Reversal, or turning a thing into its opposite, is one of the means of representation most favoured by the dream-work and one which is capable of employment in the most diverse directions. It serves in the first place to give expression to the fulfilment of a wish in reference to some particular element of the dream-thoughts. “If only it had been the other way round!” This is often the best way of expressing the ego’s reaction to a disagreeable fragment of memory.

Freud, *Interpretation of Dreams*

Sexual activity, whether perverted or not; [...] defecation; urination; death and the cult of cadavers (above all, insofar as it involves the stinking decomposition of bodies); [...] the laughter of exclusion; sobbing (which in general has death as its object); [...] the identical attitude toward shit, gods, and cadavers; the terror that so often accompanies involuntary defecation; the custom of making women both brilliant and lubricious with makeup, gems, and gleaming jewels; [...] heedless expenditure and certain fanciful uses of money, etc., together [all] present a common character in that the object of the activity [...] is found each time treated as a foreign body. [...] The notion of the (heterogeneous) foreign body permits one to note the elementary subjective identity between types of excrement [...] and everything that can be seen as sacred, divine, or marvelous: a half-decomposed cadaver fleeing through the night in a luminous shroud can be seen as characteristic of this unity.

Bataille, *Visions of Excess*
I give myself to you, but this gift of my person—Oh mystery!—is changed inexplicably into a gift of shit.

Lacan, Seminar XI

Very early in David Lynch’s *Mulholland Drive*, the film provides attentive viewers with sufficient clues that what we are watching is the dream-work at work. Indeed, I would hazard a guess that anyone who has made much sense of the film has most likely accomplished this feat by recognizing that the first two hours or so of *Mulholland Drive* represent an extended dream on the part of the central character, Diane Selwyn (Naomi Watts), while the last segment narrates the “actual” historical circumstances that have informed the dream’s patterns of imagery and that culminate in Diane’s hallucinatory psychotic breakdown (if that’s what we should call it) as well as her final hysterical suicide (if, indeed, that’s what occurs).¹

Of course, there would be nothing particularly remarkable about a self-referential “dream-film” satirizing “Hollywood—the Dream Factory” (Love 121), even if that were all *Mulholland Drive* aspired to be. The depiction of dream in cinema, the representation of cinema-as-dream, is not exactly fresh news, and I doubt I am alone in being interpretatively unsatisfied by the “it-was-all-a-dream” resolution of a film’s complexities or absurdities. But I would argue that very few “dream-films” demonstrably respect the fundamental tenets of Freud’s *Interpretation of Dreams*, much less Lacan’s *Écrits* (not to mention the excessive visions of Georges Bataille), and that in doing so *Mulholland Drive* is extraordinary. In its intricate, bewildering, and literally “preposterous” narrative structure, Lynch’s film dramatizes Freudian *Nachträglichkeit*, or deferred action, what Lacan calls the *après coup*, by giving us the historical context of Diane’s dream after the presentation of the dream itself, thus compelling us to actively and repeatedly study the film backward and forward. Moreover, just as Freud acknowledged but downplayed “universal” dream symbolism and instead stressed the need to analyze a dream’s images in the specific context of the dreamer’s life history, so the puzzling pictures that appear in *Mulholland Drive* must be mapped onto the trajectory of Diane’s actual life story (a dismal spiral down the tubes) if they are to yield their riches to a strong interpretation. Finally, and most important, Lynch’s film is faithful to Freud’s most fundamental assertion about the dream-work’s function of representing the fulfillment of a wish, the negation of a reality. For in reality (that is, in the nondream portion of the film’s narrative that I will here simply call “reality”¹⁾ Diane Selwyn is a mediocre, failed, morbidly depressed, and drug-eating actress who is guilty of having hired a hit man to murder her former lover