening clip, it encapsulates the whole film as well as the concept of the play between consciousness and unconsciousness, intent and retreat.

A similar sequence is repeated in Vanilla Sky following the car crash, from the sounds that signify violent collision to utter silence, with Crowe again employing jump cuts like punctuation marks. From the crash site, we are placed in a silent, idyllic park and a romantic encounter between David and Sofia, but she, too, fades away right at the point of connection. As Levinas says, these modes of being are not clearly separated into dual worlds, but only exist as "stroke[s]" (Existence 65) forever falling back on themselves. The regression between the spaces is like twilight or dawn, the liminal spaces in light. We cannot discern the moment of passage from day to night or night to day. The shifting between the two is gradual, a rubbing against each other, yet the clarity, the dark, arrives so abruptly upon the world.

THE WAKING DREAM: "IT'S NOT GOING TO STOP 'TIL YOU WISE UP"[15]

Positioning the Dream

Consciousness and the thoughts characterizing it have a locale, according to Levinas: they are "here." He emphasizes from the Cartesian *Cogito* not the idea that "there is thought," but on Descartes's "first person in the present," which he interprets as "'I am something that thinks,'. . . something that is posited" (Existence 65). For the protagonists of these films, they are all "dreaming" of or looking back on a narrative, their stories, which were dreamed or happened in the past. However, to even have the ability to invoke memory posits a being who is capable of thinking. Memory *requires* a subject in the present who is thinking about his / her own existence, who has taken a stand in relation to the present in order to reflect on, or in this case, reconceived of what is already a positing of the subject. To be posited means that there is "a point of departure" which in turn suggests a "localization of consciousness" (65), a place, a location for it to reside, in other words, the being of an individual existent as a residence. Even though thought can be disseminated, it still "retains the possibility of collecting itself into the *here*, from which it never detached itself" (66), Levinas concludes. Although we are given bits and pieces of many characters' stories in these films, the point of view is the protagonists'. Their point of view is the consciousness most fully-realized, the individualized voice that the filmmaker uses to invest the spectator in his narrative. History and "'eternal truths'" (66), it seems, can be localized into a single Subject, moving us from a vast impersonal landscape to the personal here and now. "Consciousness can, in spite of its sleepless eternity, begin or end in a head," Levinas explains. It can "light up or be extinguished, and escape itself: the head falls on the shoulders; one sleeps" (66). It is not consciousness per se that makes the Subject; it is *a* consciousness, singular, one set of eyes that is the subject/Subject of the film. In the films, each

[15] Aimee Mann, "Wise Up"

protagonist's subjectivity is limned by sleep, the escape from Being as well as the site for evasion as dream-construction (an area I will deal with more extensively later in this paper).

For Levinas, thought and sleep's possibility are connected: Thought, by being *here*, is "sheltered from eternity and universality" (66). Positing consciousness as *here* creates the Subject – individualizes, personalizes, and subjectivizes it – giving it a "Subject position," leading to the idea that sleep is not a little death, or a fleeing to that other life beneath consciousness, as Freud and many others have theorized, but, actually, for Levinas, "a participation in life through non-participation" (66). The concept of the Waking Dream that I have extracted from Memento, Vanilla Sky, and Mulholland Drive are manifestations of precisely how this "non-participation" works and give us a roadmap to how it may be used to alleviate the burden and brutality of Being.

Prelude to a Dream: "Do I Wake or Sleep?"[16]

Utilizing a dream or memory sequence or altered reality to sustain narrative, provide backstory, or be the story itself is certainly not new in cinema. From more traditional dream worlds often seen in family films, such as the Wizard of Oz (1939), Chitty, Chitty, Bang, Bang (1968), The Princess Bride (1987), and Big Fish (2003) to more complex scenarios like those employed in such adult fare as A Clockwork Orange (1971), Jacob's Ladder, The Usual Suspects (1995), Donnie Darko (2001), or Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind (2004), distortions and interpolations of time and place have long served as one of film's most effective techniques. My appropriation of the term "Waking Dream," however, to describe the primary narrative techniques linking these three films is a very precise construction, one that depends heavily on Levinasian phenomenology. I use the term because, although these "dreams" are constructed by the protagonists to avoid consciousness and the possibility of confronting the *il y*

a that it harbors, the directors of all three films have chosen to use the illusory nature of the dream state not only as the primary story arc, leaving *both* character and spectator unsure of what is real and what is not, but also have chosen to use these states as illustrative of the films' complex themes of becoming and sustaining a subject, questioning the stability of such a subject and pondering the nature of the effort needed to define such a Subject.

One of the aims of philosophy is, of course, what it means to lead a good human life. Memento, Vanilla Sky, and Mulholland Drive are built around these very questions: in each it is part of the protagonist's central quest and mystery that propels the plot. Lenny, David, and Diane all sense that something is wrong and vaguely suspect (in my reading) it may have something to do with the nature of the existence of their doppelgangers tied to some unatoned-for "bad" act on their part. Their "escape," or taking cover from these unsettling questions, is where the "waking" part comes in. "Waking" in these films refers specifically to the question of the characters' control and manipulation of the dreams they present to both audience and subject *within* the dream state, a degree of control generally not used in traditional dream or flashback sequences. In these films, the dreams become the characters' lives, substitutes for lives of overwhelming pain and guilt they find inescapable.

"Waking" is also important in that, at some point in each film, the character must "wake up." In Existence and Existents, the movement of hypostasis, that is, the awakening of consciousness and subjectivity, occurs in the *stance* of an instant. Even though the dreams of these characters have varying lengths, all still take place, at least metaphorically, in the space of an instant. The dream is also indicative of exhaustion and suspension, but the effort to *begin* outside of the dream requires resolution, as in "resolve," as well as a resolution, as in "resolving," the dream. The films portray this resolution as a stepping from the moment of

---

[16] John Keats, "Ode to a Nightingale"

entering the dream to the moment of leaving it. The choice, therefore, facing these characters is about their personal resolve, their effort, and what the effort brings about as a resolution. The resolution is like a choice, a choice as to whether he / she will continue in this state or emerge and awaken to face the self and others. For each of the films, the "ethical choice," already implied in subjectivity as "potentially ethical" (Srajek 30), forms the central conflict.

The links between the films and the dreams continue through the way each character utilizes what David MacDougall, in his article "Films of Memory: The Mind's Eye," calls "signs of survival" and "signs of resemblance" (262). "Signs of survival" he defines as "images of objects which have a physical link with the remembered past. These memorabilia," he explains, "serve half as symbols of experiences, half as physical proof that they occurred" (262). In their dream construction, these signs as the name indicates, point to characters' desire to survive in spite of the fatigue they exhibit. Likewise, they are half recognizable to the spectator in that they appear in some form elsewhere in the film outside of the dream state. They also possess a half-sensed meaning, like in the films of Maya Deren mentioned in the Introduction, that calls them into question due to their ambiguous nature. "Signs of resemblance" that "offer a looser, iconic link with their objects, filling in the missing pattern of the past by analogy" and permit "a broad range of associative imagery to be brought into play" (262-263). In the Waking Dreams, these signs, drawn from personal memory and memories of popular culture, help to generate the protagonists' doppelgangers. Their doubles are a kind of suasive mechanism to flee the past and their present existences, but is also a position taken, a way of "getting the hell out from the inside," purging their internal quagmires of guilt and self-loathing by attempting to eliminate that internal self entirely. Most striking, all three films feature a "blurring" of the Other within the dream, an attempt to hold onto or recreate a perfected or idealized Other.

Another link to return to here, as mentioned earlier, is genre. Since all three films are, at least on the surface, suspense dramas, seemingly neo-noirs, the question may arise as to whether different genres also may demonstrate the relevance of this undertaking. I think the answer lies in the suspense. Suspense is an important ingredient because each of these films features a character literally suspended between dream life and waking life, physical death and physical life, guilt and innocence, etc. Sleep and certain other modes of being allow a "suspension" of the Subject, or in this case the character, a chance to escape being for a while, what Levinas calls a "retreat" (Existence 64). As an audience watching the films, we, too, are "suspended," walking the high wire along with the characters, unsure of what to make of them or how to use traditional logic and judgment. We are often as lost as the characters themselves. The suspense is never really resolved, leaving the ambiguities to produce fault lines that create tensions along the boundaries of genre.

The intriguing themes of my "Waking Dream" phenomenon are certainly not new and existed well before the advent of film, as writers and thinkers have been fascinated enough to explore the possibilities posed by it for centuries. Images from the Romantic poets, who were often drawn to mixtures of philosophical questioning, altered states, and issues of subjectivity, haunted my first viewing of Vanilla Sky. John Keats, for instance, in his famous "Ode to a Nightingale," wrote, "Was it a vision, or a waking dream? / Fled is that music – Do I wake or sleep?" (VIII, 9-10). One cannot help but wonder if either Crowe, the English version scriptwriter, or Alejandro Amenábar, of the original, Spanish version, Abre Los Ojos, consciously or unconsciously, drew inspiration from the Romantics. In "I Am" (c. 1844), poet John Clare speaks of a similar state:

I am – yet what I am, none cares or knows;
My friends forsake me like a memory lost;
I am the self-consumer of my woes –
They rise and vanish in oblivion's host,
Like shadows in love, frenzied stifled throes –
And yet I am, and live – like vapours tossed

Into the nothingness of scorn and noise,
Into the living sea of waking dreams,
Where there is neither sense of life or joys,
But the vast shipwreck of my life's esteems;
Even the dearest that I love the best
Are strange – nay, rather stranger than the rest. (1-12)

Clare's poem highlights both the astonishment and the anxiety over "being" in a Levinasian sense as well as functioning as an apt description of *il y a*. Reading both images together, astonishment and menace, the tension of their relation, the strangeness of it, creeps over the reader. Writers' fascination with this tension continued well into the Modernist period, in works such as Djuna Barnes's "Nightwood," Mikhail Bulgakov's The Master and the Margarita, Apollinaire's "Zone," and – in imagery strikingly reminiscent of latter day Keats – T. S. Eliot's "The Four Quartets." "East Coker," the second of the Quartets, reflects an almost uncanny sense of the ineffable horror at losing one's sense of mooring and – presaging Theatre Silencio – places it in the core of a patron seated before a darkened stage:

The lights are extinguished, for the scene to be changed
with the hollow rumble of wings, with a movement of darkness on
darkness
And we know that the hills and the trees, the distant panorama
And the bold imposing façade are all being rolled away –
. . .Leaving only the growing terror of nothing to think about. (III, 113-121)

The Waking Dream blurs our conception of being and Being and underscores our questioning of Being in such moments. The single most important connection these films share, it is also the phenomenon that opens them, as texts, to a Levinasian reading and gives us a metamorphic approximation of some of the more abstruse descriptions in Existence and Existents.

Like any dream, the "Waking Dream" begins with sleep. Hence, a short examination furthering the meaning Levinas assigns to sleep is in order. Sleep, as previously mentioned, is an escape from the *il y a*, from the eternity of insomnia, from Existence in general. Sleep temporarily suspends Being and often the comfort offered by it makes it an appealing refuge. The Waking Dream is a *kind* of sleep. In these films, the dream is almost a separate story. This "story" is orchestrated by the Subject, who filters and arranges memories, which, as products of thought, are objects of consciousness. The Subject embarks on a reconstruction of the self, using these objects of consciousness to compose a new and better self, a constantly fatiguing and ongoing process. The subject creates a *composite self*, a pastiche or *composition* of memories through the filters and reflections of thought. This dream self has a powerful catalyst: avoidance of immersion in the experience of the *il y a*.

Astonished By Being: "Joy to the World"[17]

The paradox of Being is easier to comprehend visually than verbally. We have moments where our concern with the world, our absolute immersion in the elements of living is "interrupted" (Levinas, "Existence 8). This is not just the everydayness of human existence either. People creed greater or lesser importance to those daily concerns; however, whether they are doing the laundry or discovering a cure for cancer, both tasks are the same in their weight in the sense that they mask, if only for a while, that primary and binding relationship with Existence itself. Levinas assures us, the word "relationship" is used here "only by analogy" since a being takes on "existence only by existing already" (8). He calls this a "duality" (8), but its paradoxical nature is only so in language, which is really not adequate to express it. When this relation is sensed, when all other concerns are shunted aside for the moment, then *there is*, there is Existence.

In the luminosity of consciousness and its light, a being is "surprised by this illumination" (9), experiencing an "astonishment before the natural and the intelligible" (9), an amazement at consciousness itself. Because of this astonishment, Levinas, therefore, rejects the philosophical question that asks, "*What is Being*?" stating that there is no answer to this question since "There is no answer to Being" (9, author's emphasis). The question is actually part of the relationship with Being itself. It can be assumed, if we are asking such questions, we are contesting and experiencing Being in all of its strangeness. He adds that beyond the question is not the answer, i.e., The Truth, but the good. In other words, to stop at the idea of what Being is, is to capitulate in the effort, when reaching beyond the question leads to the attempt to *surpass* Being. **In <u>Evasion</u>,** Levinas asserted the value of European civilization lay in such efforts **(x).**

[17] Hoyt Axton for Three Dog Night, "Joy to the World"

In these films, there are fleeting moments indicative of the characters' surprise at their own being, their astonishment at the recognition of existence. Cinematically, they may be merely allusions, but they are still there. These indicators allow us to ask if these characters attempt to surpass being or if they give into the "tragic despair it entails" (Bernasconi x), for that is the most important question for the spectator. We might enjoy unraveling the mystery of the plots, sweat out the "whodunit" of the endings, be caught up in the glamour of the stars, or be fascinated with the narrative techniques employed by these directors who seem to create films more like personal mythologies than screenplays brought to life. Regardless of what we experience on the surface of these works, underneath it all, glaring at us weeks later in the night, or ransacking our discussions at the water cooler, reposes both the challenge to the protagonist and the interrogation put to the spectator: "Did they reach beyond being?"

Tiny magnets pulling us in – their astonishment makes us sympathetic. David Aames and Brian Shelby screeching to a halt in front of a semi: in that minute of silence, the first breath is a surprise. The near miss is a presentiment of a future crash, one not so lucky. All the same, in the second crash, when David awakes, it may be to the horror of his own anamorphosis, but it is still a surprise to awaken at all, to still *be* no matter what shell he inhabits. And in his dream world, when Sofia carefully, ever so gently removes his mask, she breathes, "It's perfect." Both of them cry with relief at the repair to his body, to the subject, but their tears reflect not only the happiness of normality, beauty, or a certain freedom. They also illuminate a moment of wonder: two faces, face to face, seeing each other as if for the very first time.

For Lenny, this astonishment seems to happen a dozen times a day. After all, each moment of return to his body leaves him in a state of surprise. But the truly astonishing moments occur when he confronts his hotel mirror, sees a reflection that is him and is not him.

He recognizes the face but not why it is there, here. In Betty's dream, Rita, who has amnesia, shares similar moments with Lenny – the wonder of a face she doesn't really recognize. Like Rita, Lenny often touches himself as if to confirm that he is not an apparition, slowly uncovers his tattoos realizing that this is who he is. *He is*. This stranger *is*. He sometimes scrubs at these markings, such as when washing his hands in the bathroom sink, as if trying to erase them, erase the marks of a self left behind when they are the only story of him that exists. In a sense, he exists as the signification of his tattoos.

Outside of these brief glimpses of being, there are more concrete moments expressing that soldering of Being to being, yet even within that sessile connection, Levinas implies "their separation already begins" (Existence 10).

Undergirding the "struggle for life," which is assumed to be of primary importance – food, water, shelter – is the aim of an existence at its simplest and most profound. The struggle is a concern for the future, "a care that a being takes for its endurance and conservation" (10). To lean toward the future, to sustain the self or extend a life already implies that the existent exists. When we perceive of the bare necessities as primary, we take existence as a given. For Levinas, existence is not a given; it is an "accomplishment" (74). Levinas attempts to reveal how "an already constituted existence turns back over itself" (10). He does it through the analyses of fatigue / weariness, indolence, and effort.

Fatigue and indolence are "positions taken with regard to existence" (11) resembling the positionality and escape of sleep. Fatigue and indolence, Levinas says, are often interpreted as "contents," that is, as if they were nouns like emotions or reflections are, but then their subsistence as "events" is not recognized (11). The action of them, (even as forms of inaction), is lost when they are understood solely as substantives. We do not grasp "of what they are an

impotent refusal" (11). They are a refusal to make the effort of taking up being, existing as a "recoil" or evasion "before existence" (11).

Weariness And Indolence:

"Now I Won't Be Back 'Til Later On, If I Do Come Back At All" [18]

The Waking Dream is the result of weariness and indolence. These two terms are easily conflated since they seem to produce similar effects and both involve a *refusal* of Existence that, at the same time, is still a *position* taken with regard to Existence. The tension and friction in a being produced by the coexistence of refusal and position are enormous due to the paradoxical nature of their simultaneity. Effort is required for consciousness, and it is in fatigue and indolence that, as Manning states, "the weight of this effort is felt most acutely" (Interpreting 46). He stresses that these terms must be "redefined beyond their moral implications," if we are to understand Levinas's purpose, "as a response on the part of a being to the weight of being" (46). Although weariness and indolence both suggest "an attitude with regard to action" (Existence 12), Levinas carefully isolates their distinctions. The main difference between the two terms resides in the manner in which they come about. Weariness arises as "a weariness of everything and everyone, and above all a weariness of oneself" (11). Indolence, though similar in feeling, is nuanced by its relation to action. Indolence "occurs after the intention has been formulated" (12), that is, after the decision to act has already been made, whereas weariness can occur without any intention to act whatsoever. Though subtle, these differences, especially when played out in film – an action-driven medium – can be enormous. To further clarify these distinctive terms and how they function in early Levinas, I will, in the following pages, explicate their representation in each film.

---

[18] Neil Young, "On the Way Home"

Vanilla Sky: "Dream On, Dream On, Dream Until Your Dreams Come True"[19]

Scope of the Dream

David Aames's dream moment begins when he actually falls unconscious next to the gutter, sleeping all night in the street after his heartbreaking foray into the social world he had once ruled, the disastrous post-accident nightclub scene. For David, having lost his looks, charm, and social standing mere minutes after he had discovered love for the first time, this is the moment of his deepest despair. The possibility of endlessly inhabiting a string of such nights, of existing in that kind of life, is more than he can bear. By the film's conclusion, we find out that he chose this moment for the "splice." The splice is where his Waking Dream, the so-called "Lucid Dream" option in Life Extension's elaborate menu, begins. In the real life that followed his "splice" moment, we later realize that he awoke alone, hung over, and in pain. He put his affairs in order, turned over his company to loyal Thomas Tipp, and then committed suicide. His Waking Dream state, however, begins exactly at the splice moment or as Life Extension advertises, when "Another chapter begins seamlessly." The bizarre way his Waking Dream is launched enhances the ability to imagine the co-existence of consciousness and unconsciousness. There is a communication between them, only thoroughly explained and recognizable at the end of the film.

In David's Waking Dream, he "opens his eyes" to Sofia soothing his aching head the next morning, empathy and love radiating from her face. She helps him back to her apartment where he experiences the love and affection of his "dreams." Sofia is able to accept his deformities without reservation. She is lover, partner, friend, coach, devotee. David's life continues to improve as he repairs his relationship with Brian, and his face is miraculously restored to its former perfection through surgery. He is allowed the opportunity to be the man he wishes to be –

[19] Aerosmith

an ethically better, more loving and giving person. Sofia's hands, which represent love's ability to heal all wounds, unmask him both physically and emotionally. At the end of the film, Life Extension's tech support liaison Edmund Ventura tells David that he had "A better life because [he] had Sofia." Perhaps, more importantly, he is a better person *because* of the Other, his beloved Sofia, encapsulating the essence of Levinasian "good." His Waking Dream will not end until the final moments of the film when he is confronted by the true questions of his existence.

Signs of Survival, Signs of Replacement

David constructs his dream identity almost entirely through popular culture, parts of which the careful spectator notices during the film and which Ventura confirms at the end. "You sculpted your Lucid Dream out of the iconography of your youth," Ventura explains to David, "With the feeling of a great movie or a pop song you always loved." The sky on the morning that the splice begins is the same as the vanilla sky of the Monet painting David inherited from his mother. Sofia's facial expressions and clothes are reminiscent of the movie poster of Jules and Jim hanging in his bedroom. In nearly all of the lovemaking scenes between David and Sofia, the Jules and Jim poster is a dominant part of the background. Jules and Jim are actually two men in love with one woman, not unlike the triangle of Julie, Sofia, and David. In both films, idealized love affairs end in death. The movie poster possibly doubles as a representation of this idealized love as well as David's lingering guilt over his treatment of the jilted Julie Gianni.

Besides Cameron Crowe's signature rock music lyrics serving as an additional layer of dialogue with the audience, the covers of the albums themselves become signifiers. At one point David and Sofia are walking back to Sofia's apartment, and the shot is a deliberate freeze-frame of the LP cover of Freewheelin' Bob Dylan, Sofia's and David's faces replacing those of Dylan

and his girlfriend Suze Rotolo, immortalized on the original. Even the 1964 cars lining the street and the dusting of snow are duplicated to perfection. David's relationship with prison psychologist McCabe becomes the kind he had always wanted with his cold, dominating father. Drawn from the film version of To Kill A Mockingbird, McCabe's Gregory Peck-as-Atticus Finch character is recreated perfectly, the sympathetic, wise patriarch who listens endlessly. The video montage at the end of the film includes even more glimpses of popular culture icons, such as Beth Orton, Frank Sinatra, Nancy Wilson, and a cameo of Billy Crudup in Crowe's previous film Almost Famous, as well as home movies and family photographs. These fragments are the pieces that compose David's memory. They all become signs he draws from to craft a safe, presumably impenetrable, landscape. Like Lenny's obsession with his late wife's *memento mori*, for David, it is the material world, the world of consciousness, that evokes and permits him access to his emotional world in the strange, suspended state of his Waking Dream.

Weariness

Vanilla Sky also provides a solid example of weariness. After David's accident, his weariness is not with his apartment at the Dakota or his publishing empire. Although he has plenty of inherited money, he does not retire or move to a less populated city to live quietly as a recluse. In fact, he begins to show more interest in running his publishing house than he ever had prior to the accident. Though he believes, wrongly, that his relationships with others are unraveling, he is not bored with his friends. David's is a simpler kind of weariness, one that "concerns existence itself" (Existence 11). For him, there is no lethean escape from it in the typical pursuits we rely on when our self-inflicted ennui consumes us. David's is a far more engulfing and extensive weariness. Though he does get involved in company decision-making and does seek out medical help for his deformities, he undertakes these actions with great

hostility, sneering at his board of directors, "the seven dwarfs," (and he the sleeping prince), over their conspiracies against him and ranting at his plastic surgeons. When they first show him his blank, white "prosthetic device," he glares at it and begins laughing before boiling over: "Great!" he says, then screams in rage, "At first I thought you were going to tell me it was a fucking mask!"

However, these are not real attempts to live, to move beyond what for him seems the eternally fixed moment of the accident. It is as if he is forever trapped in its wreckage, for its wreckage now lives inside of him, its lacerations not just on his face, but on his soul as well. Levinas writes that "in weariness existence is like the reminder of a commitment to exist, with all the seriousness and harshness of an unrevokable contract" (12). In a sense, his face becomes a constant reminder of this commitment, an obligation that cannot be shunned. After all, he is "lucky" to be alive, as the saying goes, since Julie did not survive the crash. When David eventually seeks out Life Extension's services, he is literally seeking out both a contract, in the sense of a pact, for his existence to continue, and a contract, in the sense of a Mafia "hit" to end his existence. Both are irrevocable. Quite literally, David *will* die, and, through the faulty technology of the Lucid Dream, it will take 150 years of nightmares before David can scream, "I want to wake up!"

Life Extension offers neither life nor death in spite of the implications of its name. Their customers must die, we assume, but it is not a true death. The lucid dream they offer is a pseudo life, which is not a true life either. The obligation incurred in existence "animates the need to act," but the weight of weariness sucks us under, becoming an "impossible refusal of this ultimate obligation" (12). David feels a need to *do*, but he still can't make the effort to *be*. The lure the Lucid Dream offers is, in Levinasian terms, "escape from existence itself" (12), without

a refusal of the commitment. It seems to suggest the possibility of existing without Existence. Levinas himself uses a travel metaphor, calling the animus to escape "an evasion without an itinerary and without an end" (12). David's setup with Life Extension is clearly an evasion, but it is an evasion of unknown duration, completely devoid of destination. He is not, as in many of the other films mentioned earlier featuring dream states, altered states and the like, trying to get *to* somewhere or *back* to somewhere. He may have chosen where his splice occurs, but he has engaged in a dream, without choosing a planned ending point. Neither life nor death, but a peculiar form of existence in between, it does not entail making a final choice. By refusing to commit to a real death or to make the effort involved in sustaining a real life, he chooses what is truly an abdication from existence. For Levinas, it is in the very refusal to exist that weariness supervenes (12). Weariness does not lead to the refusal, but this abdication of existence wearies David of *himself*. The reflexivity is a vicious circle, and the possibilities offered in the Lucid Dream defer resolution, supposedly for eternity. For David, fraught with pain and weariness, it seems the best of all possible worlds.

The result of his "weariness", however, takes on all of the elements of the Waking Dream – neither truly asleep nor truly awake, but a sense of *suspension* that will not leave him. Weariness, via his refusal, is his exigence. David makes no decision between life or death. If he had made a decision, but not acted upon it, his story would be one of Levinasian indolence. Indeed, he would be in another film, another person. He would, in fact, be Diane Selwyn.

Mulholland Drive: "I'll Find A Cure For Pain"[20]

Scope of the Dream

In Mulholland Drive, Diane's dream starts the movie with the spectator unaware that the narrative is a dream world. We may be aware of the film's quirks, moments of highly staged

play with stereotype and coincidence, or its perfect, color-saturated sets, but these are, after all, Lynch's usual distorting and distorted style. Diane's Waking Dream will end, as previously mentioned, in disintegration at Theatre Silencio, but it begins when she comes to Hollywood, as fictional, wide-eyed, silver-screen wannabe, Betty, to stay at her conveniently gone and conveniently connected aunt's luxurious condo. She arrives in a Hollywood extracted straight from a 1950s photoplay dream factory, getting off the bus sparkling, pristine, innocent, and in total awe. Even the elderly couple she has befriended on her journey say their goodbyes as "See you on the screen!", all optimism and hokey cheer. Because we, too, have seen this idealized, "arriving in Hollywood" scenario so often, nothing about it strikes us as unusual. Betty's Hollywood is no different from what so many movies have taught us to believe.

Arriving at her Aunt Ruth's spectacularly retro condo, Betty encounters Camilla, in her Rita incarnation, so disoriented from her car crash that she can't even remember her name. Betty flies into rescuer/savior mode for the beautiful stranger, seemingly a giving, concerned human being as she does so – the person we would all wish ourselves to be – unmarred by suspicion, self-interest, or protective layers of jaded, cynical intolerance. Rita, devoid of memory, is rather like a coloring book shape that Betty can fashion as she wishes using the palette of her own magic crayons. In other words, Betty controls the story. Both girls are shiny and pretty, untarnished by life experience and struggle. They have the mystery of Rita's identity and life story to discover. Betty is the one with acting opportunities, and she is the one hotshot director Adam Kirsch falls for but cannot have because casting choices are dictated by the "man behind the wall," the Big Brother figure that, in Betty's Waking Dream, controls the star-making machinery of Hollywood. Focused on her mission to save Rita, Betty walks away from her audition with Adam, even though their eyes have locked in zoom-lens shots of mutual attraction

---

[20] Morphine, "Cure for Pain"

– cinematic shorthand for the bull's eye of Cupid's arrow. People are out to kill Rita, it seems (her car crash was a botched hit), and only Betty can save her.

In turn, Rita wants to become Betty. Like the uncannily similar, interchangeable characters of Alma and Elizabeth in Ingrid Bergman's Persona, Rita even cuts her hair, donning a blonde wig to look like Betty while their faces stare out at the spectator from Aunt Ruth's dressing room. Like their Persona twins, one will help the other exit the dream into reality again. However, in her dream world, Betty is sanitized, a perfected living Barbie Doll, naïve and stilted but still sexy. Betty is also a better self, a giving self, but also, literally, a self-less subject. Her dream also contains multiple intertwining story threads, from Adam's troubles with the Hollywood puppeteer to the numerous botched killings and acts of violence that surround it. The "This is the girl" dictation from the man behind the wall will rationalize Diane's failure as an actress and her inability to find love outside of her dream and create the drama and tension within it. The dream is, after all, much more exciting than life itself.

Signs of Survival, Signs of Replacement

Like Lenny and David, Diane's dream is drawn from the encounters of her waking, "real" life. For example, Adam's mother takes the role of Aunt Ruth's fictitious landlord, Coco. The powerful and mysterious Cowboy who looms so large in the "Hollywood machinery" subplot is simply someone glimpsed at Camilla's party. The waitress at Winkie's diner unwittingly contributes her name for Diane's Waking Dream persona. Camilla's actress "friend" (they do engage in a zesty kiss, but then again, it *is* Hollywood *and* David Lynch) becomes the face of the "This is the girl," 8 x 10 glossy and the object of the man behind the wall's dark dealings. Diane's parents transform into protective but creepy seniors on the bus from Ontario. Identity becomes a fluid tool in Diane's Waking Dream.

Diane also constructs Betty's dream world from classic Hollywood cinema. A large portion of her Waking Dream is rooted in scenes from Billy Wilder's Sunset Boulevard (1950), which Lynch, to his credit, deliberately references, telegraphing it from the first scene on. The opening sequence culminating in Rita's accident pays homage to Sunset Boulevard with the street sign and curb of Mulholland Drive leading us into the story. Rita must actually cross Sunset Boulevard itself before collapsing on the steps leading to Aunt Ruth's home, the same trope of the uninvited-guest-on-the-lamb that serves as the inciting incident in Sunset Boulevard. Both homes are gated, secluded, and vine-covered – old Hollywood in freeze-frame, forever rejecting and deflecting time – the perfect setting for the Waking Dream, a term as seemingly oxymoronic or "hypostatic" as the "moving picture" itself. Twins from their street moniker titles on down, both films begin, after some initial setup, with a desperate character on the run opening the gate to sanctuary and finding refuge in their hostess' sympathy, a sympathy that quickly turns to lust and ruin.

In Wilder's film, Betty Schaeffer (Nancy Olson) is the best friend of down-on-his-luck screenwriter Joe Gillis (William Holden), who, unbeknownst to her, has taken up residence with aging Sunset Boulevard diva Norma Desmond (Gloria Swanson). Betty is also in love with him, and after discovering his desperate situation, enlists her dark haired gal pal to drive with her to his attempted rescue. In this scene, the two girls are lighted by passing lampposts at night as they drive, filled with apprehension and terror, to Norma Desmond's mansion. Lynch repeats this scene in Mulholland Drive when the girls drive to Theatre Silencio. Sunset Boulevard's allusions are perfect for Mulholland Drive, given Gillis's similarity to Diane in his failed dreams of Hollywood glamour and the way they ultimately lead to both characters' tragic demise. Additionally, Gillis in Sunset Boulevard is shot in a stereotypical Hollywood built-in pool, the same kind that finds its way into Diane's dream. In Mulholland Drive, Adam's wife is having an affair with the "Gene Clean" pool man, who, in a case of mistaken identity, is later killed by the goons who are after Adam. Mistaken identity occurs repeatedly throughout Diane's Waking Dream since each player is "not who they think they are." Both films are ultimately tragedies of failed career ambitions, love gone wrong, the capriciousness of fate, and the thin line between the real and the (often preferable) suspension generated by delusion. Hollywood, is, after all, the "dream factory." Lastly, Gillis is supposed to be a scriptwriter, but he never succeeds, much like Diane's disappointments as an actress. The "dreams," as in the hopes of both characters in both films, are slowly torn apart in the Hollywood machine.

The character of Rita is also an allusion to another product of classic Hollywood, Charles Vidor's Gilda (1946). In Diane's Waking Dream, the yet-unnamed dark-haired intruder at Aunt Ruth's sees a movie poster of Rita Hayworth starring in the film and quickly absconds with her name. In Vidor's film, Gilda is held under lock and key; she must be broken. Diane's dream also

is like a prison to her. In fact, the Waking Dreams of all three films feature the qualities of claustrophobia and suffering keeping the character locked away from conscious existence. In Vanilla Sky, David is actually in a prison recounting his story to a supposed prison psychologist, McCabe. In Memento, Lenny uses a police report as his "game plan," has Teddy the detective as his accomplice, and it is hinted, has escaped from a psychiatric institution.

Indeed, Lenny, David, and Betty must all become detectives, searching for the clues to their existences in order to escape their self-made prisons. In Mulholland Drive, Diane is sought by the police, but in her dream, she and Rita play Nancy Drew and her best friend George Payne in an attempt to solve the mystery of Rita's identity. From the childlike excitement of uncovering clues to breaking and entering into what they think may be Rita's apartment (it is actually Diane's), the two act like teenage gumshoes in a juvenile novel presumably titled something like The Secret of the Missing Identity. In fact, between the 1950s style sweaters, hair clips, the soda shop set of the audition scene, and the wide-eyed wonder girl Diane manufactures for herself in her dream, it is clear she came to Hollywood with a 1950s perception of its workings, not unusual for a small-town girl. However, in a short but moving scene outside of her dream, Camilla and Adam engage in flirty foreplay on the film set inside of a car straight out of Happy Days while Diane, obviously suffering but also literally part of the "scene," looks on crying. Like the cataclysmic shaking of her Waking Dream during the performance of "Crying" at Theatre Silencio, this moment foreshadows the ultimate shattering of her illusions of Hollywood at Adam and Camilla's party, the moment they publicly announce their "special news," presumably their engagement. Significantly, the scene ends before they finish their declaration.

Finally, although it is Diane in real life who wants to usurp Camilla's place as beautiful, successful, adored movie star, in her dream the roles are reversed even to Betty unquestionably

being the better actress, while Rita is wooden in their read-through together. Betty and Rita's relationship mimics the plot of Barbet Schroeder's Single White Female (1992), except the murderous intent of the "plot" is reserved for real life. The sinister atmosphere of identity theft augments the tension of the end of Act Two.

Indolence: *"I Sit and Watch As Tears Go By"*[21]

Mulholland Drive enacts an example of indolence in Diane's move from her unwanted, desperate cleaving to Existence to the escape proffered by her Waking Dream. Indolence is most apparent when she has met her hired hit man at Winkie's Diner. He asks her if she's sure she wants to kill Camilla, since when the money changes hands, it is an irrevocable decision. Diane is absolutely determined to act. The implication of her decision is presumably that she assumes she will experience release with Camilla's death, set free through the release of her vengeful feelings and the release of ties to her female lover. However, indolence, according to Levinas, is like weariness, containing "an attitude with regard to action" (Existence 12). It happens after one has made the choice to act. It is not due to physical limitations or a knowledge that the goal of that action is unattainable; it is rather "an aversion to effort" itself (13). A*fter* Diane's decision is made, a waitress arrives to take the order wearing a nametag labeled "Betty." The sight of Betty prompts Diane's Waking Dream, words determining the identity she will assume in her dream. Her dream is flight since the knowledge of her murderous decision paralyzes her. She must attempt to break away, to escape *her* being through her Waking Dream.

Levinas describes idleness as "not a simple indecisiveness, a being overwhelmed by the choices to be made," adding that it "does not arise from deliberation" (12). In Diane's case, she has already made a choice to have Camilla killed. She is not overwhelmed by the possible problems that being a murderer might pose, nor is she troubled by the choices which she will

face; she has one clear resolve in sight, but beyond that there appear to be no other decisions to deliberate; she cannot move forward, cannot take action. Levinas provides this insight about indolence:

> It is not a thought about the future, followed by a holding back from action. It is, in its concrete fullness, a holding back from the future. The tragedy of being that it reveals is then the more profound. It is a being fatigued by the future. Beginning does not solicit it as an occasion for rebirth, a fresh and joyful instant, a new moment; indolence has already brought it about beforehand as a weary present. (17)

Diane's present – her knowledge of Camilla's apparent engagement and her concurrent plan to annihilate Camilla before her romantic rival can have her, on top of the complete destruction of all of her promising Hollywood dreams – is a very bleak, weary present, indeed.

Memento: "Should I Stay or Should I Go Now"[22]

Scope of the Dream

Lenny's Waking Dream is the most unusual one of all three films. It is also the murkiest. Instead of being asleep for his dream, his dream story is constructed of the memories he holds of Sammy Jankis, a man whose claim he encountered as an insurance agent in his life prior to the injury causing his short term memory loss – his oft-mentioned "condition." The narrative refrain of the Sammy Jankis story is retold throughout the film with a little bit more of the tale added each time, allowing for his suspension of Being in that he can "forget" or "interrupt" the *il y a* and actually hold onto consciousness for longer periods by retreating into the comfort and familiarity of the Sammy story. The story defers the effort he needs to make in order to "solve"

---

[21] Rolling Stones, "As Tears Go By"
[22] The Clash, "Should I Stay or Should I Go?"

his mystery. Interestingly, several times when he "awakes" from his periods of non-consciousness, he meets up with another character to whom he will immediately tell the story of Sammy Jankis. The story functions as a kind of positioning for him, a connection to a past subject who no longer exists as well as an anchor to the present and the routines of the life he has constructed for himself. As the film progresses, so does the slippage between Lenny and Sammy. The dream will eventually shatter when the two stories finally merge and the one person who knows the whole story – rather than the bits and pieces that even Lenny himself clings to – will meet his demise.

Signs of Survival, Signs of Replacement

The chorus Lenny repeats throughout the film is, "Did I ever tell you about Sammy Jankis?" His associates within the film, as well as his audience, must bear with him in his repeated narrative of the story of Sammy, who, Lenny tells us, was in an auto accident, sustaining a head injury that caused him to lose the ability to create new memories. Leonard actually "remembers" Sammy since their relationship predates Lenny's condition which is, of course, the same condition that had affected Sammy. Leonard, as Sammy's insurance claim adjustor, watched Jankis's struggles to maintain memories. According to Lenny, the lesson in Jankis's failure to do so was that he didn't have "a system." He didn't "condition" himself, and he wasn't organized. In fact, Lenny has a tattoo on his hand warning him to "Remember Sammy Jankis," a "memory" he can't efface, but which has slowly displaced the "real" story. At the same time, one of his numerous other tattoos displays the indelible message, "Memory is treachery," a reminder to himself to believe only what he writes down, further confirming the Sammy version of events. At one point he explains to Teddy, "The cops don't catch a killer by sitting around remembering things. Memory is unreliable –it's not even that good. Memory can

change the shape of a room, the color of a car, it can be distorted. . .” Lenny smugly sets himself apart from others in that he doesn’t rely on memory to construct his existence; he relies on his narrative refrain and his own written record. The irony lies in the fact that Sammy Jankis never actually had a memory condition. He only faked it, and Leonard Shelby discovered it, consequently rejecting his claim. The Sammy Jankis story is really *Lenny’s* story, cloaked in his own layers of falsehood. Although his invented narrative allows him to create a subject with a past, it also spawns more questions than it answers. What is his claim here? What is he investigating now? What is he insuring *won’t* happen or come to pass?

Lenny has also created a self compiled from his environment, not just a revision of the Sammy Jankis story. Memory, for instance, has indeed changed the “color of a car,” even the make of it, and certainly distorted Lenny’s sense of himself. Jimmy, the drug-dealer who may have raped his wife, (both dead before the narrative begins), has provided a kind of identity which Lenny assumes. Lenny wears Jimmy’s suits, uses his money, drives his Jaguar, and even sleeps with his girlfriend. However, the flashbacks we have of Leonard Shelby *before* the onset of his condition are different from both his Jimmy persona as well as from the glimpses we have of Lenny between the time of the break-in and the time he takes on Jimmy’s identity. In the scenes of Lenny after his wife’s death (but before his “Jimmyization,”), he is in jeans, a down vest, and a flannel shirt. He drives a beat up pick-up truck, quite different from the Jag he claims as his after Jimmy’s murder. Are these the clothes and marks of yet another identity? Has he been changing his look and self-perception in an endless stream of constructions exactly the way Teddy describes at the end of the film? Whatever the case, Nolan is playing on the moment of being as beginning.

Lenny's most important sign, however, is himself. He becomes what will later shape much of Levinas's thinking – the linguistic Subject. Lenny's body *is* the text – covered in tattoos in different fonts and styles, all done as mirror-writing. Marc Blanchard states that, "The tattooing design implies that it is the body itself" (295). His "writing," his signature, is an anchor for him, performing a kind of "identificatory function" (288) between his lapses of consciousness which may be read as interruptions. To Levinas, "to interrupt what was really begun is to end it in a failure" (15), but even failure, which in Lenny's case is a failure to inscribe his actions into memory, does not erase the beginning, the taking on of existence. If it did, there would never have been Lenny at all. His memories may vanish into oblivion, but the situations he is in do not. His conscious spaces are a literal "inscription in being" (15), just as they are an inscription on the body. His actions may not be engraved in memory, but his self, the possession here vital, is ineradicably marked on/in existence. An "inscription" is also defined as a signature on a gift given, as in a book or an artwork ("Inscription"), and for Lenny these brief interludes of lucidity are gifts of time, markers of his imprint on the world, where to even have a signature is be a Subject. His history as a person is recorded on his body; however, without memory, each time he contemplates his tattoos, they provide him not with a past, but with a present.

The tattoos covering his body are the "facts" of his existence. Many of them begin with the words: "Fact #1:" or "Fact #2:" etc. These "facts" include statements generating a story, the story providing him endlessly enigmatic reasons for his actions: "John G. raped and murdered my wife" or the license number of John G.'s car. In a similar vein, he keeps a stash of Polaroids in his pocket, all with captions describing the people in his life and what they mean to him. He even has one of his motel and one of his (Jimmy's) car. In his voiceover, Lenny explains that he uses them to avoid being manipulated, that he must be "disciplined and organized," and that

"day-to-day notes are useful" in this pursuit. A walking filing cabinet of sticky-notes and Polaroids, he creates a false sense of a secure self, one that he believes cannot be obliterated. Blanchard states out that "Because a person's skin is as close as you will ever get to his or her private self, because skin is what ultimately guarantees a person's physical integrity" (292), a tattoo is thought both "to reflect and to affect" a person more than any other art. Writing is also "associated with the beginnings of political violence" (295), with tattoos pointing to a personal violence. This personal violence for Lenny exists both in the words which dictate murder, and in the act of tattooing itself, which he sometimes does, painfully, to himself. In spite of his safeguards, by existing on his surface, Lenny, in the act of writing is also erasing and effacing himself by dissolving the distinctions between interior and exterior.

Lenny's notes and tattoos are always a preservation measure for a future self, a self who may be mere minutes away due to his constant, narcoleptic-like lapses into unconsciousness. The so-called "struggle" for life is posterior to the taking up of Existence. It only happens after subjectivity and is then an action aimed at the future, "the care that a being takes for its endurance and conservation," as Levinas explains (10). For this reason, the instant of taking up being is paradoxically continual and prior to reflection. Lenny perfectly embodies this because he has no space or time for reflection. The minute he takes on consciousness, he is often in situations requiring immediate action. However, he exists *as* reflection in that the only way to read his tattoos, due to the Da Vinci-style engraving technique, is through the medium of a mirror.

His rhetorical system ultimately fails because both it and language itself are slippery. His pictures and his tattoos are his "truths," but each new "truth" appears more persuasive and therefore replaces the often more accurate truths he had originally recorded, leaving him caught

in his own rhetoric, circling his existence and actions. For example, Natalie's Polaroid originally contained a warning, which he crosses out and replaces with, "She will help you out of pity. She has lost someone, too." His eagerness to record this material which is partially erroneous ("she will help you") and partially true ("she has lost someone") to further his search adds to the spectator's frustration with his gullibility and sympathy with his puzzlement. Part of our empathy with Lenny is that, at heart, we know there is a certain truth to his bizarre methodology. What, initially, do we have to go on besides a person's words and actions? And what if they (as they often are) are contradictory? Which "truth" do we believe? Ultimately, however, his "system" will lead to his failure. Presaging that failure, or perhaps recognizing it in a moment of clarity, he tells us, "You lie to yourself to be happy. . .You make up your own truth." In its attempt to evade Being, that is the possibility of the Waking Dream for all of these characters, not just Lenny. All of them lie to themselves, hoping for the pardon that they can never receive alone, while deflecting the embrace of Being with the horror it entails.

A Coupling of Fatigue and Indolence

Whereas David exhibits fatigue and Diane is almost a poster child of indolence, Lenny exhibits indolence *and* fatigue, two different modes of being overlapping in some contexts. It might seem paradoxial that he could personify both modes; however, they appear to grate against each other, creating friction rather than junction.

Weariness for Levinas, true weariness, is a weariness tied to Existence itself. Lenny never appears "weary" in the usual sense of the word. He is not tired, not sleepy, not filled with ennui. He is, in fact, a man of action, pacing as he talks on the phone, running, taking pictures, tattooing himself or getting tattooed, meeting with Teddy , Natalie, someone (a direct contrast to Diane and David's post-trauma seclusion and reclusiveness). These actions, nevertheless, coupled with

his unflagging optimism, are actually shields against weariness, the weariness of his direct and undiluted confrontations with Being. Levinas's metaphor of a contract with Being, an ironclad one, makes Lenny's need for action "poignant" (12). Lenny is motivated, driven even, and the futility of his actions is nothing if not poignant, a horrifying pity when we understand what Lenny flees. To be still would be for Lenny an admission of the emptiness of his actions, of his evasion of the knowledge he cannot face, the shape his existence has taken. His action is an escape. Turning to the poet Baudelaire, Levinas states, weariness "is a matter of parting for the sake of parting" (12), (or in Lenny's case, action for the sake of action). Although Lenny has his objectives, his plan, and his routines, it becomes increasingly clear to the spectator that in reality, they mean nothing: his aims and targets no longer exist in any real sense of the word.

Weariness is an exhaustion caused by the imperative of Existence. Yet, for Lenny, as for all of us, the imperative of Being cannot be evaded, so weariness produces only a "hesitation" in the taking up of Being. "The refusal is *in* weariness" (12), Levinas explains. Though we may have a desire to refuse Being, our ironclad contract with it makes refusal an impossibility even if we, like Lenny, do not recognize it as such because weariness is never visible for him as inactivity or boredom or fatigue. Instead, it may even seem the opposite – absolute invigoration to achieve a goal. Nonetheless, Lenny repeatedly still has narcoleptic moments, losing all sense of self, then awakening, and hesitating as he reorients himself to his surroundings. He emerges from the terror of not knowing who he is to an *absolute* present and desperately seeks action to avoid that loss of consciousness again, immersing himself in activity as a re-invigoration to keep the present from slipping away into night again. For example, at one point, he hides in the bathroom of Dodd (a thug involved in the Natalie/Jimmy storyline), in a vigilante effort to protect Natalie with whom he has now slept and begun to trust. However, the very effort of

staying alert induces sleep. When he awakes, he has no knowledge of why he is sitting in a bathroom with a bottle in his hand, a bottle originally intended for his attack on Dodd. He looks at the half-empty liquor bottle and thinks, "I'm not drunk." In a comedic twist, he again plunges into action by taking a shower.

For Lenny, in each moment of consciousness, in each beginning, "there is already something to lose" (14) since already the instant of that beginning is owned by him, possessed. Beginning is both the present *and* the doubling back movement of a being's possession of itself, making it "already encumbered by the excess of itself" (15). To begin is to have a concrete presence in the present and to be "unable to turn back" for to do so is "to interrupt what was really begun" (15) and therefore fail. The film itself suggests both the aforementioned doubling back movement and the failure of interruption through its black and white sequences that move forward in conjunction with its color sequences that happen in reverse. The two strands are braided together, with the present constantly interrupted by the past. For Lenny, this movement does lead to failure. Indolence disavows action. Leonard never has a concrete presence in the sense that he continually disavows his own actions by always being in a beginning place.

In Lenny's case, indolence also involves time, the instant, where the beginning of an action, the beginning of beginning is impossible. Indolence "may inhere in the act that is being realized, in which case the performance rolls on as on an ill-paved road, jolted about by instances each of which is a beginning all over again" (13), states Levinas. This definition perfectly describes Lenny and the material reality of the film. Each time he seems to be moving closer to the truth, he repeats his refrain, "Remember Sammy Jankis," yet these moments seem to be the places where Leonard is most unmoored and ill at ease with himself. Is this refrain an attempt to secure a stable self, or is it a method of avoiding or pulling away from the places where he might

be closest to taking up and taking charge of that self? The reasons for his "refrain" mimic Levinas's analogy of the "job," where "The job does not flow,. . .is discontinuous – a discontinuousness which is perhaps the very nature of 'a job'" (13). For Lenny, the entire nature of his existence is a job, the job of tracking down his wife's killer on the surface, but also a constant effort "to be." It consumes every moment of his existence, but it occurs in moments only. It does not accumulate, except in his tattoos, which may or may not be accentuating false information. This discontinuity is reflected in the format of the film: the meshing of the color sequences unspooling backwards, and the black and white sequences which roll forward until the two come together in the moment of truth between Lenny and Teddy. The technique leaves the spectator as disconcerted and unmoored as Lenny. The instant it is over, we wonder what it is we have just seen, what happened, who really killed who, etc. In other words, to quote Eliot, "We had experience but," like Lenny, "missed the meaning."

Yet Lenny's consciousness flees these interludes. We might ask why, and the given answer is because of his "accident." However, there are scenes in the film that allude to more than this as a reason. Might they also represent a repression of his complicity with his "condition?" This is the question that Lenny begs of the Sammy Jankis story. Was Sammy "allowing" his condition to rule him, and therefore bilking the insurance company of millions? Leonard Shelby the insurance investigator thought so, but Lenny might reevaluate such a decision. If Lenny still thinks so, then his own condition allows for the possibility that he, also, might be able to relocate memories too horrific to suffer through again. Therefore, Lenny, a man forever on the move, constantly in action, may also be indolent if action is what is required to open himself to memory, to analyze his actions since the accident that caused his condition – the accident he also believes resulted in the rape and murder of his wife. Too much analysis, too

much thought, and Lenny would be faced with alternate choices, a plethora of different paths too overwhelming to consider. He continually pulls back from this possibility. His indolence then is posited as a "recoil before action. . .an indolence about existing" (15) other than the way he is, despite whatever obstacles his way presents. Levinas explains that this way "is not peace," like the calm or comfort of sleep, and, although Lenny has constructed his restless quest as purpose, it also an escape from indolence and a flight from knowledge he doesn't want to face.

Levinas gives an interesting analogy in the story of Little John the simpleton who throws his meal at his own shadow in order to escape from it; however, his shadow, "like a last and inalienable possession, still clung to him" (16). Lenny has lost every material possession of Leonard, his home and possessions, his car, his job. Even after Lenny burns the last memento mori of his wife, her hairbrush, a paperback novel, and other things he carries with him in a paper sack, he still cannot escape his contract with Existence. Shedding all the trappings of Leonard still leaves him burdened with himself, even at the end.

This burden of the subject manifests as indolence in Lenny in that he eludes every true memory of his past. At one point, he hires an "escort" to arrange his dead wife's belongings around his motel room and then to sleep beside him. She is instructed that when he falls asleep, she is to get up and shut the bathroom door, the last moment he remembers with his wife. He incurs our sympathy in what we see as his attempts to recover an unrecoverable loss. However, when the escort slams the bathroom door and jolts him awake with an accompanying rush of pain, he demands she leave, leaving the audience wondering if it is the pain of loss or the unwillingness to follow the path of memory itself that causes his anguished outburst.

Levinas is careful to differentiate between the fear of action caused by some "psychological content of pain," and in this we can understand why Lenny does not want to

remember or confront the pain surrounding the death of his wife and his own accident, but indolence is "a refusal to understand" and a "joyless aversion to the burden of existence itself" (17). Teddy tries to tell Lenny how he has been used since the accident and what he, Lenny, has done in its wake. Lenny refuses to believe, even when confronted with the evidence of his own crimes. He not only kills Teddy, seemingly the only person who knows the entire "story," but deliberately sets himself up to forget what he has learned. He is afraid to live with such knowledge and would rather be used, hapless, and kept in the dark than try to actually start on a new and different path or resolve to make a more ethical response. He refuses "to shoulder [his] existence" (17).

EFFORT: "'THERE MUST BE SOME WAY OUT OF HERE,' SAID THE JOKER TO THE THIEF"[23]

The Endeavor to Begin

When the characters, as beings, position themselves in the *here* (and now of the present), such as the way we do when we go to sleep, within that sleep state, their dreams are also a "nostalgia for escape," not just a fatigue and a weariness with the burden of Existence. In these films, the "nostalgia" is as much a byproduct of fatigue as it is of effort. Levinas purposely couples the term "fatigue" with the term "effort" in order to highlight the tension between them. Fatigue, he says, first "presents itself" as "a way of curling up into oneself" (18), which the explication of the Waking Dream aptly portrays on both a physical and interior plane. He uses the analogy of a hand that is "letting slip what it is trying to hold on to" which creates an "increasing lag between being and what it remains attached to" (18). When the hand lets go of its burden, it "remains taut with the effort. For there is fatigue only in effort" (19). In the Waking Dream, the protagonists are constantly vacillating between these modes. The fatigue of their existences leads to the dream, even while the dream itself is fatiguing; however, being attempts to surface by way of effort, to thrust through the dream, which continues to generate fatigue. Or, it might be expressed in Levinasian terms as "the sleep to which the action in its fatigue clings" (19). These characters, for all that they are searching for clues, do not want to wake up, to end the dream. However, the lag "between a being and itself," brought about by fatigue, "constitutes the advent of consciousness, that is, a power to 'suspend' being by sleep and unconsciousness" (19). Therefore, it is only the *work* of these characters that initiates fatigue with its accompanying desire to escape consciousness, but, at the same time, establishes the opening/interval for the *initiation* of consciousness, of a subject.

However, that "instant of effort" exposes how the freedom or free will of the subject is actually subjected to an *a priori* enchainment. Levinas explains, " Despite all its freedom, effort reveals a condemnation; it is fatigue and suffering. Fatigue does not arise in it as an accompanying phenomenon, but effort as it were lunges forward out of fatigue and falls back upon it" (19). What is this condemnation? It is "the despair of a finite being who is not up to his ambitions and too weak for the world" (20). In these descriptions, Levinas has linked suffering to fatigue, rendered them almost substitutable, and linked despair to effort. In the face of such wretchedness, is it any wonder these characters would prefer to flee such a double bind? Still, in their Waking Dreams, they cannot flee being's effort to take up Being, its "upsurge." In fact, it is only in consciousness that they can seek sleep or unconsciousness, and hence their Waking Dreams. Nor can they escape the falling back into fatigue effort entails. Each dream is marked by increasingly darker "instances" of fatigue out of increasingly sinister moments of effort. Their pellucidity is clouded by suffering.

Since effort "lunges forward out of fatigue and falls back" (19) upon it, each of these dreams is marked by effort. Effort is expressed in extremely similar ways in each film as "breakthroughs," disruptions of the dream in the effort to awaken to consciousness rather than existing in the states of weariness and indolence that mark the dreams. These breakthroughs strip the dreamer of control of the dream. Within their careful dream constructions, these characters insert clues that increase their doppelgängers' uneasiness and instill a sense of suspicion or doubt in an attempt to disturb the dream enough to "wake up." But can such effort be victorious?

Mulholland Drive

In Mulholland Drive, Diane's "clues" begin right from the start. After Rita's car accident, one of the two Dragnet-like cops at the crash site suggests, "Could be someone is missing." A few scenes later, in the conspiracy storyline, we hear a voice on the phone drone, "The girl is still missing." In both cases, the reference is to Rita while the real police search for Camilla, but it is also a reference to Diane, *missing* from consciousness.

Diane also has several odd characters in her dream who all warn her of danger and only appear peripherally. The first is a patron in Winkie's diner who seems to be talking to a psychiatrist. Neither Rita nor Betty is in the diner at all, and the scene apparently comes out of nowhere, not a part of any of the primary story arcs. The customer repeats several times that he "is scared." He goes on to describe a dream he had. In *his* dream, (keeping in mind that he, and hence his dream, are also crafted by Diane), "There's a man in back of this place. He's the one doing it. I can see him through the wall, I can see his face. I hope I never see his face outside of a dream," he explains fervently. He might be talking about Diane. He might be Diane talking about herself or about her hired hit man. More likely he might be a combination of these voices meant to evoke a feeling of warning and dread for both Diane and the audience, for there is, it appears, "something in back," behind a wall, in the same sense that there is, in Adam's initial scenes, a man behind the wall. Both of these mysterious figures, creations of Diane's dream, indicate the horror that threatens, at any point, to "lunge" forward through the thin membrane of the dream, a horror of Existence from which we cannot divest ourselves.

A second warning is given to Betty by Irene, her companion on the bus trip to LA. Upon their arrival at the terminal, Betty says in awe of the city, "I can't believe it," while Irene warns her to "Be careful." The same type of double entendre is expressed again when Betty first talks

to Rita, who is finishing up a shower. Betty rattles on about herself, contrasting Hollywood to her home in "Deep River," Ontario, musing, "Now I'm in this dream place."

Betty's next, darker warning comes from a fellow tenant. Answering the door, Betty is confronted by Louise Bonner, who, like a Shakespearean oracle, is the local crazy lady. She tells Betty, "Someone is in trouble. Who are you? What are you doing in Ruth's apartment?" Betty explains her relationship to Ruth and says her name is "Betty," to which Louise replies, "No it's not. . .Someone is in trouble. Something bad is happening." When Coco arrives to pull her away, Louise whines inscrutably, "That one is in my room, and she won't leave. I want you to get her out." It is Rita, however, who appears unnerved by the altercation. The warning is reinforced when, later, Coco warns Betty, "If there is trouble, get it out." In both this and the previously mentioned scenes, it is clear that, right from the start, Diane is leaving "keys," both warnings and clues for herself as the dreamer and for herself in her incarnation as Betty.

Real keys also abound throughout the film. When Aunt Ruth is leaving, for example, there is a take where she is about to get in a taxi, but instead goes back into her condo and grabs a set of keys with a small smile on her face. What does this take add to the movie? Maybe Aunt Ruth, who we find out later has died (the limo that is picking her up as Rita watches from the bushes could be read as an "eternal coachman" kind of motif) and left Diane the money that makes her LA trip possible, has no desire to leave her "keys" behind. Betty must, therefore, find all of her "keys" on her own, as we all must, since no one can the "effort" for us. One key will be proffered by Coco, the landlord, giving Betty access to her "aunt's place." There is the blue key which marks the completion of Diane's hired hit on Camilla – the same key that Diane stares at, entranced, right before her suicide. Then there is the other blue key, discovered when Camilla opens her purse to find the blue key and a huge amount of cash. This key, however, is an

unusual triangular one. Betty asks her if the combination "makes you remember anything," to which Rita hesitatingly answers, "There's something, there's something there." Her uneasiness infects both girls and fuels Betty's escalating need to trace the clues and find the keys to unlock the mystery of Rita's identity. Rita's blue key, of course, will unlock the blue box, mysteriously appearing in Betty's purse at a crucial moment in Theatre Silencio.

Lynch's "serious play" with Hollywood, acting, and identity continues with another clue, words that Diane herself might have wanted to tell Camilla, but instead are the script Betty and Rita rehearse for Betty's acting audition. Betty's lines are delivered twice, once to Rita in practice and once in her audition where she is told, portentously, "Don't play it for real until it gets real." The scene she is performing contains lines that will become especially important and poignant when repeated in part during her later, real life scenes with Camilla: "You're still here. You came back. I thought that was what you wanted. You're playing a dangerous game here...it's not going to work. This will be the end of everything. I hate you. I hate us both." These words also express a hatred of her self as in her existence – the ironclad contract we can't revoke.

The most important breakthrough for Diane, however, occurs before the Theatre Silencio sequence. It is presaged by an earlier clip where the two girls are searching the phone book for a "Diane Selwyn." Rita thinks it might be her real name, and Betty encourages her, "Maybe she can tell you who you are." In an earlier scene, Betty had encouraged Rita to come with her and buy a newspaper to check if there had been an accident on Mullholland Drive, saying, "It'll be just like in the movies. We'll pretend to be someone else." Rita hesitates in both scenes, almost as if she doesn't want to know. Eventually they do go to Diane's real life home, the Sierra Bonita apartments. When they discover "no one's home" at Diane's apartment, Betty climbs in

through a window and then lets Rita in the front door. They both cover their noses in disgust, creep to the bedroom, open the door, and discover the decaying body of a girl on the bed. It is Rita who screams in terror, and Betty who symbolically "silences" her.

Vanilla Sky: "Let Me Out"[24]

David Aames, like Betty, vocalizes his emotions about dreaming within his Waking Dream in an *effort* to create doorways out. After the crash with Julie, he "dreams" of walking in Central Park with Sofia before sliding into a coma. He tells her he "had a horrible dream," and then describes the crash and its aftermath. With underlying apprehension, he adds in all sincerity, "But I can't wake up." Shortly after he will confess to McCabe that his "dreams were a cruel joke." Later, David stubbornly insists, "There is no murder," when McCabe informs he has been charged with one. And the real David *does* know there is no actual murder. There is no death *for* him or *by* him, or for the others who also live *through* him.

The McCabe sequences problematize David's Waking Dream in that essentially even what we understand as David's real life events before the "splice" are a narrative provided to McCabe. Therefore, it is David who selects and filters what we are given of his "real" life. Even in the first scene with McCabe, McCabe tells David, "Your whole story is full of holes," then later encourages him to "Dig deep" to find answers. The answers are there; David just needs more blatant reminders of his real situation. In one real life scene, David, doped up on anesthetics and painkillers, sings Joan Osborne's "What if God Were One of Us," a song that is later sung musingly by McCabe. It is one of David's first chilling moments in his cell when he realizes something is deeply wrong with his prison confinement. It is also an ironic counterpoint to his prison stay in that David is god of this world and yet dreams himself in jail.

[24] Smashing Pumpkins

Even the real life portion of the film contains clues since it is just another story inside his Waking Dream. For example, Brian Shelby complains, "I have ceased to exist," when David and Sofia meet. Certainly by this time, he *has* ceased to exist. Likewise, Sofia also gives him a coded message. After the dance club fiasco, she tells him, "This is where I leave you." It will be the last time he sees her in real life. However, she follows it up with, "We'll meet up soon." These are not the words of someone who will, a few hours later, rescue him for a passionate love affair, yet her words are still prophetic as they lead into the beginning of David's Waking Dream life.

David is not contented with the glossy happiness of the Waking Dream and seeds his dream with progressively more disturbing breakthroughs. From the first moments of the "splice," he is suspicious of the sudden warmth and gentle compassion showered on him by Sofia. He states, "This is a joke," expressing his suspicion as bemusement when she helps him to his feet under a "vanilla sky." He reminds her, "We created a whole world together," and then warns, "This is going to change my life in a zillion different ways." Of course, it *does* change everything for him; he has just entered a whole world that he created, a dream world of memory and happy endings.

Like Lenny's Sammy Jankis references in Memento, David also has a narrative running through his Waking Dream, the story of Benny the Dog. Drawn from a TV ad David had seen his first and only night with Sofia, Benny has been frozen cryogenically and then been thawed successfully. The company that orchestrated this engineering marvel is none other than a company called Life Extension. On the TV, infomercials about Benny, commercials about Life Extension featuring Benny, or talk show appearances by Benny, play repeatedly in the background as David talks to McCabe. David himself sees Benny on TV just after his first post-accident meeting with Sofia, causing him to call her, awkward as a teenager, about seeing their

"old friend." On first screening it is easy for an audience to ignore these presumably trivial blips since we are so trained to disregard commercials anyway. Benny only takes on meaning in the final scenes of the film. In jail, David, intent on memories of Sofia, ignores them, even though (or perhaps *because*) they could provide him with all the information he needs to understand what is happening to him and how to awaken from it. It is only in prison, after he has driven McCabe away, that he stares numbly at the guard's TV screen, and the significance of Benny the dog washes over him. Benny's story, like Sammy Jankis's in Memento, is his own.

In one part of his Waking Dream, a happy David and Sofia enjoy a drink at a café with Brian, who is videotaping them with a tiny hand-held camera. When Sofia excuses herself for a moment, David admires Brian's camera, mentioning he had no idea Brian was interested in such things. "I'm into things of which you have no idea," Brian replies, echoing word for word a line David had used at the earlier, "real life" birthday party. Referring to his one-time crush on Sofia as a "proximity infatuation," Brian immediately looks over his shoulder, somehow sensing a writer is there, and says, "That's mine. You can't use it," essentially, as a character, drawing attention to his / our knowledge of his constructedness, the script drawing attention to the script. Shortly after, as a joke, he makes a terrified face and tells David, "Oh my God! Your face is splitting open!" Not knowing that Brian is joking, David's eyes widen in horror, as if suddenly the seams and cracks he embedded in his dream, like the cracks once visible in his face, are breaking wide open, the split between the two worlds now visible. It is at this moment that he first sees Life Extension's tech support man, Edmund Ventura, staring at him from the bar.

David's belief that he is going crazy increases as he becomes more desperate toward the end of the film. In his Waking Dream, Sofia begins to repeatedly turn into Julie Gianni and vice versa. These changes, like those in Mulholland Drive, involve complete identity switching. At

one point, David emerges from his bathroom to find Julie in his bed when he had left Sofia there moments before. He ends up beating her senseless in rage when she insists she is Sofia. Julie drops the assault charges releasing David from the police holding cell, and, after a terrible confrontation with Brian, in which Brain insists David had beaten up Sofia while David insists it was Julie, David goes to Sofia's apartment. Jarringly he finds that all the mementos of Sofia he had pored over so lovingly their one "real" night together have become mementos of Julie. It is Julie's face staring from the Polaroids on the fridge, Julie's dance photos on the wall. He searches through Sofia's "hope chest" and finds the sketch he had made of her that first night. Not only is it on the bottom, it, too, is a sketch of Julie. As he stares at it in shock, Julie charges out of the bedroom, dressed in Sofia's clothes, and kicks him to the ground with her stiletto heel. She explains apologetically that she thought he was a burglar and hurries to get a cold cloth. The tables turn again when it is Sofia who comes out of the bathroom. Making love to Sofia, however, puts him over the top as she turns into Julie halfway through. He holds a pillow over her face, suffocating her, only to lift the pillow and find Sofia, lifeless, beneath it. Once again, he discovers *too late* that it is Sofia he has destroyed. These are the points where consciousness breaks through, the dream interrupted, the body stirring toward wakefulness, leaning and yearning toward it. However, David collapses from fatigue each time, re-establishing the dream by allowing Julie to morph back into Sofia.

Memento

The murkiest and the most challenging part of the narrative in Memento is that Lenny's physical condition seems to truly prevent his movement beyond anything more than an ongoing quest for revenge. However, there are several signs that Lenny may know more than he allows his memory to unmask. The fact that indolence "can be overcome," according to Levinas, is what

"constitutes the bad conscience of indolence" (13) so apparent in Lenny. His "aversion to effort" (13) is the effort of allowing memory to surface completely. "The pain involved in the effort that it foresees and dreads" (13), as described by Levinas, is signaled by Lenny's brief flashbacks to his wife throughout the film, especially in the black and white sequences which indicate the past. The black and white sequences are leeched of color, suggesting a fading, like that of a photograph or of memory itself. Lenny even states at one point, "Everything fades." That the scenes of his wife are in black and white further insinuates Lenny's own psychological evasion. He continually reiterates that he is not a killer, a fact increasingly hard to believe. He clearly loves his wife, but his flashbacks of her can also be read as a disturbing sign of his own repressive evasion. At one point in the black and white sequences, his wife is reading her paperback novel in bed, and he asks, perturbed, why she is reading the same book yet again, an interesting symbolic foil to his own later repetitions. Her response is that she likes it and why does he care anyway. His response is a rather high-handed mini-lecture on how the point of reading books is the surprise in what happens next. She responds, "Don't be a dick." The marriage, once portrayed as so perfect, carries disturbing human overtones. Likewise, he flashes on a moment on their bed where he affectionately pinches her thigh while she brushes her hair. The same flashback later reveals he is injecting her with insulin though he swears to Teddy that his wife was not a diabetic. An insulin overdose is what kills Mrs. Jankis in Lenny's story of Sammy, and now we find out it is also an overdose that killed Mrs. Shelby, not the long-sought after John G. Throughout the film, everyone calls him Lenny, and he responds by saying he hates being called Lenny because his wife called him that. Is it due to pain of loss or pain of memory?

Teddy even tells Lenny, "You don't want the truth. Like your police file. It was complete when I gave it to you. Who took out the twelve pages?" Lenny did, Teddy explains, "To create a puzzle you could never solve." Teddy's revelations coupled with the revealing and suggestive flashes discussed above cause Lenny to take the only agency he has in the film – a retreat to anonymous and seductive forgetfulness. The *il y a* "burdens and bothers us, but at the same time it seduces us by the magic of its invitations to self-abandonment and dispersion" (Peperzak, "Some Remarks" 208). The dread before it is not the anguish of nothingness or death, but rather is "'too much' of oneself. . .the weariness of oneself" (Levinas/Poirie 46), or, "being without objects, being in complete silence, in utter non-thought, in every manner of retreat from existence" (Levinas/Benchelah 212). Lenny's "retreats" are an abandonment of the self, and coming close to remembering real events is fatiguing. The effort is so overwhelming it moves him beyond a mere fatigue from effort to a weariness of himself. The more he closes his wife out of his memory, the more of himself he is left with.

Although film cannot show what Levinas means by a "duality in existence" (16), where Existence and existence are conjoined, Lenny's darkly humorous relationship with himself might serve in its stead. There is the remembered Leonard Shelby, insurance investigator, who no longer exists. He is a different person entirely from Lenny-as-series. Serial Lenny is composed of a succession of selves that come into existence and then retreat as a new one surfaces. "Each" Lenny reflects the efforts of the others, and the old Leonard accompanies them all, a co-conspirator, causing Lenny to be "never innocently alone" (16). Levinas states that "Existence casts a shadow, which pursues it tirelessly" (16). In Lenny's case, the old Leonard casts a slippery shadow over Lenny which he attempts to grasp, but it is a futile effort; the pull of the *il y a*, of Existence itself, is an alluring warm darkness in which to sink, too strong to resist.

Edith Wyschogrod writes that "The being who lives only becomes part of history, is totalized after his death" (85). However, in an existent "Memory inverts historical time and as such is the living tempo of interiority as opposed to the inexorable swell of universal history. Memory halts universal time, reverses it, prevents our existence from being engulfed in its flow" (85-86). Lenny is not dead in traditional sense although a case can be made that each of his past selves are dead. His lack of memory, though, disrupts his "tempo of interiority" in the disruption of his sense of time. The only thing that keeps him from being "engulfed" is that each new Lenny that awakes to take up existence is haunted and accompanied by the spectres of those former selves who resist dissolving completely in the wasteland of his damaged memory. It is from this shadow cast by his former selves that Lenny receives clues to his own activities. Leonard discovers his "want of innocence," in his complicity with Lenny who has become a killer, not only of others, but also, in a sense, of Leonard himself.

As Levinas defines inwardness, "the ego has a self, in which it is not only reflected, but with which it is involved like a companion or partner" (16). Lenny, reflecting not on a remembered self but on a lost one who haunts his actions in the present, rejects inwardness, stating emphatically, "I have to believe in a world out of my own mind. . .We all need mirrors to remind ourselves of who we are." For Levinas, effort does not contain the joy of human labor; rather joy resides in the actual reflection upon one's effort. But for Lenny, there is no chance for real reflection. By living in the present, he labors for moments only in his commitment to find John G. and maintain a self, but each moment of labor is followed by a collapse back into the shadowy, chaotic world of nothingness again.

As an example, in his pursuit of the somewhat peripheral character of Dodd, the effort of staying committed to the chase, remaining "in the moment" is too much for him, and he lapses

into oblivion again. When he returns from this instant of blackout, "being" surging up again through effort, Dodd's car is pulled up beside his. Lenny, unaware of the cat and mouse chase the two have engaged in, smiles at Dodd unwittingly. Dodd promptly shoots at him. Their chase continues, but Lenny's consciousness slips away, only to return moments later causing Lenny to ask himself, "Am I being chased or am I chasing him?" At this moment, even the audience is unsure. Lenny, in the very moment of coming to consciousness from unconsciousness, exemplifies what Levinas calls hypostasis: the taking up of existence in an instant where Lenny is both aware and unaware, hunter and hunted, part of an instant and its effectuation through effort.

The scene that best displays the full extent of Lenny's effort and confirms his ultimate subjection to his condition is also the moment where Lenny seems most like a real subject, someone who elicits our sympathy. Natalie's betrayal of Lenny, a vital scene in the film, shows just how blatantly she can spell out how she has used him, piling on one venomous epithet after another, knowing he will only forget them minutes later. In the moment Lenny recognizes her duplicity and hits her, she leaves, waiting in a car in the driveway, while he struggles second by second to hold onto this knowledge long enough to find a pen and write it down. Natalie, in an experiment of sorts, has taken all the pens and simply waits for his pleasant stupor to return before re-entering the house, telling him Dodd is to blame for her bruised face – in effect, setting him up to avenge a beating that Lenny himself has inflicted. Lenny's concerted effort to remember and to grasp hold of his existence, the meaning of what has happened, and anticipate and hope for a future still ends in failure. Effort and fatigue are the pain and suffering of condemnation, what Levinas calls "being condemned to the present" (24); Lenny's frantic searching for a non-existent pen, so crucial to remembering what he knows, in order to

accumulate knowledge and make an informed judgment coupled with his inability to do so are, indeed, his condemnation. When Natalie walks back through the door and Lenny stares at her cluelessly, we know just how hopeless his present is. The *here* that remains does not involve a relation to the past in the desire for pardon or a hope for the future yet to come, but even that is avoided when the starkness of his stripped down present becomes too overwhelming.

In the final scenes of the film, Teddy chronicles the realities of Lenny's existence. The truth is that he, Leonard, caused his wife's death and that the real "John G." was not the murderer. John G. had raped Leonard's wife while his partner delivered the blow to Leonard's head. This head injury eventually led Leonard to, unintentionally, kill his own wife who, if we are to believe the elision of the Sammy Jankis story with Lenny's own, simply refused to believe her husband was so far gone, so far beyond, that he would continue to forget giving her insulin injections, replicating them over and over until he killed her. Teddy, the cop assigned to the Shelby's case, had helped Leonard find and execute the rapist. These revelations remove any *reason* for Lenny's existence as he understands and posits it. "Justice" has already been served. To Lenny, Teddy's "crime" is not his eventual manipulation of Lenny for his own ends, (once Teddy, a crooked cop, realizes that Lenny has no memory of exacting revenge, he has used him as a personal assassin, feeding him a series of false "John G.'s" to kill), but for forcing Lenny to remember who he is and what he has done. The tension between past and present, fact and memory is too much. Effort collapses under the weight of his fatigue.

The Instant of Effort

It is through the dialectic of fatigue and effort that Levinas introduces the present in his elucidation of the instant. One of the metaphors he uses draws on Bergson's model of duration in the melody. Levinas claims that a melody has no instants, or, what could be conceived as instants

that "exist only in dying" and "immolate themselves in a duration" (21). The melody is a whole. Its notes are not the melody, only the playing of it is its reality; otherwise, it does not really exist except as the playing itself. You can hold the score in your hand, watch the performers, buy the CD of a performance, but it is not actually the melody itself. Human labor, on the other hand, is made up of its "notes," is noted in its stops and starts. "It is never in the labor itself that joy resides," he says (22). The joy comes from reflection on it, or through the feelings from a "duty fulfilled, the heroism of the sacrifice" (22). This is an important distinction in that if we are past the point of worrying about duty or honor, if the idea of the heroic no longer matters at all to us, and if effort holds no joy in and of itself, what is the motivation *to do*? Why should I not climb back into bed? In Lenny's case, who is going to consider him a hero? If it is out of a sense of obligation that he pursues murder, a skewed sense of justice, what happens when that obligation is satisfied?

Similarly, Diane's actions are not inspired by duty. With her lover lost, career over, and money gone, what incentive to action follows her fulfillment of revenge? After all of David's duties are met, the company handed over to Thomas Tipp, all ties severed, all affairs in order, one wonders what is there left for him to do? Who will think David a hero for just hanging on? Some might see him as heroic to continue in the face of his disability and the challenges it brings, though it is doubtful David sees it this way. His face ruined and his future with Sofia destroyed by his own split-second bad decision to enter Julie's car, what could possibly drive him to want to continue? With all of these considerations in mind, we can begin to conceive of the enormity of the task facing us in every instant of existence. We can begin to understand the burden of the present and why we so often refer to "for the future" or "in the past" as a way of

refusing the bleakness of the present. The saturation of labor in fatigue is there even in the imagining of effort stripped down to its bones.

It is in these bare bones, this outline of effort, that the instant becomes visible. Due to the trauma of effort, we can imagine ourselves staggering along under its weight, a route of fits and halts not unlike the image we retain of Sisyphus, eternally pushing the boulder up the hill. Indeed, Levinas states, "the duration of effort is made up entirely of stops" (22), moments when the boulder, the burden, seems more than we can bear. Unlike the melody, effort is parsed. It "takes on the instant, breaking and tying back together again the thread of time" (22), not as pretty a picture as conceptualizing time as a flawless braid, but time with its knotty, strained rope is probably closer to life as we experience it. Effort still "struggles behind the present," as if gearing up for the confrontation, but is "already involved in the present" (22-23) because of the commitment to exist. Effort in the instant is where the subject is posited. The *il y a* is outside of time, but effort as a "stoppage and a positing" (23) is the creation of the present by creating the instant; its stance in Existence is the positing of the Subject. Here is the link between noun and verb in hypostasis. Effort in its action "is to take on a present," what Levinas calls a "primordial event" (23), since the present is a beginning, but is also "subjection and servitude" because of taking up the burden of Existence, of Being, as the work of being. It is primordial in that it is "the first manifestation, or the very constitution of an existent, a *someone* that is" (23). Therefore, the present becomes present, that is the Subject's presence is manifested by taking up the present.

In effort's effectuation of the instant, it also "runs up against the seriousness of eternity" (23): Existence itself. And in its servitude through effort and action, a being's (fatigue or pain as)

condemnation is "being condemned to the present" (24), an "inevitable present" (23), with the deliberate slippage in the word "being" and the menacing overtones of "condemned."

In the lag of effort and fatigue, Levinas returns to the image of the hand lifting a weight. In not letting go, there is no one or no thing to call upon. Being "abandoned to itself, counts only on itself" (24). He calls this state "a breaking with the sources of life" (24). The twist is that it is not as if an existent is "forsaken by the world with which it is no longer in step"; rather, the existent is "no longer in step with itself, is out of joint with itself" (24), Levinas writes.

In weariness, the aforementioned lag is as if a being "is tarrying behind its existing" (24), establishing the present. Therefore, "existence is a relationship between *an* existent and itself" (25). The relationship is an "upsurge," the distilling of a being from Being. The lag of fatigue can't nullify this bond, but its effect is a dragging on a being. The lag is, according to Levinas, "nonetheless an *inscription* in existence" (25 emphasis added). Levinas uses the term "inscription" numerous times in Existence and Existents, each time emphasizing the relation of Being– the way we are sharply, deeply engraved into existence, to being – the way it means impressing something in memory in some manner. It is such a suggestive word for the films I've chosen in law, it signifies a case where if the accuser is proven wrong, s/he must receive the penalties for the crime s/he ascribed to another. The way the various crimes in each film are twined with the multiply shifting identities of the characters evokes such a sense. "Inscription" is also about preservation, in these films the efforts to exist, to preserve the self, are especially poignant. All of these senses of inscription permeate each of these films ("Inscribe" and "Inscription").

For Levinas, this inscription is "peculiar" because of its "hesitation." It is in this lag that the present is established because the existent exerts control or takes on Existence, indicating that

a Subject's existence is "by essence an activity" (25). Whether the existent is active or at rest, it is still an activity. "It is the act of positing oneself on the ground" with even inactivity signifying "the very tension of position, the bringing about of a *here*. The present is the idea of *being present*, being in the here and now. The fundamental activity of rest, foundation," and, interestingly enough, "conditioning," is, therefore, to Levinas "the very relationship with being, the upsurge of an existent into existence, a hypostasis" (25).

Thus, effort "can be victorious and hence equal to the realities it tackles" (20). This victory, its creativity "realized in spite of fatigue, in risk," is an "advance over oneself and over the present" (20). The final revelatory moments of effort's success are the moments of resolution for these characters, and yet it is not effort that forges the "relationship between the I and the world" (27). Even as early as 1947, Levinas made it clear that something outside of the self is involved.

THE WORLD: "WE ARE LIVING IN A MATERIAL WORLD, AND I AM A MATERIAL GIRL"[25]

The Waking Dream, in its blend of sleep, the unconscious, fatigue, and effort, provides these characters with an escape from Existence for periods of time that allow them to create their more powerfully positive self constructions. These constructions become an interface with Existence. It is important to remember, however, that waking life, "real" life consciousness, also offers opportunities for a break from the *il y a*. When conscious and awake, these characters, like real people, form attachments to and in the material world. Existence in the instant means *to be* in the world, a world that for Levinas is infused with objects. To be as being is action, "event" (27), but "To be in the world is to be attached to things" (Existence 27) – objects, nouns, substantives – all external to Being. These attachments act as anchors giving us substance and weight over the nothingness of the *there is*. Existence, amorphous, limitless, and undefined, takes on a form and an outline – a body and its accompanying surroundings and goods. Robert Manning explains that "human life in the world possesses always and already a natural sincerity, an innate region of meaningful being" (49). The Subject has a significance in the world, "that life already contains," as Manning puts it, "even before [a being] begins actualizing its own potentialities" (49).

Levinas explains the attachment to the world and its "things" through the "concept of intention" where intention is "joyous" (Existence 27) and fueled by desire. David Aames personifies this joyous desire. In fact, as has been stated previously, he is immersed in a material reality. At his birthday party, (ironic because it is an event that marks his entry into the material world, a day of awakening, a day "celebrating" being, and informed instant by instant through his choices), Brian enters the party with Sofia, wryly stating *sotto voce,* "Welcome to

Graceland." The reference is hardly oblique; David is a decadent king, and like the other king – King David – who coveted another man's wife, even though he already had many, exhibits aristocratic, nearly feudal, tendencies. No matter how charming they may be, they also bewilder Sofia, who later comments dryly, "It must be difficult to control all those people's lives – everyone is connected to you for survival in some way." Likewise, his home is a bit like a popular culture museum, with all of his objets d'art signed or original, such as the aforementioned Monet painting, the work by Joni Mitchell which hangs in David's private gallery, or the Van Gogh in the living room. Not merely reproductions, they are the "real thing."

During his party, David watches Sofia intently as she examines his home. She runs her hands through the light of a larger-than-life John Coltrane hologram and then idles in front of a case holding a vintage Pete Townsend guitar. When David joins her, preening although embarrassed, she asks him, "How did you get all this stuff. . .this life?" David's answer is revealed to McCabe in one of the prison sequences. David's money is inherited from a father who scaled the heights of the American dream. Aames Sr., continuing the Graceland metaphor, crafted his *own* story in his significantly titled book, Defending the Kingdom. David eventually will *defend* the kingdom, but at his birthday, it might be said instead that he is *enjoying* the kingdom. David's territory certainly reflects his lavish usage of his father's money. Everything in it, like his bedroom mirrors, reflects David's personality and gives shape to his existence. Levinas explains that unlike pure Existence, the Being of a being in the world is "never anonymous" (29); it is the locus of the field of Existence as an existent. His apartment in the Dakota is *David's* field. Levinas adds, "The world is what is given to us" (30). We are not the origin but the receptor, and symbolically, David has neither earned nor created anything in his world; his is a received paradise, but like the Garden of Eden, David's "Graceland" becomes a

---

[25] Madonna, "Material Girl"

"grace period" before his accident, and its heights presage his "fall from grace." Not without irony, David is afraid of heights.

David's museum-like abode accentuates the difference between desire and care. Desire displaces care for existence and instead is reserved for the objects of desire, which might "slake" it. As has been discussed, David's desires for the material don't "slake" (28) his thirst for something *otherwise*, in spite of the care he takes in preserving his objects. Nothing is used. The Townsend guitar, broken onstage, sits reverently under strategically placed lights in its glass case. Sofia, bemused, questions, "Is this what Rock and Roll has come to?" pointing up how remnants of the music that had, a few decades earlier, represented "spontaneity" and "intense sensory experience" (Stiegerwald 177), had by the 1990s been commodified into untouchable objets d'art for elite collectors like David. David is, presumably, too young to remember The Who in their guitar-smashing heyday – he just knows it is a "cool" thing to have. Somewhat of an artistic dilettante himself—he does, after all, paint the occasional snowboard and proves himself a proficient sketch artist both at Sofia's home and in jail – David enjoys being surrounded by not only the products of creativity, but the company of creative people. (Brian is a writer, Sofia a dancer.) David has the desire, it seems, but simply does not know what to do with it. He is "happy," "restless with desire" (30) – the experience of the essence of the world itself.

In spite of the fact that David may have desires reaching beyond his goals in purchasing and living among his objects, they are real. Although Levinas states that "*unconsciously* desire presupposes more than its object and can go beyond the desirable; . . . *implicitly* we have always understood the meaning of the word 'to be' in its bare being, since our objects do exist" (28). Sofia's approach illustrates an even deeper sense of existence in the world. From the moment we see her arriving at David's party, she stands out. Unlike his other stylish guests, Sofia wears a

bulky, obscenely puffy, down coat. Pulling it off, she nearly knocks over another guest. She apologizes to David saying, "I'm sorry about my coat. It's too big for your closet," a reference which could be taken as descriptive of her heart, as well. He answers, "It's amazing. I love your coat." She rejects his compliment: "No, I underdressed, no, I overdressed," an amusing play on words passed off as the faux pas of a second language speaker. She is both under and over dressed – doesn't fit the party. However, she is completely comfortable with herself, and their witty repartee continues: "Do you have another room to put it in?" Sofia asks. David calls over an attendant and suggests, "Madison Square Garden is nearby. I think it might fit there."

Sofia's desiring is "sincere" (28) in that the desirable, in this case her practical coat, is an end in itself; she doesn't have "ulterior" (28) motives beyond satisfying the desire. Sofia wears her unfashionable winter coat for *warmth*, an end in itself. Levinas uses food as an example for this highly nuanced distinction in desire, explaining the desire for food is "because we are hungry"; we don't have an ulterior motive to "eat in order to live" (28), even if that happens to be the outcome of eating. Further highlighting the difference between Sofia's desires and David's is what happens to her coat in David's Waking Dream. Her down jacket is exchanged for a hipper model. At the party, Julie also mentions her coat with an amused derision, because, as a fashion model, Julie would not be caught dead (pun intended) in such a practical piece of outerwear. Julie always wears what is in vogue, more like our early impressions of David in her preferences. David falls for Sofia precisely *because* she is different, or, at least, more like the man caged inside of him, stirring another desire, when to be in the world means he will push to move out of this "caged" state – "inwardness to the exterior" (29).

Desire in Levinas, however, is not to be confused with an ontological "care for existing" (28). He situates consciousness in a "closed circle," which is the world, closed because it

"effaces every ulterior finality" and the concern for existence can be "relaxed" (36). Levinas's experiences with the concentration camps have impacted his writing, however, because he makes exception for "times of misery and privation" when the "shadow of an ulterior finality" changes desire to need, and it "darkens the world. . .behind the object of desire" (36-37). Starvation instead of hunger, for example, changes a desire to eat into an act of pure survival. Likewise, then, the world closes down, and "Time becomes unhinged." All seems "absurd" (37). Although David's sufferings after the crash are obviously not on par with the devastation of World War II, they do lead to an approximation of the sensations Levinas describes. Time, like David, lurches around, disjointed, and his life does eventually feel like an absurd parody, enough so to lead to the alluring promise and even stranger choice held out by Life Extension.

David's care for his world prior to the accident is a care not concerned with the future. It is not linked to promoting survival, in its simplest sense. However, after his accident, he does exhibit a self-care quite different than what he displays earlier in the film. Instead of the grinning libertine plucking a single gray strand out of his full, gorgeous head of hair in the bathroom, he is genuinely concerned about his own future. The necessity of repairing his body and his struggle to live rise to the surface through the decidedly mixed blessing of his disfigurement. On the one hand, he had been handsome and rich, but also shallow and callous, even cruel. On the other, he was blissful in his ignorance of suffering. His disfigurement is a great teacher and leveler for him, but it is hard to say it is worth the price.

"At the very moment when the world seems to break up we still take it seriously and still perform reasonable acts and undertakings," Levinas writes. "To call it everyday," he adds, "is to fail to recognize the sincerity" (37) of our simplest, but most important desires. David employs the "best face man in New York," takes his medications and doctor's visits seriously, while he

prepares, as he states to McCabe, for a "new form of me," (echoed in the soundtrack through director Cameron Crowe's use of Peter Gabriel's song "Solsbury Hill": "I will show another me"). The David who ignored the responsibilities of his empire, coming in late to work, flirting with his female assistants, and skipping out of board meetings now covers his living room floor with memos that look not unlike the numbing rows of cubicles stretching out in Billy Wilder's The Apartment. Like the insurance company drones in that film, David seems to understand, for the first time, the endless minutiae involved in "defending the kingdom," the sheer man hours and effort that drive his publishing empire. He regularly conference calls with Thomas Tipp for his "planned reemergence," his work driven, for once, by a sense of purpose other than self-satisfaction – a purpose that provides him a future and need to survive.

Levinas, delving deeper into his explication of the world, posits objects composing a field of consciousness as ends in themselves since they are finite and real. Because a thing is the "end of an intention" or a desire, it is a "goal, a limit," and therefore, "an object is a being, the terminus of a movement" (29). Its existence arises from the movement, and the "sincerity" or intentionality of the movement verifies it, *substantiates* it. From desire, then, in its movement toward its intended, is both authenticity and substance. An object is an object of a consciousness – intended, the effect of an agency, given voice to, etc. David Aames, in the full flower of his supremacy, might have effected this substantiation, but it could also be viewed in reverse. David, damaged but purposeful, receives at least some of his sense of validation from *outside* of himself.

For Levinas, desire contains the "joy," which is the "promise of the desirable," (30) the promise that the object holds out. The object itself, though offered up to us, does not *contain* the desire, rather the movement toward that which is revealed to us does. Sofia perfectly describes

David when she playfully accuses him of being a "pleasure delayer." She recognizes immediately that David is the kind of man who is probably more interested in the "chase" than in actually contending with the woman he "catches." It is the promise of the desirable that fascinates him with his joy coming from the pursuit of the goal. It is a point Crowe emphasizes, accentuating it even in the party sequence in a scene where David rapidly introduces a socialite guest to a catering girl, both obviously former lovers. The women look at each other awkwardly until one comments, "I shudder to think what we might have in common." David just grins, both women seemingly variations of the same commodity, his self-absorption concretizing them as *objects*, not Others, different flavors he can choose as he prefers.

"Desire," by implying "a distance between me and the desirable," creates a "time ahead of me" and "also a possession of the desirable which is prior to desire" (30), but "the encounter with the Other" has the power to "break with the world" (30). David's encounter with Julie is such an event, breaking up David's world. Julie Gianni, sitting in her car outside Sofias's apartment the next morning, mirrors Sofia's "pleasure delayer" jibe, painfully but accurately describing his desire as being "more fun when you can draw it out." Explaining this to McCabe and drawing even further attention to the drug-like qualities of his "romances," David keys him in to the enhanced buzz of ""Keep[ing] relationships casual to the absolute breaking point."

The word "encounter" that Levinas uses in his discussion of the Other implies movement, what will become a Levinasian definition of "transcendence" in his later work. Still, even here, in this early writing, the idea of "breaking with the world" means that the Other will disrupt, disturb, and interrupt the subject. Sofia disturbs David because he thinks he has everything, the carefree, perfect life, until she makes him recognize something that he does not possess and cannot purchase, but it is Julie who "breaks" him open.

The Other may also "interrupt" the subject through compassion when the compassion is startling, comes from an unanticipated source, or in an unexpected circumstance. For example, Thomas Tipp unsettles David in that he inspires compassion and exhibits loyalty, both of which are not normally a part of David's world. Tipp urges effort, instructing David, "Claim your life," in essence asking *him* to "*defend* the kingdom." David perceives him as a drunken buffoon, but Thomas is right about the corporate takeover attempt and will become David's most dependable ally. In David's dream, it is Thomas who bails him out of jail, not Brian.

Similar "effects" from the encounter with an Other happen in both Memento and Mullholland Drive. In Memento, besides the obvious final scenes where Teddy shakes Lenny to the core, Natalie also impacts him. Lenny's empathy is so "engrained," if you will, that he responds to her and feels protective and responsible for her because he believes she needs him – it is the most ethical part of him that reaches for Natalie. Lenny himself inspires a similar effect in Burt, the hotel clerk, who, in spite of his boss' order, tries not to take too much advantage of Lenny's condition. He softens in spite of himself and is clearly fascinated and puzzled by Lenny. In Mulholland Drive, Coco, actually Adam's mother, at her traumatic engagement party, reaches over and pats Diane's hand reassuringly, consoling her after her awkward and somewhat naïve revelations of her origins and aspirations. Her gesture startles the spectator as well since neither the audience nor Diane understands exactly why Coco does this. Her compassion, never explained and working on a subliminal level, remains infinitely mysterious.

Levinas also employs the word "approached," which figures heavily in his other works, to indicate what he calls the "giveness" of the Other. In that strange elision that will complicate his later thinking, the Other here is a socio-cultural Other, approached through respect, obligations, rights, but also an opening to relationships with history, the intangible, and the

inexplicable. Levinas's conception of the ethical is already bound up in the Other. Whether the results are positive, as in the case of David, or negative, as in the case of Diane, or a mixed bag, as in Lenny's case, the point is that the Other disrupts in its alterity.

Humans are clothed with all of the trappings of society, from manners to institutions, as well as that which doesn't fit this order of things, such as the abject and the scandalous, the part of our world which is banished from sight, evoking closed doors, secrecy, back alleys, all "places which enjoy a sort of extraterritoriality in the world" (31). Both Memento and Mulholland Drive take us very deliberately into settings of "extraterritoriality," eerie places where the characters do not seem to belong. From Lenny's "Budget Inn" hotel rooms to Adam's "Barton Fink in hell" digs, the greasy spoon where Lenny meets up with Natalie to the double / triple entendre of "Winkie's on Sunset" where Diane hires her hit man, we are taken to places we never want to be. From the garbage strewn, graffiti covered lot behind Winkies, and the abandoned building where Lenny kills Jimmy and Teddy, to the Cowboy's deserted ranch illuminated by a single lightbulb, or the squalid offices where "dirty deeds," job-for-hire sleazeballs meet in Mulholland Drive, both films are saturated with the seamy and sordid. Even Adam carries a golf club with him for the occasional convenient window smashing. Conspiracies also underlie the main plots – the quadriplegic, midget ringleader and his gang (including not only the ominous, eyebrowless Cowboy, but also the unforgettable espresso – regurgitator) in Mulholland Drive, the "seven dwarves" board members in Vanilla Sky, and Teddy and company's manipulation of Lenny to destroy a "string of John G.'s" for drug-money rip-offs in Memento. The abject is covered over by the Waking Dreams, which render beautiful the sordid stories of lived events, even for Lenny by ennobling his revenge murders as a quest to restore honor. Through these dream worlds, the characters attempt to banish or keep secret what doesn't fit the social niceties of polite society

because these disturbing elements of life in the world are sites of ambiguity and horror, moving dangerously close to the experience of the *there is*.

In contrast, Levinas explains, man has looked at himself "in a mirror and [has seen] himself. He has washed, wiped away the night and the traces of its instinctual permanence from his face" (31). We wash away the traces of the *il y a* when we take on subjectivity and form. In these films, the traces are pictorial, conveyed through image. David, as already mentioned, does this "washing" after his first nightmare at the beginning of the film, which is not so odd given that he knows who and where he is. On the other hand, from Lenny and Rita, the two characters suffering from memory loss, the action stands out. Lenny does it each time he wakes up, and like Rita, uses "washing away" as a way of filling in subjectivity. Both almost instinctively shower when awakening despite the seemingly more pressing issues of where they are and how they got there, as if the instinct to wash rises up even before we name ourselves or claim our subjectivity. Rita is in the shower when Betty first enters Aunt Ruth's apartment, and Lenny takes one in Dodd's motel room, forgetting the fact that he is supposed to be laying in wait for Dodd. When we cannot "wash" away the *there is*, we end up like Diane, growing ever more troubled as subjectivity unravels in the face of Existence. Symbolically, Diane begins to appear more and more disheveled, more "unwashed" as her Waking Dream dissolves.

Likewise, clothing is at once the real fabric covering which is part of the social code of the civilized world and is also extended as a metaphor for the cloak of Existence, since nakedness does not affect it. Instead, nudity is also a type of clothing, "a *form*" (31). Invoking the light and its accompanying consciousness for the Subject, Levinas writes, "Form is that by which a being is turned toward the sun, that by which it has a face, through which it gives itself, by which it comes forward" (31). When Existence becomes an existent, it takes on a form, it has

a face, our face, the face of the Other, and through the *face* a being comes forward, it approaches. At Sofia's apartment, again outside of the Waking Dream, David and Sofia are in that moment of euphoria engendered by new possibility, the first experience of someone to whom we are attracted. They stay up all night exhilarated by the newness of it. At one point, they decide to draw portraits of each other's "shortcomings." When they share them with each other, David, significantly, has drawn a hyper-idealized Sofia, her hair covering an eye to add mystery and intrigue to her face. The form of Sofia's picture is a caricature dominated by a huge smile, a humorous nod to the Tom Cruise grin, dollar signs surrounding his face, the soundtrack fleshing out the drawing as Gabriel sings: "When illusion spins her net / I'm never where I wanna be / And liberty, she pirouettes / When I think that I am free / Watched by empty silhouettes / Who close their eyes, but still can see…Today I don't need a replacement / I'll tell them what the smile on my face meant. . ." ("Solsbury Hill"). David and Sofia dance around each other, "approach" each other through the face, and Crowe's separation of the real face from the drawn one only emphasizes how much the face informs.

Form conceals the nudity, the alterity, of pure Existence, and the relation with nudity "is the true experience of the otherness of the other," as far as the word "experience" may be used (Existence 31). When Lenny wakes up in Natalie's bed, her otherness, magnified by his "condition," is so alien that he is completely disconcerted and disoriented to the point of immediately reaching for clothing, donning her shirt instead of his own. For Levinas, the experience of the social matrix does not create the sense of uneasiness that "a being feels before another being, before alterity" (31). Like Lenny, David does not invite his lover, Julie Gianni, to his birthday party though he had slept with her the night before. She surprises him by coming anyway, dragging him to his bedroom and opening her coat to give him his "present." She is

stark naked underneath, and he is surprisingly uncomfortable with her. It is not simply her nakedness, but the proprietary nature of her assumptions about their relationship, illustrated by her changing of his alarm clock message to her own voice repeating, "Open your eyes" that had so unsettled him that morning. His rejection of her at the birthday party says more of his experience of her otherness than it does about his feelings for Sofia. Again, the Other in her alterity disturbs his sense of mastery of his world, his "Graceland" / feudal lord personality. Humans feel all sorts of emotions and passions in their relationships with others, but the "timidity" we feel "before the very otherness of the other" (32) is usually concealed. We are as uneasy with the existence of the Other as we are with our own. The uneasiness is covered over with the events of human interaction, the give and take of daily life, the interventions, "around which, as around a third term, social life necessarily starts" (32).

Sociality, as defined by Levinas, "is communication or communion" since its participants "are not simply in front of one another; they are along with each other around something" (32): a meal, other people, an idea. At Camilla and Adam's party, Diane is the outsider. The guests are seated at a table, the perfect symbol of gathering around something, in this case a meal as well as a celebration. The faces, however, have become strange and cruel for Diane. People whisper, hands over mouths, eyes turned toward her as condescending smiles are sent her way. Diane is left out of this "social matrix," feeling herself a social pariah, Camilla's "pity" guest. Tears well in her eyes, her expression registering just how much she wishes she had never taken the limo Camilla sent for her (just as, at the beginning of the film, "Rita" wishes she had never taken the limo ride up Mulholland Drive).

Communication is an important descriptor for Levinas in that he uses the same term describing the relation between subject and Other to describe the relationship between the

conscious and the unconscious within a single existent. The fact that Levinas uses the same word to signify the attempt of the of the conscious to reach the unconscious as he does to illustrate the subject's attempt to reach the Other – and that both remain eternally beyond our grasp – shows that, even at this point in his work, Levinas considers the unconscious as separate, otherwise. It is not simply a different aspect of the subject, but wholly other, unreachable, ambiguous, with depth, prior to the world of consciousness. His use of the term communication for both conscious/unconscious as well as relations with Others appears deliberate and certainly presages a great deal of his later work.

Continuing in his discussion of social relationships, Levinas states, "A neighbor is an accomplice" (32). It is an interesting choice of words given the magnitude of the word "neighbor" in his later writing. In the relation with the neighbor, the "ego loses nothing of its *ipseity*" (32), none of itself. It remains intact, whole. An accomplice can be an ally, a participator, an assistant, but someone we can never become. The subject remains the subject in spite of its relation with another, a relationship mediated by all of the social trappings of the material world, a fact that we cannot overcome. In spite of this experience of "social life," Diane remains individual and, consequently, fully alone. Relationships simply cannot disguise the experience of the solitary existent, which is to say that we cannot weld ourselves to the Other, despite our desire to do so to achieve that ultimate union that would (at least partially) relieve us of the burden of Being. We cannot, to return to the Sisyphus metaphor, achieve a relation that will take half of the weight off of our shoulders. The burden remains ours, and the Other remains forever exterior, outside of us in the material world.

In all three films, identity swapping is crucial as a strong, almost primordial desire, but also never fully achieved. Betty puts Rita in a wig that is the same cut and color as her own hair

and changes her clothes to the red and black of her Hollywood fantasy. "What pretty red hair she has," Rita says of the Gilda poster in Betty's Waking Dream, only to have Betty "mistake" it as a remark about Aunt Ruth. In Memento, Lenny, as previously discussed, takes on the Jimmy persona and, it is suggested, many others. In Vanilla Sky, the desire to merge into another is also expressed several times. Brian first compares himself to David in the near crash at the beginning of the film, exclaiming, "My own death was right there in front of me, and you know what happened? *Your* life flashed before my eyes," to which David asks, "How was it?" Brian responds, "Almost worth dying for." A similar sentiment is expressed during David's party, when Brian rants, "You're rich and women love you, and I'm from Ohio and I'm drunk," a line that is further obfuscated by the exchange, a few bizarre beats later, when David says, "You're not from Ohio," and Brian responds, "I know," before they continue with their original conversation. Then, there are the Ohio origins of McCabe, David's wholly created Waking Dream prison psychiatrist. To further complicate this connection to a "state" of seeming nothingness and everywhereness all at once (the American *il y a*?), Joe Gillis, the writer in Mulholland Drive's "twin" Hollywood story, Sunset Boulevard, is also from Ohio. In the same party scene, David also compares Brian to Frank Sinatra, who is far more representative of David's own lifestyle. The comparison only emphasizes Brian's desire to be like or be David Aames.

David expresses the same leaning toward a different self as Brian. At Sofia's apartment, David tells her, "I like your life," to which she adamantly states, "It's my life and you can't have it," a sentiment running through all three films. We can be affected, influenced, or impacted by another, it seems, but not *essentially* changed. "The individual remains fully *me*" (32), writes Levinas, which, again, means that the "I" will always remain fully alone and cannot ever

appropriate or consume the Other, no matter how hard one tries, or in these films, no matter how many methods one employs.

Levinas moves from the idea of sociality to love, which he introduces with a metaphor on eating, describing love as an "essential and insatiable hunger" (35). There are constructive meanings to this "hunger," for example, in friendship where there is something "inexpressible. . . something unfulfilled, a permanent desire" (35). Out of the absence of fulfillment, Levinas is able to state, "*The very positivity of love lies in its negativity*" (35 author's emphasis). However, we might say it is the "negativity" that also disturbs. Levinas acknowledges that in loving, especially "the random agitation of caresses," the lover realizes "that access is impossible, violence fails, possession is refused" (35). These films demonstrated what one possibility is as a result. In both Mulholland Drive and Vanilla Sky, there are scenes of disappointed, thwarted desire, manifested in a room full of people. In Mulholland Drive, Diane's heart breaks as Camilla kisses another girl, and she witnesses Camilla and Adam's "announcement." In Vanilla Sky, even Sofia notes how devastated Julie is by David's rejection, calling her, "The saddest girl to ever hold a martini." Additionally, in these three films, the *absent* Other, even in death, is a permanent desire, with the beloved's absence lingering like a cavity needing to be filled. Yet in the absence lies the *presence* of the Other as well. Love may be consummated without the Other being consumed, even in our most intimate attempts at possession where both the desire to possess and the attempt to possess are not realized. Levinas says that "The *other*" exists as an "objectless dimension," where, unlike hunger which "aims at something," desire for the Other is "a hunger for nothing," intangible, never satiated in its aims, an "unappeasable promise" (35). As such, "voluptuousness," or the "pursuit of an ever richer promise" cannot really be achieved because of the metaphorical "wall" thrown up by our permanent alterity. Without terminus, the

promise is also the promise of the future. David Aames, as a case in point, demonstrates how this promise is unattainable. In his Waking Dream, his mental projection of Sofia exists for David only as a mental construct, a perfect Other that mirrors his "best" self: the real, material Sofia did not, as in his dream, rescue him from the street, but rather stays away, unable to love the disfigured man. The "real" Sofia can only pity him, feel remorse about what could have been and mourn the lost potential of that past moment; while David's choice of LE reaches toward the future in recognition of the unfulfilled promise in the present.

Hunger, as the prime example of the simultaneity of desire and its object, reflects being in the world in the present. The objects of our existence such as breathing, eating, taking shelter, do not refer to the *care* of existence, but its actuality. As Levinas writes, it "is not for the sake of living; it is living" (36). When we take on existence, become subjects, we are "freed from the last implications of the instinct to exist, from all the depths of the ego which never will divest itself of its masks and whose positions are all poses, for whom confession is impossible – and to go sincerely to the desirable and take it for what it is" (36). That is what it means to be in the world, to be sincerely present.

Levinas, rather than figuring out what role the world plays in "the ontological adventure," instead points out that it is "another thing to look for that adventure *within* the world iteslf" (33 emphasis added). It is the world in its givenness, in the "adventure itself," that allows the existent a chance of escaping "anonymous being," the terror of the *il y a*. Even in the madness of our times, in our most extreme moments, we usually still manage (to some extent) the affairs of the day to day. The children are fed, the calls are returned, the job is performed, the bills are paid. These are not inauthentic acts. To say so, to Levinas, is to miss the point – the sincerity of them and of our intentions. As Bob Dylan says in his recent autobiographical sketches, one of the

most important lessons we learn is that “everyone you’ll ever meet is fighting a hard battle” (20). The assumption of inauthenticity negates the very real concerns that make up our living in the world, our very real attempts to effect change in the world, no matter how compromised those attempts may be when they are at the mercy of people with varying motivations and intentions. It is an aporia: “living in the world is consciousness inasmuch as it provides the possibility of existing in a withdrawal from existence” (38). This possibility is a “hesitation” in that it is an effort to be taken up. The subject-existent metabolizes from the hesitation.

LIGHT: "BLINDED BY THE LIGHT"

The givenness of the world is praxis because it involves both the theoretical aspect traditionally associated with contemplation as well as a *turning* attention to, suggesting action. The action of contemplation includes what might be called agency: "a desire, a movement to take hold of something, to appropriate something for oneself" (Existence 38). However, there is a distance between the ego and its object: "an attitude of reserve," that is a holding back or maintaining of distance. Intentionality arises in the space one keeps between object and intention. Levinas further extends his argument, explaining that the distance between object and intention "can indeed be traversed" while remaining at a distance. It is like the relation between an existent and Existence, where Existence is not separated from but rather "adheres to the I" (39), an I that is "enthralled by it" (39). The I is both held captive as well as being captivated, held spellbound by Existence. However, between an object and intention, it is not so one-sided a possession. There is a reciprocity in it. Maintaining the distance of intentionality creates a freedom, an object "yonder" we must come to and approach (39). (It is not a major leap to say that we *respond.*) This is the desire and its movement. When we contemplate an object, it reveals itself through form, which is "what is illuminated in it and apprehendable" (39). It becomes apprehendable because consciousness can to take hold of it, grasp its form, and understand it. "Thus while the I in the world tends towards things," writes Levinas, "it also withdraws from them" (39), in its own immutable distance, creating both an interior and an exterior.

Getting at intentionality from another angle, Levinas describes it as being "the very origin of sense" (40). Sense bridges exterior and interior. It cannot simply be dismissed as a "concept," a way of "making sense" of experience, rather it is "permeability for the mind. . . luminosity"

(40). Through the term "luminosity" he evokes vision and light as a source of sense perception, a consciousness coming from the Subject, a "apprehension" and a "first experience" of an object. It is not a stretch to say that the existent is a "sensible being."

Light becomes in Levinas "a condition for phenomena, that is, for meaning" (40), and therefore consciousness. Through light objects/the world are possessed, a possession that is consciousness and "not a burden," unlike the weight of Existence. In a rather Cartesian sense, like the *Cogito*, "Illuminated space all collects about a mind which possesses it" (41). Sight situates the relation between subject and object, the interior engulfing the exterior. "Thought is always clarity or the dawning of a light" (41), a presence very much in the present.

In Memento, the shots behind the opening credits display a hand, presumably Lenny's, shaking a Polaroid; however, each shake causes the photo to fade a little until it is just a blur, much like Lenny's memory. Since it requires light to develop a Polaroid, the dissolving of the image implies the *loss* or fading of light. The Polaroid depicts Teddy's blood-soaked and murdered body lying on the floor of a seedy and abandoned building. At the time of the photo, Teddy had just finished revealing Lenny's elaborate self-deception, and his revelations, when *brought to light*, push Lenny to kill the messenger as well as the message. The vanishing Polaroid, a serial killer-style memento, is the very last object of truth. Its erasure wipes clean all evidence in Lenny's memory and is the reverse of the possibilities of light.

Correspondingly, the moment Julie Gianni's car flies off of the overpass in her attempt to kill both David and herself, there is the violent sound of shattering glass and crumpling metal then absolute silence. In his DVD Director's Commentary, Cameron Crowe says there is "such a darkness about the silent car." From the crash, David loses consciousness and enters a coma, a vast world of darkness, for three months. Recounting the aftermath of the event to McCabe,

David states, "Here is what you remember from a coma: Nothing." That nothingness brings us full circle to the *il y a* and the loss of the Subject. In a similar vein, in the Mulholland Drive sequence following Theatre Silencio, there is a scene where Rita is unable to find Betty who, just moments before, had been beside her. Standing in the light of Aunt Ruth's bedroom, she hesitatingly opens the mysterious blue box, opening the door to consciousness for Diane on the other side of the dream. To arrive there, the camera zooms right inside of the box, plunging character and spectator alike into utter blackness – another disorienting, horrifying representation of the *il y a*. It is, as in David Aames's case, like suddenly being propelled into a coma, devoid of intention, light, and consciousness. What both characters experience is being able "to sink into unconsciousness and thus accord [themselves] a reprieve" (44).

Consciousness as knowing includes sensation where knowing becomes "the condition for any free action" (43). The subject's ability to withdraw enables it to remain free from captivity by the world through light and intention. Light *suspends* and "defines the I," which gains contour through consciousness. The Subject remains always outside the objects illuminated including its own history, a being "outside of being, and even outside of itself" (43). Extending this idea, we can see that the relation with the Other would also not exist without the conditions of light. The Other is not an object, but also remains "outside" of the "I."

Already in taking up subjectivity, taking up being, we commune with objects. As Levinas explains, "Existence in the world qua light, which makes desire possible, is, then, in the midst of being, the possibility of detaching oneself from being" (44). We escape the *il y a* through being in the world, its "hesitation, this interval in existing" it provides. The escape may mark freedom or perhaps is only illusion in that, regardless, the I is still tied to Existence. However, light is also a necessary condition for any relation with another. Existing in the world is "the amplification of

that resistance against anonymous and fateful being," becoming a conscious existence, a Subject; it is not "inauthenticity" or "evasion" (44).

In all three films, the absence of light often brings the characters closer to the *il y a*, breaking down that ontological distance between the Subject and Existence. A great deal of Memento, for example, takes place in dimly lighted spaces – abandoned buildings, motel rooms with the curtains drawn, dingy barrooms, and tattoo parlors – as if consciousness fades in conjunction with the illumination. And in Mulholland Drive during Diane's Waking Dream, for instance, it is night when Rita's accident occurs, when Adam is stripped of all power and possessions and makes the trek up to the Cowboy's corral, and when the girls go to Theatre Silencio. On the other hand, Diane's moments of discovery, both in and out of the Dream, occur either during the day or accompanied by intense artificial light. The most important one happens when the limo driver stops on Mulholland Drive as he takes Diane to Camilla and Adam's party. Camilla emerges from the side of the pitch black road to lead her up a hill, through dense undergrowth, on the garden path until they emerge into the intensely brilliant light illuminating the party. Here, Diane will relay the truth about her origins, her winning of the jitterbug contest in Canada, her inheritance, and her meeting of Rita on the set of The Sylvia North Story, a film in which she had desperately wanted to star, but instead was placed in a smaller role when Camilla was tapped for the lead. Essentially this story is almost a photo-negative of the Betty audition scene, from "only the director" not wanting her to his recognizing, in Camilla, that "this is the girl." It is also at the brightly lighted party that Diane will recognize the futility of her attempts to reestablish a relationship with Camilla who is fused to Adam's side. The "light" of the party reveals Diane as a conscious being without the intermediary of her Waking Dream or the encroachments of the *il y a*.

"Light, knowing and consciousness appeared to constitute the very event of a hypostasis" (44), Levinas writes, making light a non-negotiable condition for the movement from Existence to existent. The most obvious example of this in the films is David Aames in Vanilla Sky. The Spanish version of the film, Obre los Ojos, translates as "open your eyes." Indeed, this phrase is the defining line of both film versions – whether it is stated as a voice on an alarm clock, a voiceover whisper, or a request from Sofia or Julie; it marks every crucial moment in the film. Not only does Sofia tell him this, marking the beginning of his Waking Dream, in later scenes, when Julie repeatedly insists that her name is Sofia, she tells David, "Wake up, man!" as he ties her to his bed, demanding, "Are you for real?" The most important "opening" is David's coming to consciousness at the end of the film. He makes the decision to awaken and in his case literally become a person and a Subject again. It is on a skyscraper-high rooftop in stunningly bright sunshine that David makes this choice. His leap of faith is a fall into being, marked by a streaming montage of images indicating consciousness and knowing, a gathering of the subject. The final flash is of a hospital room, where, echoing the first line of the film, a doctor commands, "Open your eyes, David." This is his hypostasis.

HYPOSTASIS:

"AM I CHASING HIM, OR IS HE CHASING ME?"

Sleep and Place: "I Wait in This Place, Where the Shadows Run From Themselves"[26]

Sleeping, in Levinas, is not an escape from a particular event, or a bodily necessity performed at the end of the day, as we might usually think of it. For him, it is a limiting of Being "to a place, a position. . .a base, a *condition*" (66-67). In all three films, sleep and the space where it occurs are significant. To sleep just anywhere, to nod off on the subway or fall asleep reading a book, isn't quite the same as sleep tied to a personalized space. Levinas observes, "Only the concrete determinations of the surroundings, of the setting, and the ties of habit and history give an individual character to a place which had become our home, our hometown, our homeland, our world" (67). The place defined as our bedroom, for example, might be thought of as a base camp, the place where all of our other operations begin and the important things are strategized. The bedroom or other sleep space is also the most personal space we have, the one most tied to us. If we give a tour of our home, we might skip the bedroom altogether or show it very quickly with some embarrassment for what it may reveal about us. It is also a place we trust the most and feel safest. The vulnerability of sleep, our abandonment and trust in it, forges a relationship with the place where we sleep, making it a "refuge. . .in which being, without being destroyed, is suspended" (67). It is, ironically, losing consciousness in sleep that allows an existent to take a position and gain consciousness.

For Lenny, his motel room has become a refuge, one of the only places he feels comfortable because he recognizes his personal effects strewn about inside it – paper bags with his handwriting on them, notes to himself, his marked map on the wall. He can feel about as safe

there as anyone with his condition can. The room is "anonymous" but slowly takes on something of Lenny's character as he accumulates "mementos" of this current incarnation of his life. The person that we share our sleep with is important to our feeling of security within that vulnerable state. Whether a child, husband, wife, lover – even a pet, for that matter – they become part of our safe haven, our history and relation with sleep. For Lenny, waking for the first time with Natalie in his arms is at once alarming and reassuring, in the former case, because she is a total stranger, and in the latter, because she looks so much like his late wife. It isn't much of a stretch to assume that while he was sleeping or for the few minutes he was drifting back into consciousness, he may have imagined himself "home" again. This idea is further emphasized by his mental flashes of himself in bed holding a dark haired woman in his arms. Her face changes from his late wife's to Natalie's and back again. Lenny also repeatedly tells of waking up and reaching to feel the empty bed beside him, as if half expecting to find his wife there once again, even though he knows it isn't possible. To imagine himself home is to imagine himself Leonard.

For Diane, the bed is also important. There is a "Betty" bed at Aunt Ruth's and a "Diane" bed at the Sierra Bonita. Significantly, when Betty and Rita share the bed at Aunt Ruth's condo, it is after the two have seen the dead body on the Sierra Bonita bed. It is as if sharing a bed conjoins them, not just sexually, but also in terms of identity. They find no refuge in sleep with such uneasiness. Instead, Rita fitfully "opens her eyes" without waking, whispering "silencio" over and over in terror. This, of course, is the first step leading to the end of Diane's Waking Dream.

For David, his bed, bedroom, and sleep not only open the film (twice), but his position in cryogenic suspension, though never seen in the film, is where he will take the, as mentioned

---

[26] Cream, "White Room"

before, ultimate refuge. It is also the place from where he must struggle most to "open his eyes" and take up consciousness, also illustrating *being* suspended in life yet still attached to it – the perfect metaphor for the position or condition of sleep.

It is from these places of sleep that the characters have "staked a claim," and taken a stance in Existence. Consciousness will then pull out of sleep *as* a position. Consciousness comes out of sleep as in exiting it, arising from it, awakening from it. It is not consciousness that determines place. On the contrary, from sleep and a position, "consciousness *comes to* itself" (67, emphasis mine). It is as if each character has been "out" for awhile and is "coming around," that is, coming to him or her self in coming to consciousness. The base of place and sleep *supports* consciousness. A subject posits itself through position, a positioning of itself. The opposite of positionality in this sense is not a freedom from place but a "destruction of the subject, the disintegration of the hypostasis" (68).

In Memento, Lenny hires a call girl for a night, but instead of sex, he asks her to place his wife's personal effects -- her hairbrush, a book, her bra -- around the room and then to climb into bed. When he falls asleep, she is to get up and slam the bathroom door. His intent is to recreate the moment of his personal tragedy. The attempt fails because he can't return to the same haven of his former home or the kind of sleep that accompanied it. Instead, he awakes, and, overcome with emotion, frustration, and rage, throws the call girl out. Levinas sees emotion as that which "overwhelms" us (68). "Emotion puts into question not the existence, but the subjectivity of the subject; it prevents the subject from gathering itself up, reacting, being someone," he asserts. "Emotion is a way of holding on while losing one's base" (68). Diane deals with a similar moment of emotional instability, one that ultimately causes the complete collapse of her Waking Dream. When she and Rita awaken together, it is the emotional

disturbance of the ensuing scene at the Theatre Silencio that overturn her sense of self. Emotion disrupts place, causes "vertigo. . .*that finding oneself over a void*" (68 author's emphasis). When the emotionally shaken girls return from the Theatre Silencio, Diane as Betty, literally disappears from her own dream, leaving Rita to essentially fall into the endless void of the blue "Pandora's" box alone. Both girls essentially disappear into thin air.

The here of consciousness is anterior to all thought, "every horizon, all time" (68). It is the beginning, the formation of the existent as a singularity, *a* being that "gathers itself together…takes on things" (69). The body, therefore, marks the beginning of consciousness. Levinas sets the body up as a much more powerful and important element than more traditional philosophical or religious views which often separate the materiality of the body as inferior, positing it as a house to consciousness, as a symbol, or as a means of expressing the interiority of the Subject. But for Levinas, the body "is the irruption in anonymous being of localization itself" (69) and "in it is effected the very transformation of an event into a being" (70). In his hotel room, Lenny's awakenings are often signaled by physical sensations – cutting himself by a razor, for instance, or pulling tape from his leg. These moments tie him back to a body from which he feels disengaged and remind him of his own existence. The very wonder of his bodily recognition is also what Levinas might call a "strangeness" (9), with his body providing him "an experience of materiality" (69). David Aames, through the incredible impact that his facial disfigurement makes on his life, is a walking illustration (as are Lenny's tattoos) of the importance of the body to conscious life.

The Present And Hypostasis

Levinas explains that taking a position and the positions itself are "the very event of the instant as a present" (70). Rather than the present appearing, as we often think of it, an "infinite

series" (71) of instances, it is instead unaware of the infinite, interrupting it, but commencing again rather than enduring or continuing since to continue would be to create a history. The present "thus can have no continuity" (71) but is apprehended as discontinuous, discrete instances without accumulation. Lenny, of course, through the guise of (however real or constructed one reads it) his condition, exemplifies the idea of "being" in the present. He never picks up where he left off. Levinas calls the present "a situation in being" where there is both Existence and an existent or Subject. Its fleetingness "is the ransom paid for its subjectivity, that is, for the transmutation, within the pure event of being, of an event into a substantive – a hypostasis" (71). Transmutation happens to the being, however, not to time. Levinas is careful to distinguish between the idea of a moment of time, the present, frozen or suspended, for example, from the idea of it as a "halt, not because it is arrested, but because it interrupts and links up again to the duration to which it comes, out of itself" (71).

The best example of this is when David, in the bar with his friends, first talks to Life Extension tech support Edmund Ventura. In this moment of the film, David is told exactly how self-constructed his world is, how much he controls what happens to his Waking Dream. David, refusing to believe it, expresses his annoyance at the noise of the bar patrons surrounding him. Instantly, the patrons freeze and there is dead silence – a silence that is so unusual and complete it is shocking, arresting, the sound of no sound whatsoever. Time doesn't stop, but it is interrupted, and then, as if David had pressed a button, it picks back up again. It is but an instant come and gone, but after this moment, the next instant seems a non-sequitur. Time has not changed, but David has. The present "is the effectuation of the subject" and "breaks with the duration in which we grasp it" (72). For all three characters, it is the chosen awakening in the present as a position that creates them as subjects, rather than the stuff of dreams.

The Present and Time: "In the End Is My Beginning"[27]

The instant itself, like a Being taking on being, "struggle[s] for existence" (74). The instant of the present is really, then, "the accomplishment of existence." Levinas likens each instant to a "beginning, a birth" (75) in which "existence is acquired" and only then "links up" with other instants. Levinas calls the instant a "conquest," explaining that "The conquest of Being continually recommences. . .at discrete instants" all "issu[ing] out of nothingness" (8). The choice of the word "conquest" is interesting in that it suggests a battle, a warlike effort to take up being. For Lenny, of course, it is always a battle, each moment he lives visibly a conquest in every sense of the word. Every time he "awakes," he must begin again, literally *re*-commence, not in the place where he left off, but at the very beginning. Each time he regains consciousness, he starts from a nothingness imposed on him by short-term memory loss, where the past is an empty space signifying nothing, and from that emptiness he must construct a present and a self, often very, very quickly, using whatever faculty is at his disposal – logic, instinct, sheer terror, absolute puzzlement, or ennui. But using these faculties already presumes an existent. Levinas assures us that this event is paradoxical – you must already exist to take on Existence – but he sees this "duality" as apparent in various situations "where the adherence of existence to an existent appears like a cleaving" (9). In the abrupt scene shifts that indicate time and memory lapse as well as the abrupt dialogue shifts as Lenny repeatedly awakens again, this cleaving is revealed. Lenny is obviously a living human being, but his animation seems more like an overcoat he shrugs into than a real personality. They are two distinct entities that briefly and continuously are joined and sundered.

The moments or instants of Lenny's life, rather than presented as the single-minded obsession they appear to be, come to resemble impulsive instants as the movie progresses. His

---

27

tattoos may dictate his goal, but his condition constantly throws him into locations and situations that determine his actions instead. What is amazing is that he is able to accomplish anything at all. When Lenny takes on each beginning moment, he seemingly has nothing to lose for he "possesses nothing" (14), both literally and figuratively. Literally, he owns nothing; his car, clothes, and money are stolen. Figuratively, he possesses nothing in that he has no short-term memory, and therefore, assumingly, no past. Levinas likens such a state to a fire that "consummates its being in consuming itself" (14), and, indeed, Lenny burns very brightly in the moments we see him, achieving and consuming each self he takes on before retreating into his narcoleptic spaces again. Though Lenny's situation implies a certain freedom for the subject, since there are no *ties* to past or memory, no strings attached to this subject in terms of the normal bonds of responsibility, Levinas indicates otherwise. Lenny *already* has something to lose, "for something is already possessed, if only the instant itself" (14). As Levinas states, "A beginning *is*," and it is a recursive move, the commencement of activity and a turning back, a conservative effort of a being that "possesses itself while it is" (15). It is "already encumbered with the excess of itself," Levinas explains, but "one has to run through the adventure to its end" (15). This certainly happens to Lenny; he cannot stop and "re"-position himself. For example, "awakening" while running, Lenny is forced to contend with the residue of the "last" Lenny and *his* instant because Dodd is shooting at him. Although Levinas obviously is not writing in such literal terms, this scene does make his investigation of beginning visible.

Levinas also explains the instant as a "relationship" not with past or future instants, but with Being. The paradox of the relationship and its beginning in the instant is that "What begins . . .does not exist before having begun, and yet . . . what does not exist . . . must through its beginning give birth to itself, . . .without coming from anywhere" (75). To be more exact, "its

point of departure is contained in its point of arrival" (75). The arrival of the present is also then a withdrawal from the present. In Mulholland Drive, the opening scene of Rita's near-death is both her arrival in the present instant of Diane's dream, but also marks the withdrawal of Diane into her dream. In the same manner, the opening shot of the film is Diane's empty bed, indicating an absent other, Diane. The same bed is one of the last shots in the film, but this shot reveals a woman's corpse. The same point of beginning and withdrawal is a feature of Memento. Lenny's decision to set up Teddy's murder via the license plate tattoo, and then following through with the deed, bookend the film. It is also the instant where the black and white sequences, which play forward and cover the past, meet the color sequences, which unspool backward, a future moving backward to the instant. The two sequences meet at Teddy's death scene and from there, for the last scene, Lenny and the spectator are in the present – again a movement of withdrawal and arrival expressed through film technique.

In this movement, in the birth of the instant, Levinas states, we find "the whole mystery of the time of a creature" (75). David Aames, like the protagonists of the other films, showcases the mystery of time, compounded and illustrated by the effort of the Waking Dream. His moment of suicide is both a withdrawal, but in that same instant is also an arrival, a beginning of his new "life." His "splice" is a literal instant of arrival and withdrawal. Each character's movement of the instant indicates the presence of the present and a creation of the Subject.

TIME AND THE OTHER

"TIME IS ON MY SIDE. YES, IT IS"[28]

As the subtitle of this section suggests, the mystery of time is only revealed after the instant and the beginning of a Subject. It stands on the "side" of an existent in the sense that it is not eternal and not a part of, or on the "side" of, Existence itself, which is time-less. The title, on the other hand, with its emphasis on the Subject's temporality, also stresses time is outside of the subject. It is not "my" time – "it" is outside, other. It comes to me from somewhere else. Rather than transcending the subject, an existent moves toward the outside and toward alterity in a movement Levinas calls "excendence" which he associates with the word "existence, where the emphasis is put on the first syllable" (81). The Other is an integral part of the relationship between an existent and time. Levinas's brilliant accounting of subjectivity ends with the interplay between time and the Other, precisely where some of his better known works, such as Time and the Other, Totality and Infinity, or Otherwise Than Being, or, Beyond Essence take up. Like the existent he so eloquently describes, his own point of departure is contained in his point of arrival. For this final section, I will look at time and the Other starting with the past, moving to the future, and then returning to the present in a doubling back movement of my own.

The Definitive Past: "I Know It's Over"[29]

In the instant, the simultaneous creation of the Subject, a definitive existent creates a disconnect with the past. The instant is new and therefore breaks with the past. As previously stated, time is not continuous as in its usual depictions. The approach of what is to come makes the past, past. In the preceding sentence, "is" marks the present and "to come" marks the future.

[28] Rolling Stones, "Time Is on My Side"
[29] The Smiths, "I Know It's Over"

In the three films under discussion, the absent Other is in the past; in all three cases, her presence is no longer present, and yet her absence is the exigence of the plot. Likewise, her absence stems directly from the actions of each protagonist, for each is culpable in her death. In Mulholland Drive, Diane's culpability is most obvious. She has literally demanded the destruction of her former lover. Before pocketing his fee, the hired hitman asks her, "Are you sure you want this?" to which she emphatically responds, "More than anything in this world." It is her single-minded obsession, like Lenny's, that leads to Camilla's murder. Her hands may not be bloody, but the responsibility is solely hers.

In Memento, Leonard is also culpable in his wife's death. It may not be premeditated murder, as in Diane's case, but it is an involuntary homicide nonetheless. His "condition" may excuse him from direct blame, but presumably he would have been under some kind of surveillance – a halfway house, a prison, or a mental institution, as the official Memento website and DVD Extras contend. The gateway image to both features a newspaper with a front page headline heralding the escape of a mental institution inmate and the suspicious deaths connected to him. However, in the movie, the only one watching him is Teddy, who must have helped Leonard escape whatever safeguards may have been established for him. In his disguised Sammy Jankis story, he lets slip to Teddy that Sammy ended up in a mental hospital. Still, there is a large gap between Leonard's wife's death and his re-emergence as "Lenny," unintentional serial killer. As Lenny, conversely, he *is* responsible for the accumulation of deaths in his wake. Even the first time he kills to avenge his wife's death, he still is committing murder – cold blooded and premeditated. Yet he does not have to be "at any moment definitive" (85). The commencement of the existent is possibility, a new beginning, although Levinas adds, "Yet I always carry along my past whose every instant is definitive" (85). Regardless of whether he

remembers or not, his past is both defined and defining. By the time he murders Teddy, the excuse of his condition has long since vanished, no matter how sympathetic he seems to the spectator.

Subtle hints sustain the theory that Lenny has some idea of what he is capable, despite and possibly because of his condition. After his chase with Dodd, he calls Teddy to come and rescue him. When Teddy arrives and they confer about the captive Dodd, Lenny suggests marching Dodd to his car by gunpoint. Teddy asks sarcastically, "Why would I have a gun?" to which Lenny, with innocent dark humor, pulls a gun out of the bedside drawer and looks at it, surmising, "It must be his. I don't think they'd let someone like me carry a gun." Teddy adds wryly, "I fuckin' hope not." The fact that not once, but several times, Lenny retains a gun in spite of the frightening possibilities presented by "someone like" him having one reveals a disquieting intentionality.

Lenny also indicates his expertise in destroying the evidence of the murders, which again confirms his culpability. When Lenny returns to Natalie's house, panicked by the encounter with Dodd, he shows her a Polaroid of Dodd gagged and bound. In an effort to calm him, Natalie attempts to rip apart the picture, but the attempt ends in frustration with Lenny interjecting offhandedly, "You have to burn them." It is such an odd piece of information for him know. If he did not know how to destroy Polaroids as Leonard, then he is remembering something as *Lenny* despite a "condition" which he claims precludes this possibility. This incident would be very telling in and of itself, but additionally insinuates that Lenny has destroyed Polaroids often enough to know how to do so quickly and effectively. Throwing his photos in the garbage is not acceptable because they offer evidence of murder. It is further verification of his culpability as is his constantly shrinking police file, which Teddy advises him is his own doing, Lenny's self-

creation of a puzzle he can "never solve." It is the definitiveness of the past that he attempts to undo. It is not just his wife's absence that is his exigence to action, it is also the "missing" John G. Levinas states that "A subject is not free like the wind, but already has a destiny which it does not get from a past or a future, but from its present. . .If commitment in being thereby escapes the weight of the past. . .it involves a weight of its own. . .against which a solitary subject. . .is powerless" (104). In Lenny's case, it is less the past weighing him down than the weight and burden of his own existence in the present that is a burden. His attempts to obliterate the past do not leave him burden-less, despite his questionable desire to be just that. The irony is that without his "burdens," i.e. his existence, Lenny not only doesn't have a past or future, he no longer has a present. And the present, really, is all Lenny has.

In Vanilla Sky, David *seems* the least culpable of the three – since his past involves neither murder nor homicide. Nonetheless, he is deeply culpable, however indirectly, because his actions culminate in Julie Gianni's suicidal crash. His casual dismissal of Julie the night of his birthday party is almost instinctively or, at the very least, empathetically deduced by Sofia Serrano in a single glance, even though she doesn't know Julie or the details of her relationship with David. David claims Julie is stalking him, but Sofia seems to understand Julie's pain, despite the fact that Julie has already publicly mocked her. In her "martini" description to David, Sofia shows recognition of Julie's loss and despondency; since Julie has in effect become the past for David, his attitude and actions toward her cannot be taken back.

By the next morning, David's high from his evening with Sofia allows little room for Julie's distraught low. As the past, she is, literally, a "drag" to him, a weight pulling on his euphoria. Outside of Sofia's apartment, Julie tells David, "You just never seem to be there for your friends until they've already given up on you." (She could be speaking on Brian's behalf as

well.) David assures her, "I'm not blowing you off," but he is, and Julie knows it. And David knows she knows it and cannot escape her condemnation.

Time breaks the contract with Existence and at the next instant resurrects the "I" and its commitment again, but it is not a series of new experiences confronting an identical subject. Lenny's experiences, for example, are a mixture of repetition and newness, but his "selves" are never identical; each instant for Lenny is actually a little death as a "condition for a new birth" (94). David's experience of the instant is of time as a "response to the hope for the present," and if the present is also the Subject, then hope is "the very expression of the 'I'" (94), where "Hope hopes for the present itself" (94-5). In his case, his hope is a hope to have a present and, in achieving one, for it to be a better present. Levinas holds out the prospect that "At the very moment where all is lost, everything is possible" (95). However, the personhood of the protagonists or "'*personality*'" is dependent on or founded on a being's "*very need for time* as for a miraculous fecundity in the instant itself, by which it recommences as other" (95).

All the same, the Subject cannot provide for its own alterity, an otherness that would create a new instant and not simply a resurrection of one, inducing the "impossibility of saving oneself by oneself and saving oneself alone" (95). The salvation of an existent, Levinas implies, "can only come from elsewhere, while everything in the subject is here" (96). In Vanilla Sky, Julie Gianni is the most abject of characters, and the Other with the greatest impact on David, despite his love for Sofia. During David's car ride, we can see him slowly being pulled outside of himself and his enclosed little world. Julie actually offers possibility, but David ignores and rejects her. He does recommence as Other after his ride with Julie, however painful that otherness may seem at first.

Once in her car, David is awkward, not wanting to hurt her, but condescending at the same time. His prolonged cat and mouse game ending in a one-night stand has done damage that cannot be undone. After all, it is a mere 24 hours since he bounced out of bed with her, promising to call. Although the damage is definitively past, the present is hope, another instant for both of them. However, in the car David actually *increases* the damage when Julie asks him his opinion of her CD which she plays for him. He calls it "vivid." When Julie states that she has made the kind of music she would like to buy, David quips, "if you can reach just one person. . ." which cuts her to the quick. He has not only rejected her, he has also rejected her art. The conversation takes a turn as she asks, "When did you stop caring?" His retort, "Caring about what?" shows just how distanced he is from the conversation and from Julie. She, beginning to grow agitated, adds, "about the consequences of the promises that you made." He denies any promises, plays dumb, as it were. When Julie confesses her love for him, he flounders attempting to pass it off as a misunderstanding, that he assumed they were just friends. Julie implores him beseechingly, "You've been inside of me. . .I live with this aching possibility that you might call me to do something," David's fear level accelerating as the car does in time to Julie's words. He tries to soothe her, "Let's go home and we can talk this out. . ." These offers come too late, and it is only at the moment where her alterity shakes him outside of himself that he reacts. The spectator is shaken, too, when the visual "stasis" of the scene's instant "enters time," accelerating to its stunning conclusion. Anger amplifying his fear, David commands her to stop the car while she continues her long held-in emotional appeal completely disregarding him. She continues over him, "When you sleep with someone, your body makes a promise whether you do or not!" In a final attempt to pierce through the social veneer that permits lies, secrets, and silences, she demands, "Do you believe in God?" David's totally

inadequate and again condescending response is to say, "Ok I love you," several, frantic times. In his first dream following the crash, he describes Julie as having been "upset" but tells Sofia he doesn't know why, not yet recognizing his part in the calamity.

Although Julie is the exigence to action – the accident leaves him scarred on so many levels – he also must contend with the additional costs: Brian's friendship and the loss of a possible relationship with Sofia. They, too, are lost through his carelessness. However, he never admits culpability for his actions to McCabe, who is essentially his confessor figure. Levinas speculates that the instant of subjectivity is "tragic," and perhaps it is only time, that, "far from constituting the tragic, perhaps shall be able to deliver us from it" (78). These are instants of tragedy; *all* the lives in these films are marked by the tragic. However, "being" does not only mean suffering. The future may offer something *otherwise*.

The Present: "All Because of You I Am. . .I Am"[30]

"The present, free with respect to the past, but a captive of itself, breathes the gravity of being in which it is caught up" (78), Levinas writes. The present is not tied to the past, but to itself, its own birth, its life and force lying in the weight of Being to which it is tied. He goes on to say that "It is a being and not a dream" (78), an interesting word preference given the focus of the films at hand. An existent is not, as Shakespeare would have us believe, the "stuff that dreams are made of," but has substance, is substantiated in the stance of an instant, that is, the present. From David's "Living the dream, baby," to Diane's "It's like a dream world," to Teddy's comment to Lenny, "You're living a dream, kid," all three films show some recognition of the difference between existing in a Waking Dream, hoping in the present to resurrect the Other they have destroyed in the past, and existing as a present existent in time.

[30] U2, "All Because of You"

Each of the main character's responsibility lies in the present which curtails any idea of absolute freedom, or, as Levinas puts it, "The freedom of the present finds a limit in the responsibility for which it is the condition" (78). And here Levinas turns to what will mark all of his later work: "A free being alone is responsible, that is already not free. A being capable of beginning in the present is alone encumbered with itself" (79). The protagonists' dreams dissolve leaving them firmly in the present, burdened or "encumbered" with it, tangled up in themselves and, most significantly, alone. David's "friends" on the top of the skyscraper are all synthetic people, his own constructions, either idealized versions of someone he once knew or popular culture pastiches, fleshed out, reified fragments of consumer life. Diane's visions, ranging from the beautiful Camilla to her maniacal parents running in under her doorframe screaming are all mere spectres. Lenny's film-length monologue may be for the spectator's benefit, but it is delivered to himself.

The doubling back movement of the present "is the affirmation of the *I* already riveted to itself, already doubled up with a *self*" (79). In film, we cannot "see" the riveting of ego to the self, but these films suggest it by showing the dual nature of these characters. For all three, to be in the present induces the curious sensation of being a dual self – Leonard and Lenny with Sammy as a convenient point of elision; David who commits suicide and David who led a happy life with Sofia; Diane as Betty who creates Camilla as Rita. The present becomes a Subject, a being. "From there," Levinas interjects, "results the essential ambiguity of the 'I'" where "The 'present,' the 'I' and the 'instant' are moments of one and the same event" (79-80). The event is hypostasis, visibly taking place where the dream ends and the present begins.

In our own lives, this is impossible to discern. Film, though, gives a much more subjective position from which we may appreciate these shifts. The "time" of the Waking

Dream is in the present when it is occurring, certainly, but when the dream ends, the characters must take a position in regard to their existences. This "'halt' of the present is the very effort of taking a position, in which the present joins with itself and takes itself up" (80), Levinas explains. The coming together of the dream life with waking life is just that joining of self with self. As subjects, their "action does not consist in willing but in being" (81). Instead of willing the dream, they must *be*. Action directed at the world, at objects, at change, in other words, *being in the world*, involves will. But crucially the *being must* come first. Additionally, the subjects are ambiguous and inscrutable, not just to the audience, but to themselves in the world of the film they inhabit. Even they are having difficulty deciphering what is past, what is present, and what is really of themselves. The beauty of these films is that even after leaving the theatre, over drinks or coffee, even days later, we work to solidify the ambiguities, figure them out along with the flow of time in the films. Yet they are not intended to be resolved, frustrating our own determination to resolve these questions in *our* selves.

Resolve (resolving to be) is always present and in the present. Not only does resolve lie in the present, so does the Other. Both offer beginnings and demand a response/responsibility. It is *from* the Other that the future is possible, from the Other that it is offered. The past is defined, its choices made. Each moment of the present that is captured in all three films (though, as we know, film present only exists in *our* present, since it is, on celluloid, a captured, canned present) is the moment of resolution and a new beginning possible only because of the combined possibilities of the present and the Other. The moment of resolve surfaces when the characters apprehend their responsibility and culpability in the death of an Other – Mrs. Shelby, Julie Gianni, Camilla Rhodes. The films' protagonists have tried every evasion and are backed up

against not just their own interior walls, but the endlessness of Existence itself. It is the Other who will ask the question that unsettles and disrupts.

The other "bears alterity as a quality" (97), a quality we need in order to break free from the vice-grip of our personal dream. We think of the relation with the Other as being an identification with, a finding of commonality, a fusion with similar "selves" – sort of a cosmic harmony. The "we" places the other "alongside of oneself, and not facing one" (97). What is in common, for Levinas, is the third term we coalesce around, but only when the I-You relation precedes it. "It is not a participation in a third term," he explains, but rather "it is the fearful face-to-face situation of a relationship without intermediary, without mediations" (98). The Other, then, is not simply the alter ego, the bolstering reification of the subject. "He is what I *am not*," Levinas declares. "He is the weak one whereas I am the strong one; he is the poor one, 'the widow and the orphan'" (99, italics mine). The Other can also come to us as "the stranger, the enemy and the powerful one" (98). The relation is, by nature and by necessity, "initially asymmetrical" (99). For the characters, facing resolutions on multiple levels – to take up being in the present, to acknowledge the weight of their own definitively past culpability, to face another in the desire for pardon – is the crux of the films and the weight of every instant of the present. Contained in it is, ultimately, the ethical moment of resolution.

Mulholland Drive: "People Are Strange, When You're A Stranger"[31]

In Mulholland Drive, when Rita opens Diane's blue box and is devoured by it, Diane's dream completely dissolves. From the black hole of the open box, we jump to a woman, presumably Diane, lying on her bed. The Cowboy opens her door and says, "Wake up pretty girl." Diane awakens to face the burden and responsibility of the present, but it is a weight so heavy and requiring so much effort she can barely get out of bed. However, the present also

holds out the hope of freedom. It is not freedom itself, as Levinas explains, but the imagining of freedom that "explains the despair which marks the engagement in existence in the present" (90). To wake up is in many ways more than depressing since sleep, for Diane for example, offered the illusion of freedom, in its temporary release from herself.

In Diane's Waking Dream, Adam meets with the Cowboy at his ghostly ranch. The Cowboy asks him, "What does it mean to lead a good life?" which is at heart the essential question of philosophy. The question resonates in that up to that point, a "good life" to Adam had been "*the* good life," which, in the parlance of our time is one defined by material pleasures and power. Having lost them, Adam is forced to define his answer differently. The Cowboy purposefully obfuscates the two, warning Adam, "You will see me one more time if you do good. Two more times if you do bad." Adam *will* only see him one more time, at his real life, Mulholland Drive party. However, if we assume all messages in the Waking Dream are a product of Diane's creative ability and effort, it is *she* who has the opportunity to do good or bad. Opportunity, with its implications of freedom in the present, which is always a *present opportunity*, "has a presentiment of a mode of existence where nothing is irrevocable" (91). Diane essentially "sees" the Cowboy twice – at Adam's party and at her bedroom door. Therefore, Diane has "done bad." She awakens with this knowledge, and contravening any thought of freedom, she faces the definitive subjectivity of the 'I'" which is irrevocable. Her definitiveness is accomplished in the instant of the present, which is what Diane is left with, unable to bear the implications and self-accusations of its burden, unable to face an Other which prevents for her "the order of time" (91).

Robert Bernasconi writes in Existents and Existence's Foreward that we "discover. . .a self riveted to being" in the moments "when we experience pure being in the anguish and despair

---

[31] The Doors, "People Are Strange"

of nausea as an internal mechanism, or when in shame we are unable to hide from ourselves" (x). Diane's last day is exactly such a discovery. After being awakened by and confronting her neighbor, she makes coffee, important in that the final scene of the film returns to her on the evening of the same day. In other words, there is no "new" day for her. The camera pans across the blue key to her coffee cup, and then to Diane, shaky and unblinking, staring, riveted, at the cup and key. Still in her bathrobe, she appears not to have moved all day. Time, in this case, is *not* on her side, for each moment, Lynch seems to suggest, remains forever the same, filled with guilt, angst and inescapable horror. For Diane, there is no Other to break the madness of self implosion. It is as if she has insomnia, and as Levinas reminds us, the *there is* always returns, and we come full circle in our entanglements with Existence. He continues: "The hypostasis, in participating in the *there is*, finds itself again to be a solitude, in the definitiveness of the bond with which the ego is chained to itself" (84). Diane, possibly more than any of the other characters, faces this brutal embrace. It is a defining bond in that a Subject is a defined existence. The "definitive element" Levinas describes is "solitude," the ultimate recognition that, "I am alone, that is, closed up in an existence that is definitively *one*" (85), as if the Subject without the Other is entombed in the self. Diane is utterly alone, cloistered in her house, left with horrifying ways of being. She can neither face herself and her existence, nor be left facing Existence itself, let alone face the accusation in the eye's of another person, as we see in her last seconds.

Diane's "instant" of the present seems to unfurl as she sits mesmerized. She suddenly blinks, shakes herself like a bird settling its feathers, and a thunderous knock on the door is heard. The senior couple from her Waking Dream bus trip, (a couple I read as her parents), released from the blue (Pandora's) box, run in under the front door, now frenzied, insect-sized, frightening. A single female scream rips through all other sounds, and it is this scream that

causes Diane to jump up and run to her bedroom, chased by the suddenly full size parent figures stoking her shame, guilt, and fear. In the most crucial moment of resolve, she lunges across the room as they reach for her, grabbing a gun and shooting herself. Like the past already defined, she falls into the same position as the earlier dead body on the bed, enveloped in Theatre Silencio fog and smoke. Levinas writes, "It is not enough to conceive of hope to unleash a future" (91). Diane has destroyed her hope in destroying the Other, Camilla. Even earlier in the day, her brief visions of Camilla, the illusory hope of her return weren't enough to "unleash" the restorative powers of the future.

Lynch seems to send a similar message in his closing scenes. As the fog swirls around Diane's dead body, obscuring her, the dark, terrifying keeper of the blue box who dwells behind Winkies on Sunset – stands framed by the fog. The dark side of Hollywood is released, a dark side that does not die with the death of a single young girl. Cinema, like Existence itself, remains. This symbolic figure, invoking all that makes us unnerved and uneasy, is followed by translucent black and white images of a smiling "Betty" and "Rita" superimposed over the night skyline of Hollywood. As the soundtrack swells, they, too, fade, and the blue-coiffed matriarch of Theatre Silencio appears, whispering "Silencio" – all that is left and all that endures, the impossibility of death and "the universality of existence even in its annihilation" (56). The screen fades to black followed by the words "Dedicated to Jennifer Syme, 1972-2001." This dedication is (oddly enough) the most moving part of the film. Although it is outside of the narrative, it indicates that, beyond the voyeuristic pleasure of unraveling Lynch's themes and plots, there are real people, genuine girls from small towns, still arriving in Hollywood with dreams of being "discovered" and catapulted into stardom. Whoever the girl in the dedication really is, having it

follow this particular film coupled with her early death cannot help but evoke a feeling of empathy and loss for the character of Diane Selwyn.

Finally, in a summative vision of time, Diane's unforgiven past, hopeless future, and present without the Other, merge. Between the moment when the Cowboy calls to Diane to "wake up" and the next shot, the screen briefly goes black for a moment. The woman on the bed within seconds becomes a decomposing body, her mottled rigor-mortis on a disintegrating mattress visible only through multiple viewings. This quick second of film really is the whole movie – from Diane alive and dreaming to Diane dead. The woman, however, looks like she could be *either* Diane or Camilla. The two girls have so merged identity in Diane's world that the body has become a symbol for both. Ultimately, it does not matter which girl it is; they are both, by the film's end, dead. This moment is similar to Memento's bringing together past and "future" in the moment of present at the end of the film. Past and future will crash into each other in the decisive moment of the present.

Memento: "I Look at Life From Both Sides Now"[32]

This film's present "begins" when Lenny kills Jimmy. After changing into Jimmy's clothes and dragging him into the basement, Lenny, as usual, blacks out before returning to the present. A dying Jimmy whispers, "Sammy. . .," attempting to tell Lenny that he knows him, that they are acquainted because he knows the Sammy Jankis story. In panic, Lenny questions himself, "He said 'Sammy.' How does he know about Sammy?" Facing the dying man, the mystery of the Other and the alterity of death push Lenny to respond, "What have I done?" This is one of the only times in the film where he (even momentarily) *assumes* responsibility for his violence, an answering to the face of the Other and the alterity of death. He not only takes for

[32] Joni Mitchell, "Both Sides Now"

granted that he did the violence, he also admits it, his question reflecting the injustice of his actions.

When he runs outside the abandoned building, Lenny sees Teddy and asks him for help with the injured Jimmy. They enter the basement, Lenny explaining, "I don't know what happened. I've got this condition." Teddy checks Jimmy for a pulse and says, half joking, "It's not as serious as his, cause this guy's dead." In a sense, Lenny's condition *is* as serious – Leonard is effectively dead, yet the "I" is still there. Levinas extrapolates:

> In the flow of consciousness which constitutes our life in the world the ego maintains itself as something identical across the changing multiplicity of becoming. Whatever be the traces which life imprints upon us by modifying our habits and our character, in constantly changing all the contents that form our being, something invariable remains. The 'I' remains there to tie the multicolored threads of our existence to one another. (87)

Each subject, however different, is always an "I." Identity is a noun and does not define the Subject; it hides the Subject who has taken up being through the event of the present.

When they return upstairs, Teddy explains to Lenny that Jimmy was John G., but Lenny, already suspicious, denies it. "Bullshit. He's not the guy," he says, asking how Jimmy knew about Sammy Jankis since the Sammy story is a part of Lenny. Levinas explains, "Being *me* involves …an impossibility of undoing oneself" (89, emphasis mine). Lenny is completely imbricated in the Sammy story which, in turn, is tied inextricably to the Leonard story. Lenny wants to separate himself from the past and, moreover, from himself, but it does not free him. Teddy insinuates that Lenny is more closely tied to Sammy than he knows: "You tell everyone about Sammy. Anyone who'll listen. 'Remember Sammy Jankis. Remember Sammy Jankis.'"

Further, he offers Lenny an excuse, an excuse that Lenny himself will repeat: "So you lie to yourself to be happy. There's nothing wrong with that. We all do it. Who cares if there's a few little details you'd rather not remember?" Lenny responds contemptuously, "What the fuck are you talking about?"

Lenny's attempt at estranging the ego from the self, according to Levinasian theory, "is not a liberation. It is as though one had given more slack rope to a prisoner without untying him" (89). Teddy continues to prove this impossibility by hammering Lenny with details he can't (or won't) remember from his own life. "Your wife surviving the assault. Her not believing your condition, the torment and pain and anguish tearing her up inside. The insulin." The screen quietly flashes to Lenny preparing a syringe to inject his wife. Lenny says, "That's Sammy. Not me." Teddy, rolling his eyes, tells him that , through the Sammy story, he is "conditioning" himself, "learning through repetition." Lenny disagrees: "Sammy *let* his wife kill herself. Sammy ended up in an institution."

When Teddy points out that Sammy was really nothing more than "a con man, a faker," Lenny shakes his head; "I never said that Sammy was faking." As Lenny heads toward the door, Teddy calls after him, "You exposed him for what he was, a fraud." Lenny turns around urgently and says, "But I was wrong. That's the whole point." He goes on to explain how Sammy's wife had come to him for answers, but Teddy interrupts, "Sammy didn't have a wife." Lenny's face registers the shock of recognition, perhaps realizing ". . .the impossibility of getting rid of oneself" (89), even with anterograde amnesia, his own past still is carried along. When Teddy states matter-of-factly, "It was *your* wife that had diabetes," Lenny flashes on his wife pulling the shower curtain that Leonard had believed suffocated her off of her face, followed by Leonard injecting her thigh with insulin. The fingerprints of *his* existence cling to him.

The choice Lenny faces is to listen to what Teddy tells him and resolve to take an alternate path in the beginning offered. Instead, he chooses denial. "My wife wasn't diabetic," he says, returning in his mind to pinching her thigh playfully. Teddy can only say, "Well, I guess I can only make you remember the things you want to be true."

Levinas writes that, "The solitude of the subject is more than the isolation of a being . . . It is, as it were, a dual solitude: this other than me accompanies the ego like a shadow. . .This duality awakens the nostalgia for escape, but no unknown skies, no new land can satisfy it, for we bring ourselves along in our travels" (90). Jimmy cannot be Lenny's John G. anymore than any of the others he has killed. To satisfy revenge would assuage *Leonard*, but leave *Lenny* purposeless. Lenny both desires an end to his quest and a continuation of it. His argument with Teddy confirms the dual nature of his singularity as well as intimating that Teddy knows perfectly well the "shadow" accompanying Lenny. When Lenny interjects, "He's not the right guy," Teddy responds, "He was to you. C'mon, ya got your revenge. Enjoy it while you still remember. What difference does it make whether he was your guy or not?" Lenny proclaims, "It makes all the difference." However, due to Lenny's twin needs, it really makes no difference at all. As Teddy prophetically says, "You run around. You're playing detective… A dead wife to pine for. A sense of purpose to your life. A romantic quest that you wouldn't end even if I wasn't in the picture."

Teddy is also an Other demanding an answer: the face-to-face confrontation so necessary for time and reparation of the past. Classical philosophy, Levinas writes, "underestimated the alterity of the other in dialogue where the other frees us" (97), by pulling us out of ourselves and through freedom leading us to responsibility—the limit of freedom. Teddy can "free" Lenny, but Lenny will deny that responsibility, close himself back up inside himself. Interestingly, he does

not kill Teddy just yet, not when doing so could only be murder for the sake of murder. He needs to justify it and turn it into revenge, stating to himself, "I'm not a killer. Just someone who wanted to make things right."

Leaving the abandoned warehouse, he asks himself the question to which Teddy had already supplied the answer. It is the key question of the film: "Can I just let myself forget what you've told me? Can I just let myself forget what you made me do?" In answer, he writes "Don't believe his lies" on Teddy's photo and adds Teddy's license plate number as a "fact" to his tattoo to-do list even though he knows *at that moment* that Teddy is not the killer, even though Teddy has admitted that he, like endless people, *could* be a "John G." because his proper name can come out *like* that – he is "John Edward Gammell" who uses his middle name – rather than "John." But John G. has become anonymous and faceless for Lenny. It doesn't matter who he really is because he is just an undifferentiated being. Lenny loses sight of John G.'s humanity and individuality making him part of a "they." As Simon Critchley points out, "If the other gets lost in the crowd, then their transcendence vanishes," where transcendence is about the "separateness" (26) of the other person. Indicting Teddy, Lenny engages in an interior monologue voiceover: "You think I just want another puzzle to solve. Another John G to look for. You're a John G., so you can be my John G. Do I lie to myself to be happy? In your case Teddy, yes I will." By making Teddy "John G.," Teddy becomes an object, part of the same, swallowed up, and able to be killed.

Surprisingly and tellingly, Lenny does not black out in the middle of this, the longest scene in the film. Taking Jimmy's gun (and Jaguar), he says, "I think I'd rather be mistaken for a dead guy than a killer. I think I might hold onto this for awhile." He is prophetic; he will be mistaken for a dead guy. Though it seems as if he is referring to the gun as the thing he will hold

onto, it can be construed through a Levinasian read it his consciousness he will "hold onto for awhile." And he does. Invigorated, Lenny seems full of determination and hope, but hope in Levinas "aim[s] at time even though it cannot unleash it" (91). As Lenny reflected earlier in Natalie's bed, "How am I supposed to heal if I can't feel time?" Only the future "offers up consolation or reparation to the present moment of the one who suffers," but that suffering of the present "remains like a cry whose echo will resound forever in the eternity of spaces" (91). Time, then, is the "forgetting of the unforgiven instant and the pain for which nothing can compensate" (92). Lenny cannot forget. Without time and the ability to feel it, the pain and the desire for revenge remain forever undimmed.

Alone, he cannot even move outside of his jumbled, specious, interiority, he can only take on faith that the world is exterior, out there: "I have to believe in a world outside my own mind. I have to believe that my actions still have meaning, . . . that when my eyes are closed, the world's still here," he says in the film's closing moments, driving Jimmy's car to the tattoo parlor to have Teddy's license number permanently inked on his body, essentially sealing Teddy's fate. However, "It is not enough," Levinas admonishes, to have a "death avenged" because "Hope . . .is not satisfied with a time composed of separate instants" where each is "impersonal as the first one" (93). He is not just sealing Teddy's fate, he is sealing his own. His existence becomes more and more depersonalized, uncovering the frightening prospects of a being without time, a being without the Other. Lenny, flashing on his late wife lying against his chest, asks a startling question: "Do I believe the world's still here?" He flashes back to his wife, who, in one of the film's oddest moments since she died before he commenced his tattooing, is gently tracing a tattoo on his chest. The one she is caressing is in a spot that, prior to this scene, had been bare. Located directly over his heart, it reads, "I've done it," and serves a dual purpose.

It is both an acknowledgment that his quest is completed (in spite of setting himself up to continue searching) and a confession – the confession he never makes verbally, the tattoo he will never actually get because they represent "facts" to him. This is one fact he refuses to accept.

During this interior monologue / voiceover, he closes his eyes a moment, pausing before opening them again. It is the only place in the movie where he closes his eyes and does not lose consciousness. Combined with the other elements in the scene, it reveals a Lenny able to expend far more effort over his consciousness than he ever lets himself (or the spectator) believe. As he screeches to a halt in front of a tattoo parlor, Lenny says, "Now. Where was I?" before the screen fades to black. The half-joking tenor of this line, pooled with our knowledge that he is deliberately setting up Teddy's murder through the tattoo, leaves the spectator in a dramatic limbo that mirrors Lenny's purposefully "unsolvable puzzle" begging the question of whether we, too, suffer from a similar human condition of not really wanting to know, of retreating in the face of our own culpability, and fleeing the effort of being. Lenny's next moment of awakening will be to the belief that Teddy *is* the killer, retreating from subjectivity and self-knowledge, failing to move beyond the hypostatic moment toward the Other. He never takes up responsibility and obligation but closes down any option of exterior possibility. Lenny ends up alone, Teddy, his last "key," destroyed. SEE P. 88

Vanilla Sky: "A Dreamer of Pictures, I Run in the Night. . ."[33]

One of the key questions asked of the protagonist throughout Vanilla Sky is, "What is happiness to you, David?" Levinas's "first" happiness is a being in the world – David's own happy obsession in Act I. But as this question is progressively posed by Julie, McCabe, and Edmund Ventura, the tech support man, David's answer changes depending on the moment, each moment offering him the possibility of a different answer. It is only in his answer to Ventura,

though, that he realizes how happiness is tied to the present and the moment. "Time," Levinas writes, "in the world, dries all tears" (92). For David, through time, "Everything caught up in the ego, all its anxieties for itself, the whole mascarade [*sic*] where its face never succeeds in stripping itself of its masks, loses its importance" (92). David's recognition of his own culpability manages to break through as he finally recognizes his role in Julie's death and his own injuries. In the face of Ventura's gentle but insistent demand, David is literally "stripping" himself of his physical and psychological "masks," refusing continued participation in the masquerade of his Waking Dream. In many ways, this is the exact opposite of the decision Lenny makes in Memento. Edmund Ventura takes him up to the rooftop of the Oasis Project, formally Life Extension, at the point where his Waking Dream breaks up. From the splice to his *present resolve* may have been 150 years, but it is really a symbol for an instant. He had no Other, no experience of time, so it is as if he has simply taken a step from one stepping stone to another. Every step, every instant is an effort. Ventura admonishes, "Consequences, David. It's the little things." David asks, "The little things? There's nothing bigger, is there?" Director Cameron Crowe adds, "All those throwaway moments we pretended didn't matter. . ." end up mattering the most ("Director's").

Solitude is not a terrible thing because of loneliness or lack of society, but because it is definitive, singularized Being. What shatters the definitiveness of the Subject is the relation with the Other. It is a "radical breakup of the very categories of the ego" (85), allowing the "I" to be somewhere other than in the subject. At the time David Aames meets Sofia, he is a being in the world, completely enclosed in a self. Cameron Crowe states that David "uses his smile" as an entry that allows his "playacting at love" ("Director's"). This playacting means he never has to leave the self. According to Crowe, however, Sofia "sees him very clearly." She allows him to

---

[33] Neil Young, "Cinnamon Girl"

be somewhere other than himself, pushing him to confront "his conscience. He's a good man who compromised himself," Crowe explains. Sofia sees it, and through her, he sees himself. The morning following his meeting with her, "He confronts who he is and how and if he can *hang onto* this new version of himself" (emphasis added). Here, Crowe alludes to the difficulty posed by time. If, as Levinas says, each instant confronts possibility, then each instant, for David as for Lenny, also contains the moment of erasure or retreat. It is a moment of choice that he would not have had without Sofia.

But the next instant is another present, and in its arising another moment of resolution. Crowe asks, "Have we been irresponsible in love? What is love right now in a world fueled by pop culture?" ("Director's"). David *does* get in the car with Julie, and he *did* treat her carelessly. But his face-to-face confrontation with her pulls him out of himself, her alterity frightening and disturbing to him. He knows his own culpability in her death but feels like he can't live with its long-term consequences. Ventura tells him that after the nightclub debacle, "You woke up hung over and alone. You never saw Sofia again." At that moment, David does not picture the empty street, Sofia, the night at the club, but instead flashes on his own drug overdose –falling to the floor at the same moment he remembers the inside of the car going over the embankment, the symbolic and nearly literal deaths of two very different David Aames. Not just responsible in Julie's death, however, David has also deeply impacted Sofia. Ventura explains, "It was Sofia who never fully recovered…From that first night where true love seemed possible," implying that true love was never again a possibility for Sofia, that her psychological scars and pain prevented it. In the moment of choice Ventura offers, David can flee his responsibility and the hope of the present yet again, or he can enter the present and literally become a Subject. Ventura

informs him, "You're now in a suspended state," meaning that, at that moment, he does not *exist yet*.

The testimonial advertisement for the Lucid Dream states, "Upon resurrection, you will continue in an ageless state. . .but living in the present with a future of your own choosing. . . Your life will continue as a realistic work of art, painted by you minute to minute." And although a Levinasian subjectivity in the present *is* confirmed minute by minute, the future is not of our own choosing, at least not in Oasis Project terms. You must "have a time and a history" for Levinas in order "to have a future and a past" (101). In David's suspended state, there is neither.

From the timelessness of his suspended state, David must consider entering time or retreating from it by remaining in suspension. Crowe describes David as "A man realizing the mistakes he made and the crazy choices he made to sort things out" ("Director's"). The elevator, which alternates from breathtaking vistas beyond the glass to the blackness of its supporting encasement, is a space where he is shaken out of himself. Ventura tells him as they approach the rooftop for the final scene of the film, "Now we are heading toward your true moment of choice," then adds somewhat humorously, "forgive me I'm blowing your mind." David's moment of choice, and entry into the present, is marked by an Other so radically outside of David's understanding, he can only visualize or imagine the experience as being pulled up, perhaps up and out of his own hellish existence to a place where he can return to himself. He is, after all, "not a big fan of heights," and it is his mind that is sculpting the events. Ventura's revelations and, in fact, his mere existence are a radical experience of the Other; his alterity is not able to be appropriated, and in Levinasian terms, "shatters" his own definitiveness. However, the Other is also "an alter ego known by sympathy, that is by a return to oneself" (87). Rather than an implied reciprocity, I think the Greek roots of "sympathy" are closer to Levinas's

meaning. The radically different ego of the Other is known *with* suffering, pathos, or passion through the "shattering" mentioned above as well as by the return to the subject and the accessing of time. Ventura holds out the promise of David's literal return to himself, his surgical resurrection, and simultaneous entry into time. It is an exciting, frightening, and "mind-blowing" experience.

On the rooftop, surrounded by the surreal beauty of David's "realistic work of art," his vanilla sky, Ventura tells him, "We're now on pause and you're about to return to your Lucid Dream. . . a beautiful life with Sofia or whomever you wish." The other alternative, says Ventura, is to "choose the world out there." He also reminds him that it *is* 150 years later. David's funds, now obviously devalued, will not last long, and he will begin aging immediately. "But remember," Ventura persists, "even in the future, the sweet is never as sweet without the sour." Unlike the Lucid Dream, a future is only possible with a present, and it is uncertain, which is why we are able to hope. David considers his choice; the Lucid Dream is a powerful lure. "How do I wake up?" he asks, and Ventura replies, "The decision is yours." David, suddenly cognizant of the skyscraper-height of the rooftop and the effort it will take to overcome his fear, realizes, "I chose this scenario didn't I?" Ventura affirms it, stating gravely, "Yes, to face your last remaining fear . . . .It's been a brilliant journey of self awakening and now you've got to ask yourself this: what is happiness to you, David?" For the first time David can answer that question: "I want to live a real life. I don't want to dream any longer."

Taking a position, a stance, confirms subjectivity, but the existent is not a substantive, as implied by the word position, rather it is "pure verb" (82). David's "grammaticality," drawing on Levinas, lies in the fact that the "function of a verb does not consist in naming, but in producing language, that is, in bringing forth the seeds of poetry which overwhelm 'existents' in

their position and their very positivity" (82). A name is static compared to the movement and action suggested by "verb." When David halts the Waking Dream by taking a position, he also *begins* something else. Hypostasis, which Levinas calls a "new grammatical category" (83), suspends the anonymous *there is*, creating in its stead the personal, the existent. "An entity – that which is—is a subject of the verb *to be*, and thus exercises a mastery over the fatality of Being, which has become its attribute. Someone exists who assumes Being, which henceforth is *his* being" (83), Levinas explains, positing the intertwined nature of the noun/verb which cannot be separated from each other. And here we find consciousness, David's consciousness, which both arises out of itself and "takes refuge in itself." It takes rest in itself, "appropriates" being. Hypostasis, as the present, is a function of time, and through it, David will have subjectivity, a present, and hence, a future and a past. The past-present-future dynamic and the chronological birth –life-death triad is completely overturned. This overturning draws attention to our own being and our own responsibility simultaneously. As Rudolph Bernet writes, "Only the 'instant' linked to the unexpected upsurge of the other can change my life to the point of forcing me or allowing me to re-commence from the beginning," indicating "my essential dependence on the other" (94). Forgiveness and hope, then, are only available to me when I have entered time through the intervention of the Other.

And so as David's "final request," with the moment where death and either rebirth or return are closing in, he chooses to communicate with Sofia one more time, drawing courage from her solemn face. He murmurs, "Look at us. I'm frozen and you're dead. . .And I love you." "It's a problem," she says casually, a slight, comforting smile illuminating her face. Levinas writes,

> The caress of a consoler which comes softly in our pain does not promise the end of suffering, does not announce any compensation, and in its very contact, is not concerned with what is to come *afterwards* in economic time; it concerns the very instant of physical pain, which is then no longer condemned to itself, is transported 'elsewhere' by the movement of the caress, and is freed from the vice-grip of 'oneself,' finds 'fresh air,' a dimension and a future. Or rather, it announces more than a simple future, a future where the present will have the benefit of a recall. (93)

Even as a construct of his Lucid Dream, she is the one to whom he is able to confess, knowing that a "board of experts" from Life Extension/Oasis is watching him along with Ventura. He has witnesses he must answer to. "I lost you when I got in that car. I'm sorry," he says, fully realizing the weight of resolve that exists in every moment. "Do you remember what you told me once? That every passing minute is another chance to turn it all around. . . .I'll find you again. I'll see you in another life when we are both cats," David promises, reflecting both the "recall" possibility of the present – the finding again (as well as the idea of return embodied in the fabled nine lives of cats). Turning from her, David is able to face the "dive" into his present. As he falls, images of *his* real past and public events that occurred during his lifetime flash by: The Dakota, a baby playing with a ball, children playing in leaves, Heloise, a scene from <u>The Red Balloon</u>, kids on a boat, a referee, a subway car, Bruce Springsteen, Audrey Hepburn, Jaqueline Kennedy. However, the last image is of a little boy swimming with his mother. A child best exemplifies our inability to reduce the Other to the same, appropriate or consume the other. The image also rounds out the idea of needing to dive into and take up being in the present.

The movie ends with an extreme close-up of David's closed eye. A gentle voice commands, "Open your eyes, David," and indeed, his lashes flutter open. From David's birthday party where he meets Sofia, to this, another kind of birthday, this film is all about awakening – beings taking on Being. For David, literally, it is about his awakening to the moment and to the present, and, perhaps more importantly, a different, more vital and important kind of awakening: a response to the call of others, a real and ethical sociality – for any of us.

Pardon

Levinas concludes Existence and Existents, with a clear statement about subjectivity: "The present is the very fact that there is an existent. . .However powerless it may be, an existent is master of its existence, as a subject is master of its attribute. In an instant an existent dominates existence" (103). Lenny and Diane are existents, and may dominate Existence, if only for a moment, but what makes David different is both his relationship with time and with the Other.

Time cannot arise in a solitary Subject because "The absolute alterity of another instant cannot be found in the subject. This alterity comes to me only from the other" (96). Levinas insists it is the Other who will make this instant different from the last one. Lenny and Diane have no one left who can provide the necessary alterity of another instant, another present. Diane ends her temporality altogether; Lenny arguably chooses to be time-less ("I don't know how long you've been gone," he says of his wife). The relationship with the Other constitutes time in that "it is exterior to my instant" but not an object I can appropriate or master. "There is a freedom," Levinas states, "in having one's being pardoned by the very alterity of the other" (97). Without the Other, and therefore time, there is no chance for pardon.

If there is no new instant, then there is no present, which also means no chance for pardon; however, with a present from the Other – the gift of the present – we find a freedom

rimmed by responsibility. Only David has the chance for the present and pardon. The experts of the Oasis Project, Ventura tells him, are "Waiting for your answer." His *response* is informed by responsibility, a Levinasian responsibility, that, (even at the time of this book), is to the Other and is marked by compassion. Cameron Crowe muses, "Compassion's a tough thing to see, let alone feel" ("Director's"). Levinas calls its effect "infinitely mysterious," (as is the Other), in that, paradoxically, it both announces the future and recalls the present. The "pain" of the present doesn't get "redeemed," nor does "retribution in the future. . . wipe away the pains of the present. There is no justice that could make reparations for it," Levinas points out. "One should have to return to that instant, or be able to resurrect it. To hope then is to hope for the reparation of the irreparable; it is to hope for the present" (93), since reparation would have to occur in the present, the moment, where the suffering happened. "Is not the future above all a resurrection of the present?" (94) Levinas asks. Each future moment creates a new present. Time itself is a resurrection of the present and the Subject. In his experience of compassion which always involves an Other, (how can you be compassionate without the Other?), only David can find the hope of the present, and through it, the lure of pardon.

CONCLUSIONS: AND THEN I WOKE UP

> Weaving together time and space, the present and the past, reality and illusion, with one foot in the camp of reportage and observation and the other in storytelling and dream, integrating duration and following the development beings and things, the cinema of the future will undoubtedly be to the cinema of today infinitely greater than what Joyce and Faulkner are to Paul Borget. Having been theatrical, pictorial, musical, romantic, the cinema will finally be able to be itself: quite simply cinematic. (379)

Theorist Jean Mitry wrote these words in 1963. More than 40 years later, is it possible to say that cinema is "finally" able to be itself? Ironically, Mitry foresaw the possibility, but the achievement he imagined is no joyous, ecstatic, givingness of Cinema. It is a weight and a burden tied to the birth of every film. As there is, according to Levinas, no answer to Being, perhaps there is also no answer to Cinema, either.

Out of the *il y a*, the all-encompassing void of Cinema, T. S. Eliot's darkened stage, the unbearable, unceasing music of Theatre Silencio – spills a film – an existent, a singular entity come to being through a celluloid hypostasis as a being – the noun of the film requiring the verb of action, movement, to exist. Playing, the film becomes a Waking Dream of the spectator, suspending time and the effort to be for awhile. And through light, the spectator has consciousness of the film, the *reel* of film gains meaning. Through interaction with an Other, the spectator, the film, *this* film, comes to exist in time, in the stance of the moment, in its position on the screen, the instant of itself. A film's very fragility is indicative of its effort to exist against the endless Existence of cinema. The film, the existent, temporal in its viewing, "pardoned" for

its past action by the preservationist, another Other, cannot, even in its death, its disintegration, negate Cinema as a whole.

And so this entire reading becomes, in the end, less about the illustrative potential of a philosophy of subjectivity (although it is that), or the content of the films as emblematic of a philosophy (though it is that, too), but more about the *relation* between *a* film and the impersonal, totalizing, overwhelmingness of Cinema itself.

My rationale for pursuing this project initially stemmed from an interest in ethics and a desire to respond to both the beckoning and the challenge of Levinas's philosophical project. His heavy emphasis on the relation with the Other, however, stirred a need to understand how his conception of Subjectivity had evolved, leading to my focus on Existence and Existents. Levinas's imagining of subjectivity in this book made these rather challenging films not only meaningful and relevant, but also revealed the depth and insight of their complexities in startling ways. By extension, the films made clear the intricacy involved in the processes of real life *being*, highlighting the possibilities built into each, singular, human existence, its accomplishment, as well as the effort required in its every instant. Reading between Existence and Existents and the three films revealed constant tensions between totalities and singularities – between Cinema and genres, genre and a particular film, being and Being, self and Other, raising questions of how these seeming polarities complicate and problematize what we mean when we say – not mention utilize –terms like "method" and "theory."

Film and philosophy are often areas treated discretely, but they cannot be comfortably settled out. To claim something as only film or only philosophy, for example, is to create artificial distinctions, a *violence* in the maintenance of boundaries. Reading these films *through* Levinas's philosophy provided a way of disturbing all four of the texts, the book entering into

the films and the films, in return, engaging the book. Although I expected to encounter this effect, the films' seeming insistence on *being* philosophy – standing on their own ontological ground – was less so. Nathan Anderson asserts that film does not act as a "surrogate for the philosophical text" (par. 8); in these films, I would argue, it *is* the text. Creating its own philosophy through its format of frozen, unrepeatable moments held captive within each frame, though each frame flickers past us with a speed that provides the illusion of imitating life, films, as Stephen Mulhall proclaims, can generate "philosophy in action . . .rather than" simply being "raw material or ornamentation for a philosopher's work" (par. 1). He adds that "reflective beings" may sometimes disagree, but philosophy can be used to ameliorate the differences in point of view since it has the capacity of "altering [the] sense of what stances are available" (par. 7). Likewise, we may find ourselves in spaces where we are "utterly disoriented" – by events, by ourselves, by others, a situation not unlike the characters in these films (or, to approach it from a different angle, by the effect of the Levinasian Other on the Subject). Films, then, can contribute to our effort of "orientation" by providing a means for "imagining how we might take a stand" (par. 7). Most importantly, Mulhall insists, whether or not a film in itself is philosophizing rather than simply illustrating a philosophy, each film still must be "judg[ed]. . .case by case" (par. 12), suggesting that it is not a question that can be answered by Cinema as a whole.

Nathan Anderson also agrees that films can "engage the spectator in much the same way as a philosophy text might" (par. 7). Following his definitions of how that can happen, the three films analyzed here provide such an engagement in their joint proximity to and distance from the audience. They read *as* philosophy in that not only do they disturb the spectator in the theatre, they continue their disturbance outside of the theatre. These films specifically "call upon the spectator to ask questions about basic issues" (par. 7), in this case, what it means to be an "I,"

what defines the self, what motivates us, what effort is needed to be what we imagine ourselves to be. They call on us to question how others in our lives, especially the most important ones, impact us, change us, instruct us, hold us hostage. Further, we are left to ponder what our temporality means, whether time shapes us or we shape time, whether reparation for our past acts is possible, and, as Anderson asks, what it means "to be truthful to oneself and to the others" (par. 11). To this end, films require us "to search for evidence" (par. 7) that the films supply but also call into question, leading us "to reflect not only on the world presented within the film but on its significance for making sense of the reality [we] face in the everyday world" (par. 7).

Each film takes a stance as a reality, that, while possibly seeming "concrete," as Mitry points out, "remains fictional" (379). The film's reality is present to us, but beyond our grasp. Its presence within absence "overwhelms" (379). Because it takes a stance as a reality, its "self-positing is always open to question," leading the spectator to *speculate* about "the precariousness of human identity" (Anderson par. 12). All three films discussed in this study raise this question in particularly unsettling ways, through questions of memory, self-perception, identity, and existence itself, asking, as Stanley Cavell does, what "may be lost or invaded" (qtd. in Anderson 18). The question is not whether we *believe* in the filmic reality presented, but if we are *troubled* by it. The troubling aspect comes out of the alterity of the film's own posited reality in relation to an individual's lived reality. Neither is necessarily disturbing on its own; it's the collision of the two that is. This collision reveals difference, which becomes an opening, an entryway into the realm of philosophy, perhaps even beckoning us to alternate pathways of thinking about the ethical itself.

While writing this paper, I discovered (rather arduously) that the ethical was already implied within Levinasian subjectivity even though Levinas never uses the word "ethical" in

Existence and Existents. As Levinas says in regard to this book, for the existent, "Getting out of the anonymousness of being" involves hypostasis, but, he adds, "Nevertheless, at the end of the book, the essential idea that the true bearer of being, the true exit from the *there is* is in obligation, in the "for-the-other," which introduces a meaning into the nonsense of the *there is*. . . .That is the kernel of all I would say later" ("interview" 45-46). In relation to film, Telotte, drawing on William Robinson's work, makes a similar observation:

> The movie character. . . because it is based in the visual image with its immediate sensory impact, because it so immediately evokes life itself and thus instantly argues for its own existence. . .appears more as an event, an enactment of human possibility, and thus as a source of value that speaks directly to us. (373)

When the event of hypostasis is explored through these films, each one emphasized that a Subject *does not exist without the Other*. The Other is already integral to subjectivity in its relation to time. It is an accomplishment to overcome the brutality of Being, an accomplishment that mirrors overcoming our murderous nature toward the Other – both are intersections with alterity, and lead, as Levinas later shows, to the ethical. Being itself is not self-reflective or ethical; only the Subject has the potential to be. The same could be said about Cinema; only *a* film has the potential to be either self-reflective or ethical. In both cases, the need for the Other, or for the spectator, is clear.

Overcoming the brutality of Being is the necessary beginning of the ethical. In other words, Existence and Existents had to be written, had to be achieved, before Levinas's philosophy of the face could be posited. Like Levinas, I, too, end at the beginning, with a dissertation beginning and ending in violence. As Robert Manning contends, "Levinas is no

idealist." He adds that in Existence and Existents, "Levinas's ideal accounts of the intersubjective relation not only recognize relations of violence and oppression, but that violence and oppression are always in the background of Levinas's discourse" ("Interpreting" 11). In my chosen films, the intersubjective relation exists between spectator and characters, also reflecting violence in the characters' own struggles to be. Within the Waking Dream sequences, the characters insist on their subjectivity even when they are mere products of their own dreams and in film's narrative in general. The films attempt to defy audience disbelief with characters who exert effort moment by moment in their continuing struggle to be real. They attempt to assert their own beingness, shot by shot, challenging the spectator to deny their reality. The spectator, initially motivated by a narrative "interest in the characters and their situation," is lead to "a motivation to philosophy insofar as the effort to make sense of their situation calls on us to reflect on the affinities of their situation with our own" (Anderson par. 22). Further, "our efforts to make sense of the motivations of the characters call on us to reflect upon preoccupations we may share with them" (par. 22). Finally, Anderson notes, "Although this type of motivation to philosophy may not be unique to film, it is particularly powerful in the case of film, insofar as film tends to involve us almost tangibly with the lives on the screen" (par. 22).

Additionally, characters can undercut their own constructedness by delivering "a subversive message, the possibility that we might see ourselves differently, less as abstract beings inhabiting an abstract world than as humans *living* in our world" (Telotte 373-374). Telotte states that the "elusive, enigmatic, role-playing figures" in many current neo-noirs "bring us face to face with our expectations of character" (380). For example, the power of a character like Verbal Kint/Keyser Soze in The Usual Suspects, "lies in his ability to play at *being* a character in a world that seems inclined to see people in static ways" (379). Soze is able "to

conjure up just the sort of character" that is required in his various situations and "draws upon whatever his confining world presents him with" (379). He develops an entire other life, that of Verbal Kint, using whatever elements he can find in his interrogator's office. Similarly, the three protagonists in the films I have discussed construct their better selves from everything at hand with the same lightening-quick precision. Like Soze who "becomes a figure of difference" (379), Diane, David, and Lenny all negotiate multiple spheres of influence, but unlike Soze, they are unaware they are doing it. In spite of their odd and sympathetic naïveté, even more than Soze, they are able to reveal "just how contingent this world and its sense of order are" revealing "a kind of destructive power inherent in a world that insists change and difference are impossible, and thereby indicts the world's values" (379). Mulholland Drive, Memento, and Vanilla Sky do not present us with a comfortable pay-off in plot or character but allow the "potential for a new subversive development," through characters that depend on "individuality, one that might challenge our usual values" (380).

The subversive quality also occurs in the telling of the story. Like Louis Malle's far more lighthearted Zazie, the directors of these three films achieve similar effects "By using dream logic to break up the narrative, by transmitting information through an unreliable arranger and creating characters who either change their identity or do not seem firmly anchored in narrative space" (Hedges 16). By doing so, they are able to break apart what Malle calls "the narcotic effect of cinema" (qtd. in Hedges 16). The spectator becomes a participant rather than "the recipient of a spectacle designed to produce passive gratification" (Hedges 16). What they do to film is also what happens to Existence and Existents when read through film. Robert John Sheffler Manning has cautioned against the complacency, "colonization" even, of Levinas's philosophy. He has a "suspicion that the eager and widespread reception of Levinas's very

troubling discourse . . .has led to a certain pacification . . . of this discourse" ("Beyond" xi). Instead of pushing Levinas into a more pacifying reading, these films force a closer read, generating an intimacy, which, rather than fostering familiarity, pulls us from theory-level read to word-level and sometimes even to a level that exists sublingually, the level and language of the visual.

Inez Hedges, in Breaking the Frame: Film Language and the Experience of Limits, describes a moment in some films "when words fail and when meaning dissolves with the disappearance of the differences between words and things that enable meaning to exist" (21). Each of the transformative events in these films appears to me to be such a moment. The events are so horrific, they are unable to be verbalized;. visuals speak an unsecured language to spectators as meaning evaporates for the characters. David's crash and its consequences are only represented by the upended, silent car and the coma-like flashes of black screen. Leonard's memories of his home invasion and his own concurrent memory loss are submerged under the shower curtain with his wife, her struggles for breath mimicking his struggle for memory. Her real death is only a possibility acted out by the imaginary Mrs. Jankis. We never see Camilla's murder, just Diane's own self-decay. Hedges suggests that the breakdown in language could "presage new possibilities of representation, of subjectivity, without actually finding a solution" (21). The new possibilities of representation are suggested in Levinas's later works where he attempts even more vividly to push against the very limits of language. However, in this study, the films themselves become a movement of subjectivity. The films not only do not offer a "solution," the question of subjectivity is not answered, since there is, as Levinas reminds us, no answer to Being. The lack of solution is a kind of unknowability that interpretation can't resolve. Hedges suggests that "the unknown also offers the possibility of hope, a chance to solve the

dilemma of life" (27). It is this chance and possibility that is also announced in Existence and Existents. For Levinas, the possibility lies in the instant, the instant of the Subject.

The film as an existent shares the same possibilities as the Subject in the instant. Francesco Cassetti writes that "At every moment, the film indicates a point where it can anchor its own moves and find a response; . . .the film *offers itself* for viewing – instituting its own destination as a goal to be reached" (qtd. in Buckland 60). In return to the offer of the film, Buckland states that "the spectator 'commits him/herself to viewing,' s/he responds to the availability of the world-on-the-screen by taking his/her own responsibility in response to the propositions of a destination by the film'" (60).

One way we foreclose our responses to film is to insist or rely on genre to answer for us. It is not just the level of character or the level of film where violence is present or has a presence. It is also at the level of genre. Mark Jancovich states, "Traditionally, Film Genre Criticism has been obsessed with tying down the 'essence' of film genres: identifying the fundamental characteristics of a genre, the boundaries between genres, deciding which films belonged to which (single) genre." However, he goes on to state that "such a project is not only impossible, but also fundamentally ill-conceived" (469). Any attempt to classify films has encountered the difficulties of pinning down the elements or characteristics of such a fluid and variable medium. "Genre terms are therefore fundamentally unstable and ambiguous and resistant to any essential definition" even though audiences and critics alike perceive them as "largely stable entities" (470-471).

The formulaic aspect of generic film is assumed to tell stories "we already know" (Knight 344). Deborah Knight, in her article "Aristotelians on Speed," points out that both form and content in this case exist as repetitions – the genre becomes a monolithic category. "The question

raised by genre, then, concerns the relationship between the particular generic text and the genre(s) of which it is an instance" (345). To classify a film into a particular genre runs the risk that people watch for the genre-as-text rather than the film-as-text. Knight explains that the "implication is that, for any genre, the story-type is in a neat way self-identical, fixed, prescribed, invariant, and singular" (348); the type or genre rather than the film is considered in the singular, implying a thematizing, totalizing influence.

By deliberately looking for a particular kind of film in order to conduct a Levinasian read, (I examined more than 100 films), and *then* deciding on what marked them as a particular genre, I enacted a kind of cinematic violence, a wrenching of meaning that is itself unethical. These enforced boundaries attempt to blur their distinctions in the act of grouping, totalizing them into a whole rather than keeping the difference of each film intact *as* difference. Each film is no longer a singularity, but a "they." Levinas writes in Totality and Infinity that "The alterity of the Other does not depend on any quality that would distinguish him or me, for a distinction of this nature would precisely imply between us that community of genus which already nullifies alterity" (194). It is not much of a stretch to see how this is applicable to the notion of film genre. On the other hand, as Jeffrey Dudiak, exploring the question of singularity, asks, "To conceive of the other as 'another me,'. . .is to practice a form of vandalism. . .But does not such an insistence, rigorously maintained, require as a radical consequence that there can be, for Levinas, no such thing as an 'I in general'" (320-1). An extremely intimate reading *does* seem to declare that no other film can be "read" in the same way, begging the question of whether there can be a singular in theory or methodology.

Though the films I chose exhibit many of the standard features of noirs, neo-noirs, and suspense films, there is another way in which they defy and challenge notions of genre

altogether. The suspense of these films remains suspended – in many ways completely unsolvable in the traditional sense. We can approach their possibilities but never approach them. Though they are often terrifying, the terror may reside only in the characters' narrative inventions or even, possibly, our own. Do the films present a world view that is jaded, pessimistic, paranoid, hopeful, or seemingly incomprehensible? In this uncertainty, they represent the experience of radical alterity. We get caught up in the world the films create, feel empathy, shed tears, but they remain nonetheless slippery and unattainable – unable to be pinned down, made our own, taken into our being. Each time the films are approached, they yield new, unexpected readings. There is little agreement between critics and other spectators – not even agreement within one's self on any given day, of what they are, or who the characters are and what it all means. The material aspect of the film is the same every time (unlike theatre which is a new work in terms of each performance). However, each reading of the same film here mutates endlessly, giving it the shape, if you will, of enigma.

And this is precisely their fascination and frustration, for they are not just open-ended in their resolutions, but open-ended scene by scene, shot by shot. In each case, the film rests within the framework of the protagonist's questionable memory, dreams, self-deceptions or self-constructions, changing, questioning, and challenging the entire nature of such cinematic narrative techniques as flashback and flash forward. Even the supposed "real" stories are told from the protagonist's chancy point of view and beyond that, there is the notion of the films themselves as productions of the actor, filmmaker, screenwriter, etc. They are, despite whatever trappings of genre we might genuinely ascribe to them, endless halls of mirrors that both invite and resist our penetration/entry into them, our insertion of our own subjectivity into their gaps.

Might this not suggest a complete break from genre in the usually understood sense of the word? Are the films intergenre, not read against the grain, because there is no grain to read against? Might this not be one of the powers of a Levinasian intervention in cinema studies? But there are even more disturbing questions.

Scott writes, "We know from long experience that when a locale or a people universalize their peculiar values and turn the tribal into an encompassing, universal expectation for all people, justification for conquest, colonialism, and oppression is a small step away" (30). Levinas, in his 1934 essay, "Reflections on the Philosophy of Hitlerism," states that "Hitlerism is 'an awakening of elementary feelings'" which "express a basic attitude concerning the nature of reality and of the self. Thus, 'these elementary feelings harbor a philosophy'" (9). In Manning's reading of it, Levinas proposes that racist ideas are taken more seriously than ideals of human rights because "racist ideas, unlike the ideals of liberalism, are rooted in the body and take seriously what modern persons feel and take seriously about themselves: bodily experiences" (Beyond 3). This may seem to have very little to do with popular film in the second millennium, but it is actually much more suggestive than it appears.

A philosophy expressed and expressing itself in Triumph of the Will (1935), for example, with its images of smiling, bright-eyed children washing their faces and brushing their teeth, caring for the body, and ultimately the body politic, would be an easy to dismiss film if it were not for the fact it aided in propagating some of the bloodiest moments in human history. Although numerous writers and speakers have pointed to its potency, cautioned against ever forgetting its lessons, it is not just a dangerous, powerful, agonizing moment in the human historical order: it is also one of the most disturbing and contested examples of the power of Cinema's persuasiveness or a film's claim to exist as a singular entity. Edith Wyschogrod writes

that "To be as separated being is to be in such a way that life has a meaning apart from its integration into the historical order" (85). Cinema is its own historical order, from whence the film, as a separated being is able to create a meaning apart. However, that meaning is not ethical simply because it is singularized or engaged by the spectator.

If we cannot really pin down the boundaries of genre, such as film noir, we cannot pin down such boundaries for documentary or propaganda films either. It is all the more compelling a reason to consider carefully the philosophy of the body, with its messages of or about the Other transmitted in every film. Because each one harbors a potential. In the same way, one of the reasons Levinas's philosophy in Existence and Existents is so demanding is that it begins in the body, is of the body and lived experience in the world. But it cannot stop there. The ethical also must begin in the body. The Other cannot be someone who gets in the way of my self care because what Levinas calls "the murderous" character of our "nature" is also of the body. To turn it into responsibility instead is to overcome that murderous intent in our responses to the Other. In these three films, it stands out markedly that the "murderous nature" is so apparent in three very sympathetic characters. However, it is still Diane who is responsible for the hit (this is the girl), Lenny who sets up both himself and Teddy (this is the guy) and pulls the trigger, and even David who dreams himself a murderer. His choice to take up being can only happen when he first overcomes that dreamed, but possible, intent. He alone opens his eyes to consciousness. This does not make him a more ethical character, but responding to a real command from another to open his eyes presages such a possibility. It is only David who understands that, as Stanley Cavell (qtd. in Hedges 31) explains, "games, plays, stories, morals, art – all the farcing of coherent civilizations – come to nothing, are nothing. To accomplish this will seem – will be

– the end of the world, of *our* world. The motive, however, is not death, but life, or anyway human existence at last."

Works Cited

Alford, C. Fred. Levinas, the Frankfurt School and Psychoanalysis. Middleton, CT: Wesleyan UP, 2002.

Alemany-Galway. A Postmodern Cinema: The Voice of the Other in Canadian Film. Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 2002.

Andersen, Nathan. "Is Film the Alien Other to Philosophy?: Philosophy as Film in Mulhall's On Film. Review. Film-Philosophy 7:23 (2003): August 2003 http://www.film-philosophy.com/vol7-2003/n23anderson.

Aronowicz, Annette. "Introduction." Nine Talmudic Readings. Trans. Annette Aronowicz. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1994.

Bernasconi, Robert. Foreword. 2001. Existence and Existents. By Emmanuel Levinas. Trans. Alphonso Lingis. Pittsburgh: Duquesne UP, 1978.

Berry, Oliver. Rev. of Memento, dir. Christopher Nolan. 8 September 2003 **http://www.kamera.co.uk/reviews_extra/memento.php.**

Blakesley, David. "Rhetorical Perspectives on Film and Culture." The Terministic Screen: Rhetorical Perspectives on Film. Ed. David Blakesley. Carbondale, IL: Southern IL UP, 2003. 125-127.

Blanchard, Marc. "Post-Bourgeois Tattoo Reflections on Skin Writing in Late Capitalist Societies." "Films of Memory: The Mind's Eye." Visualizing Theory: Selected Essays from V. A. R. 1990-1994. Ed. Lucien Taylor. New York: Routledge, 1994. 287-300.

Bodnar, Christopher. "The Database, Logic, and Suffering: Memento and Random-Access Information Aesthetics." Film-Philosophy 7:10 (2003): 8 Sept. 2003 http://www.film-philosophy.com/vol7-2003/n10bodnar.

Buckland, Warren. The Cognitive Semiotics of Film. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge UP, 2000.

Burke, Kenneth. A Grammar of Motives. 1945. Berkeley:U California P, 1969.

Chanter, Tina. "Reading Hegel as Mediating Master: Lacan and Levinas." Harasym, pp. 1-21.

Charney, Leo. Empty Moments: Cinema, Modernity, and Drift. Durham: Duke UP, 1998.

Clare, John. "I Am." c. 1844. English Romantic Writers. Ed. David Perkins. San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1967. 1111.

Clayton, Dave. Rev. of Memento, dir. Christopher Nolan. 8 Sept. 2003 http://www.angelfire.com/movies/davesothermovielog/memento.htm.

Coffeen, Daniel. "This Is Cinema: The Pleated Plenitude of the Cinematic Sign in David Lynch's Mulholland Drive." Film-Philosophy 7:7 (2003): 8 Sept. 2003 http://www.film-philosophy.com/vol7-2003/n7coffeen.

Cohen, Richard A. "Translator's Introduction." Ethics and Infinity: Conversations with Philippe Nemo. Emmanuel Levinas. 1982. Pittsburgh: Duquesne UP, 1985.

Critchley, Simon. "A Disparate Inventory." The Cambridge Companion to Levinas. Eds. Simon Critchley and Robert Bernasconi. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge UP, 2002. xv-xxx.

---. "Introduction." The Cambridge Companion to Levinas. Eds. Simon Critchley and Robert Bernasconi. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge UP, 2002. 1-32.

---. Continental Philosophy. Oxford: Oxford Up, 2001.

Crowe, Cameron, dir. Commentary. Vanilla Sky. 2001. DVD. Paramount Pictures, 2002.

---. "So Lonely I Could Cry: How Elvis Inspired My New Movie, Vanilla Sky." Guardian Online 11 Jan. 2002. 22 Jan. 2005 http://www.guardian.co.uk/print/0,3858,4332583-103408,00.html.

Darke, Chris. Light Readings: Film Criticism and Screen Arts. London: Wallflower, 2000.

Davis, Colin. Levinas: An Introduction. Notre Dame, IN: U Notre Dame P, 1996.

Derrida, Jacques. Adieu to Emmanuel Levinas. Trans. Pascale-Anne Brault and Michael Naas. Stanford: Stanford UP, 1997.

"Differentiate." Def. 3. The American Heritage College Dictionary. 3rd. ed. 1993.

Dudiak, Jeffrey. The Intrigue of Ethics: A Reading of the Idea of Discourse in the Thought of Emmanuel Levinas. New York: Fordham UP, 2001.

Dylan, Bob. Chronicles: Volume One. New York: Simon and Schuster, 2004.

Ebert, Roger. Rev. of Memento, dir. Christopher Nolan. Chicago Sun-Times Online 13 Apr. 2002. 22 Jan. 2005 http://suntimes.com/ebert/ebert_reviews/2001/04/041302.html.

Ebert, Roger. Rev. of Vanilla Sky, dir. Cameron Crowe. Chicago Sun-Times Online 14 Dec. 2001. 22 Jan. 2005 http://suntimes.com/ebert/ebert_reviews/2001/12/14/1121403.html

Eliot, T. S. "The Four Quartets." The Complete Poems and Plays: 1909-1950. San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1980.

Ellis, Jack C. and Virginia Wright Wexman. A History of Film, 5th ed. Boston: Allyn & Bacon, 2002.

Hand, Seán, ed. The Levinas Reader. Oxford: Blackwell, 1989.

Harasym, Sarah, ed. Levinas and Lacan: The Missed Encounter. Albany, NY: SUNY, 1998.

Hartmann, Mike. "Mulholland Drive: A Love Story in the City of Dreams." 2001. 16 Sept. 2003 http://www.geocities.com/Hollywood/2093/mulhollanddrive/index.html.

Hedges, Inez. Breaking the Frame: Film Language and the Experience of Limits. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1991.

Hirsch, Foster. Detours and Lost Highways: A Map of Neo-Noir. New York: Limelight, 1999.

Hyde, Michael J. and Craig R. Smith. "Aristotle and Heidegger on Emotion and Rhetoric: Questions of Time and Space." The Critical Turn: Rhetoric and Philosophy in Postmodern Discourse. Ian Angus and Lenore Langsdorf, eds. Carbondale, IL: Southern IL UP, 1993. 68-99.

"Inscription." Def. 4 a and b. The American Heritage College Dictionary, 3rd ed.

"Inscribe" Def. 2, and "Inscription." Def. 2, 4. Webster's New International Dictionary of the English Language. 1926 ed.

Isocrates. "Antidosis." The Rhetorical Tradition: Readings from Classical Times to the Present. Eds. Patricia Bizzell and Bruce Herzberg. Boston: Bedford, 1990. 50-55.

Jancovich, Mark. "'A Real Shocker': Authenticity, Genre and Struggle for Distinction." The Film Cultures Reader. Ed. Graeme Turner. London: Routledge, 2002. 469-480.

Keats, John. "Ode to a Nightingale." 1819. English Romantic Writers. Ed. David Perkins. San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1967. 1184.

Knight, Deborah. "Aristotelians on Speed: Paradoxes of Genre in the Context of Cinema." Film Theory and Philosophy. Eds. Richard Allen and Murray Smith. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1999. 343-367.

Kudláček, Martina. In the Mirror of Maya Deren. [Documentary]. Zeitgeist Films, 2001.

Levinas, Emmanuel. Alterity and Transcendence. Trans. Michael B. Smith. New York: Columbia UP, 1999.

----. Of God Who Comes to Mind. Trans. Bettina Bergo. Stanford: Stanford UP, 1998.

---. Ethics and Infinity: Conversations with Philippe Nemo. Trans. Richard A. Cohen. Pittsburgh: Duquesne UP, 1985.

----. Existence and Existents. 1947. Trans. Alphonso Lingis. Netherlands: Martinus Nijoff; The Hague, 1978.

---. "The Proximity of the Other." Interview with Anne-Catherine Benchelah (1986). Is It Righteous To Be?: Interviews with Emmanuel Levinas. Ed. Jill Robbins. Stanford: Stanford UP, 2001. 211-219.

---. "Interview with François Poirié (1986)." Is It Righteous To Be?: Interviews with Emmanuel Levinas. Ed. Jill Robbins. Stanford: Stanford UP, 2001. 23-84.

---. Time and the Other. 1947. Trans, Richard A. Cohen. Pittsburgh: Duquesne UP, 1987.

---. Nine Talmudic Readings. Trans. Annette Aronowicz. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1994.

---. On Escape: De l'évasion. 1935. Trans. Bettina Bergo. Stanford: Stanford UP, 2003.

---, and Richard Kearney. "Dialogue with Emmanuel Levinas." Face to Face with Levinas. Ed. Richard A. Cohen. New York: SUNY, 1986. 13-35.

Llewelyn, John. Emmanuel Levinas: The Genealogy of Ethics. London: Routledge, 1995.

MacDougall, David. "Films of Memory: The Mind's Eye." Visualizing Theory: Selected Essays from V. A. R. 1990-1994. Ed. Lucien Taylor. New York: Routledge, 1994. 260-270.

Maltby, Richard. Hollywood Cinema, 2nd ed. Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2003.

Memento. Dir. Christopher Nolan. Perf. Guy Pearce, Carrie-Ann Moss, and Joe Pantoliano. 2001. DVD. Columbia TriStar, 2001.

Manning, Robert John Sheffler. Interpreting Otherwise Than Heidegger: Emmanuel Levinas's Ethics as First Philosophy. Pittsburgh: Duquesne UP, 1993.

---. Beyond Ethics to Justice Through Levinas and Derrida: The Legacy of Levinas. Quincy, IL: Franciscan Press, 2001.

Miller, Toby. "Apparatus Theory." Film and Theory: An Anthology. Robert Stam and Toby Miller, eds. Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2000.

Mitry, Jean. The Aesthetics and Psychology of the Cinema. 1963. Trans. Christopher King. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 2000.

Moran, Dermot. Introduction to Phenomenology. London: Routledge, 2000.

Mulholland Drive. Dir. David Lynch. Perf. Naomi Watts, Laura Elena Harring, Justin Theroux, and Ann Miller. 2001. DVD. Universal Studios, 2002.

Newman, Marc T. "The American Ascetic Film Hero Transformation Model: The Emergence of Film Heroes in Rhetorical Narration." A Rhetorical Analysis of Popular American Film. Ed. Marc T. Newman. Dubuque, IA: Kendall/Hunt, 1993. 264-326.

---. Introduction. A Rhetorical Analysis of Popular American Film. Ed. Marc T. Newman. Dubuque, IA: Kendall/Hunt, 1993.

Nolan, Christopher. Interview with David Wood. BBC Online. 2000. 8 Sept. 2003 http://www.bbc.co.uk/films/2000/10/16/christopher_nolan_i_interview.shtml.

Norris, Kathleen. The Cloister Walk. New York: Riverhead Books, 1996.

Peperzak, Adriaan T. Preface. Ethics as First Philosophy: The Significance of Emmanuel Levinas for Philosophy, Literature and Religion. Ed. Andriaan T. Peperzak. New York: Routledge, 1995. IX-XIII.

---. Beyond: The Philosophy of Emmanuel Levinas. Evanston, IL: Northwestern UP, 1997.

---. "Some Remarks on Hegel, Kant and Levinas." Face to Face with Levinas. Ed. Richard A. Cohen. Albany, NY: SU New York P, 1986. 205-219.

Poulakos, John, and Takis Poulakos. Classical Rhetorical Theory. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1999.

Richardson, Granetta L. "Screen Play: *Ethos* and Dialectics in A Time to Kill." The Terministic Screen: Rhetorical Perspectives on Film. Ed. David Blakesley. Carbondale, IL: Southern IL UP, 2003. 272-285.

Riggins, Stephen H. "The Rhetoric of Othering." The Language and Politics of Exclusion: Others in Discourse. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 1997.

Rinzler, Alan. Bob Dylan: The Illustrated Record. New York: Harmony Books, 1978.

Ritter, Kelly. "Postmodern Dialogics in Pulp Fiction: Jules, Ezekiel, and Double-Voiced Discourses." The Terministic Screen: Rhetorical Perspectives on Film. Ed. David Blakesley, Carbondale, IL: Southern Il UP, 2003. 286-303.

Robbins, Jill, ed. Is It Righteous To Be?: Interviews with Emmanuel Levinas. Stanford: Stanford UP, 2001.

Robinson, William R. "The Movies as a Revolutionary Moral Force, Part II." Seeing Beyond: Movies, Visions, and Values. New York: Golden String Press, 2001. 60-77.

Sabrina. Dir. Billy Wilder. Perf. Audrey Hepburn, Humphrey Bogart, and William Holden. Paramount, 1954.

Said, Edward W. (1994). Culture and Imperialism. New York: Vintage, 1994.

Savlov, Marc. Rev. of Vanilla Sky, dir. Cameron Crowe. Austin Chronicle Online 14 Dec. 2001. 22 Jan. 2005 http://www.austinchronicle.com/gbase/Calendar/Film?Film=oid%3A142048

Scott, Charles E. "A People's Witness beyond Politics." Ethics as First Philosophy: The Significance of Emmanuel Levinas for Philosophy, Literature and Religion. Ed. Andriaan T. Peperzak. New York: Routledge, 1995. 25-38.

Smith, Steven. "Reason as One for Another." Face to Face with Levinas. Ed. Richard A. Cohen. Albany, NY: SU New York P, 1986. 53-72.

Stiegerwald, David. The Sixties and the End of Modern America. New York: St. Martins, 1995.

Strozier, Robert M. Foucault, Subjectivity, and Identity: Historical Constructions of Subject and Self. Detroit: Wayne State UP, 2002.

Telotte, J. P. "Rounding Up the Usual Suspects." Seeing Beyond: Movies, Visions, and Values. New York: Golden String Press, 2001. 371-383.

Usai, Paolo Cherchi. The Death of Cinema: History, Cultural Memory and the Digital Dark Age. London: British Film Institute, 2001.

Vanilla Sky. Dir. Cameron Crowe. Perf. Tom Cruise, Penelope Cruz, Cameron Diaz, Kurt Russell, and Jason Lee. 2001. DVD. Paramount Pictures, 2002.

Wyschogrod, Edith. Emmanuel Levinas: The Problem of Ethical Metaphysics. 2nd ed. New York: Fordham UP, 2000.