

## Narrativism and performativity in *Absurda* and *Darkened Room*

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In various psychological readings, Lynch's works have often been connected with the notion of identity, going so far as calling *Lost Highway*,<sup>1</sup> *Mulholland Drive*,<sup>2</sup> and *Inland Empire*<sup>3</sup> a "blurred identity trilogy".<sup>4</sup> His films are not the only ones where the notion of identity comes into play, and *Twin Peaks*<sup>5</sup> might be one of the best examples, as both a television series and a film,<sup>6</sup> featuring various doppelgangers and ruining the notion of a unique personal identity. However, in order to see why such a concept matters at all for at least two of Lynch's short films – *Darkened Room*<sup>7</sup> and *Absurda*<sup>8</sup> – we must first visit the philosophical background of personal identity: what makes me the person I am? Is it my body? Perhaps, my mind? Or maybe something else entirely.

Various questions are often connected with the concept of personal identity:<sup>9</sup> what/who am I? What is it to be a person? How do we find who is who? What does it take for a person to persist from one point in time to another? The last question is known as the persistence question. There are many ways to respond to the persistence question. The so-called *psychological-continuity* views state that we inherit beliefs, rationality, or similar mental phenomena from our past selves, and we pass these mental states to our future selves.<sup>10</sup> The most important properties of a person are mental or psychological states, and the notion of personal identity and of particular mental states are internally related, but neither is conceptually prior to the other.<sup>11</sup> Classical counterexamples often include situations like memory losses or comas. For example, is Cooper in *Twin Peaks: The Return*<sup>12</sup> the same person even after a coma? Somehow, we intuitively feel he is.

On the other hand, *brute-physical* views state that the same biological body is needed for causal identity relations,<sup>13</sup> we are our bodies,<sup>14</sup> and psychological facts are excluded. Physicalists believe that psychological connectedness would lead to issues such as that tinkering with

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<sup>1</sup> *Lost Highway*, directed by David Lynch (October Films, 1997).

<sup>2</sup> *Mulholland Drive*, directed by David Lynch (Universal Pictures/BAC Films, 2001).

<sup>3</sup> *Inland Empire*, directed by David Lynch (Absurda, 2006).

<sup>4</sup> Freud Museum, "David Lynch's blurred identity trilogy," *Freud.org*, Aug 22, 20212, <https://www.freud.org.uk/2012/08/22/projections-1-david-lynchs-blurred-identity-trilogy> (accessed Apr 1, 2022).

<sup>5</sup> *Twin Peaks*, created by Mark Frost and David Lynch (Lynch/Frost Productions, 1990–1991).

<sup>6</sup> Cf. Kristina Šekrst, "Wanna Binge-Watch an 18-Hour Film? *Twin Peaks* and the Psychology of the Watching Experience," in *Images Between Series and Stream*, eds. Adam Cichoń and Szymon Wróbel (Warsaw: Universitas, 2023).

<sup>7</sup> *Darkened Room*, directed by David Lynch (DavidLynch.com, 2002).

<sup>8</sup> *Absurda*, directed by David Lynch (Absurda, 2007).

<sup>9</sup> Eric T. Olson, "Personal Identity," in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Summer 2022 Edition)*, ed. Edward N. Zalta, <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2022/entries/identity-personal>.

<sup>10</sup> Olson, "Personal Identity."

<sup>11</sup> Sydney Shoemaker, "Identity, Properties, and Causality," *Midwest Studies in Philosophy* 4 (1979), 340.

<sup>12</sup> *Twin Peaks: The Return*, created by Mark Frost and David Lynch (Showtime, 2017).

<sup>13</sup> Olson, "Personal Identity."

<sup>14</sup> Judith Jarvis Thomson, "People and Their Bodies," in *Contemporary Debates in Metaphysics*, ed. T. Sider, J. Hawthorne and D. W. Zimmerman, 155–176.

someone's brain or feeding a person a drug could result in a new person.<sup>15</sup> Thomson<sup>16</sup> gives the following experiment: we transplant the brain of a person named Brown into the body of a person named Robinson and destroy the rest of Brown-body. The survivor thinks he is Brown, acts like it and it seems intuitive to say that the survivor is Brown. To illustrate, if we were to conduct an experiment in which all the relevant information from a person's brain was stored on a computer, and our body was completely destroyed, it seems intuitive that we feel the body as a somewhat necessary condition for our identity. Lynch played with this intuition in *Lost Highway*, by having different identities linked to the same physical bodies. *Lost Highway* begins with the story of Fred Madison, a saxophonist, and his wife Renee receiving threatening tapes. He meets a Mystery Man, who claims he had met him before. The final tape is watched by Pete alone, and to his horror, it shows him over his wife's dead body. He is sentenced to death, and one day a prison guard finds Pete Dayton, a mechanic looking exactly like Fred, in Fred's cell.<sup>17</sup> Yet, we as the audience are compelled to make the same connection and try to find similarities between these people because *sharing a body* seems like a *necessary* condition for a person's identity, which does not have to be a *sufficient* one. *Mulholland Drive* with the identity change of the two main characters seems to fit this picture as well. But *Inland Empire*, and its precursor *Darkened Room*, seem to tackle something else. In the world of Lynch or in the world of films in general, it is not enough to have psychological continuity or physical continuity, there seems to be an importance in the *story* a character is telling about herself.

Since *Darkened Room* is often seen as a precursor to *Inland Empire*, let us first inspect the importance of the story in its more mature version – *Inland Empire*. *Inland Empire* follows a Hollywood actress Nikki Grace, who got the lead role in the film *On High in Blue Tomorrows*. A woman, claiming to be her neighbor, visits her and tells her two stories, the first one about a boy whose reflection caused evil to be born, and the second one about a girl who found an alley behind the marketplace which led to a palace. She predicts she will get the role and strongly insinuates the film deals with murder. After Nikki had won the role, she found out they are shooting a remake of a German film whose production had been abandoned after both leads were murdered. To illustrate the neighbor's second story, Nikki finds an alley behind the set and finds herself back in time during the rehearsals, thus becoming a character from the neighbor's story. The layering continues: she escapes into a house, where a group of prostitutes tells her to burn a hole through silk and look through it, as a version of a Wonderland mirror and illustration of the neighbor's first story. The linear cinematic narrative breaks with Nikki complying and seeing one of the film's characters claiming she was controlled by the mysterious The Phantom in order to murder someone. The line begins to blur as far as if she is a character or a real-life person, which is further accentuated in the credits, where she is credited as *Nikki Grace / Susan Blue*, both the actress and her film character.

So, what is the importance of a *story* for personal identity? Not as a middle ground between psychological continuity and brute-force continuity views, but as a different viewpoint whatsoever, there is the philosophical theory of *narrativism*. Narrativist accounts of characterization state that making someone the person she is has something to do with

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<sup>15</sup> Thomson, "People and Their Bodies," 167.

<sup>16</sup> Thomson, "People and Their Bodies," 158.

<sup>17</sup> McGowan mentions an interesting stylistic difference: Fred's world is shot with monochromatic tones and low, yellow lighting, along with long periods of silence, while Peter's world is shot using the traditional conventions of Hollywood realism. See: McGowan, *The Impossible David Lynch*, 167.

*narratives: what makes me the person I am is the stories I tell.*<sup>18</sup> A person's identity is established by forming an autobiographical narrative: by possessing a full and explicit narrative of one's life, one develops as a person.<sup>19</sup> Of course, you do not have to tell your whole life story in order to have your identity developed, but you *could* if asked – it is the disposition that counts.<sup>20</sup>

Another layer is the audience – our mental states are important as well since we need to accept these stories as well. Schroer and Schroer<sup>21</sup> state that the second narrativist condition is that we do not need to match a kind of story produced by a professional author, regarding quality and consistency. I believe that this condition is the condition the audience has to fulfill in the tripartite relation of the *audience – identity – character*. We do not need to know every detail the screenwriter and director can tell us, we only need to remember the general outline of the story in order to differentiate between various characters. The audience becomes a part of the narrative and breaks the wall by accepting different narratives as formative rules. Telling a story establishes a person's identity, but in the world of cinema, sometimes the characters are not the only ones that are telling the story. The same goes with real life and the so-called *social narrativism*:<sup>22</sup> we do not remember the first two or three years because of our childhood amnesia, and we rely on testimonies of others to form that portion of our identity. You might also not remember what you had done the night before, and somebody else might tell you. I will posit that both the audience and other characters have roles in establishing other characters' identities in films, either as an informative device, or, best exemplified by Lynch's works, as a *performative device*.

From a narrativist perspective, the line "Someone's saying something about her again" in *Darkened Room* becomes an establishing moment creating a character's identity or a portion of it if she is unable to do so. And it seems that in Lynch's opus, saying something has a certain biblical power of creation and identification. In *Inland Empire*, Nikki becomes one of the prostitutes – Sue – transgressing the boundary between her and her character, by proclaiming: "I'm a whore". Not only do we as the audience accept a new narrative, but the character accepts the *identity*, a new *story* as well. By stating her new role, Nikki is being fully engulfed by the new narrative. In this case, the uttered line is a performative,<sup>23</sup> which unlike *constative* language that describes the world actually, as a speech act – such as performing a marriage ceremony ("I do."), promising, swearing, or betting – actually *does* something under the following conditions: the utterance being stated under the right circumstances by the right speakers with the right intentions.<sup>24</sup> The circumstances are certainly right since Nikki had already become a part of the group and behaved like one, as the only speaker able to do so – herself stating her identity – with the intention of actualizing her role. That goes along with narrativist theories, which state that one has to be the story's narrator and central protagonist, and the story must be about what one takes to be his or her own life.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Eric T. Olson and Karsten Witt, "Narrative and Persistence," *Canadian Journal of Philosophy* (2018), <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/00455091.2018.1486674?journalCode=rcjp20>

<sup>19</sup> Marya Schechtman, *The Constitution of Selves* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1996).

<sup>20</sup> Jeanine Weekes Schroer and Robert Schroer, "Getting the Story Right: A Reductionist Narrative Account of Personal Identity," *Philosophical Studies*, 171 (2014), 465.

<sup>21</sup> Schroer and Schroer, "Getting the Story Right: A Reductionist Narrative Account of Personal Identity," 468.

<sup>22</sup> Eric T. Olson and Karsten Witt, "Narrative and Persistence."

<sup>23</sup> John Langshaw Austin, *How to Do Things with Words* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1962), 5.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>25</sup> Eric T. Olson and Karsten Witt, "Narrative and Persistence."

Saying something from a pragmatist standpoint can be equated with doing something. In Lynch's works, words have often had the performative power, which is best exemplified by *Inland Empire* and its unofficial prequel *Darkened Room*. In the latter, the introductory narration in which a woman narrates about her friend suddenly comes to life. *Darkened Room* starts with a seemingly unconnected documentary-style narration, in which a woman proclaims that her "friend is sitting in a darkened room" and that she cannot see her. The camera then gives us the ability to see her, but by stating the narrative point, the performative aspect of the filmmaking process took place. Namely, by talking about an imprisoned friend, the character of such a person was born. Movies tend to do magic, and so does Lynch. In *Absurda*, the theater audience is identifying one of them as a murderer, while the accused person named Tom disagrees and tries to reject the narrative imposed on him, which seems unsuccessful in the end, since Tom really attacks his friend, again illustrating the performative aspect of the narration. Let us observe these two shorts in more detail.

*Darkened Room* inspired some elements of *Inland Empire*<sup>26</sup> and serves as a certain precursor. First, there is at first a strong feeling of the same style dealing with a hand-held camera in a somewhat low-resolution documentary fashion, which soon transforms into eerie Dutch angles and Lynchian mysterious surroundings. Second, the actress Jordan Ladd who is playing the blonde woman appears in *Inland Empire* as Terri, one of the Valley Girls. To continue, the idea of the Lost Girl<sup>27</sup> seems to have originated in this short film, which is the friend in question the introductory narrator was telling the audience about. In *Inland Empire*, the Lost Girl became imprisoned in a hotel room, symbolizing limbo, after having an affair. Her television screen is displaying not only historical but also present and future events, even though she has no control over its actions. In this case, the Lost Girl has no control over her narrative nor over other narratives: the stories are unfolding in front of her eyes. She is using a radio play *Axxon N.* to communicate with Sue by stating: "Do you want to see? You have to be wearing a watch", which corresponds to a line in *Darkened Room* told by a brunette: "These watches weren't even working watches". Another image is the cigarette hole in *Inland Empire*, mirrored again from *Darkened Room*: the brunette states that "you light a cigarette", then "push and turn right through the silk", and finally "fold the silk over and then you look through the hole". In the short, the abusive brunette wears a silk slip and complains about a hole in her slip. In *Inland Empire*, the Lost Girl gives Sue instructions to burn a hole and see through it, creating a window into other stories. There, the Lost Girl has some control over providing other people with new stories, but here, the abusive brunette is the one seeing everything, and the blonde is not able to look through the hole and notice all things, as the brunette does.

Of course, the opposition between the brunette and the blonde mirrors *Mulholland Drive*.<sup>28</sup> *Mulholland Drive* tells the story of a young brunette with amnesia after a car accident, who sneaks into an apartment occupied by an aspiring blonde actress Betty Elms. The woman assumes the name Rita after seeing a poster of Rita Hayworth on the wall. Betty and Rita try to find out the details of her accident, begin a relationship, and finally visit Club Silencio, in which a host claims that everything is an illusion. Rebekah Del Rio sings Roy Orbison's song *Crying* and collapses, but her voice continues to be heard, thus illustrating that the performance itself

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<sup>26</sup> Inland Empire Wiki, "Darkened Room", *Inland Empire Wiki*, 2022, [https://inland-empire.fandom.com/wiki/The\\_Darkened\\_Room](https://inland-empire.fandom.com/wiki/The_Darkened_Room) (accessed Apr 1, 2022).

<sup>27</sup> Anne Jerslev, *David Lynch: Blurred Boundaries* (Cham: Springer), 167.

<sup>28</sup> Jerslev, *David Lynch: Blurred Boundaries*, 285.

was an illusion. The next day Diane Selwyn wakes up and looks the same as Betty but is a failed actress instead. Soon we find out that she had an affair with Camilla Rhodes, a famous actress who is obviously Rita. In the first part of the film, the blonde was the one establishing the brunette's narrative: her amnesia makes her incapacitated from a narrativist aspect. She is performing the role of social narrativism and filling in Camilla's blanks. In the second part of the film, the blond is the submissive one, a situation reflected in *Darkened Room*, where the blonde is verbally and supposedly physically abused by the brunette. The blond is silent, and the brunette is the master of her narrative as well, as she loses a part of her established identity and has another narrative forced upon her by not disagreeing with it. Narratives, as we have emphasized, can be told by other people. However, there can be a discrepancy between the story we tell, and the story others tell about us,<sup>29</sup> but you cannot have a narrative forced upon you, it has to be about what you take to be your life.<sup>30</sup> In Lynch's world, it seems that the performative aspect of the narrative overrides the person's acceptance.

The introductory narration by Etsuko Shikata describes the situation happening in the darkened room. I have already mentioned this as an example of a performative aspect, in which the narration comes to life at the moment of the utterance. The brunette also seems to possess the power of the narrative, implicitly fulfilling the social narrative role: "When I'll tell you what really happened." The brunette, according to her own words, notices "every f\*\*\*ing little thing" and knows what was *really* going on. Of course, we as the audience are left in the dark, but we seem to be able to change the narrative. At the beginning of the second part of the film, the blonde breaks the fourth wall and talks to the audience who is listening to a story ("Are you listening to me?"). Her utterance that "someone's saying something about her again" can reflect two concepts. First, by saying a narrative of a person, someone is filling in the blanks of the story that makes that person who she is. Second, it is hinted that saying something about the brunette will make her come to life or come to the room, which is again emphasizing the performative aspect of the narrativist utterances. We, as the audience, are hearing her narrative and participate in the creation of her identity.

There is another interesting Lynch's piece playing with the power of doing things with words. *Absurda*, which premiered at the 2007 Cannes Film Festival, features a cinematic theater with a giant pair of scissors sticking out of the screen. When you are used to David Lynch's cinematography, this is the most ordinary part of the film, of course. The projectionist proclaims that the scissors were used to kill a dancer who is being shown on the screen. The members of the audience notice that the dancer looks like one of them, Cindy. Cindy proclaims, "It is me", while the projectionist shows Tom's face on the screen stating that "this is the one who did it". Tom denies it, but others agree that it was him on the screen. Tom soon starts to feel strange while the scissors are shown in a stabbing motion, and Cindy accuses him of looking at her "like that". Soon, screams are heard, and the others beg Tom to stop. After a fadeout, a dancer is shown dancing and she is telling us that she always liked to dance.

There is a lot going on in just two and a half minutes. First, the projectionist tells the story of a ballerina, and by telling it, her image appears, giving her a cinematic life. The performative aspect of his words is actually doing something: *telling a story is creating a*

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<sup>29</sup> Alfonso Muñoz-Corcuera, "Persistence Narrativism and the Determinacy of Personal Identity," *Philosophia* 49 (2021), 723–739.

<sup>30</sup> Marya Schechtman, *The Constitution of Selves*.

*character*. Such a notion can be seen as a reflection of the role of the director in the filmmaking process. The director uses the story and combines all the filmmaking pieces into a coherent narrative. The director started to be seen as an “author” or *auteur* in French film criticism in the late 1940s.<sup>31</sup> For example, Truffaut considered a director an artist,<sup>32</sup> and not just someone who is adapting a script or staging a play. In this short, Lynch’s projectionist is controlling the narrative and making a new reality happen. He is not just an author, he is more than that, he is a performative author. In the same way the director’s words are controlling the reality in the film, following his every whim and move, the projectionist’s words are creating a new reality. By telling us a story of a murder and who did it, there is no *whodunit* mystery: he possesses the major narrative and becomes omniscient. His own narrative is a performative one and by telling the story of a murder, he is making the murder happen.

The notion of identity is emphasized in *Absurda*. First, Cindy identifies with the dancer shown on the screen. Her utterance “It is me” has the same role as *Inland Empire* Sue’s proclamation “I am a whore”. Two layers of identity are important here: the performative aspect of the utterance and the acceptance of the narrative. The subject recognizes another object or referent as herself and equates her identity with that of an object, establishing an equivalence in language and reality. Cindy’s utterance “It is me” has a certain performative power and by proclaiming those words, the identification or signification has been done. By identifying herself with the dancer, Cindy is also *accepting her narrative*. If the dancer is her, and her narrative was told from a social narrativism aspect by another person – the projectionist – then she has to partake in that narrative because of her very identity. The screams and the supposed murder in the end is fulfilling the performative aspect of the narrative. Namely, if Cindy has presumed the dancer’s identity, the narrative being told must come to life as well.

It is interesting to note that Tom refused the identification, even when others were claiming that it indeed was him on the screen. I have mentioned that in social narrativism,<sup>33</sup> other people can influence your story, i.e., partake in creating your identity. However, there might be a discrepancy between what you take to be your own life and what others say.<sup>34</sup> This is the same case here: Tom can refuse the identification and the narrative that is being forced upon him. However, in Lynch’s world, the narrative is not just an utterance, it has a performative power, and forcing a narrative is successful. Like in *Darkened Room*, as soon as the identification took place, Tom had no control over his life, i.e., his narrative started to feel “weird”, and ended up murdering a person.

For Harris,<sup>35</sup> the characters shown in *Absurda* are hardly representations of real people, they are just mere reflections of the projected image. The focus is on the audience who is active in the creation of the meaning. In the same way we are presuming characters’ identities in *Lost Highway* or *Mulholland Drive*, we are actively creating the identities and encouraging identifications in *Absurda* as well. Harris sees the projectionist as Lynch himself, controlling and

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<sup>31</sup> John Caughie, *Theories of Authorship* (London: Routledge, 2013).

<sup>32</sup> Kristin Thompson and David Bordwell, *Film History: An Introduction* (McGraw-Hill Higher Education, 2010).

<sup>33</sup> Eric T. Olson and Karsten Witt, “Narrative and Persistence.”

<sup>34</sup> Cf. Marya Schechtman, *The Constitution of Selves*.

<sup>35</sup> Sam Harris, “Reflections on / of the projected image: David Lynch’s *Absurda*”, *MediaFactory.org.au*, October 23, 2017,

[www.mediafactory.org.au/2017-everyones-a-critic-studio/2017/10/23/reflections-on-of-the-projected-image-david-lynchs-absurda](http://www.mediafactory.org.au/2017-everyones-a-critic-studio/2017/10/23/reflections-on-of-the-projected-image-david-lynchs-absurda) (accessed Apr 1, 2022).

unfolding the events, but he can be seen as an *auteur* in general as well. It is no coincidence that the short is taking place inside a theater, mirroring both the filmmaking process and the end result. Harris<sup>36</sup> sees Lynch's "foresight" because the director knows what is going to happen. I think that this is certainly the case, but only because the power of the director lies in the performative aspect of whatever narrative he chooses to pursue. Another hint that we are dealing with both Lynch and other directors is the name itself: *Absurda* also became the name of Lynch's production company, producing numerous other films as well, including Werner Herzog's *My Son, My Son, What Have Ye Done* (2009).<sup>37</sup>

We could also connect all of these characters and identities to ideas of *doppelgangers*,<sup>38</sup> which are common in Lynch's work, especially *Twin Peaks*. Both *Darkened Room* and *Absurda* may have served as an influence for Jordan Peele's *Us* (2019),<sup>39</sup> in which genetic clones were created by the government to control the originals on the surface. They were soon abandoned underground and left to mindlessly mimic the actions of their counterparts above. Their underground world could be seen as "darkened room", from which there is no way out, and they can only observe the reality happening above, like the Lost Girl can using her television in *Inland Empire*. Peele's work also features scissors, symbolizing untethering of the clones from their counterparts, but also a sequence in which a clone and her counterpart fight while dancing in motion like ballerinas. It would be hard to ignore possible *Absurda*'s influence in this film.

Lynch as the director acts as a painter, he was reportedly<sup>40</sup> imagining a world in which a painting would be in perpetual motion. The projectionist has a double role here: first, as Lynch's surrogate, he is reviving the picture, which suddenly starts dancing. Second, every projectionist actually puts images into motion, creating an illusion of movement. McGowan<sup>41</sup> states that Lynch's cinema implicates the spectator in their very structure and deprives the spectator of the underlying sense of remaining at a safe distance from what takes place on the screen. When the fourth wall was broken in *Darkened Room*, we were no longer passive spectators, we were being begged to intervene. Here, the *Absurda* audience is not watching a film, they are being a part of a narrative and a part of a new film or reality unfolding. Lynch's *Absurda* illustrates bridging that gap between passive spectators and acknowledging that we are not possessing the omniscient narrative even though we may have observed them all: the *auteur* is more powerful than us.

Social narrativism helps us about past or present events, but the director is here to tell us what is yet to happen. In *Inland Empire*, a part of Nikki's story – unbeknownst to her at the time – was created by her neighbor, telling her about the little girl, little boy, and the murder – but unlike social narrativism that tells the past, surrealist narrativism may tell the future. Lynch deliberately merges the past, the present, and the future, along with what is real and what is not. This was especially illustrated by the Lost Girl watching even future events, which she is unable to control. In an intimate scene in *Inland Empire*, the audience is inclined to believe that Nikki

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> *My Son, My Son, What Have Ye Done*, directed by Werner Herzog (Industrial Entertainment/Defilm/Paper Street Films/Absurda, 2009).

<sup>38</sup> For more *doppelgänger* examples, see: Hackston, Ronnie, "(Un)familiar faces: motifs, themes and doubles in the world of David Lynch," *BFI*, May 28, 2021, <https://www.bfi.org.uk/sight-and-sound/lists/david-lynch-cosmos-motifs-themes-doubles>.

<sup>39</sup> *Us*, directed by Jordan Peele (Universal Pictures, 2019).

<sup>40</sup> Michel Chion, *David Lynch. Second Edition* (London: BFI Publishing, 2009), 9.

<sup>41</sup> Todd McGowan, *The Impossible David Lynch* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), 2.

and her co-star Devon have begun an affair. Nikki states that her husband ought not to find out about them and jokes: “Damn! This sounds like a dialogue from our script!” As a result, the camera pans, and we see the surrounding crew, realizing that Nikki thought the affair was actually happening. The meta-narrative about the film-creation process becomes a part of a new narrative, the one of a character realizing the illusion inside the illusion.

In *Darkened Room*, there is a Charlie McCarthy ventriloquist doll in the beginning. The doll is being forced to say whatever the puppeteer wants. We can inspect it from two aspects. The first one is the brunette forcing the narrative upon the silent blonde. The second meta-layer is the director forcing his narrative – the film itself – upon the audience. The fourth wall was broken at the beginning of *Darkened Room* when the blonde was pleading for help because we are the audience here, waiting for the puppeteer, the director, to *perform*.

Both *Absurda* and *Darkened Room* are short pieces that contain a lot of complex ideas present in other Lynch’s works. Namely, the notion of identity seems crucial for Lynch’s films, which is manifested in these two short films using performative narratives, i.e., performing an action of identification using words. That way, Lynch not only tells a story, but is able to change characters’ identities as both an *auteur* and a creator of the narrative.

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