Us, We, Me, I: The Artifice of Identity and Film in *Persona, 3 Women*, and *Mulholland Drive*

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8 January, 2021

Image credits (top – bottom): Bergman, Ingmar. *Persona.* AB Svensk Filmindustri, 1966.
Altman, Robert. *3 Women*. 20th Century Fox, 1977.
Lynch, David. *Mulholland Drive*. Universal Pictures, 2001.
Frame purchase: canva.com

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Introduction

"I've tried

to become someone else for a while

only to discover that he, too, was me."

— Stephen Dunn, "Discrepancies"

The construction and origins of our identity, together with the question of "who we are", has occupied a dominating position in (the history of) cinema and has expressed itself in all kinds of genres, from comedy films such as *Synecdoche, New York* (2008) to cult classics like *Fight Club* (1999). "Identity is first of all a matter of finding ourself within a shared social imaginary" (23), says Paul Kahn, and "film is just such a common imagining" (23). By evoking Lacanian theories of the 'Imaginary', Kahn opposes our perception and presentation of the world against "determine[d] truth" (24). Just as film creates a world with a setting, narrative, and certain characters, he argues, so do we build our own realities. This way of looking at reality as a notion that is fundamentally nothing more than "a product of the imagination" (23) positions the moviegoer as an artist who shapes his own world. Film allows us to reflect on our constructed realities by presenting its own constructed realities. This powerful quality in cinema to unify with its audience, thereby "allowing us to know the way we see and have seen ourselves" (180), is, according to Leo Braudy, "one of the greatest contributions of film to culture" (180). Our identities, then, – whether that of the characters in front of the green screen or human beings in the "real" world – become a concept that we create and keep shaping ourselves.

The belief that identity construction is a social process, and influenced by the people around us, runs as a core idea in three films that will be the central subject of this thesis: Ingmar Bergman's *Persona* (1966); Robert Altman's *3 Women* (1977); and David Lynch's *Mulholland Drive* (2001). These three films tell the journey of pairs of women, who variously go off to a secluded cottage (*Persona*), become roommates and colleagues (*3 Women*), or try to solve a mystery together (*Mulholland Drive*). As a result of this togetherness, the two

women develop a complicated relationship in which both feelings of love and hatred, assimilation and rejection are involved. As these feelings grow more complex, the personalities of the two women seem to shift and blend into each other, and the film reaches its climax through its depiction of this fusion, only to separate them afterwards. What connects these films, a process that will also be the central point of this thesis, is that they all convey a similar message about the nature of identity in relation to others by arguing that identity is fluid and vulnerable or otherwise sensitive to external forces.

Although the films differ greatly in plot and narrative, they strongly resemble each other in terms of themes and ideas, their central element being the unstable identity of the female characters. In psychoanalytic film theory, there has been a growing interest in the portrayal of women on screen, and this thesis aims to contribute to this field by dissecting and discussing these three films that are often mentioned in relation to each other, but are rarely properly explored together.

This thesis will analyse the portrayal of women in *Persona, 3 Women,* and *Mulholland Drive* with regard to their representation of mental illness, duality, and a fractured sense of identity. In these films, female identity has been complexified in order to communicate the idea that identity is fluid – even artificial – and can be affected through "the other", embodied by the second female protagonist. Through close analysis of important scenes, this thesis aims to show that instead of two distinct characters, there is in a sense only one woman in the film, while the other stands as a figment of her imagination. This is made clear both literally and figuratively by these films' cinematography – as these movies portray the women merging into one through framing and other use of particular images. These cinematic techniques and certain (fantastic) symbols that the films employ not only turn them into surreal pieces of art, but also further obscure and complicate the ways in which these films throw the identity of the female characters into question. By specifically focusing on character development and the relationship between characters, while also considering cinematic language, imagery, and setting as crucial components of the cinematic experience, I will argue that the second female character in the film is – among other things – a projection of the main character's fears, desires, and weaknesses, and therefore functions as a persona that the protagonist both admires or aspires to be, yet also refuses to accept because it reveals hidden truths about

herself. The projection of an invented, second personage, is the result of an identity crisis fed by feelings of isolation and failure.

In order to understand the psychology behind this identity crisis, I will discuss theories of psychological projection and projective identification in relation to split or dissociated identities as proposed by Anna Freud and Melanie Klein, followed by Winnicott's theory of the True and False Self. By using their theories as a theoretical framework, this thesis will analyse *Persona, 3 Women,* and *Mulholland Drive* from a psychoanalytical perspective in order to explore the question of individuality and false identities within the main character. In chapter one, I will discuss the psychology behind dissociated identities, in which I will focus specifically on projection and projective identification, as these are the defence mechanisms mostly used by our subject women. For the final three chapters, I will analyse in turn *Persona, 3 Women,* and *Mulholland Drive* in a psychoanalytical context, which will be followed by a conclusion.

What is remarkable is that these films came into being under similar circumstances: at once, in a state between consciousness and unconsciousness caused by illness or meditation. Bergman explained in an interview that the idea for *Persona* developed took form when lying ill in the hospital, where he was in a "non-existing" (Oras 2:28) state between fantasy and reality, which he called a "marvellous feeling" (Oras 2:50). When Altman's wife was ill, he saw dreams that would later be the foundation for his *3 Women* (*Altman: Interviews* 194). Lynch has often given meditation as the stimulus for his ideas. When talking about the origination of *Mulholland Drive* in an interview, the director stated that the ideas simply came to him, and recalled that evening as "a most beautiful experience" (Macaulay 64).

In relation to the origin of these films, it is remarkable that *Persona, 3 Women,* and *Mulholland Drive* are also, perhaps in consequence, surreal films: they each possess a dreamy quality that also illustrates this slippage between the conscious and unconscious. The films are surrealistic in the sense that they fuse with the "instinctual, subconscious, and dream experience" ("surrealism, n.") in order to reach another realm juxtaposed to the characters' reality. Surrealist films have an interest in depicting the subconscious mind of their characters, whether this is when hallucinating, dreaming, imagining or fantasising. These modes of existence might reveal certain unconscious thoughts we have about our identities (hence

Breton's definition of surrealism as "a cry of the mind turning back on itself") (Nadeau 241), hence surrealism becomes a way through which the individual (both the protagonist and the spectator) dives into and explores these contents of the unconscious. Michael Richardson argues that surrealism in film is "not a thing but a relation between things and therefore needs to be treated as a whole" (226*).* This quality of ambiguity in these films make them open for interpretation, while also closely linking them with the concept of overdetermination, a term introduced by Freud, indicating something that "can easily be interpreted from numerous perspectives, and which contains within it in a highly visible manner the signs of a range of discourses, topics, issues, and themes" (Wolfreys 11). In addition to the films themselves, the subconscious state of the characters is also overdetermined in the way that there are multiple causes and explanations for the characters' identity forming. There is, therefore, a direct correlation between the overdetermination present in both the films themselves and their characters.

As is often made clear by the directors, there is no particular message that these films want to convey. In this respect, this thesis will argue that rather than meant to be understood, these films are meant to be experienced, and I will be addressing these films accordingly. In a similar way, the characters in these films have strong, but experience contradictory feelings about each other and behave in opposing ways. Therefore, even though there are clearly defence mechanisms such as projection and projective identification involved in their interactions, this is not unidirectional in the sense that person A projects onto person B and person B identifies with this projection. Rather, feelings and thoughts are being projected back and forth, characters swap roles, and masks are being put on by both women.

Despite this quality of overdetermination and ambivalence inherent in these films, the films are clearly concerned with representing identity as unstable. *Persona, 3 Women*, and *Mulholland Drive* all raise the following questions: what is identity, and how is our identity constructed? Are our identities fixed or fluid? How do other people affect our identity? And: can identities blend when we spend close time with someone else? The first woman implicitly raises these questions, as she is struggling with a false image of herself and her reality, while the second woman is incorporated in the films to answer these questions with regard to identity construction in a world full of isolation, shattered dreams, failure, pain, and loss. In

order to cope with that world – or rather, to escape it –, these women create fantasies for themselves, which leads to a disillusioned image of the self and the world. While the women are moved further away from their reality, the films also present a certain message about film as a medium, Hollywood, conventional women roles, desire, insecurity, obsession, or guilt. The idea that we can share and steal identity is a connecting thread, and the films push the boundaries of this psychology, taking us to a point at which it becomes almost impossible to tell the two women apart. This is the aspect of artificiality which the films are interested in. Often, there is no distinction made between fantasy and reality, falsity and truth, persona and authenticity. Meta-cinematic elements are clearly present in *Persona, 3 Women*, and *Mulholland Drive*, as the films engage in considerations of cinema, theatre, acting, and performance as such, leading to a twofold relationship in which one woman takes on the role of performer, and the other of spectator. The spectator stands as a witness for the performer's acts, who is building narratives of her own in the hope to create meaning for herself. In a similar way, the moviegoer creates meaning for himself – film becomes "an initial point from which to engage in critical self-reflection on our common beliefs and practices" (Kahn 25). In this sense, *Persona, 3 Women,* and *Mulholland Drive* can be considered as deeply self-reflexive films that challenge our thinking on identity, performance, and truth.

Chapter 1: Psychoanalytical Framework

The word "identity" in this thesis refers to the individual in what is imagined to be 'its truest form', a state of being that Winnicott called the True Self, which he contrasted with the False Self, a notion closely linked – but not equivalent – to Carl Jung's concept of 'the persona', or Helene Deutsch's description of the "as-if" personality. The False Self is inauthentic and unoriginal, while the True Self operates in spontaneity, and stimulates creativity. The True Self makes us feel alive; it denotes a certain vitality coming from "the aliveness of the body tissues and the working of body-functions, including the heart's action and breathing" (*Maturational Processes* 148), redolent of Erikson's description, through which he argues that true identity involves "a feeling of being at home in one's body" (165).

The False Self, however, further removes the individual from the True Self and his reality, for it depends upon "images, imaginings, and fantasies that misrepresent the real" (Elder 10). This identification with the other goes hand in hand with the use of defence mechanisms: by relating and not relating to the other ("I am (not) like him/her"), we construct ideas about ourselves in connection to external objects. Defence mechanisms such as projection and projective identification, then, always involve at least two entities – a subject and an object – and contribute "to the development of identity" (Cramer 167) of either the subject or both the subject and object.

As I have argued in the introduction, identity is formed both mentally and socially in our relationships with others. Our behaviour and image are partly shaped by unconscious motivations, which are often in conflict with our consciousness. These conflicts can evoke anxiety in us, which we try to overpower, suppress, or deny through defence mechanisms. In order to understand the role and operation of defence mechanisms such as projection and projective identification in psychological films such as *Persona, 3 Women,* and *Mulholland Drive*, it is crucial to familiarise the reader with key concepts. This chapter covers for the main part theories of projection and projective identification as defence mechanisms as offered by Melanie Klein and Anna Freud. With these concepts as my starting-point, I will delve deeper into Winnicott's theory of the False and True self, which is also part of an individual's defence

system. Aside from defining terminology, this chapter will discuss the causes and effects of defence mechanisms, and the failure to incorporate a True Self, both leading to an unauthentic self and ultimately disintegration – all these ideas will give us pertinent information that will increase our comprehension of our subject films.

The theories of defence mechanisms by Anna Freud and Klein have one pivotal element in common: they trace the employment of defence mechanisms to a central starting point – our childhood. Their core belief is that one's behaviour as an adult is influenced by his or her familial relationships and childhood experiences. "For in every adult there dwells the child that was, and in every child there lies the adult that will be", as John Connolly said in *The Book of Lost Things* (2006) (4). This belief that the foundation of our identity is rooted in our childhood has led to numerous theories of psychoanalysis and psychopathology, and is on display in the introduction to Sigmund Freud's *Totem and Taboo* (1913), in which Abraham Bill states that "the civilised adult is the result of his childhood or the sum total of his early impressions: psychoanalysis thus confirms the old saying: The child is father to the man" (5). Sigmund Freud's youngest daughter, Anna, is believed to be a progenitor of child psychoanalysis. A new direction was found when she and other children's psychoanalysts started to analyse children by having direct contact with them. The first half of the twentieth century, therefore, saw a wave of psychoanalysts who were trying to understand the conscious and unconscious elements in the mind of children. Klein, a second pioneer in child analysis, even invented her own method to analyse infants – the play technique. Through this idiosyncratic approach, she would observe children and the way they played with their toys.

This new field of study in psychoanalysis led to revolutionary findings: for one, it revealed that children employ defence mechanisms from an early age, hence psychoanalyst Jean-Michel Quinodoz's portrayal of Klein as the discoverer of the "infant-in-the-child" (84). Klein's discoveries form a central part in Object Relations Theory, which split up from Freudian Theory in arguing that – among other things – relational drives carry more weight than biological drives in identity formation. "The need for human contact", says Craig Johnson, "constitutes the primary motive within an object relations perspective" (296). As a general principle, Object Relations Theory insists that the relationship with the caregiver as an object – usually the mother – creates and modifies to a great extent one's identity as an adult. This

same idea is also underlined in Anna Freud's work, who states that the use of defence mechanisms is “of crucial importance for the picture which the child forms of the world around him and the way in which this personality develops” (123).

Defence mechanisms are unconscious responses that protect the ego from experiencing anxiety or guilt. The subject experiences thoughts and feelings he cannot tolerate, and makes use of defence mechanisms in order to distance himself from these unacceptable drives. In her studies on child analysis, Klein noticed that children, when anxious, tried to hold onto good objects in order to internalise good feelings, while they dismissed the bad objects along with certain negative associations. Through this recurrent observation, she concluded that “it is primarily against aggression and anxiety that defences were erected” (Segal 3), among which “denial, splitting, projection, and introjection appeared to be active” (3). She argued that splitting too, is a primitive defence mechanism that infants employed when exposed to anxiety in relation to the mother: "the child turns to his mother's body all his libidinal desires but, because of frustration, envy, and hatred, also his destructiveness" (Segal 5). Moreover, these anxieties spring from certain phantasies that the child is not aware of. A common example of splitting in early infancy is the distinction between the “good breast” versus the “bad breast”: the presence of the mother's breast indicates food, whereas its absence signifies the lack of it. The absence of the breast, therefore, unconsciously leads to frustration and fear in the child, who, in order to defend “himself against the reality of his own hunger and anger” (Segal 16), creates certain phantasies that will – although momentarily – satisfy him. Yet, in doing this, the infant also alters his perception and understanding of reality. This tendency to escape reality through certain phantasies, then, might persist in adult life, for they are “ubiquitous and always active in every individual” (Segal 12). How and to what extent these imaginings will affect the individual, however, is dependent on “the nature of these unconscious phantasies and how they are related to external reality” (Segal 12). In *Persona, 3 Women,* and *Mulholland Drive,* characters also create certain phantasies for themselves, which take place in their inner world and function as a form of wish-fulfilment that Klein discusses in her work. The concept of ambivalence plays, according to her, a necessary role in the path to maturity: if a child fails to learn to distinguish between fantasy and reality, it will as an adult be prone to think in two

extremes. This seems to be the case in the films, as the women often experience feelings of either love or hate and regard the other as both an idol and scapegoat.

Perhaps most known for her theories of defence mechanisms is Anna Freud, who often conflicted with Klein in certain methodological perspectives. In what arguably is her most famous book, *The Ego and the Mechanisms of Defence* (1936), she addresses “the ways and means by which the ego wards off unpleasure and anxiety” (v). The book operates as an expansion of her father's work, as she builds on his theories, while at the same time she redefines some terminology. Like Klein, she argues that anxiety functions as a catalyst for defence mechanisms. Although the reasons for this anxiety vary (See Freud, Anna 54; 57), Freud suggests that they arise from the id, which is the unconscious part of the psyche that has certain instincts and desires. As the ego is positioned as a mediator between the id and the superego, its prime function is to balance the wishes of the id and the superego. When a "relatively strong id confronts a relatively weak ego" (Freud, Anna 140), the ego fails to maintain this balance, which evokes feelings of anxiety in the individual. One reason that Freud gives for defence is what her father called “the pleasure principle”, which represents the idea that an individual "will welcome pleasurable affects and defend itself against painful ones” (Freud, Anna 62).

Freud explains that the term “defence” first made an appearance in her father's work “The Neuro-Psychoses of Defence” (1894), but that it soon got replaced with “repression”. She then clarifies the distinction between these two words by defining repression as a “special method of defence” (43), thus suggesting that repression is one of the several modes of defence. According to Freud, there are ten defence mechanisms that the ego employs in order to protect itself: displacement (also called *sublimination*), introjection, isolation, projection, turning against one's own person, reaction formation, regression, repression, reversal, and undoing. While arguing that defence mechanisms are natural, she warns that they become problematic when they occur too frequently. The key in mastering the ego is for the ego to become aware of its own defence mechanisms.

The concept of psychological projection is believed to have been theorised by Sigmund Freud as it first appeared in one of his letters to Wilhelm Fries, an otolaryngologist and at the time a close friend of Freud (see Quinodoz 24). In his writings on paranoia, Freud discusses a

particular case of a woman that used to be his patient, who “deliberately repressed” (*Origins of Psychoanalysis* 110) certain memories of herself in an intimate encounter with a stranger. Freud believes, that in order to protect her ego, the woman had to emit negative images through the “mechanism of transposition or projection” (111). He makes the distinction between “normal projection” and projection in the condition of paranoia – with the former, the individual is conscious of an “internal change” (111), whereas with the latter he is not.

Klein drew further on this notion of projection. As a child splits objects into good and bad, it naturally wants to introject the acceptable and project the unacceptable (Segal 26). As is the case with most defence mechanisms, projection involves both a subject and an object. The subject is the projector, whereas the object is the recipient that can be both animate or inanimate. Sigmund Freud believed that often the object already possessed the projected feature, but that the projector hyperbolised its manifestation. Similar to any other defence mechanism, projection occurs when an individual disapproves of a specific thought or trait of himself. In order to disown himself from this attribute, he projects the subject matter onto an external object, and loses his awareness of it. However, the unpleasant quality that the subject has projected, does not disappear, but remains, although the subject does not consider it to be part of himself anymore. In this sense, projection can be delusional, and create a falsity for the person who does the projection. Projection involves other defence mechanisms as well, as the subject is both *denying* and *repressing* these qualities that he thinks of disowning.

But it is not just negative qualities that are projected, as Hanna Segal explains: "good parts may be projected to avoid separation or to keep them [the object] safe from bad things inside or to improve the external object through a kind of primitive projective reparation" (Segal 27). In this case, projection is not employed to defend the self, but to protect the object. In *Persona, 3 Women,* and *Mulholland Drive,* we will see that projection is used in both these ways: the women project negative traits in order to partly attack the object and to distance themselves from those traits, while at the same time they take on the role of caregiver and project positive traits in order to protect the object. In addition, projections can “provoke counter-projection when the object is unconscious of the quality projected upon it by the

subject" (Jung et al 273). Counter-projection becomes a form of retaliation that causes the women in the films to function as both an object and a subject.

When these positive and negative qualities are adopted and internalised, making them part of the object, we speak of projective identification. Through her research on child analysis, Klein was able to expand upon Sigmund Freud's notion of projection and introduced the concept of projective identification in 1946:

> Much of the hatred against parts of the self is now directed towards the mother. This leads to a particular form of identification which establishes the prototype of an aggressive object-relation. I suggest for these processes the term *projective identification*. ("Notes on Some Schizoid Mechanism" 102) (emphasis in original)

Although not necessarily, projective identification is a further step of projection. Its effects are often more disturbing than projection, too: the object not only receives the projection, but also *identifies* himself with these attributes, believing that he indeed possesses these qualities. In the process of projective identification, the projector "strives to find in the other, or induce[s] the other to become, the very *embodiment* of projection" (Laing 79) (emphasis in original). So whereas projection is a one-sided process, projective identification requires active participation from two people: the projector *sends*, and the object not only *receives* but also (whether willingly or unwillingly) *accepts* the projection. In this sense, projective identification leads to the establishment of some sort of an exchange. A Freudian equivalent to Klein's concept of "projective identification" is what Sigmund Freud has called "introjection" and his daughter Anna "identification with the aggressor". In contrast to Laing, Anna Freud argues that projective identification causes for a shift in roles, as the object is no longer a target anymore: "the child transforms himself from the person threatened into the person who makes the threat" (113).

Projective identification can lead to disillusionment in both parties, as both the subject and object imagine the projected qualities to be part of the object's identity: the projection of the subject is turned into a reality for the object. As the object identifies with the characteristics that are actually present within the subject, there emerges some type of connection between them: the parts that are split off by the projector are internalised in the recipient. Winnicott defines projection and introjection as "identifying oneself with others

and others within oneself" (*The Collected Works* 36). In this regard, the object becomes an extension of the self. In *Persona, 3 Women,* and *Mulholland Drive,* something similar happens: as one woman is projecting, the other is integrating these qualities of the projector. The projector believes that she has distanced herself from these same qualities, but they are still part of her. So on the one hand there is a woman who still possesses these qualities but does not believe she does, while on the other there is someone who does not possess these qualities but believes she does. This confusion causes a blur in the films, as the characters become increasingly similar.

Projective identification leads not only to confusion of identity but also of dynamics of power: often, there is a power struggle between the subject and object, as effort at control and manipulation can become part of it. While the projector exhibits symptoms of megalomania, the object feels weak, helpless, and controlled by the subject. Laing explains that "the recipient of the projection may suffer a loss of both identity and insight as they are caught up in and manipulated by the other person's fantasy" (37). In extreme instances, projection and projective identification can lead to gaslighting of the object. But this fear of control might also work counterproductive, as Segal portrays: the projector might fear "that an attacked object will retaliate equally by projection" (30). Furthermore, the projector might feel imprisoned when the object starts to identify with the projection. This is especially the case with positive traits, for the projector will experience the feeling "of having been robbed of these good parts and of being controlled by other objects" (Segal 30). In this context, power is not absolute – rather, it shifts. In *Persona, 3 Women,* and *Mulholland Drive,* power is relational: the relationship between the two women is power-driven, and the shifts of power are visible, as it oscillates between two poles – between the receiver of care and caregiver, between the subject and object, and between the projector and projected.

Throughout her whole career, Klein preferred to use the word *position* over *phase* to denote certain stages in an infant's life, for the word position for her indicates a type of behaviour that "persist[s] throughout life" (Segal 36). Klein explains that it might seem as if defence mechanisms are used temporarily, but they are actually unconsciously taken with the child into adulthood. Whereas many of these defences are completely normal in infants (see Freud, Anna 80), both Klein and Freud impose the belief that they might become a problem

if they persecute later on in life. Although they might seem to be effective in the immediate moment – as they help the individual to cope with anxiety and offer relief –, they can damage the subject in the long term, as they distort our perception of reality, as Freud explains: a certain mechanism of defence, such as denial, repression, or projection "belongs to a normal phase in the development of the infantile ego, but, if it recurs in later life, it indicates an advanced stage of mental disease" (80). In the following chapters, I will regard the female protagonists in *Persona, 3 Women,* and *Mulholland Drive* as adults who exemplify this same idea: these women still, albeit unconsciously, employ defence mechanisms in order to avoid the truth about their reality and self. In this sense, they fit Klein's description of the infants in her analyses who have built inside themselves "a complex internal world" (Segal 4) that is wholly based on phantasies. Besides power struggles, relational problems, and a detachment from reality, defence mechanisms can lead to a further depersonalisation and ultimately to a total destruction or obliteration of the self:

> When the mechanisms of projection, introjection, splitting, idealization, denial, and projective and introjective identification fail to master anxiety, and the ego is invaded by it, then disintegration of the ego may occur as a defensive measure. (Segal 30)

According to Freud, healthy identities are formed when there are "harmonious relationships possible between the id, the superego, and the forces of the outside world" (175). Defence mechanisms may still be employed, but need to "effect their purpose" (175), so the ego develops self-awareness and increases mastery of the self. For Segal,

> The acceptance of reality involves the renunciation of omnipotence and magic, the lessening of splitting, and the withdrawal of projective identification . . . It also involves, as part of reparation, allowing one's objects to be free, to love and restore one another without depending on oneself. All or most of these elements are lacking when the reparation is a part of manic defences against depressive anxieties. (102)

A concept closely tied to the (dis)integration and distortion of identity is Winnicott's theory of the True and False Self as conceptualised in his studies on emotional development. As with Klein and Freud, who traced the use of defence mechanisms back to childhood, Winnicott argues that the True and the False Self emerge during childhood and in relation to the mother. The True Self is intrinsic and authentic, it is taken to be the Self that one is naturally born with. The False Self, on the other hand, is "turned outwards and related to the

world" (*Maturational Process* 140). The False Self is part of our defence system, and its primary "defensive function is to hide and protect the True Self" (*Maturational Process* 142) as a means to prevent certain anxieties from rising. Winnicott classifies five distinct forms of the False Self, ranging from the most extreme version of the fake to the more healthy. In the case of the extreme, the False Self is presented as the True Self, and "it is this that observers tend to think is the real person" (142). In a completely healthy sense, however, the False Self is only employed to serve society, in the form of "the polite and mannered social attitude" (143). In this thesis I will argue that the female characters in *Persona, 3 Women,* and *Mulholland Drive* oscillate between the extreme and the less extreme, for they often impose a façade (on others) of the True Self. In less extreme cases, this façade is still there, but the True Self is "allowed a secret life" (*Maturational Processes* 143). In the next chapters, then, we will see that the female characters in *Persona, 3 Women,* and *Mulholland Drive* employ several defence mechanisms as they fluctuate between their True and False Self and arguably still fight (*Persona*), succeed (*3 Women*), or fail (*Mulholland Drive*) to become whole.

Chapter 2: "You could be me just like that": The Hopeless Dream of Being in *Persona*

When Bergman was asked what his film *Persona* is about, he gave the following answer: "two young women sitting on a shore in large hats, absorbed in comparing hands" (205-206). Although this description Bergman offers is sufficient for a simple synopsis of the storyline, it reveals little about the film's deeper level, and therefore leaves it still very elusive when it comes to analysis. In *Persona*, Bergman draws our attention to the hands of two women: that of Elisabet Vogler (Liv Ullmann), a stage actress who has been diagnosed for mutism, and that of Alma (Bibi Andersson), a practicing nurse who is assigned to (psychologically) take care of Elisabet. As the two set off to a beach house to provide Elisabet further care, the actress' reticence becomes counterbalanced by Alma's talkativeness, who, as time goes on, confides stories about her past to Elisabet. Increasingly, Alma starts to identify herself with her female counterpart to the extent that the two women become indistinguishable on the screen. Throughout the film, the theme of identity is transformed into a metaphor as it questions and explores the role of art, death, language, performance, motherhood, and gender roles. With *Persona,* Bergman presents the world of theatre and play as a double-edged sword – a form of temporary escapism that allows us to break free from the complexity and difficulties of life, though often at the expense of our own identity.

The professions of Elisabet and Alma are of great significance as they reveal something about the nature of the two women and the way they want to be perceived. We learn that Elisabet is an actress, a piece of information and detail that immediately puts her identity into question: actresses put on different masks – their role is to *impersonate* and *perform* other characters. Moreover, it becomes clear that Elisabet was in the middle of a stage performance when she suddenly stopped using her voice: playing the role of Electra, and glistering with sweat under the bright projection lights, the heavily made up Elisabet looks confusedly around her, unable to utter a word. The subtle reference to Electra in the film cannot go unmentioned as it is of relevance to our interpretation of the film: Electra is a Greek mythological figure that is the central character in the identically titled play by Sophocles. In

his essay on *Persona*, Robert Boyers argues that the film is a retelling of this play, in which Alma embodies Electra's sister Chrysothemis, an "unhappy young woman, nervous, guilt-ridden, and incapable of doing anything at all" ("Bergman's Persona" 6). Just like Electra, Elisabet is a mourner: she has buried her emotions and thoughts, and has withdrawn herself completely from society. During her performance of *Electra*, it seems as if Elisabet has suddenly become aware of her lack of identity as an actress, which she, paradoxically, decides to voice through her silence.

Following in the footsteps of her mother, Alma works as a nurse in a hospital. She is assigned to take care of Elisabet, who has been in this condition of voicelessness for the past three months. After a short interaction with Elisabet, in which we discover that Alma is engaged, Alma gives her supervisor her first impression of the patient: "At first her face looks soft, almost childish, but then you see her eyes... her expression is so hard" (07:48-08:02). Despite her portrayal of Elisabet as ostensibly sweet and infantile, Alma expresses her wish to turn the assignment down, explaining that she might "not be able to manage [Elisabet]… mentally" (10:16-10:18). Instead, Alma advises that Elisabet should be taken care of by an older and more experienced nurse. Alma's refusal to look after a patient, a task that she should both mentally and physically be able to carry out as a nurse, portrays Alma in a certain light: by putting the emphasis on *older* and *more experienced,* Alma gives us the impression that she herself has not fully reached adulthood, is short on experience, and therefore perhaps has not developed herself as deeply as she would need to have done to accept responsibility for something that she clearly regards as an intimidating challenge.

Based on this first interaction between Elisabet and Alma, the film establishes a comparison between the two women in terms of (mental) power, just as Alma does: "If she [Elisabet] has made a conscious decision not to speak or move... then that shows great mental strength – I may not be up to it" (10:21-10:30). In depicting Elisabet as a strong figure, Alma already alters our perception of the two female characters. A great inspiration for Bergman and his work, and whose influence is also evident in *Persona*, is the Swedish playwright August Strindberg. Bergman explained that "Strindberg has followed me all my life" (Bergman et al 23), and *Persona* too echoes in many ways Strindberg's work, particularly his play *The Stronger* (1889), a work that shows the interactions between two women – a talkative Mrs X

and her completely silent counterpart, Mrs Y. Following *The Stronger, Persona* juxtaposes silence with speech to ask a crucial question: when one is silent, and the other exposes themselves in speech, which is the stronger?

Our impression of Alma is further shaped when we are alone with her in her room, in which she speaks directly to the camera while she is applying some lotion on her face and neck:

> It is funny. You can go about as you please, do almost anything. I will marry Karl-Henrik and we will have a couple of children, whom I will have to raise. It is all decided. It is inside me. I do not even have to think about it. It is a great feeling of security. I have a job I like and enjoy. That is good too... but in another way. But it is good. Yes... it is good. (14:00-14:45)

By sharing these private and intimate feelings with us, Alma gives us a glimpse of the compelling thoughts that occupy and control her mind before she goes to sleep. Her struggle to find the right words, as well as the contradiction of herself, is an indication that the young nurse is uncertain about the way her life has been unfolding so far. She doubts her role as someone destined to partake in marriage and raising children, as has been decided for her by fate, and seems to crave more in life than these traditional domestic roles expected from her.

Someone else who seems to be discontented with her reality, is Elisabet. Although we barely hear or see her speak in the film, this idea is repeatedly brought up by both Alma and another female character in the film, Alma's supervisor, the doctor, who accuses Elisabet of being untrue to her character. Although she plays a fairly minor role in the film, and has no distinctive relationship with Elisabet other than being her doctor, she seems to understand her suffering and confronts the young actress with an analysis of her malady in the following monologue:

> Don’t you think I understand? The hopeless dream of being. Not seeming, but being . . . The chasm between what you are to others and what you are to yourself . . . and the constant hunger to be unmasked once and for all. To be seen through, cut down, perhaps even annihilated. Every tone of voice a lie, every gesture a falsehood, every smile a grimace. (20:05-20:48)

Elisabet’s condition of “seeming” instead of “being” denotes in Winnicottian terms the dichotomy between the False Self and the True Self, and places Elisabet in a position in which

she embodies the former. As we have seen, the False Self, Winnicott explains, is characterised by the participation in “reacting rather than existing” *(Maturational Processes* 122*)* together with ceaseless feelings of phoniness – two features that the doctor recognises in Elisabet. The doctor, played by Margaretha Krook, knows that there is no cure for Elisabet: her silence is self-controlled. This lack of language is a form of emotional suicide for Elisabet, who has made the choice to remain silent in the hope that she can thereby disguise her false character. But, as the psychiatrist reveals, this creation of a façade as a form of escapism is fruitless: at some point in life, your reflection and judgments are required, regardless of whether they are true or false: "questions like that only matter in theatre, and hardly even there" (21:29-21:43).

Following the advice of the doctor, the two women leave the hospital and instead move to a secluded cottage near the sea, where they find themselves in what seems to be a never-ending, one-sided conversation from Alma's part. One evening, Alma tells Elisabet about an unusual experience she had on a beach, where she met another woman named Katarina. The two spent some time together, both wearing “cheap straw hats” (35:18) – which reminds us of a previous scene with Alma and Elisabet –, when they meet two young boys with whom they engage in sexual activity. This incident, which leaves Alma pregnant, not only reveals that she has been unfaithful to her fiancé, but also undermines her previous statement in which she expresses this fidelity to him: “I like Karl-Henrik so much ... I'm faithful to him” (27:54-28:01).

In this shot, Bergman does not make use of flashbacks to take us to Alma's memory, for the film is not interested in the events of her past – instead, he zooms in on the – albeit one-sided – exchange between Elisabet and Alma, as the scene is rather about the emotions and guilt this experience awakens in Alma, and the fact that she opens up and confesses this to Elisabet. This image is reminiscent of a psychotherapeutic session: while sitting on a *chaise longue*, a sofa that is associated with and used in psychotherapy, Alma confesses her deepest sins, while Elisabet, like a therapist, in an extremely attentive manner observes her from a distant. "Equally important", explains Bergman, "is the woman who listens to her – the *receiver*" (Bergman et al 208) (emphasis added). In this new setting, having left the hospital behind, roles get reversed: instead of taking care of Elisabet, Alma is now the patient in need of (mental) support – Elisabet's support.

As the story progresses, the depiction of the difference of strength between the women will persist, and while the two increasingly engage in a vis-à-vis relationship between projector and receiver, we will slowly notice how dependent Alma actually is on Elisabet. In this type of relationship, dependence often results from an “increasing idealisation of the ideal object” (Segal 27). Alma finds solace and comfort in Elisabet, who she believes is “the first person who has ever listened to me [Alma]” (27:05-27:10). In future interactions with Elisabet, too, the nurse is not hesitant to express her admiration for her: she frequently compliments the actress on her beauty, and wonders why a person like Elisabet would be concerned with her stories. It is through Elisabet that Alma finds love and “unaccountable happiness” (*Envy and Gratitude* 320): “It feels so good to talk. It feels nice and warm. I've never felt like this in all my life” (27:25-27:39).

This affection, however, is turned into revolt when Alma finds a letter written by Elisabet and decides to read it. In this letter, Elisabet shares her observations regarding Alma: “She feels as if her notions of life fail to accord with her actions”. Alma feels betrayed, similar to how a patient would feel betrayed upon discovering that her therapist has shared confidential information about herself with others. This is also the first time in the film that Alma is confronted with the reality of herself. Hurt by the idea that Elisabet, a loved and trusted friend, has unmasked her, Alma shows that she is willing to go as far as needed to harm Elisabet. Her feelings of vengefulness and desire for revenge become clear in one of the longest silent shots in the film, when a piece of glass turns into a powerful weapon for Alma, with which she knows she can hurt Elisabet. At this point, Alma is totally out of her character as a nurse: she is about to throw a kettle of boiling water on Elisabet, when something surprising happens: we hear Elisabet, who is motivated by her death instincts, speak for the first time. Consequently, Elisabet leaves the cottage, and Alma immediately regrets her actions and behaviour, which she labels as "sheer exhibitionism" (56:13), and desperately begs for her forgiveness. In these moments, we see Alma acting out the mechanism that Klein and Freud have referred to as “splitting”: she is only capable to view matters in an either extremely positive or extremely negative light – she either adores Elisabet to the point of almost worshipping her, or loathe her to the degree that she will get involved in death-defying situations. Just as with Klein's example of an infant's relation to the mother's breast, Elisabet's

presence indicates happiness for Alma, whereas her absence leads to sadness, anger, and regret.

As Alma is tormented in an emotional battle between love and hate, the two women become embroiled in a complex relationship that shows how similar the helper is to her ill partner. The film hints at the idea that the two women share one psyche, and Bergman makes use of certain techniques to emphasise this idea and to indicate a certain confusion between the two protagonists. Bergman suggests this idea in several ways: literally, through narrative, and figuratively, through his use of visuals. The film's themes of duality most visibly arise when one evening, Alma lies together in bed with Elisabet. Overwhelmed with guilt concerning her abortion, she bursts out crying: "What about all the things you'd decided to do? Don't you have to do them anymore? *Is it possible to be one and the same person at the very same time, I mean, two people*?" (34:19-34:35) (emphasis added). The ambivalent smile of the mysterious Elisabet turns Alma's questions into rhetorical ones, for we realise that we do not need an answer – at least, not through words: the film instead answers by having the two women embrace, signalling their unification.

In one of his interviews, Bergman explains that it was a picture of Bibi Andersson and Liv Ullman which ultimately formed the genesis of the film. The photo of the two women made him realise how – uncannily – the women resembled each other, as they were "both like and unlike" one another (Bergman 206). This peculiarity of similarity and discrepancy between the two women – who were both involved in a relationship with the director – bothered him for a long time, Bergman explains: "I thought it would be wonderful to write something about two people who lose their identities in each other; who are similar in some way" (Bergman et al 196). In *Persona*, precisely this idea is executed in a scene, where Alma says the following:

> You know what I thought after I saw a film of yours one night? When I got home and looked in the mirror, I thought, *we look alike . . .* I think I could turn to you if I really tried. You could be me just like that... (35:23-35:58) (emphasis in original)

While saying this, Alma snaps her fingers, indicating the easiness in which Alma could turn into Elisabet, or vice versa. A third indication comes from an outsider: Elisabet's husband, Mr Vogler, who appears at the cottage. The blind man, played by Gunnar Björnstrand, calls Alma

several times by Elisabet's name, even when Alma corrects him. The film then suggests that Mr Vogler has sex with Alma. Mr Vogler's blindness, which is made incompatible with his wife's silence, is also symbolical, for he recognises Alma's voice as familiar, and hence becomes unable to identify and distinguish the two women.

Through Bergman's way of framing, too, it is multiple times suggested that Alma and Elisabet are parts of each other. Bergman plays with light and dark, foreground and background, camera angles, close-ups, and movement to illustrate the two women as one, or at least, as two halves that complete each other and make a whole person. The scene in which Mr Vogler – mistakenly? – takes Alma for Elisabet is shot in an interesting way, for it shows the application of these techniques (Fig. 1): of both women, only the left half of their face is shown. In addition, the scene is shot in deep focus, a technique through which the objects in both the foreground and background are in focus (Santas 59*).* In general, deep focus is a way to emphasise all elements in an image; in *Persona*, this allows us to "explore the psychological states of [the] characters" (Knopf 177): through the use of deep focus, Bergman makes his characters equally notable, yet by zooming in on them, simultaneously cuts them off, leaving us with an incomplete, fragmented picture, as well as representing the women as such.

These same techniques are used in an earlier shot, when Alma talks about her first love, explaining that "in some strange way it was never quite real... at least, *I* was never quite real to him. But my pain was for real, that's for sure" (26:28-26:42). While Alma is telling her story, the camera zooms in on her, and because Elisabet is sitting behind her at the table, Alma is concealing certain parts of her (fig. 2). Elisabet's face is out of the picture, but her body is still there, while Alma's body is not on screen, but we can see her face. This way of framing represents the women as two halves who complement each other. It is also relevant to our previous chapter, as it illustrates Winnicott's description of the receiver being an "extension" of the sender when projective identification takes place. Alma's story about authenticity, identity, and reality appeal to Elisabet, who identifies with similar difficulties.

Fig. 1. Mr Vogler mistakes Alma for Elisabet in *Persona* (Ingmar Bergman, 1966, AB Svensk Filmindustri)

Fig. 2. Alma talks about her first love, with Elisabet behind her in *Persona* (Ingmar Bergman, 1966, AB Svensk Filmindustri)

The notion of projection and projective identification is most effectively executed near the end of the film, when the film reaches its climax. The scene concerns Alma's confrontation

of Elisabet's past in a lengthy monologue. The scene is shown two times – the first time from the perspective of Alma, then from Elisabet's, which furthermore illustrates how both projection and projective identification are simultaneously experienced by the women. Although the original motive for the repetition of the same scene is simple (Ullman explained in an interview that Bergman simply "couldn't choose" between the two shots) (Oliver 42), the scene provides us with important details for an understanding of the film. Alma accuses Elisabet of lacking "motherliness", and claims that Elisabet wanted to have the (social) role of being a mother, but when she got pregnant, she regretted her decision, fearing responsibility, pain, and mutation of her body, while keeping up the appearance of the "young, happy, expectant mother" (1:11:37). Elisabet opted for an abortion, but when this failed, she detested the child, and abandoned him so she could return to the theatre. Alma believes that these feelings of guilt and remorse continue to gnaw at Elisabet, who feels repulsed by her own son, and is unable to reciprocate feelings of love and affection to him.

In this fragment, Alma fills in on Elisabet's thoughts, feelings, and experiences, but while doing this, she is actually projecting her own experiences, guilt, and fears onto Elisabet. We know that Alma also has her doubts about her role in life, about her motherly qualities – or the lack of it –, as she actually attempted an abortion that *did* succeed. Alma, just as Elisabet, struggles to choose between her career and a child. She calls Elisabet "cold and indifferent" (1:11:52) for her ethos, making use of the same choice of words that she described herself with before (1:06:19). In this light, this confrontation can be interpreted as Alma speaking to her ugly side, this side of guilt that she is experiencing from her abortion. Although the scene is repeated, the two women give one performance, the same performance, only in different ways: Alma through her garrulity, Elisabet through her silence. The techniques employed here foreshadow a later scene of *Mulholland Drive,* in which Lynch also repeats a scene to communicate this very same idea that the two women represent two sides of the same coin.

Persona is about two women who are "exchanging masks and suddenly sharing one between them" (Bergman et al 202). The monologue that Alma delivers is a visualisation of this exchange of masks, after which the characters morph into each other: Alma's left side of her face and Elisabet's right side are mirrored and combined to form a Janus-faced person –

a "combination of Bibi's and Liv's less attractive sides" (Bergman et al 203). Suddenly, Alma seems to become aware of her own projections, and immediately finds herself in denial:

> No! I am not like you. I don't feel the same way as you do. I'm Sister Alma. I'm only here to help you. I'm not Elisabet Vogler. *You're* Elisabet Vogler. I'd really like to have... I love... I haven't... (1:13:55-1:14:57) (emphasis added)

Alma is trying to repress her fear of and dislike for having a child – "child" being a word she is not even capable to say at that moment, a word that restricts her speech, because it makes her nervous. She pretends that she genuinely wanted to have a baby in the past, blaming the situation for her abortion, whereas in reality, like Elisabet, she never wanted to. After this confrontation with Elisabet, or rather, arguably, with herself, in which she feels “the bad object intruding” into her (*Envy and Gratitude* 322), Alma tries to detach herself from Elisabet: she notices how alike the two of them are, but resists to accept this idea, and therefore uses the mechanisms of denial and rationalisation to protect herself. She reminds herself and Elisabet why she is in the cottage house, and identifies and represents herself again as the balanced person who *offers* help rather than being the one who *needs* it. Clothing, a tool that often shapes and determines someone's identity, also plays a role here: Alma reassumes her role as a nurse by dressing up in her old uniform.

From a Jungian perspective, Elisabet can be interpreted as representing Alma's Shadow, a side of Alma that keeps haunting her, but that she keeps trying to rid herself of ("You won't get to me") (1:16:00). Alma, then, represents Elisabet’s persona: she is the chatty, upbeat side of Alma, who expressed her engagement with joy in order to meet the expectations of society. In reality, however, Alma craves freedom – these are the desires of the id. When she realises she is deceiving herself, she slaps Elisabet in the face, which, Boyers argues, is a "gesture of self-defence" (“Bergman and Women” 134). The self-defence here, refers to Alma's attempt to protect her ego from her Shadow, rather than it being a physical form of protection from Elisabet.

The film has a remarkable interest in hands and their depiction. Hands are considered to be an important motif in the film, as they are demonstrated as a sort of tool through which we penetrate or come close to the unknowable other. In the prologue of *Persona*, a young boy in a hospital is stroking an image that oscillates between Alma and Elisabet's face. The

boy, like the spectator, is trying to reach out into the soul and depths of this individual, but is blocked by her persona. The title of the film, “Persona”, the Latin word for “mask”, refers in a Jungian context to a certain social mask that human beings put on in order to disguise the individual and put forward a façade. Elisabet, who is a stage actress, someone who can strip away and bring aspects of the human condition forward, could be Alma's (whose name means "soul" in Spanish) persona: she is beautiful, listens well, and possesses other positive traits, which make Alma admire her. Alma tries to turn into this ideal self, but we realise that this is a fantasy sustained by the real self. Alma is the caregiver in their relationship, for she has to take care of her persona, which would be Elisabet. This would also explain why Alma wanted a more experienced person to nurse Elisabet, for she knows that she is (yet) unable to cure herself. On the other hand, Alma could function as Elisabet's mask, which would make Alma the persona of Elisabet. Along these lines, the scene in which Alma reads about herself in Elisabet's letter can be interpreted as the moment that Alma finally gets unmasked. According to Robin Wood, the women represent two psyches of the same individual: Alma “represents our daily selves; Elizabeth our deeper and acuter awareness” (191). Although the film seems to support each of these theories, these ideas remain speculations, something Peter Cowie elucidated earlier in his discussion on *Persona:* "Everything one says about *Persona* may be contradicted; the opposite will also be true" (231).

As much as *Persona* is about the projection of the self into the other, the film is also about the execution of projection in *film itself.* Initially, Bergman explains, he wanted to name the film *Cinematography*, but this title got rejected by Kenne Fant, the Swedish director who financially supported the film (Bergman et al 202). Nevertheless, Bergman frequently draws our attention to cinematography as an art and technique, as is reflected it in his prologue: *Persona* opens with a projector, a device that *projects* images onto a receiver, which is in this case us, the spectator of the film. The projector is projecting – seemingly – arbitrary images, such as that of a phallus, a spider, the organs of a sheep, and a crucified hand – images that Bergman also used in his previous films, making *Persona* a retrospective film that reflects upon itself and its place within Bergman's *oeuvre*. The amalgamation of these uncanny images contains subliminal messages that delve into our unconscious as certain symbols and linger there. Our unconscious, then, has different connotations and associations with these images. Bergman calls the opening of the film "a poem in images" (Bergman et al 202), and just like a

poem, he explains "images mean different things to different people" (199). Therefore, every individual will have a different interpretation of the prologue, or of the whole film, for that matter, and that is what makes the experience different for everyone. In her book on Bergman's work, Laura Hubner applies this idea to the young boy in the film: he could represent Elisabet's son (as is also confirmed in the closing credits), Bergman himself, or us, the spectator (Kalin 84). In *Persona,* projection operates on two levels: between the characters, and between the audience and the film. Alma is the subject of Elisabet's gaze, just as the two women are the subject of the spectator's gaze.

Persona also works on meta-cinematic levels: throughout the whole film, we are reminded that we are watching a film. The film opens and ends with a running projector, and as we are following the tensions between Elisabet and Alma, the film is several times interrupted. After Alma's confrontation with Elisabet's letter, Alma returns to the cottage, and the film snaps – the projector has stopped working, and leaves a burn in Alma's face. In reality, Bergman explains, something similar happened: the director had to return to the hospital as he was recovering from pneumonia, and the film drew to a halt (Bergman et al 202). Hubner argues that *Persona* "attempts to show ideas with images and it[s] [depiction of] burning/splitting celluloid" (Kalin 84). The lens of the camera that is shattered into pieces and explodes, might denote Alma's mental breakdown, or could refer to the relationship between Alma and Elisabet, as Alma's trust of Elisabet has become shattered.

Persona is a work of art about art. In the film, there are several references to art and the artist's place in relation to it. Often, Bergman takes a critical position in his depiction of art by mocking its meaning. In the hospital, Alma expresses her high regard for artists: "I have tremendous admiration for artists. I think art is enormously important in life, especially for those struggling for one reason or another" (11:25-11:39). In an interview, Bergman explains that this scene is meant to be cynical, and describes Alma as “bewitching” (Bergman et al 211), suggesting her naivety and innocence. "Artists are hardly the social visionaries they used to be. And they mustn't imagine they are!" (Bergman et al 211).

At the same time, Bergman undermines the importance of art by reality: in the film, he refers to two dreadful wars that are part of our collective memory, regardless of whether we have experienced these events ourselves – The Vietnam War and World War II. Elisabet is

the witness of the horrible footage that these wars have left behind. The first time, she is holding a photograph of a young boy during the Holocaust. The second time, Elisabet sees on the television a clip of the self-immolating monk during the Vietnam War. Breathing heavily, Elisabet is pushed towards the corners of her room, in an attempt to distance herself from the images she is witnessing on the screen.

Bergman reveals that Elisabet's silence is unneurotic, as language fails to manage the horrors that make up her reality and world: "It's a strong person's form of protest" (Bergman et al 211). With *Persona,* Bergman emphasises that it is images that haunt us, more than anything else can do; and even when we think we have forgotten about them, these images still remain in our unconscious. Images come back in photographs, on television, and film, and they arouse all kinds of connotations and feelings in us. Elisabet has realised that language is not capable of softening our suffering. Alma eventually also succeeds in realising the failure of art in curing the ill: "I always thought great artists felt this great compassion for other people... that they created out of great compassion and a need to help" (50:33-50:40). In the end, partly through Elisabet, she becomes aware that art is just an illusion, a way to hide the pain rather than to heal it.

Bergman works with these illusions. In the opening of the film, we see shots of people of different generations – an old woman, a middle-aged man, and the young boy – lying in bed. It seems as if they are sleeping and resting, but their bodies are not moving, and there is a special focus on their limbs, hands, and (closed) eyes. The setting is an all-white room that resembles a hospital... or is it a morgue? As an audience, we are unsure whether we are looking at dead or sleeping people. Again, our unconscious is being tested, together with our associations of what we perceive on the screen. *Persona* is deceiving, it plays with the audience's mind – it is artificial. It is this aspect of the film, its “hopeless dream of being” – which is also personified by its characters –, that Bergman exposes in his film. With *Persona,* Bergman illustrates that truth is foremost subjective and can be adapted to fit our wishes: we all have our own version of the truth.

The philosophical stance of *Persona* is displayed in a chapter of a book that Alma reads to Elisabet while the two of them are lying on the beach:

> All the anxiety we carry within us, all our thwarted dreams, the inexplicable cruelty, our fear of extinction, the painful insight into our earthly condition, have slowly crystallised our hope for another-worldly salvation. The tremendous cry of our faith and doubt against the darkness and silence is the most terrifying proof of our abandonment and our unuttered knowledge. (23:53-24:23).

Both characters embody two different approaches to life: on the one hand, there is Alma, who expresses her disbelief in the excerpt, while on the other hand we have Elisabet, who has learned to reduce herself to nothingness through her silence. She understands the pain in the world, and therefore seeks this "another-worldly salvation" that theatre failed to be. For the actress, everything has become a role, even being a mother. The rare moment we see and hear Elisabet talk is when she risks getting burned with hot water, for her fear of death is more powerful than her persona – this possibility of death finally generates realness and genuineness in Elisabet.

Boyers argues that "Bergman's autonomous women do not always succeed in making satisfactory lives for themselves, and there are times when insistence upon one's own truth, or *the* truth ... goes against the grain of one's real interests" ("Bergman and Women" 140). *Persona* confronts our thinking on authenticity and truth by questioning what and who we are when masks are taken off. Both Alma and Elisabet wear these masks in order to survive societal conventions: their performance is a result of certain expectations that they or others have of themselves.

Persona is a poem that reflects aspects of the human condition by displaying a certain paradox. The film reveals that all our thoughts and emotions in life can easily run into each other and become toxic in a certain way. In our interactions with others, we both connect with and detach from each other. Our identities are formed through others, but they can also cause the loss of our own identity. While we might feel as if we become whole with another, we become fragmented. And sometimes, we construct our reality based not on actual meanings, but on believed ones.

Chapter 3: “You're a little like me, aren't ya?”: The Desire to Impress in *3 Women*

Just as *Persona* is a poem in images, so Altman’s film similarly exceeds the world of cinema: the vague and fading colours, together with the soft and obscure images in *3 Women* remind us of a painting – in fact, Altman reveals, the film is named after a painting that the director himself had worked on before making the film (*Robert Altman: Interviews* 195). The wavy, flowy lines in *3 Women* present the film as a dream, and by interweaving with the symbols of motherhood, sewing, food, and water, this dream exposes notions of artificiality and transformation – both of the film itself and of its characters. *3 Women* similarly explores fluidity between women by having two women interact and become doubles of each other, while revealing the toxic and destructive nature of their background, past, and environment. *3 Women* is a film about female relationships: it is about mothers and daughters, about female siblings, female friendship, and ultimately a female triad in which all these types of relationship dynamics have shifted and morphed between its archetypal characters.

The film tells the story of the shy adolescent Pinky Rose (Sissy Spacek), who has taken a new job at a rehabilitation centre near Palm Springs, California. Here, she meets her co-worker Millie Lammoreaux (Shelley Duvall), with whom Pinky immediately becomes fascinated. Soon, the two women become roommates, and the tensions between them increasingly heighten. While Millie and Pinky are trying to find their place in the Californian desert, a third woman, Willie (Janice Rule), becomes involved, and the three find themselves in what seems to be a strange and unusual relationship.

3 Women starts with a shot of the sagging legs of an elderly woman, juxtaposed with a pair of slim legs of a woman next to her, as the two women delve into a pool. A sign on the wall reads "rehabilitation and geriatrics centre". The slim legs are that of Millie, who is holding the older woman by her hand, as she guides her through the water. Dressed in pink, Pinky is staring at her from behind a window, following the physical therapist’s movements in order to prepare herself for her first day of work at the health spa. Pinky Rose is a shy and timid girl, who looks up at the other girls in the spa – her soon-to-be colleagues –, but particularly has

her eyes on Millie. Millie, on the other hand, seems rather confident, and has built herself a reputation for verbosity. For the most part of the film, Millie is seen on the screen in relation to other people: we frequently witness her encounters with her colleagues and neighbours, whom she often talks to about frivolous, shallow and irrelevant matters:

> Do you guys know how to play Scrabble? It's a real good game. You can learn a lot of new words... some words I've never even heard of before. "Orator". It's in the dictionary, all right. I think it's some kind of, oh, professional talker or something. But the most unusual one was "zebus". You know what zebus are? The humps on a camel's back. (07:22:07:57)

Millie, who does not know the word *orator*, and believes that eloquence of speech is just for professionals, has little success attracting people's attention. In this specific scene, Millie, Pinky, and their co-workers are in a locker room, ready to leave work, while Millie, completely unaware of the indifferent attitude of her co-workers, continues talking. Millie's obliviousness prompts awkward moments: often, she answers questions that were not directed towards her in the first place, whereas sometimes she is so fixated on her own stories that she fails to realise that her colleagues have already left the room. Pinky, however, is deeply focused on Millie, and continues to be a true listener for at least the first half of the film. This relationship between the speaker and her listener, and their interactions, is a familiar image that we have witnessed before in *Persona*: as with Elisabet, who allowed Alma to unload her emotional baggage on her, Pinky functions as Millie's recipient.

Millie's ability to indulge in self-deception makes her believe and accordingly represent herself as popular and full of sex appeal: "I've stood this guy up so many times before and he just keeps comin' back for more" (58:00-58:02). Another man, her neighbour Tom, supposedly keeps asking Millie out, but she explains she will not "go out with him until he gets over that cold" (39:53). For the remainder of the film, Millie is repeatedly seen making advances towards Tom, but he never reciprocates. At working days, Millie eats at the hospital nearby, where the food "costs twice as much" (24:22). During lunch, she sits at a table where she is unwanted and ignored by its company, yet never ceases to try to impress the people. When one of the men next to her shares his wife's wish for a new sofa, Millie becomes competitive: "I just got a new sofa too" (26:01). Before leaving, she makes another effort by inviting everyone for dinner, but no one responds.

Pinky, however, becomes attached to Millie from day one, and continues to see Millie through this lens of admiration. On her second day of work, Pinky expresses her fondness for Millie to her colleague: “She sure is nice, isn’t she? Just seems like she always does everything right” (19:23-19:27). Her colleague, who initially required assistance in refreshing her memory about who Millie is, seems unimpressed by Pinky’s sentiments and ignores her, while Pinky continues to share her concern for Millie’s absence that day: “Hope she is not sick. I sure do miss her” (19:55-19:57). Pinky is longing for someone she has been knowing for only a couple of days. After Millie has shown Pinky around the Purple Sage Apartments, the juvenile Pinky unveils her adoration of Millie: “You know what? You’re the most perfect person I ever met” (41:00:41:01), which Millie nervously giggles to: “Thanks” (41:03).

One explanation for Pinky’s obsession with Millie is Pinky’s youthfulness. Although we never learn about her age (neither does Millie), it is suggested that she is an adolescent. Pinky’s relation to Millie is similar to that of a child towards her mother, and Pinky is therefore, just like a child, unable to see through Millie. Gradually, Pinky's idealisation of Millie turns into imitation, or even a form of theft: Pinky starts wearing Millie’s clothes, writes in her diary and rides in her car as if it is her own, while adopting her Social Security Number at work. During lunchtime, Millie expresses her dislike for tomatoes. The same evening, while having dinner, Pinky is either trying to impress Millie, or unconsciously imitating her: “I hate tomatoes. Even when I have spaghetti I don’t put tomato sauce on it” (44:18-44:21). In *The Ego and the Mechanisms of Defence*, Freud explains how imitation in adolescents works:

> The changeableness of young people is a commonplace. In their handwriting, mode of speech, way of doing their hair, their dress, and all sorts of habits they are far more adaptable than at any other period of life. Often a single glance at an adolescent will tell us who is the older friend whom he admires. (168)

In *3 Women,* Millie is this older friend that operates as the teenager’s object of admiration. She functions as a kind of mother, friend, and sister to Pinky, while at the same time, Pinky is impersonating her role model.

Altman hints at Pinky's age by emphasising her silliness and youthfulness: In the cafeteria, Pinky blows bubbles in her drink through her straw, and a few scenes later, she is seen spinning in a patient's wheelchair. While having a drink with Millie, Pinky puts salt in her beer,

watches it foam up, and finishes it in one gulp, only to carelessly belch afterwards (32:00). When Millie introduces her to Dodge City, a bar, Pinky gets excited: “Ooh! What is this place? Disneyland?” (28:08). Millie, on the other hand, annoyed by Pinky’s childish behaviour, shakes her head and explains that it is her favourite bar, where “a lot of guys hang out . . . mostly cops” (28:16-28:17). Pinky, who is unaffected by this detail, is then captivated by a tepee, and jumps right in. This scene in the film offers an idiosyncratic portrayal of Pinky as an innocent child, whereas Millie is the flirty grown-up – or at least, trying to be.

Pinky takes on the role of spectator for the first portion of the film: the young teenager is often “transfixed by what she is witnessing” (McElhaney 151). The way she looks at things resembles that of a child who learns about and discovers the world: Pinky is both fascinated and shocked by the events she witnesses. The delivery of Willie’s son – Willie being the pregnant artist who owns both Dodge City and the Purple Sage Apartments – near the end of the film is arguably the pivotal scene in which this form of hypnotism becomes most evident, as Pinky is disturbed by a certain uncanniness and fails to take action, therefore partly becoming responsible for Willie’s stillbirth.

Nonetheless, Pinky and Millie are similar in many regards. Both women are from Texas and are named Mildred. Both are loners who wish to be accepted by society, which is often visualised through the depiction of the two women literally following other people. According to Klein, a high degree of commonality is needed in order for projective identification to take place: “for the individual to feel that he has a good deal in common with another person is concurrent with projecting himself into that person” (Segal 341). The inclusion of a twin in a film that is so concerned with the double is most probably a conscious move from Altman. It alludes to a later scene in which Millie says to Pinky: “You’re a little like me, aren’t ya?” (08:57). On their way home from work, Pinky and Millie have an interesting conversation detailed in a similar context:

P: I wonder what it's like to be twins.

M: Huh?

P: Twins. Bet it'd be weird. Do you think they know which one they are?

M: Sure they do. They'd have to, wouldn't they?

> P: I don't know. Maybe they switch back and forth. You know, one day... Peggy's Polly. Another day, Polly's Peggy. Who knows? Maybe they're the same one all the time.
>
> M: Can we just talk about somethin' else now? (53:29-54:07)

Pinky's speculations call to mind an earlier question Alma raised in *Persona:* "Is it possible to be one and the same person at the very same time, I mean, two people?". Altman makes use of at least one other technique to convey the idea that Millie and Pinky might be the same person: through mirrors, Altman juxtaposes the two women: they become reflections of each other, creating a certain double effect between them. This is different than Bergman's technique in which he brought the faces of Alma and Elisabet together through fragmented shots, but both have the same effect of emphasising a certain duality that is present in two distinct individuals.

However, as we have also seen in *Persona*, the film does not only bring the women together, but also separates them, as certain problems arise. When Pinky brings Millie the message that Deirde, Millie's ex roommate, and two other young men will not be joining her dinner party, Millie gets upset, and becomes angry as she is not perceived the way she wants to ("I'm famous for my dinner parties"). In order to protect her own insecurities, she becomes defensive and puts the blame on Pinky: "Well, look at you. I told you to get yourself fixed up. You probably scared 'em away" (1:04:32-1:04:46). Millie employs blame shifting, a form of projection: while it is in reality Millie's own unpopularity, she blames Pinky for intimidating her guests. Millie's attack on Pinky takes an even nastier turn when Pinky tries to console her: "Just shut up. You ruined everything. You always do" (1:04:52-1:04:54). Millie leaves the apartment, to "have some fun for a change" (1:05:24). The same night, she returns with Willie's husband, Edgar (Robert Fortier). Pinky ought to sleep on the rollaway bed, when she attempts to stop Millie from spending the night with the drunk Edgar: "Don't. What about Willie?" (1:07:44). This makes Millie burst out in anger:

> Why don't you mind your own business for a change? This has nothing to do with you. Ever since you mind in here you've been causing me grief. Nobody wants to hang around you. *You don't drink. You don't smoke. You don't do anything you're supposed to do.* Well, I'll tell you what. If you don't like the way I intend to live around here... why don't you just move out! Any time suits me! Any time at all! (1:07:04-1:08:07) (emphasis added)

Shocked and hurt by the thought that Millie does not want her, Pinky reaches her breaking point and attempts suicide by jumping in the pool in front of the apartment. Pinky's suicide attempt forms a critical moment in the film as it leads to character development and transformation. The pregnant Willie is capable of showing concern for Pinky because she can imagine the pain of losing a child, which also foreshadows her own pregnancy. However, Pinky's tragic accident also affects Millie: for the first time in the film, we see Millie thinking and talking about Pinky rather than herself. When Dr Norton in the hospital tries to hit on Millie ("I'll buy you breakfast") (1:14:33), Millie rejects him and accompanies Pinky instead. Millie's transformation is even more overt when she quits her job at the rehabilitation centre:

> She [Pinky] never did anything wrong on purpose. She's just scared of you, that's all. Then she almost died, and nobody even cared around here. You're the bad ones, not Pinky. All you care about's your time clock... and your money, and your dumb books. Well, you don't have to worry about Social Security Numbers anymore, because I quit! (1:34:12-1:34:30)

Millie finally dares to open her mouth to object and speak the truth. By standing up for Pinky, she shows that she will no longer tolerate dishonesty and negligence. She leaves the world of reputation and appearance behind, which signals a moment of rebirth for her.

Pinky, too, undergoes a transformation during her stay at the hospital, where we find her in a state of unconsciousness. Pinky Rose is suddenly doing the things that she "is supposed to do": she drinks, she smokes, she paints her nails, and even condemns Millie's apartment (which she first regarded as "perfect") for its size. Even though she used to fear guns, the young woman is now seen shooting with Edgar. Pinky's transformation from a naïve, innocent child, to a rebellious teenager is also visible through her clothing: instead of a soft pink that she used to wear, Pinky – who now wants to be addressed by the name Mildred – is clothed in a revealing, hot pink suit.

Through these changes, there occurs a shift in power dynamics between the two women: while Pinky functioned as a spectator in the film, fixated on Millie, Millie now starts going after Pinky, like a worried mother that follows her child. Pinky is doing all the things that Millie had been doing before, but she is more successful in them and receives attention from the people around her. This switch between Millie and Pinky in the middle of the film, is very Bergmanesque: Pinky is adopting a new persona, as she is living the life that Millie had always

desired. It is Millie's fantasy life that becomes projected onto Pinky, who then identifies with this projection, and completely changes her image. After this turning point in the film, the operation of projection and projective identification are clearly visible: as Freud described in *The Ego,* Pinky's role from the passive observer to the active executer gets carried out: she shifts from the threatened to the threat itself. Winnicott gives a similar description of this shift in position between the sender and her receiver, when he explains that projection and projective identification "let the other person be the manager sometimes, and . . . hand over omnipotence" (*Home is Where We Start From* 38).

As with *Persona*, *3 Women* is concerned with the artificial. In *A Companion to Robert Altman*, McElhaney argues that *3 Women* blurs "the lines between the real and the artificial, and this is manifested not only in the image but also in spoken language" (155). Millie is almost always holding a monologue, except for those moments when she is with Pinky. In *Persona* and *3 Women,* the wordiness of Millie and Alma have different purposes and effects: while Alma's conversations carry weight, Millie's words are empty: for the young woman, the essence of her speech is inconsequential – what matters for Millie is what others will think of her, and whether she is impressive enough for the people around her. Millie enjoys prolixity as she believes that being complex will mark her as a likeable person: she is living a life that has been made complicated rather than simplified. When describing her dress, for instance, Millie reports it has an English mustard colour: "My car was more of a French mustard colour" (1:35:47).

Winnicott explains that the False Self has the need to "collect impingements from external reality so that the living-time of the individual can be filled by reactions to these impingements" *(Collected Works* 169*).* Millie forms her identity by emulating the things she sees on TV, advertisements, and within her community. Millie is a victim of consumerism as she desperately holds onto the latest trends: her mailbox is filled with advertisements that try to persuade her into buying, and on her wall in her room, there are posters pinned that among other things express that "clean is sexy". One shot later, the impact of these magazines on Millie is illustrated, as she finds Pinky's dress on the floor, together with a carton of milk: "How come ya left these lyin' in the middle of the living room floor?" (49:48). For these reasons, her neighbours call her "Thoroughly Modern Millie", a reference to the eponymous

1967 film and its over the top protagonist. Winnicott, as mentioned before, presents spontaneity as *the* attribute that discerns the True Self from the False Self, followed by “the personal idea” (*Maturational Processes* 148), signalling creativity and originality: “Only the True Self can be creative and only the True Self can feel real” (148). Millie, who lacks “creative originality” (152), and Pinky, who imitates the fake, are both the epitome of the False Self in 3 Women.

The first time we see Millie speak to her colleagues, is when she has finished working: "I'm saving for one of those new microwave ovens I've been reading about. You can cook a hotdog in three minutes" (05:41-05:48). Millie is hooked on all types of equipment that have time-saving purposes. In *3 Women*, notions of time, modernity, and consumerism are transformed into recurring themes which are often illustrated in relation to food: every time Millie talks about food, this is about food that can be made within a certain time span. One specific dish that Millie is allegedly famous for, tuna melts, are "real easy and . . . only take about 15 minutes to make" (43:06). Millie often talks about the easiness and fastness in which certain meals can be prepared, although her motivations to save time remain unclear. Through the symbol of food, the film demonstrates a certain artificiality present in the nature of its characters and the film's time and place. The food that Millie eats, prepares, and serves, often consists of processed or canned food, hence is unnatural and denotes a certain consumerism culture within which its characters are trapped. That same evening, Millie shares her quick recipe with Pinky, in case she is ever "out on a date or somethin'" (43:11):

> First, you open all the cans and jars so you'll have 'em ready when you go to mix 'em. Then you drain a can of tuna, and you dump it into a big mixin' bowl.
> Now ya add a tablespoon full of mayonnaise... and some salt and pepper, and ya taste it to make sure it's okay. (43:15-43:30)

Millie's tuna melt recipe consists solely of pre-packed goods. Even the onions and celery she uses are processed, as they have been turned into dehydrated onions and celery salt. During dinner, Millie explains that "it's a lot better with real onions on it" (44:05), but Pinky luckily "can't tell the difference" (44:10).

The setting in *3 Women*, too, has a quality of falsity in it: Dodge City is built like a desert, and is decorated with fake objects, such as rubber rattlesnakes and flimsy rocks made

from plastic. Pinky, who was earlier unable to tell the difference between real onions and onion powder, fails to do the same for the rocks: “I thought that was a real rock” (34:31). Edgar Hart, proud owner of the bar, and arguably the only significant male character in the film, works as a *stunt double*. In an interview, Altman talks about the character of Edgar: “There was a kind of macho sadness about him”, he explains, “and that was the character – as much a fake as Millie was to become” (Thompson 108). Throughout the film, we notice several Coca Cola machines – its trademark symbolising capitalism and Americanization – claiming to be “the real thing”.

The artificiality in the film shadows the film’s engagement with loneliness. Palm Springs represents a desert in which all the habitants are lost wanderers, and Millie and Pinky happen to be two epitomes of that fate. Although Millie claims she is famous for her dinner parties, we never see people coming over for dinner. Millie shows Pinky the rollaway bed at her place, “for whenever we have company” (44:57), but in the end, Millie and Pinky are the only ones who are seen sleeping on it. One morning, Millie says she has a date for the night: “I’ll probably be home real late” (47:58), and as expected, the opposite happens: Millie comes home early, and immediately goes to bed.

One reason for the film’s and its character’s concern with food is because of its symbol of connection and unification: eating and food bring people together. Millie’s attitude towards food and her constantly inviting people over for dinner springs from this loneliness: if successful, as Barbara Hardy explains in her essay on Dickens’ *Great Expectations* (1861), the “ceremony of food” (358) turns into a celebration of hospitality, love, and togetherness. In *3 Women,* however, things turn out differently: the only time there is a potential of guests in Millie’s apartment, people do not show up. The dishes that Millie prepared for that night, remain untouched. Millie, who believes that food “is the way to a man’s heart” (28:58), remains alone, as the men around her fail to prove her belief true. *3 Women* depicts a world in which people are just a number – as is suggested by its title, but also figures such as Pinky and Millie’s supervisors at work. Millie and Pinky, then, are two forgotten people in an isolated town. As Altman explains:

> Millie’s a victim of women’s magazines and movies and everyone around her. She just repeats things that she thinks will make people like her, but she’s totally alone.

> Both Pinky and Millie were lost souls trying to find an acceptable way to live. Pinky was like an alien who had arrived on the planet and said, 'How do I hide myself in this world? I'll become *that* person'. (Thompson 106) (emphasis in original)

3 Women is about the desire to belong, which manifests itself in impersonation and imitation through defence mechanisms. Both Millie and Pinky have lost traces of their heritage: Millie explains to Pinky that she does not have "any folks" (46:18), whereas Pinky writes in Millie's diary that she has been "wondering about my parents a lot lately... who they were, what they did. Maybe I can trace them someday" (1:43:13). Both Millie and Pinky distance themselves from their parents and from the traditional idea that family is defined by biological connections. When Pinky is in the hospital, she rejects the elderly couple that claim to be her parents: "They're not my parents . . . *I don't care where they came from"* (1:26:53-1:27:05) (emphasis added). Instead, Pinky and Millie try to build a family on their own, by trying to make connections with others in their community. Because heritage and friendship – two factors that shape one's identity – are missing for these characters, Pinky and Millie feel lost and have no inspiration to create.

Altman juxtaposes artificiality with creation, and depicts creation through two important motives: sewing and pregnancy. Both these motives are shot through water, which Altman explained is there to represent amniotic water *(When the Movies Mattered* 82*).* During the film, Pinky is several times seen sewing, while Millie is, for instance, preparing her tuna melts – creation versus artificiality. Sewing represents transformation, growth, and connection, as you weave pieces together. The comparison between the two women in terms of authenticity is further expanded upon when Millie buys Pinky a computerised sewing machine that "practically sews for you" (1:16:37). Transformation is also visible through Willie's pregnancy, as both the birth and the death of her child can be perceived on the screen. Willie, who is also involved in art, is the ultimate symbol of creation: through her art, she creates an alternate dimension in which the present stretches forever. Millie and Willie mirror each other, which is also signalled by their name, whereas Pinky represents the adolescent who is shifting between her True and False Self. Both Millie and Pinky, then, need Willie in order to become whole.

After Willie's stillbirth, a time jump occurs, and the film comes to an end with the successful formation of this female triumvirate. Pinky has regressed into her old self, while

her mother is implied to be Millie, who now appears to be much older, wearing Willie's hat and make-up. Two delivery men in a big, yellow Coca Cola truck arrive at the scene to bring us the news that we have not witnessed ourselves: we learn that Edgar has passed away. The details of what has happened remain unclear, but we are made to believe that it involved an accident: "I just don't understand it, him being so good with guns and everything" (1:59:41). When the men leave, Willie explains that she "just had the most wonderful dream" (2:01:27), suggesting that everything that we have seen so far was part of Willie's dream.

3 Women is a cyclical film: through the characters of Pinky, Millie, and Willie, the film shows the cycle of a woman's evolution from being childlike to more mature and all the facets that are part of that evolution. In the end, the transformation is complete, with the three women all indicating three different time periods in one individual's life. Millie has assumed the role of the mother, whereas Willie represents the wise, old grandmother. In an interview for *3 Women* at Cannes, Spacek defines Pinky as "the eternal child" (Traven 1:17). The tagline for *3 Women* on a French poster is in line with this vision of the film: "one woman became two, two women became three, three women became one".

When Pinky wakes up in the hospital, after having jumped into the pool, representing the "womb", she becomes a different person – she is reborn in that sense. Pinky distances herself from the girl she once was: there comes an end to her inner child phase. As Pinky takes on the role of Millie, Millie herself moves on to the next stage of her life: she leaves her habits of smoking, drinking, and flirting behind, cares less about her social status, and becomes protective, like a mother – this signals her rebirth. Willie's transformation, finally, is implied in the scene in which she gives birth: the child dies – Willie's infertility signals that she has reached old age.

Pregnancy and water are both visual keys that symbolise birth, death, time, and repetition. The very first shot in the film depicts two generations in a pool, bearing strong similarities to the myth set out in Lucas Cranach's painting *The Fountain of Youth* (1546) in which the pool functions as a space of rejuvenation for elderly women. In the pool, Millie and Pinky re-enact a performance as they practice for Pinky's first day at work, with Millie representing an employee, while Pinky plays the patient. Subsequently, Pinky sticks her feet in the water as if she is giving birth – this will be mirrored in a later scene in which Willie gives

birth to her son. Birth represents the cycle of life, the evolution of ideas, and repetition. The water in the pool, but also the water that swishes over the screen, symbolises transition, continuity, but also change. In her reading on *3 Women*, Nevine Mahmoud likens the swimming pool to "a container for . . . projections and reflections" (6). The water in this container, then, represents fluidity through which the identity of the women flows into each other and forms a single identity.

McElhaney argues that *3 Women* is about death and decay, both in a physical sense (as about the body that loses its power), but also in terms of its ideology. There is the literal death of Edgar, together with the stillbirth of Willie's son, but there are also other subtle references in the film that signal decline: Pinky's alleged parents, Mrs Rose and Mr Y.R. (played by Ruth Nelson and John Cromwell), are both "markers of decay" (McElhaney 151). The old man is deaf, his wife is disoriented: even though they are physically present, they are mentally absent. Pinky and Millie's profession entails taking care of the elderly, people who have lost most of their (bodily) functions because of old age. The setting in the film, too, indicates decay: it represents a wasteland in which its habitants desperately make efforts to keep the place alive.

In the end of *3 Women,* the three women have built themselves a family, without the presence of any men. This all-female world represents a paradox of both immortality and extinction. The women have finally found a place for themselves and within themselves in a world with no past or future, only an all-encompassing present. At the same time, however, there has come an end to the cycle, as reproduction is made impossible. Altman offers a similar description of this paradox:

> One sees seals, or sea lions, basking on rocks, just kind of lying around. And I see *3 Women* as if those three female seals had kicked the last male off that rock and are much more comfortable... but at the same time you know it means the end of the species. (Danks 162)

The murals that Willie paints in the pool have mythological qualities to them. Its creatures seem to be androgynous, but masculine dominance and phallic imagery are also present, which the film itself embodies in the figure of Edgar. As Edgar is involved with Pinky, Millie, and Willie, we see how each of the women experiences their time with him, and so how one

woman in her lifetime may experience sex, relationships, and men through different phases of her life. This literal image of the three women being terrorised by the same man, is also visible in the frescoes painted and decorated by Willie hanging in Dodge City, which depict animals such as reptiles, snakes, or butterflies. Butterflies are the ultimate symbols of transformation; reptiles and snakes shed their skin and reveal something new underneath, symbolising rebirth. The animals in these paintings parallel the three women in the film. However, we often see that these paintings have bullet holes in them. Bullets are associated with Edgar, as he introduces us and the women to the gun and the shooting. In this light, the bullet holes in the paintings might indicate or represent the damage that he has done to the women. Edgar functions as an obstacle for these women and their transformation, which means the women must get rid of him in order to complete their metamorphosis, which is exactly what the last scene in the film suggests. The presence of men and masculinity causes pain, trauma, and conflict, but also the pursuit of connection, the quest for identity, and the exploration of the self. In the end, Millie, Pinky, and Willie are not fragmented individuals without an individuality, but rather form a harmonious trio that makes up a family and signals its peace.

In the end, the film refers to two symbols to suggest this transformation – the same symbols that were previously concerned with the themes of artificiality and creation: food and sewing. The first reference is to Millie's "attraction to vegetables [which] indicates her healthy rejection of the junk food culture she once accepted" (Gabbard 258). The second symbol recurs a few seconds later, when the women enter the house, and Willie rips her skirt, again suggested by Millie: "I'll fix that for you. Millie [to Pinky], get my sewing basket" (2:01:22-2:01:27).

3 Women explores what it means to be female by zooming in on etiquette, appearances, and gender politics through surrealism, psychoanalysis, and dream logic. Film critic David Sterritt explains that *3 Women* "is steeped in ordinary practices of a kind we rarely pay much attention to until they go awry: social habits of speech, dress, domestic work, making a living, recreation, and profoundly ingrained habits of simple bodily movement" (*When the Movies Mattered* 83). The film states the emptiness in the characters of Pinky, Millie, and Willie, as they struggle to become fulfilled, and try to live up to all these social

conventions and expectations in order to find the answers. Altman's film is about the search for and attempt to create meaning, identity, and a place in a world, body, and time of decay. In *3 Women*, stability of identity, immortality, and rebirth are achieved by affecting the other to such an extent that they become you.

Chapter 4: “It'll be just like in the movies – we'll pretend to be someone else”: The Hollywood Dream in *Mulholland Drive*

Lynch’s *Mulholland Drive*, finally, can in many ways be regarded as an insoluble puzzle. The cryptic nature of the film has led to the rise of many fanbases, communities, and websites whose members conspire about the (endless) possibilities that the film offers. There is a general consensus among critics that the film consists of two parts – one section covers a dream, the other represents reality. Both sections are part of the story of a single character, who in the first section introduces herself as Betty, then as Diane. As either part of the film contains both dreamlike and realistic elements, both theories are plausible – yet, no specific theory has been confirmed by Lynch himself, who remains notoriously taciturn about the meaning of his film(s). This, however, would have been beside the point of the film, as Chris Rodley argues: “with *Mulholland Drive,* Lynch has made the very notion of ‘dream’ versus ‘reality’ an irrelevant opposition” (267). In *Mulholland Drive,* the several states of life – whether it be the subconscious, unconscious, or the oneiric – all blend together and become one, representing themselves as different levels and degrees of reality.

It should be noted, however, that this chapter *does* take a specific interpretation as its foundation – the analysis I offer in this chapter is, consequently, based on this certain interpretation of the film, which considers the first half of the film to be a dream sequence, and the second half as the “actual” reality of the main character Diane. From this perspective, *Mulholland Drive* can be regarded as a dual narrative film which involves a woman who creates a fantasy for herself as a way to deny and escape her reality. The film tells the story of Diane Selwyn (Naomi Watts), a failed actress who both loves and envies Camilla Rhodes (Laura Harring), the dark-haired actress who is successful in her career and is about to marry a director named Adam Kesher (Justin Theroux). Diana, unable to endure the pain of losing Camilla and failing her career, hires a hitman to have Camilla murdered. The first part of the film portrays Diane’s dream of success, love, and fortune, after which follows the exposure of the guilt-ridden woman’s reality marked by failure, rejection, and depression. In *Mulholland Drive*, Lynch adopts a Hollywood narrative that satirises the artificiality and corruption of its

film industry, while at the same time exposing the ways in which identities can shift and transform through dreams and fantasies – two powerful tools that create beautiful, yet destructive illusions.

Mulholland Drive operates on two levels: the first part of the film revolves around Betty and Rita. Betty is an ambitious young woman who has moved from small town Deep River, Ontario, to Hollywood in order to fulfil her dream of becoming an actress. Here, she meets Rita, who is involved in a car crash and as a result suffers from amnesia. The idea that Betty and Rita are fictional characters and part of a dream, is hinted at in the last part of the film, in which we are introduced to Diane, Betty's real-life counterpart. Rather than a movie star, Diane is in reality unmotivated, depressed, and overlooked. Rita functions as a stand-in for Camilla, who is secretly involved in a sexual relationship with Diane. The dreamscape in *Mulholland Drive* represents Diane's subconscious, manifested in the first part of the film. After the opening of a group of jitterbug dancers, the camera zooms into a burgundy-coloured pillow, as if we are about to delve into a dream. The pillow is later revealed to be Diane's, which means that the dream – a cathartic experience for Diane – is the product of her imagination as a failed actress.

In both the dream and reality of Diane, the quest for identity plays a major role. On the fantasy level, there is a literal search for identity, embodied by the mission to discover Rita's identity. The amnesiac woman is deprived of any form of identification: "I don't know what my name is. I don't know who I am" (43:15-43:19). In reality, Diane, unsure of her purpose in life, is exploring and discovering her own identity by creating this fantasy and projecting ideas about herself on her double Betty. Projection as a defence mechanism in *Mulholland Drive*, then, is not employed through language, as is mainly the case in *Persona* and *3 Women*, but rather is wrapped up in fantasy. Jungian psychologist Marie-Louise von Franz explains that projections are often "depicted in products of the unconscious, such as dreams, waking fantasies, and mythological traditions" (20). In addition, projection in *Mulholland Drive* mostly seems to take place between Diane and her alter-ego Betty, while Camilla/Rita functions as the catalyst for these projections. As is the case with the three films, the projector or sender is involved in a conflict with *herself*. From a Winnicottian perspective, the conflict is between the False and the True Self. In *Mulholland Drive*, this battle is most

visible through the juxtaposition of fantasy with reality, for the False Self is both hiding the True Self and "enabling the True Self to start to live" (*Maturational Processes* 148) by means of fantasy.

Diane's dream starts in the style of a soap opera, or drama, depicting Betty's arrival in this "dream place" (19:38), that is Hollywood. While we form our impression of Betty, Lynch uses clichés to create an unsettling atmosphere and hint at the artificiality of Betty's character and nature: her acting is over the top, and she has a blind kindness and innocence around her. This artificiality is also perceivable in the way the airport scene is filmed: certain shots are blown-out; dialogues of the characters are dubbed. Betty, in awe of her environment from the moment she arrives in Tinseltown, has difficulty hiding her excitement, even when she meets the injured Rita:

> I couldn't afford a place like this [talking about her Aunt Ruth's apartment] in a million years. Unless, of course, I'm discovered and become a movie star. Of course, I'd rather be known as a great actress than a movie star. But, you know, sometimes people end up being both . . . And now I'm in this dream place. Well, you can imagine how I feel. (26:15-26:44)

Betty is the bubbly, sunny, and optimistic character who falls for the Hollywood illusion that is portrayed as glamorous and alluring, full of potential on the surface for the young woman. As the film goes on, however, Betty's beliefs and naïve trust in the movie industry will be juxtaposed with the grim reality of Hollywood, revealing that this glossy exterior – both of Betty's character and Hollywood itself – is not part of Diane's reality.

This dream world that Diane has created becomes a way through which she escapes her disturbing reality. Diane's dream reveals her preoccupations, fears, and desires, and therefore parts of her personality. Betty is Diane's idealisation of herself, as Diane in reality is angry, jaded, and unsuccessful. However, in her dream, she has been turned into this perky, innocent person, who has a star potential. Betty functions as the executor of Diane's desires: she is both successful in her career, and Rita's lover and saviour. The antagonists in Diane's surroundings, too, have turned into friendly faces in her fantasy: Adam, the director, wants to hire Betty for the *Sylvia North Story*, whereas in reality, Diane was rejected for the part: "I wanted the lead so bad . . . [but] Camilla got the part" (2:13:45-2:13:49). In Diane's fantasy, Adam is forced to hire Camilla, whereas in reality, Camilla is chosen for her talent, as Diane

reveals: “He [Bob Brooker] didn’t think so much of me” (2:14:03). This is a form of rationalisation that Diane employs as a defence mechanism to justify the situation, that is, why she never got the lead in reality. Another character that has been repurposed to suit Diane’s wishes, is Coco, Adam’s mother, who often pities Diane. In Diane’s fantasy, on the other hand, Coco is a kind landlady, who has a motherly role, as she several times tries to protect Betty by warning her for evil. The cowboy, the blue key, and the waitress at Winkie’s are other subtle clues that show us how Diane’s mind has warped elements of her reality to produce this dream.

Various layers of reality are addressed in *Mulholland Drive*: there is the level of waking, sleeping, and dreaming. Lynch gives these levels equal treatment by representing them similar to such an extent that it becomes difficult for the spectator to determine what is objectively happening. In a sense, the dream is a deeper, more revealing and realistic mirror of Diane as a person than her reality is. Dreams, then, have the potential to be closer to reality than reality itself: they tell us more about who we are deep inside our psyches, as they echo contents of the subconscious. To some extent, Diane can be regarded as representative of all the characters in her dream, reflecting the idea that everyone in our dreams is a representation of ourself.

In Lynch’s film, dreams and fantasies are employed as defence mechanisms. In her *Introduction to Klein*, Segal offers the reader several examples of ‘manic phantasies’, a form of defence whose “main purpose is to ward off underlying phantasies” (16). Winnicott further draws on Klein’s notion of manic defences:

> It is just when we are depressed that we *feel* depressed. It is just when we are manic-defensive that we are *least likely to feel* as if we are defending against depression. At such times we are more likely to feel elated, happy . . . ‘full of life’, and at the same time we are less interested . . . in the awfulness of hate, destruction, and killing. (*Through Paediatrics* 132) (emphasis in original)

The role that fantasies take in *Mulholland Drive* is that of distancing the individual from his or her inner reality. By employing manic defences through fantasy, Diane creates this second personage who is “full of life”, withdrawing herself from and manipulating her reality. This has put her in such peril that it has inched her towards tragedy at the end of the film. By

including the diner scene at Winkie's in his film, Lynch ultimately presents a world in which dreams can become reality. The scene resembles a patient detailing a dream to his therapist:

> I had a dream about this place . . . It starts out that I'm in here... but it's not day or night. It's kind of half night, you know? And I'm scared, like, I can't tell ya . . . Then I realise what it is. There's a man... in the back of this place. He's the one who's doing it. I can see him through the wall. I can see his face. I hope that I never see that face... *ever outside of a dream*. (12:27-14:25) (emphasis added)

Dan, the man who shares his dream, has returned to the scene to "get rid of this god-awful feeling" (14:40). But Dan's confrontation with his nightmare shows, similar to Diane's, that even if something is imagined, our feelings for the fantasy can become real – so real that it can drive us to destruction. According to film critic Mark Cousins, Dan is yet another character who has been repurposed in Diane's dream. Near the end of the film, when Diane orders the hitman to murder Camilla, she sees Dan in the corner of her eye, who is standing by the counter and looking at her, as if he witnesses her "committing the crime – a thought-crime" (Cousins 23:15). The creature behind the dumpster, in this context, could signal Diane's terror at planning the killer, or the guilt that springs from it. Dan's fear, might then be actually Diane's own, and so, it is Dan who is confronting the creature in her dream, instead of Diane, who has projected her fears onto a complete stranger.

Through illusions, a concept closely tied to dreams and fantasies, the film also manipulates our senses. By working with these illusions, Lynch creates certain expectations – only to prove the opposite. By doing this, Lynch not only deludes his own characters, but also his audience. In Club Silencio, the magician – who could be interpreted as Lynch's alter-ego – reveals that "*no hay banda"* (1:45:31): there is no band. And equally, there is no orchestra: "this is all... a tape recording" (1:45:48). The magician illustrates this idea by calling a man on stage, who pretends to play a clarinet. When the man stops "playing" the clarinet, the sound of the instrument continues. However, when Rebekah del Rio is on stage to sing the Spanish version of Roy Orbison's "Crying", Lynch deceives us for a second time. Rita and Betty, who are also moved by her performance, start crying: their real tears are juxtaposed with the tear-shaped jewel on the performer's face, a detail that "warns us to be on guard against Lynch's manipulation" (Mactaggart 61). Only when the singer faints, and the song on the recording continues, the audience is – again – hit with the fact that the performance is nothing more

than a set-up. Through this scene, Lynch presents the power of illusions and the possibility to become touched by it, showing us how susceptible and unprepared we are to our emotions, as they easily get affected by the artificial.

In an earlier scene, Betty and Rita are seen rehearsing for Betty's audition. Because of the camera angle that this scene is shot with, it initially does not seem as if the women are acting. The script of the audition further misleads us by making us think that the dialogue between the two women is part of their reality:

B: "You're still here?"

R: "I came back. I thought that's what you wanted"

B: "Nobody wants you here"

R: "Really?" (1:09:45-1:09:52)

After Rita's question, the camera zooms out on the script in her hands. This metatheatrical aspect of the film again blurs the line between truth versus untruth; authenticity versus artificiality through acting and performing. Betty criticises the screenplay for its "lame scene" (1:10:58), yet later executes the act so powerfully, captivating our attention in the same manner as the performers at Club Silencio. Only when the audience starts to applause, the scene is cut off, and we are taken back to reality. Just as the performance of "Llorando" is a set-up, so in a sense is Betty's audition scene. Until this scene, Betty remains a flat character, lacking depth in her personality. Only when she starts *acting*, there is a shift in character: her performance becomes so convincing that we start to confuse it with reality. The reason why Betty's audition is so powerful and comes across as realistic, might be because it evokes certain emotions that Diane is holding underneath the surface, which are brought forward through the act. Similar to dreams, acting functions and delves into a deeper layer beneath reality, a layer that feels more vital than our realities.

Diane's dream also reveals truths about Hollywood and its toxic industry. Identity in Hollywood is flexible and unstable, as the film reflects the idea that its residents reinvent themselves by confusing reality with fantasy: through a Rita Hayworth movie poster, the raven-haired woman establishes her identity: "My name's... Rita!" (25:44). The music that continues in the background when Rebekah del Rio faints, might suggest the idea that the

industry goes on, regardless of whether you are part of it or not. Adam is constantly persuaded by the Castigliane brothers, an intimidating group of mobsters who make decisions for Adam regarding the casting process of *The Sylvia North Story*, threatening him when he does not follow their instructions. When Adam protests, the answer is simple: "It's no longer your film" (33:22). Their famous phrase, "this is the girl", becomes an expression of violence, as it translates to a second time in the film in which Diane orders the hitman to kill Camilla. In Diane's mind, the systematic selections of the casting bureau are as corrupted as the murder of Camilla is plotted – both are conspiracies. In this way, the casting process in Hollywood is portrayed as violent and inhuman, reinforcing the idea that actors, actresses, and directors are easily replaced within the movie business of the "Hollywood Dream".

Mulholland Drive centres around mental illness, dreams, and fantasy, as it tells a story about jealousy, envy, desire, and obsession. Diane craves to be a successful actress, but also has sexual desires: in both these cases, Camilla is her target. The tagline of *Mulholland Drive* reads "A love story in the city of dreams". When Camilla breaks off their relationship, telling Diane that they "shouldn't be doing this anymore" (2:02:46), Diane's heart is shattered. Diane still fantasises about Camilla in her dream, and Betty even declares her love for Rita while having sex: "I'm in love with you" (1:41:53). But even in the dream, Rita does not respond back. It is this unrequited desire of Diane's that is one of the main subjects in *Mulholland Drive.* Diane's fantasy is to obtain and control the object of desire, Camilla. Lynch shows us the power of desire and fantasy in an erotic scene near the end of the film, in which the mug of coffee in Diane's hand transforms into a glass of bourbon, while the robe that she is wearing turn into a pair of shorts. The cause of these feelings of desire, however, extends from an inherent lack within the subject: it is the desire to fuse with the object to become whole. The same evening, the two women go to Club Silencio, which shatters the illusion of Diane's fantasy, denoted by the cowboy: "Hey pretty girl, time to wake up" (1:56:42). At the same time, it is also a turning point in the film itself, as we, as the observer, realise the truth that the scene is a commentary on the first part of the film, directly telling us that every scene we have seen so far was an illusion.

Diane, unable to think of Camilla in nuanced ways, but either in terms of positive and negative, often employs splitting as a defence mechanism. Splitting in *Mulholland Drive* is

notably present – in fact, Diane's love for and resentment of Camilla is embodied through two characters: on the one hand there is Rita, who is vulnerable, gentle, and submissive. By being involved in a car crash, Rita is made even more vulnerable in Diane's fantasy, and becomes wholly dependent upon Betty. On the other hand, there is Camilla Rhodes (played by Melissa George), who is cheeky, assertive, and outspoken. By the mechanisms of splitting and projection, Diane projects the good qualities of Camilla onto Rita, whereas she imposes the bad ones on Camilla Rhodes. However, this form of defence is at the expense of Diane's own mental wellbeing, as the ego "is incapable of splitting the object . . . without a corresponding splitting taking place within the ego [itself]" (*Selected Klein* 81).

Segal makes a distinction between envy and jealousy: according to her, jealousy is "based on love and aims at the possession of the loved object and the removal of the rival" (40), whereas with envy "the subject envies the object for some possession or quality" (40). Jealousy, therefore, is often aimed at the whole object, while envy is focused on a certain quality or trait that is part of the object. In this light, Diane's love and hatred towards the same person (Camilla) ensue from these feelings of both jealousy and envy. Her jealousy emerges from her love for Camilla as a romantic partner: the "removal of the rival" in the film, then, is manifested in Diane's dream, as Adam is portrayed as a failing director, and is repeatedly humiliated and denounced. Freud explains that projection, together with projective identification "ceases to be innocuous and becomes pathological when it is carried over into a person's love life" (120). Employing these two defence mechanisms in relation to an object, who is at the same time one's partner, can lead to an "obsessional fixation" with the object, in the form of "projected jealousy" (120). In the dream, Betty and Rita are finally unified, expressing their love to each other through words and intimacy. This blending of the two personages is further implied when Rita starts wearing a blonde wig, which makes the women look more similar.

However, Diane also envies Camilla for her acting career, as becomes clear at Adam's dinner party near the end of the film. When, on top of that, Adam and Camilla announce that they are going to get married, Diane pulls the trigger and hires a hitman to have Camilla murdered: a common consequence of envy – the "destruction of the object" (Segal 40). Diane explains that she wants this "more than anything in this world" (2:17:37). The murder is for

her a form of retribution for all the pain she has been suffering from, but also leads to guilt: "The destroyed objects", Segal explains, are the "source of endless persecution and later guilt" (42). This guilt haunts Diane in her dream, the dream being both a way to escape reality, but also a way to "remove the source of envious feelings" (Segal 41), as she further delves into denial. Freud, too, explains that the "loss of a love object" (80) can cause the emergence of "some agreeable delusion" (80). The dream in *Mulholland Drive*, then, in Freudian terms represents this delusion, whereas from a Kleinian perspective functions as a form of manic reparation, aiming to "repair the object in such a way that guilt and loss are never experienced" (Segal 95). When Camilla re-appears in a hallucination in a sort of pseudo-reality of Diane in her apartment ("Camilla, you've come back"), Diane is overwhelmed by joy, for she believes that her "love can restore what her hatred has destroyed" (Segal 93). She fantasises that Camilla has forgiven Diane for her horrible mistake, but because Diane never acknowledges her mistakes, and therefore never repents, her guilt is "not relieved, and the reparation brings no lasting satisfaction" (96). Instead, Diane's entire dream seems to be built around the idea that the Camilla is still alive, which might also explain why the hitman in her dream is portrayed as a messy, unprofessional person, who accidently leaves the scene killing three people instead of one – someone who fails to do the job. The hitman in Diane's dream is again a form of denial, a way of disguising the horrible truth that we only find out about when we see the blue key in her apartment. In the end, however, it is not only the object, but also the subject that becomes disintegrated, and ultimately destroyed. Segal defines disintegration as:

> The most desperate of all the ego's attempts to ward off anxiety: in order to avoid suffering the ego does its best not to exist, an attempt which gives rise to a specific acute anxiety – that of falling to bits and becoming atomized. (30-31)

Segal's description of disintegration bears similarities to the concept of dualism in relation to the self and unity in Zen Buddhism. Lynch's philosophy, which can be traced back to Zen Buddhism, is to be found everywhere in his later films. One specific idea in Zen, which I believe is rooted in *Mulholland Drive*, is the idea that "the dualistic conception of reality divides the self and so is doomed to failure" (Walling 3). In *The Philosophy of David Lynch*, Mark Walling argues that many of Lynch's characters look at the world through this dualistic perspective – that often lies at the heart of Western philosophy –, which causes the subject to seek an

object outside the self "in order to locate a sense of unity and authority" (110). This, however, becomes destructive for the subject, as she tries to find elements in the other rather than within herself, "unable to apprehend the unity of existence" (96). Diane, in doing this, splits herself into the character of Betty, but also seeks unification with Rita. Zen would consider this "type of division" as an illusion (Walling 97). In the end, Diane becomes a victim of her own feelings of guilt.

Winnicott's theories, which stem from a dualistic worldview, argue that the self should primarily be "reactive to [internal] stimuli" (*Maturational Processes* 148) rather than external, which has correlations with Lynch's interest in Transcendental Meditation, its goal being to "dive within" (48), as he expressed several times in his book *Catching the Big Fish* (2006). Just as Segal, Winnicott presents self-destruction as a likely consequence of defence mechanisms. In the extreme case of the False Self –which I argue is Diane's case –, the True Self is completely hidden to such an extent that the individual acts "a special role, that of the True Self *as it would be if it had had existence"* (*Maturational Processes* 147) (emphasis added). Diane's True Self comes only to light at the end of the film, where we realise that the cheerful Betty we have followed so far is a manifestation of the False Self, that is, a coping mechanism for the True Self. Through this depiction of Betty and Diane as two polar opposites, we explore two sides of the same person – an exploration which, ultimately, results in "its annihilation" (*Maturational Processes* 147).

Through the techniques of surrealism, Lynch obscures the boundaries between dream and reality, making our minds fail to explain what is real and what is imagined. Lynch is reticent when it comes to the meaning of the film, as he has many times refused to explain his work: "I never interpret my art. I let the audience do that" (Sheen 1). Cinema, especially on such a level of abstractness, is full of meaning and interpretations. Lynch explains that the meaning of the film depends on the experience of the individual, giving a similar description on the purpose of cinema as Bergman, who also believed that one's interpretation is based on and reflects the contents of the individual's unconscious. In *Mulholland* Drive, the contents of the unconscious are expressed through (day)dreams and fantasies. And just as Diane is the director of her own dream, Lynch gives us the power to do the same for his film, allowing us

to partake in a psychic odyssey that cinema is, to enter the realm of dreams – a boundless world in which anything is possible.

Conclusion

Although our three films are completely different in terms of plot, style, and narrative, they share many similarities. In every film there is one woman who is sick, the receiver of care, whereas the other is the caregiver, the one who looks after the sick. The supposed receivers of care are Elisabet, Pinky, and Rita. These women have either been hospitalised (Elisabet and Pinky), deal with some sort of a memory loss (Pinky and Rita), or lack speech (Elisabet and Rita). The caregivers, in return, are embodied by Alma, Millie, and Betty, who take on the role of the protector, sometimes even behaving as a mother. These two extremes of the spectrum reveal something about power relationships: the receivers of care have been turned into sick patients to give them a character of vulnerability, which allows the caregiver to look after her, and therefore to feel more powerful and in charge of the relationship, gaining a status of dominance. In contrast to this, the receivers are embodied by women who take on the role of the observer, either being completely mute (Elisabet) or saying little (Pinky and Rita), whereas the supposedly dominant person in the relationship is talkative and cheery, often times oblivious to their talkativeness. This dichotomy between the characters allows room for projection and identification, creating another distinction between the two extremes, that of the sender and the receiver. The silent women in these films, the receivers, all try to find their identity, as their identities remain a complete enigma, and therefore function as empty canvasses that the talkative women, the senders, can project onto. The projections in these films are often employed by the sender to distance herself from certain negative qualities, such as certain fears and insecurities, but also fantasies and desires, which are imposed on the receiver, so she can identify with them. Through this projective identification, the projecting woman tries to control the object of her projection. What we realise with every film, however, is that these “empty” characters prove to have a more stable identity than their counterparts. As a result, we see these caregivers become dependent on their “patients”, rather than vice versa. Segal explains how control of the object might in reality indicate one’s lack of power and dependence on the object:

> Control is a way of denying dependence, of not acknowledging it, and yet of compelling the object to fulfil a need for dependence, since an object that is wholly controlled is, up a point, one that can be depended upon. (83-84)

The power relationship between the two women, therefore, becomes reversed, as the caregiver becomes in need of her patient. While these silent women then come off as the stronger in the relationship, the struggle of the original caretaker between her True and False Self becomes more visible. The caretaker in the relationship, then, becomes an essential person in the character development of the caregiver, or the lack thereof: the films all portray a deep inner conflict – in Winnicottian terms, a tension between the False Self and the True Self.

This idea of the False Self connects to the last similarity I have discussed in these three films, which is that they all show an interest in acting, imitation, performance, and the artificial: the women in these films are all actresses, whether literally (Elisabet and Betty/Diane), or symbolically (Millie). These women play a person who performs in their role by presenting themselves in a different light than they actually are. Artists and performers – the ones that act out, the ones that perform – are the objects of admiration. The films present people who find solace in this creation of something false, following and imitating others because they are unable to create from within and make themselves whole. In regard to actors, Winnicott has made a division between those "who can be themselves and who also can act . . . [and those who] can only act, and who are completely at a loss when not in a role, and when not being appreciated or applauded" (*Maturational Processes* 150). The three women who I have referred to as the actual "patients" in the films, embody the latter way of being: these are fractured women who believe their false self-image to be the truth of their reality – they are characters who have, to cite Winnicott again, "only existed falsely" (151). The lack of substance in their character, and the lack of an authentic individuality, results in their interpreting their world by projecting themselves onto others, and in this way they therefore further shape their identity in relation to and through their interactions with the other woman. In order to feel complete, they overcompensate for the traits they have denied, rejected, and projected, and which are in turn mirrored through the object. The object must therefore be part of the subject, for she is part of the patient's external world, and becomes a substitute for what the subject lacks in her internal world. This process of projection, and projective identification – identifying with the image seen, experienced by both the sender and receiver – explains the women's interdependence on each other. As the women blend

and become shadows of each other, their identity starts fading away, and just like the women, we start to question whether the other is perhaps part of her.

This thesis has explored the theme of identity and its relation to authenticity as opposed to artificiality in *Persona*, *3 Women*, and *Mulholland Drive* by arguing that all these films use female identity as their base to argue that identity is fluid, interchangeable, and mutable. Identities in these films are complex, multiple, and self-contradictory, as they are borrowed, stolen, or made one's own through intimacy, language, clothing, and fantasy. Drawing on theories of Klein, Freud, and Winnicott throughout this study, I have explored why and to what end these female characters employ defence mechanisms such as projection and projective identification as they struggle between their True and False Self.

I have also sketched some of the ways in which the theme of artificiality intrinsic in these three films is not only to be seen in the identities of the characters, but also in the identities of the films themselves. While the characters on screen struggle with notions of performance, illusions, and artificiality, the films themselves simultaneously explore the artificiality of cinema as a medium, making them all self-reflexive films – a film about film; a performance about performance. The interactions between the two women on the screen intertwine every time with this broader message of the film about artificiality, acting, and performance, and tells us that both are equally important: the artificial, acting, and other meta-cinematic aspects of the films are the cinematic equivalent to projection and projective identification in the psyches of the characters. The films play out the unmasking of the human psyche through its characters, but also the unmasking of the artificiality and illusions of film itself. The films themselves are used to explore the darkness of the human psyche, but also explore the darkness of film itself as a metacommentary.

As a two-fold division between the performer-spectator, sender-receiver, subject-object relationship between the characters develops, the films endeavour to build a similar relationship with us, the spectator, and film itself as the performer. In this sense, two relationships are being explored: that between the characters, and that between us and the screen. The women in the films need a counterpart who bears witness to their persona, just as the films themselves need an audience to unmask. While the women introject their own thoughts and feelings, so do we, by looking at the screen, introject our own mind and soul. As

the two women employ projection and projective identification for self-discovery and to find their True Self, the screen too projects, and we are subject to its projection, as it invites us to identify with the images on the screen. In his essay on the position of the spectator in cinema, Nick Browne compares the moviegoer to a dreamer, explaining that the spectator is a "plural subject: in his reading he *is* and *is not* himself" (36) (emphasis added), in a process akin to Evelyn Keller's distinction between "me" and "not me" (Rueschmann 175). It is the spectator, then, who decides to remain uninvolved as a recipient, or accepts the film's invitation and participates. In the latter, he or she will find themselves in a journey analogous to those of our female protagonists – in a search to find themselves, only to find parts of that self in the other.

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