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Aesthetics of Negativity in US Television Fiction and Comics: *Here* by Richard McGuire and *Twin Peaks, the Return*

In the original version of Richard McGuire's comic *Here*, published in the magazine *Raw* in 1989, an initial panel depicting the empty corner of a living room at an unspecified point in time introduces a journey in time over a fixed space, in a to-and-fro of temporal leaps ranging from the age of the dinosaurs to the year 2030. The first panel is an almost abstract image, just a few lines converging on a point, verging on an illusion of space and perspective, depicting one corner of a living room next to a window. This article begins with this first image of an empty space, stripped bare, that underpins the whole development of *Here*, to venture a hypothesis of a negative aesthetic, a visual logic of emptying out and tearing in contemporary US television fiction series and comics.

In some of the most significant practices in the context of recent innovations in comics and television, there appears to be a clear continuity with earlier explorations in the realm of visual arts, particularly in painting, based on the premise of a negative approach, whose expression can be analyzed using philosophical and even theological theoretical sources. To study the presence of the logic of emptying out, opening up and tearing in works like *Here*, or in Season 3 of David Lynch's *Twin Peaks: The Return* (Showtime Networks, 2017), or even in the works of the cartoonist Chris Ware, it is necessary to turn to methodological and theoretical tools similar to those needed for an analysis of the paintings of Mark Rothko or the work of the Anglo-Indian artist Anish Kapoor. Through a contextualization, a comparative analysis and finally a hermeneutic approach, it is the aim of this paper to attempt a broader explanation of the experimental logic emerging within contemporary popular culture in the English-speaking world, and particularly in the United States.

1. A SHORT HISTORY OF AMERICA

The key feature of the first version of *Here*, which constituted a milestone in innovative comics, was McGuire's ability to use secondary narrative elements to draw out a tension that has been implicit in the comic strip since its origins: the status of the comic strip panel as an open window on the concatenation between past, present and future, on the one hand, and the reader's freedom to travel through all the moments in time laid out in the panoply on the page (Pintor, 2017a). In the six pages of *Here*, the accessibility of all the different moments in time on the page was related to the use of a technique of insets or overlapping panels. In this way, different points in time open onto others, in a journey towards the origins constructed firstly out of ordinary family moments, and then out of historical events, all of which occurred in the same space.

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The journey through time articulated in the cut between images and the pantheist tone that permeates *Here* aligns with the editing techniques used in the movies of Jonas Mekas, or particularly in Terrence Malick movies like *The Tree of Life* (2011) and *Voyage of Time* (2016). All these works exhibit a poetics associated with the American transcendentalism of Emerson and Walt Whitman, which McGuire expresses in a context as open to experimentation as the magazine *Raw* (1980-1986; 1989-1991), directed by Art Spiegelman and Françoise Mouly, as an intellectual counterpoint to the rough underground style of the magazine *Weirdo* (1981-1993) created by Robert Crumb. However, what for Malick is a journey through vital moments, in search of divine grace or a kind of transcendence, in McGuire becomes, through the strategy of inset comic panels, a negative voyage, an exploration of ellipsis, and the threat of infinite openness.

As in the case of filmmakers with a close affinity with painting, such as Peter Greenaway, who in the same era released movies like *The Cook, the Thief, His Wife & Her Lover* (1989) and *Prospero's Books* (1991), the fact that *Here* happened to be published around the same time as the appearance of Windows software could be cited to explain the logic of windows and different points in time opening up in constant overlaps. However, it is the expression of tearing and opening that makes the first version of *Here* so unique, with its constant allusion to the possibility of the primordial void behind all moments in time. In contrast to the movie *The Tree of Life*, there is no



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voice-over, no text that guides the journey; instead, the boldness of the work lies in the act of the montage itself, in the juxtaposed articulation of discrete temporal frames where the narrative hierarchization is left up to the reader.

The visual beauty of McGuire's more extensive development of the first version of the comic strip in the album *Here* (2014) gives the journey through time a more pictorial dimension, again in tune with the spectacular use of the 70mm format by Mallick. The use of color and the absence of the reticular structure of traditional comic panels intensify the sensation of a unique space. From the living room in a house, the different games, conversations, births and absences of a family saga respond to and link in with one another, in a multiplicity of parallel moments in the planet's distant past and foggy future. The first panel in the original 1989 version of the strip, only a few angled lines, is expanded now into a series of fourteen pages by way of prologue.

On the first of these pages, a window that maintains the page white background also reproduces a corner of the house, enveloped in a gloom of grey tones very similar to those used by the Danish painter Vilhelm Hammershøi. On the second page, almost as if it was a musical movement, the shades of grey are once again organized around the whiteness of the light that enters through the window and is silhouetted against the fireplace. In the pages that follow, in a kind of dance, shot and reverse shot, window and fireplace exchange different lights. These pages evoke different moments, but always as a huge mass of color around a central blank hole, until the series of rhythms comes to life with the abrupt appearance of the year and a human figure, a woman appearing in 1957, without knowing why she came to the window.

The image of the woman, always with the page dominated by these internal empty spaces, is followed by the figure of a cat in 1999, of a virgin landscape in 1623 and, once again, the female figure in 1957. From this moment and throughout most of the album (except for the moments before and after the existence of the house), both the window and the fireplace continue being two blank spaces. These spaces appear to reveal a deeper dimension beyond the cadence of the windows that capture different moments, linking together actions that are nearly always mundane, lacking in any obvious *pathos*. "Life has a flair for rhyming events," says one of the characters much later, in a panel marked 1775. Far from appearing like ghosts, all the human figures peopling *Here* manage to make the real specter the reader, the wandering owner of a gaze which, as in the movies of Terence Davies, constantly loses what it longs to hold onto.

However, the basic emotion that dominates this work is not, as in Terence Davies' movies, tied up so much with family memory, a bitter melancholy, or the tragic reality of irreversibility. *Here* evokes the shimmering gleam of moments that act like buoys against the rushing flow of time. But behind the hymn to the forests, cultures, births, and deaths that parade through the space of the house in *Here*, in an echo of Robert Crumb's *A Short History of America* (1979) is clearly discernible, McGuire displays a keen attention to the gaps, the intervals. At the end of the road that begins in American poetry with Whitman is always the negative approach of Emily Dickinson's blank spaces, their extraordinary revelation of what is lost between the images.

“We grow accustomed to the Dark,”¹ she declares in one of her poems, while in another she concludes what could be the defense of another way of writing poetry, drawing comics or making movies: “Until the Cheated Eye / Shuts arrogantly – in the Grave / Another way – to see–”² It is not so much a case of evoking a journey or a direct tension towards abstraction—in this sense there are much more obvious examples of abstraction in comics, from Manfred Sommer to Renato Calligaro³ –as of elaborating a constellation of negatives and gaps around a central void, while maintaining the precision of the figuration. In certain ways, the way McGuire works with time is analogous to what the Canadian cartoonist Martin Vaughn-James does with space in *The Cage* (1975) or to the mechanisms that underpin certain works by Marc-Antoine Mathieu, such as *Julius-Corentin Acquefacques, prisonnier des rêves* (1991) and *3* (2011).

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In *3*, the story of a murder in a sports stadium is explained through a concatenation of reflections in glasses, screens and mirrors, to which one more panel could always be added. Similarly, among the panels of *Here* a new opening could always be inserted, but it would never have a clarifying purpose, as in the case of *3*, since there is no generic plot that underpins the album; instead it would point to that “other way to see” alluded to by Dickinson. In the final panel of *Here*, when the woman in 1957 remembers that she has come to the living room window to retrieve a book, the work is revealed to be a kind of Proustian unfolding through recognition, like an accordion which, once all the layers of time have been exposed, returns to the same spot. It is in fact a strategy similar to that employed by David Lynch in *Twin Peaks: The Return*. Just as the idea of the central blank hole graphically dominates the whole work, narratively, there is also a central, inexplicable opaqueness behind the passage of time.

¹ Emily Dickinson, “The Tint I cannot take – is best –”, in Emily Dickinson, *The Poems of Emily Dickinson*, 1998), p. 666.

² Emily Dickinson, “We grow accustomed to the dark”, in Emily Dickinson, Op. cit. p. 452-453.

³ Notable in Sommer’s case is the series titled *Secuencia* nº1, 2, 3, 4 y 5 (1981).

See also Molotiu, A. (Ed.) *Abstract Comics: The Anthology* (2009) and Anderson, Kimball et al., *Comics as Poetry* (2012), as well as the work of Tamryn Bennett (2014).

2. THE FRUIT OF NOTHING

In contrast with the Shakespearean approach that has dominated the golden age of drama beginning in television fiction after 9/11, *Twin Peaks: The Return* establishes a pact with the spectator that is not based on the premise of a self-contained story and does not invoke the resources of Elizabethan drama. Each episode appears to be conceived as a visit to the studio, to the workshop of the artist, as a navigation through the different dimensional thresholds and windows that open up around the original location of the town of *Twin Peaks*. In this sense, its approach bears a closer relationship to the non-narrative strategies of *Here* or *The Cage* than the standard forms of television fiction, even if the end of the series deliberately aspires to a closure of the story, a return to the starting point.

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In this context, the development of recurring motifs in *Twin Peaks* results in scenes understood as paintings, experiments, and possibilities of a multiple universe resounding, first of all, with the history of the United States since World War II, and, secondly, with the intuition of a much older temporal dimension rooted in nature. In the arc of the twenty-seven years separating the first season (ABC: 1990-91) from the last season of *Twin Peaks*, there is a dialogue with time and an intention to identify the negative flip sides of a sinister eternity. As in *Here*, there is a return to the starting point, but expressed in an image filled with *pathos*: the blood-curdling scream of the actress Sheryl Lee, a Laura whom Agent Cooper (Kyle McLachlan) believes he has resurrected and returned to her home.

While the basic approach that characterizes both Lynch's painting and filming style involves zooming in on a detail that betrays the apparent tranquility of the whole, exploring the imbalance between the wide shot and the fragment, between the exquisitely cut grass and the decayed ear in *Blue Velvet* (1986), both the last and the first episodes of the third season of *Twin Peaks* emerge onto a non-existent outside world, flattened after an absence of almost three decades, both for the characters and for the spectators. The peaceful whispering of the Douglas fir swaying in the wind, the hum of the Packard Sawmill and the music of Badalamenti accompanying each of Audrey's light steps through her father's hotel or the RR Café in the first two seasons are replaced now by the silence of an open world.



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In his book *Catching the Big Fish* (2006), David Lynch suggests that for something to be able to appear, it is first necessary to create the void. *Twin Peaks* opens by establishing in that world of The Open (*Das Offene*, Rilke called it in the eighth of his *Duino Elegies*⁴) the maximum embodiment of power: a huge, empty glass cube.

Resembling a Faraday cage, the cube is located in an attic in Manhattan, which along with Philadelphia, Las Vegas, and Buenos Aires, forms part of a new geography for the series. In a meticulous ritual of invocation, several surveillance cameras record the emptiness of the cube, which is watched over by a young man who is unable to foresee the appearance, first, of a maleficent presence, and later, of Agent Cooper.

This initial empty space acts as a catalyst, in the same way as the initial empty panel in *Here* and just like Chris Ware's central panels of empty and torn spaces in both *Jimmy Corrigan, the Smartest Kid on Earth* (2000), and (especially) *The Big Book (I Just Want to Fall Asleep)* (Acme Novelty Library 18), one of the parts of *Building Stories* (2012). This work of Ware is not so much a comic book as a box, like the boxed assemblages of the artist Joseph Cornell, with fourteen different pieces—tabloids, notebooks, strip cartoons, an album bound in cloth and even a screen or game board—whose stories are organized around the everyday trials and solitudes of a woman with an amputated leg. The strategy of keeping the center of the page empty is expressed in *The Big Book* in the image of an empty notebook (pp. 23-24), the lintel of a door (pp. 32-33 and 34-35), an open orchid (pp. 46-47), and even a woman's vulva (pp. 42,45).

In consonance with Lynch's and McGuire's sources, Ware uses formulas for emptying the central space of the page developed previously by classical illustrators in the American press, like George Herriman, the author of *Krazy Kat* (1913-1944), and Frank King, the creator of *Gasoline Alley* (1918-). A gradual emptying, like that advocated by the artist Jorge Oteiza (2003) when reflecting on his sculptural works, produces an effect of liberation, of asceticism or, in terms of the negative topology of the German mystic Meister Eckhart, a way of giving birth to the "fruit of nothing" in the empty space of the soul. To this end, the detachment (*Abgeschiedenheit*) that makes possible the incarnation of God in man, the process of *kenosis*, is as important as the breakthrough (*Durchbruch*) that reveals the ground (*gründ*) on which the transcendental encounter can occur.

The breakthrough and the opening of the threshold between worlds is not only the symbol that characterizes all David Lynch's work (Pintor, 2017b), but also the unique quality of the actors' gestures in the third season of *Twin Peaks*. The ritual precision of the gestures in the first two seasons of the series becomes, in the final episodes, an intention to tear at the darkness of the image, to gain access to the transcendence that lies beyond the murder of Laura Palmer. Both Laura and her mother withdraw their own faces in respective symmetrical scenes to reveal an abyss (*abgründ*) of light in the first case and of darkness in the second. Similarly, there are numerous vortexes that open up to that other space explored by the filmmaker in the heterotopia of the Black Lodge, the Club Silencio in *Mulholland Drive* (David Lynch, 2001), or the radiator in *Eraserhead* (David Lynch, 1977).

⁴ Upon which only an animal could gaze, since the human gaze is always on the world and far from that nowhere without no (*Nirgends ohne Nicht*).

3. AN APOPHATIC AESTHETIC

What is portrayed as a containment of the abyss of The Real in Lynch's work up until to *Inland Empire* (2006) in *Twin Peaks: The Return* foreshadows a negative return of the sacred that emerges out of the liminal void. Not only does the slapstick, inherited from the filmmaker Jacques Tati, that characterizes Dougie, an ill-fated, childlike, inarticulate Cooper (both played by McLachlan), constitute a prodigious figuration of the holy madman, but it is also in this third season, beneath the torn surface, that the light emerges most. Just as in Lynch's most recent paintings, the canvas often reveals a bright world beyond compared to the dark and abject experience of the home in the black canvases of his early period, a kind of exercise that comic strip authors like Frank Miller and Bill Sienkiewicz had already experimented with in *Elektra Assassin* (1986-87) or Grant Morrison and Dave McKean in *Arkham Asylum* (1989).

In this respect, there does not seem to be a substantial difference between the visual attitude of breakdown and deepening sometimes found in Sienkiewicz, McKean or Lynch and which characterizes works by Anish Kapoor like *Place* (1985) and *The Healing of St. Thomas* (1989-1990), or in the ultimate purpose of the tears in Lucio Fontana's concetti spaziali in the 1960s. In his study of the apophatic aesthetic ("apophatic" from the Greek word ἀποφάναι, meaning "to say no", "to negate") based on Kapoor's work, the theorist Amador Vega (2004) points out how the void of the space inside the wound, the tear, offers a new language that emerges from sacrifice and contemplation to posit itself as a pronouncement or an "opening up to others".

However, the sacrificial device, which is central to the series by J. J. Abrams and to the infiltration of superheroes from the Marvel series—*Daredevil* (Netflix, 2015-), *Jessica Jones* (Netflix: 2015-) or *Luke Cage* (Netflix: 2017-)—is reduced in Lynch's case to the distance of a death that occurred in the pilot episode and of a quest that is more visual than strictly narrative. The excerpt from Eckhart's sermon on the Conversion of St. Paul on the Road to Damascus highlighted by Vega in his discussion of Kapoor, "[...] when he rose up from the ground with his eyes open, he saw nothing" (Vega, 2004, p. 155), not only alludes to an inner vision, but also evokes its opposite: the impossibility of finding a response to the outward gaze that we find at the beginning of Kafka's *The Castle* (*Das Schloß*, 1926), when it is the very negation of the image that acquires a gaze of its own and contemplates the character, the reader.

Just where the castle in Kafka's story ought to be, all that is revealed is a thick, dark fog. Prior to any word or definition, the abyss of that void with intended as a way out was also the ultimate endeavor of artists like Rothko, who, like Fontana, worked on series, variations, and open processes. Lynch has never been satisfied with a single figure to construct a character, and from *Lost Highway* (1997) to *Inland Empire* (2006) he repeatedly juxtaposed two narratives around a central hole, around which the symbolic order of a single, split character collapses. Like the black hole which, in the last years of his life, began making its presence felt in Rothko's paintings despite his efforts to contain it with reality, the symbolic dimension of color, for Lynch, sex and murder form the core of a trauma that traps its characters in a loop between reality and flight into a fantasy that is even more horrific.



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This overflowing of the abyss in this case acquires a historical, *Godardian* dimension, with its embodiment of the origins of contemporary evil in the explosion of the first atomic test in New Mexico in 1945. The eighth episode functions with the autonomous, self-contained dimension of an episode of *The Twilight Zone*, (CBS: 1959-1964) or *Black Mirror* (Channel 4: 2011-2014; Netflix: 2016-), but at the same time it opens at a precise historical location. The domination of certain images on the limits of the abstract to the sound of Krzysztof Penderecki's music not only constitutes a re-reading of the experimental movies of Stan Brakhage, Jordan Belson or Bruce Conner, but also the foundation of a negativity whose ultimate meaning, capable of transcending the representational, collides with a nihilist mode of negativity prone to expression in forms and figures of horror.

The mushroom cloud, the hobos, Cooper's evil *doppelgänger*, the portrait of Kafka that looms over Gordon Cole's office, the images of Cooper appearing in the glass cube and through the electrical power outlet, the decapitated body, and the mutant animal resulting from the explosion are examples of a rich figuration around which the concept of negativity can no longer be read as synonymous with a negative approach, serving instead as the seed of a dramatic temporality, of a plurality of images and idols.

The imaginary that feeds Lynch's poetics is the same one that gave rise to American comic strip classics like Chester Gould's *Dick Tracy* (1931-1977) or the post-war strips of EC Comics,

When it slips into the mouth of a young girl, the strange insect-frog hybrid born a decade after the atomic explosion contaminates the Edenic purity of the 1950s in the United States, an idea Lynch has narrated so many times, recreating the aesthetic of Norman Rockwell or even the ingenuous iconographic repertoire of the etiquette manual *Good Times in Our Streets*.

The imaginary that feeds Lynch's poetics is the same one that gave rise to American comic strip classics like Chester Gould's *Dick Tracy* (1931-1977) or the post-war strips of EC Comics, a dark, B-grade universe perpetuated by illustrators like Daniel Clowes in *Like a Velvet Glove Cast in Iron* (1989-1993) or Charles Burns in *Black Hole* (1995-2005), and which, in a subtler way, is palpable in the pages of David Mazzucchelli's *Asteros Polyp* (2009). Each of its chapters is headed by a panel that acts as an abyss, in the middle of the page, leading to the lost highway in the header in the last chapter. In *Twin Peaks*, whether the girl is Killer Bob's mother or Laura Palmer's grandmother is less important than the depiction of an evil conceived as a distortion or perversion of a pre-established ritual.

“This is the water, and this is the well. Drink full and descend. The horse is the white of the eyes, and dark within.” This mantra, used by Judy’s archangels of evil to silence the music of the Platters in the eighth episode, expresses a form of darkness present in all of Lynch’s work, from his black paintings to the final scream in *Twin Peaks: The Return*. Lynch tunes into a nihilist imaginary of evil understood as an intrusion, or as an absence of good and *eudaimonia*—εὐδαιμονία, wellbeing, happiness (Nussbaum, 2001). To the presence of a negative aesthetic in a subtractive and theological sense, *Twin Peaks: The Return* adds an invocation of figurations of evil that are simply responses to the need to represent the site of negativity in contemporary society.

4. IN PRAISE OF NEGATIVITY

“We live in a time that is poor in negativity,” argues the philosopher Byung-Chul Han (2012, p. 17), echoing Heidegger; an era where the *disciplinary society* described by Foucault (1976), still governed by the “no” and the prohibition, has been giving rise to a *performance society*. In such a society, the lamentation of the depressed individual that “nothing is possible” can only be explained because the central value cultivated is the opposite: “nothing is impossible.” The need to sustain one’s own identity (Ehrenberg, 2008) in a context characterized by the positive promise that one can be anything ultimately proves exhausting. The gloom that pervades television series like *Mad Men* (AMC, 2007-2015), *Breaking Bad* (AMC, 2008-2013) or *The Leftovers* (HBO, 2014-2017) appear as a response to the excess of positivity of societies based on the *American Dream* (Pintor, 2015).

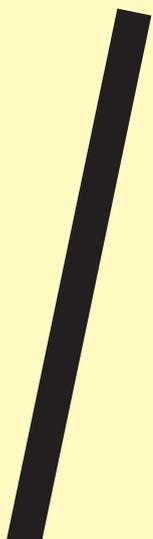
Like gloom, evil also appears in very different incarnations in the series of the last twenty years only as a way of channeling the tension caused by an excess of positivity. The realist evil of *The Wire* (HBO, 2002-2009), *Treme* (HBO, 2010-2013) and *Show Me a Hero* (HBO, 2015); the evil incorporated in the genre’s discourse of *The Sopranos* (HBO, 1999-2007), *Boardwalk Empire* (HBO, 2010-2014), *True Detective* (HBO, 2014-) and *The Handmaid’s Tale*, (Hulu, 2017); the fantasy universe of *Walking Dead* (AMC, 2010-) or *Game of Thrones* (HBO, 2011-); and the documentary horror of *The Jinx: The Life and Deaths of Robert Durst* (HBO, 2015) are all manifestations of a need to create stories based on a negativity understood, following Heidegger, as *Nichtheit*, i.e., as a tragic vector of time and the essential condition of being.⁵

All of McGuire’s and Ware’s work, as well as the work of others of their generation like Daniel Clowes, Charles Burns, Seth (Gregory Gallant), Chester Brown, Joe Matt, or even some of the young “underground” illustrators on the American scene, like Simon Hanselmann, is based on a desire to portray the cracks in an excess of positivity behind which dwell the great, negated phantoms of American fiction and society: solitude, alienation, the protection and pressure of the

⁵ Based on a critical re-reading of Hegel, and on phenomenology, Heidegger points out in *Being and Time* (1927) § 82: “Thus Hegel can define the essence of spirit formally and apophantically as the negation of a negation. This ‘absolute negativity’ gives a logically formalized interpretation of Descartes’ *cogito me cogitare rem* wherein he sees the essence of *conscientia*.” And he adds: “Time is ‘abstract’ negativity. As ‘intuited becoming,’ it is the differentiated self-differentiation that ‘is there,’ that is, objectively present.



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identical and the standardized, the violence of consensus. At least since the 1950s, the house with a yard and pool has been the incentive that the “American way of life” offers the performance society, but it is also its greatest hoax. Like any other house in the paintings of Hopper and Hockney or in the stories of John Updike and John Cheever, the home portrayed, through a negative approach adopted by these artists, is the emblem of the space of sameness and the excess of normalcy.

In the same way, for Lynch, all these cases are characterized by the desire to turn the void into a compensatory space for the depictions of the home that promise a preconceived happiness. It is only in this way that the image of the empty, abandoned house at the end of John Cheever’s short story “The Swimmer” (1964) can be understood. In the end, the tearing and subtraction referred to above are meaningless if they are not accompanied by their opposite, the ascent, the Anabasis. Indeed, in one of his last works, the entrance to the Monte Sant’Angelo metro station in Naples, Italy, Anish Kapoor has designed two complementary structures: one externalized and the other gaping inwards. In his works, like Fontana’s, the tear and the cut would be meaningless if they didn’t expose the abyss (*abgrûnt*). Negativity entails both the reversibility and the dissimilarity of the image itself, the emergence of what medieval theologians called the *vestigium*.

From the perspective of the construction of US identity, there is an image of contemporary television fiction that clearly expresses the link between negativity, emptiness and negative forms of evil and gloom

It is significant that movements outside the “underground” belonging to other, more commercial spheres of the comic strip industry, such as the revival of superheroes since the 1980s, have engaged in similar operations in narratives with codes that are genre expressive. It is interesting to note that in the work of authors like Grant Morrison, Neil Gaiman and Dave McKean, or Frank Miller, universes of visual saturation that transcribe an obsessive depiction of evil coexist with openings into the void and empty space. These openings are associated with narrative instances of violence, sacrifice, redemption or transcendental experiences of the protagonists. This is the meaning that can be ascribed to the central empty spaces on certain pages of *Arkham Asylum* (pp. 6-7), *Violent Cases* (1987, pp. 26-27, 38-39) by Neil Gaiman and Dave McKean or *Ronin* (vol. 3; p. 24) by Frank Miller.

As something objectively present and thus external to spirit, time has no power over the concept, but the concept is rather ‘the power of time.’”

In light of such operations and of the above exploration of *Here* and *Twin Peaks*, it would seem appropriate to define the space representative of evil not as a violent release of passions but precisely as a consequence of its opposite: a-pathos, the absence of *pathos* and passion. “When humans are not moved by passion, which launches them into action, they fold in on themselves, and depraved feelings are born,” suggests Kierkegaard (Marina, 2011, p. 57). *Twin Peaks*, which plays with the narrative baggage of the first two seasons, uses negativity to establish a productive link between the “void of escape”, on the one hand, and a set of forms of evil arising from the a-pathos or stagnation of eccentric characters, some of whom are clearly inspired by icons created by authors like Chester Gould in *Dick Tracy*. Here, which does not address evil but does take on Heidegger’s idea of negativity, bases its journey on a succession of layers of time in an exploration dependent on a lack of *pathos*.

A desperate vindication of passion made through the topology of silence, of subtractive forms

From the perspective of the construction of US identity, there is an image of contemporary television fiction that clearly expresses the link between negativity, emptiness and negative forms of evil and gloom: the final scene showing Don Draper (Jon Hamm), the protagonist in the series *Mad Men*, doing yoga in the final episode (“Waterloo”, 7.7), which is followed by the Coca-Cola “Hilltop” ad (1971), the perfect definition of positivity in the performance society. It could be viewed as a response to the carousel of family images in *Here*, the empty glass cube in *Twin Peaks* or the poetics of Chris Ware. “It’s the Real Thing” sings a group of young people of different ethnic backgrounds on a hilltop; different, close, but able in their convergence to flatten, in an unsettling manner, any difference between them. Compared to the “can-do” attitude based on the negation of difference and individual *pathos* that the character Don Draper repress during the series *Mad Men*, the negative approach, like the mystic dimension in the case of the apophatic aesthetic, is precisely the opposite: a desperate vindication of passion made through the topology of silence, of subtractive forms.

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