寄稿論文

Lost and Found in Los Angeles: Urban Alienation and Expressionist Topography in *Punch-Drunk Love*

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Introduction

Punch-Drunk Love (2002), Paul Thomas Anderson's fourth feature film, marks a significant shift in the director's treatment of cinematic space. Principally set in Anderson's hometown, the San Fernando Valley in Los Angeles, the film sometimes travels outside Southern California and covers a broader space than his earlier works. The distance between here and elsewhere is thematized at multiple levels within the story. Simultaneously, *Punch-Drunk Love* transforms the Valley into an uncanny place. From the film's opening sequences, the empty and sometimes labyrinthine urban space isolates and torments the central character, who wanders around the city without going anywhere. The film's narrative space is a mixed expression of utopian and dystopian aspects of contemporary urban life, on the one hand, and an expressionist externalization of the protagonist's troubled mind, on the other. It is, in short, a realm situated between the real and the imaginary. A space of urban alienation and capitalist consumerism, the Los Angeles in *Punch-Drunk Love* becomes an appropriate location for staging a drama of isolation and (mis)communication, of distance and closeness, an odd but fascinating variant on the genre of romantic comedy. Creating a strange narrative space with various streets, workplaces, apartments, houses, and stores, the film takes the viewer on a tour of the uncanny Valley as well as of the protagonist's unique interiority. Topography and psychology become inseparable in this film. What *Punch-Drunk Love* presents is a cinematic city that is both desolate and magical, dystopian and utopian.

Like two of Anderson's earlier films, *Boogie Nights* (1997) and *Magnolia* (1999), *Punch-Drunk Love* is mostly set in the San Fernando Valley. But this film's representation of narrative space is more extensive and abstract than his previous works. It is more extensive in that the film's narrative covers a broader geographical area. Not confined in the Valley, the story occasionally moves away from Southern California to other locations, most notably Hawaii and Utah. The film's extensive treatment of spatiality also derives from the way it shows a greater variety of locations. *Hard Eight* (1996), *Boogie Nights,* and *Magnolia* are heavily reliant on interior scenes of face-to-face dialogue and basically organized as chains of such scenes. In these films, roadside cafés, bars, retail stores, casinos, hotel rooms, automobiles, apartments, suburban homes, and film or TV studios stage the verbal exchanges between the principal characters to drive the narrative forward. With *Punch-Drunk Love*, such scenes of dialogue become less conspicuous. Instead, the director begins to embrace quiet moments of silence and

other nonverbal means of expression, working effectively with Adam Sandler's solo acting in many scenes, Jon Brion's music and unique soundscapes, and Jeremy Blake's visual artworks that both disrupt and fortify the story's development. Not required to jump from one scene of dialogue to another, the camera can now focus on the central character and travel to various locations inside and outside the city with him. By limiting the number of principal characters and abandoning the employment of multiple story lines, Anderson expands the cinematic space of his work.

The film's intensive focus on a single character is, in turn, crucial in establishing the abstract nature of its narrative space.[1)] The urban space in *Punch-Drunk Love* is strangely deserted. Its buildings, rooms, stores, streets, and parking lots often look too tidy and too sanitized to count as realistic. The Los Angeles in this film is apparently not so much an actual city as an abstract condensation of some aspects of urban life, just as the film represents Hawaii as an ideal paradise for tourists from the mainland U.S. Sometimes it looks as if Sandler's character is the only inhabitant of this city, an alien just arrived on a deserted planet. In *Punch-Drunk Love*, the city becomes an objective correlative of the central character's emotional state, and this is related to a significant change in the director's storytelling style. Putting aside the format of the Altman-like ensemble film adopted in *Magnolia*—a style that allows the viewer to be equally close to and equally distant from each of the principal characters—Anderson's four subsequent films center around the often troubled interiority of a single male character: an introverted man who sometimes succumbs to uncontrollable bursts of anger in *Punch-Drunk Love*, an Ahab-like monomaniac pursuer of wealth and power who does not seem to know what he really wants in *There Will Be Blood* (2007), a traumatized veteran who wanders around postwar U.S. society in search of a surrogate family or a principle of life in *The Master* (2012), and a pothead detective who dwells in nostalgia and suffers from occasional moments of paranoia in *Inherent Vice* (2014).[2)] Instead of aiming at objectivity, omniscience, or detachment, Anderson's works from *Punch-Drunk Love* to *Inherent Vice* foreground the subjective perspective of the central character. It is through this limited point of view that each of these films constructs its narrative space. This is of course not to say that the fictional worlds of these films are entirely a product of the protagonists' subjective vision,

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1) Jason Sperb, too, emphasizes the abstract aspects of this film: "A key notion in *Punch-Drunk Love* is 'abstraction'—how the film works visually, aurally, and thematically through nonnarrative, nonrepresentational means. In the film's very first moments, a car flips and crashes, after which a harmonium is dropped off outside Barry's warehouse. . . . In *Punch-Drunk Love*, these unexplained events force the audience to reject any notion of cinematic realism." Jason Sperb, *Blossoms and Blood: Postmodern Media Culture and the Films of Paul Thomas Anderson* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2014), 165.

2) Another work of romantic comedy with quirky twists, *Phantom Thread* (2017) is probably the closest film to *Punch-Drunk Love* in Anderson's oeuvre. The later film, however, departs from its precursor in assigning an equal weight to the perspective of each of the two principal characters. A comparison of these two films would be a fascinating topic for another essay.

although *The Master* perhaps does not exclude the possibility of such an interpretation. Rather, what emerges is a world frequently refracted through a single consciousness, a complex mixture of the objective and the subjective, or of the actual and the imaginary. In introducing the extensive use of this subjective storytelling style for the first time in Anderson's oeuvre, *Punch-Drunk Love* showcases a new aesthetic direction in his filmmaking career. Building on what has been achieved in the magical moments at the end of *Magnolia*, with its famous sequence of the rain of frogs, Anderson's fourth feature film departs from verisimilitude. An analysis of this film's treatment of narrative space will provide an insight into the director's later works as well.

1. Expressionist Space and Urban Alienation: The Opening Sequences

The term *expressionism* is usually associated with the artistic movement of German expressionism in the early twentieth century. Although it has been employed in film criticism for a long time to characterize the features of the Weimar cinema as well as of films from other nations and periods, it is, like many aesthetic terms, an amorphous concept. In his detailed account of the history of the concept, Thomas Elsaesser lists some of the elements often associated with expressionist cinema: "the stylization of the sets and the acting, 'Gothic' stories and perverse eroticism, angular exteriors, claustrophobic interiors, and above all, that uncanny feeling of not quite knowing what is going on, a lack of causal logic, and stories with twists and turns that double up on themselves."[3] Distorted set designs, highly artificial spaces, and the sense of uncanniness, disorientation, or bewilderment evoked by them are certainly among the features popularly imagined in association with cinematic expressionism, but Elsaesser emphasizes that the connection between these aesthetic characteristics and the political reality of post–World War I Germany is what has been developed by critics in retrospect to categorize a specific set of diverse artistic works. Michael Levenson, in a similar vein, points at the retrospective construction of this aesthetic category and claims that "[a] name and a series of features—stylized representation in nonnatural spaces, primitive or archaic iconography, extravagant physical gestures—gave the fragile coherence to artists and their artifacts."[4] Although expressionism might be an amorphous term that should be constantly reconsidered and redefined, its value as an aesthetic category lies in the special connection it draws between interiority and exteriority. Placing expressionism in the larger context of modernism, Levenson discusses expressionist cinema as a manifestation of the modernist concern with the aesthetic of depth, what he calls "deep Modernism": "It is true that Expressionism relied on extravagant

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[3] Thomas Elsaesser, "Expressionist Cinema—Style and Design in Film History," in *Expressionism in the Cinema*, ed. Olaf Brill and Gary D. Rhodes (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2016), 18.

[4] Michael Levenson, *Modernism* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2011), 52.

gestures and illusory spaces, but it is equally true that these distortions were justified in terms of a deeper realism, an expressive truth unavailable within prevailing norms. The rapidly shifting basis of realism has been a mark of Modernism."[5] The apparent departure from verisimilitude in cinematic expressionism—with its frequent distortion of narrative space—is an attempt to reconfigure what constitutes realism and the real itself.

It might still seem anachronistic to use the word *expressionist* to characterize an American film made in the twenty-first century, but some critics have already employed it in their writings on Anderson's films. In his suggestive essay on *The Master* and Anderson's earlier works, Geoffrey O'Brien points at "a peculiarly American disconnectedness" and "deep loneliness" that can be found in his films and briefly traces the development of the director's storytelling style.[6] As O'Brien suggests, Anderson is "some kind of realist," "a history painter for a culture where epochs are measure in decades" in *Boogie Nights*, which shows the rise and decline of the porn industry in the San Fernando Valley in the 1970s and 1980s.[7] The director's departure from this realistic and historicist style of storytelling is observable in *Magnolia*, with which he begins to seem an "expressionist allegorist" who does not shy away from "breaking the framework of any possible plotline and finally breaking the framework of the real altogether."[8] Anderson's subsequent expressionist style does not require artificial set designs that frequently appear in German expressionist films, since the culture it represents offers enough materials for expressing the impulse "to reconfigure the real": "[I]f this was expressionism, it was an expressionism that needed scarcely more for its effects than the actual materials of a culture beyond caricature."[9] In O'Brien's view, the director is an artist who can absorb the salient aspects of the material reality of contemporary U.S. society and transform it into visionary or nightmarish landscapes of alienation and loneliness. Following O'Brien's argument, George Toles adumbrates the blurring of the boundary between the subjective and the objective in *Punch-Drunk Love*, succinctly summarizing the characteristics of the film's idiosyncratic representation of the urban space of Los Angeles and other places: "The spaces Barry Egan occupies and moves through seem a curious mixture of impersonal strip mall topography and emanations of his baffled, tormented psyche. It is increasingly a challenge to determine where the cloistered self leaves off and its physical surroundings begin."[10] The cinematic space of *Punch-Drunk Love* is at once an urban milieu that isolates its central character and an expression of the already alienated interiority of the same character, a figure of profound loneliness. This circular relationship between the alienating space and the

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[5] Ibid., 243.

[6] Geoffrey O'Brien, *Stolen Glimpses, Captive Shadows: Writing on Film, 2002–2012* (Berkeley, CA: Counterpoint, 2013), 292.

[7] Ibid., 293–4.

[8] Ibid., 294.

[9] Ibid., 295, 294.

[10] George Toles, *Paul Thomas Anderson* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2016), 4.

alienated mind further traps the character in the cage of the self. To quote Levenson's words again, the film's uncannily distorted representation of Los Angeles is "justified in terms of a deeper realism, an expressive truth unavailable within prevailing norms."

The film's opening sequences announce its unique treatment of the urban space and present the protagonist as a kind of enigma, placing the spectator simultaneously inside and outside his mind and perception. *Punch-Drunk Love* begins twice—or perhaps three times. It is as if the film does not know how to begin to tell its story, and this gesture of hesitation mirrors the protagonist's awkward relationship with the surrounding environment. The first beginning, as it were, opens with a long shot of Barry Egan (Adam Sandler), sitting behind a desk in a distant corner of an empty warehouse and talking on the phone to a Healthy Choice representative about their "advertisement for the airline promotion and giveaway."[11] He is positioned screen left, not at the center of the frame, and his blue suit almost melts him into the blue wall behind him. The cinematographer Robert Elswit's use of the wide-angle lens has two significant effects in this shot: to distort the space surrounding Barry (as is observed in the slightly warped line separating the upper and lower halves of the two-tone walls) and to embed Barry in a space that is deeper, wider, and emptier than it actually is.[12] While the first effect expressively projects Barry's troubled mind onto the outside world, the second functions as an exaggerated representation of an actual space that isolates him. Repeatedly employed in other scenes as well, the combination of these optical effects suggests a close interaction between the interior and the exterior, an expressionist interaction in which neither precedes the other. And these visual effects are further fortified by the film's strange soundscape. The thumping and thwacking noises occasionally heard on the soundtrack are disorienting in that it is not clear where they are coming from. The viewer cannot know whether these noises have their source inside or outside Barry's mind, or inside or outside the warehouse. Once again, the film doubly blurs the boundary between the interior and the exterior. In a long take, the Steadicam shot continues to sustain its attention on Barry after the phone call. As the camera pans from left to right and follows him, the screen briefly goes black before he opens a roller shutter door, becomes a silhouette in the frame within the frame, and walks out of the warehouse into the adjacent driveway in the early morning. This symbolic moment of inauguration—which combines the act of opening a door, the shift from darkness to light, and the beginning of a new day—makes it clear in retrospect that Barry has been placed in a completely enclosed space. Once outside, the camera moves behind Barry, shows his back in medium close-up, and then racks focus from his figure to the background, a street that runs in front of the building in which the warehouse is located. Here the object of the camera's gaze shifts from the man to the

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[11] *Punch-Drunk Love*, directed by Paul Thomas Anderson (2002; New York: Criterion Collection, 2016), Blu-ray Disc, 0:00:46. Subsequent quotations of lines from this film will be noted parenthetically in the text with timestamps.

[12] Depth of field is one of the visual and psychological devices that Levenson associates with the aesthetic of deep modernism. See Levenson, *Modernism*, 242–3.

outside world, forcing the viewer to share his perception of the surrounding environment. A cut to the next point-of-view shot takes the viewer closer to the street, where two enigmatic events happen in quick succession: a car flips over and crashes on the street, apparently without any cause, and a mysterious person in a red taxicab drops a musical instrument in front of Barry. The film's insertion of two reaction shots of Barry in bewilderment fortifies the viewer's identification with the protagonist, since the viewer, too, is perplexed with these unexplained accidental events. Like the rain of frogs in *Magnolia*, these events transform an ordinary cityscape into something uncanny.[13) This is an enigmatic world in which mysterious things can happen suddenly at any time without any reason, a place where perhaps no one could feel at home. To quote Elsaesser's words again, there is an "uncanny feeling of not quite knowing what is going on" and a total "lack of causal logic." By placing the camera simultaneously inside and outside Barry's mind and perception, this sequence forces the spectator to measure and remeasure her or his distance from the protagonist.

The second opening sequence repeats the first in once again beginning with a shot of Barry talking on the phone behind his desk. While the lens continues to distort the image slightly, however, this time the camera is much closer to Barry, showing him from the front in medium close-up. Although the viewer is thus placed near the protagonist, here the problem of distance is transferred into his phone conversation with one of his customers, probably someone on the East Coast:

> BARRY: Okay. You have my home phone number, right?
> CUSTOMER: What's that for?
> BARRY: If you wanted to call me. It's not a problem.
> CUSTOMER: No, I'm fine. I have your work number.
> BARRY: Okay. Because of the time difference, if you needed to reach me earlier—
> CUSTOMER: No, that's fine. I can just get you at your office. (0:03:32–0:03:47)

The telephone, a device of communication repeatedly associated with Barry in this film, makes it possible for him to elide the physical distance from the customer in a different time zone. But the dialogue suggests that he has trouble measuring an appropriate interpersonal distance, a characteristic frequently emphasized by the subsequent narrative. After the call, the camera again follows Barry outside, this time through the already open shutter door. As the camera moves behind his back to place itself in the same position as in the previous sequence, the sun, already high in the sky, causes blue and rainbow-colored lens flare and adds a somewhat magical quality to the shot. The thwacking noise comes from an unspecified source once again. While he looks at the musical instrument still left on the sidewalk, a woman dressed in red, Lena Leonard (Emily Watson), drives her white car into the alleyway.

[13) Sperb, *Blossoms*, 156.

Barry suddenly becomes nervous and retreats into the warehouse for a while, a behavior that functions as another indication of his problem with interpersonal distance and turns him into an enigma to be deciphered by the viewer. Lena approaches Barry, who comes into the frame once again. The shot that captures the two in their first face-to-face dialogue presents a striking composition: the juxtaposition of red, blue, and white, the contrast between the bright sun behind Lena and the dark shadow behind Barry, and the colorful flare between them. As Adam Nayman points out, the rainbow-colored flare between the two prefigures the harmonious relationship that will be established between the man in blue and the woman in red.[14)] After Lena points at the "piano in the street" and leaves (0:05:32), the film inserts a brief shot of Barry from her point of view. Thwacking noises and train whistles come from nowhere, and Barry quickly hides into the darkness inside the warehouse, as if afraid of being run over by an imaginary passing train. When he goes out to confront the instrument again, which Lena later tells him is a harmonium, the film reveals the street address and the name of the garage that shares the same building with Barry's warehouse: "10101 Eckhart Auto Body." The camera captures and isolates him at the center of four extreme long shots taken from different positions in deep focus. The solitary figure of Barry on the deserted street is surrounded by a strangely quiet soundscape.[15)] This sudden moment of silence expresses Barry's concentration on the musical instrument, but it is soon broken by the loud noise of a passing Atlas Van Lines truck, which says "Relocation at its best!" on its side. Another truck of this moving company and cardboard boxes with the company's name on them will appear later in the film, both associated with Lena. Barry finally picks up the harmonium and runs with it into the warehouse and then into his small office inside the warehouse, a strange space that functions as Barry's cocoon, a box within a box, a half-private space within a public space. Here he tries to play the instrument, and the film stages a magical moment of light and music until Lance (Luis Guzmán), one of his staff members, opens the other roller shutter door of the warehouse, lets the blinding light of reality flood into Barry's office, and wakes him up from his daydream. Perhaps this moment can be regarded as the film's third beginning. Each of the three beginnings corresponds to Barry's awkward contact with the outside world, which always assaults him with its sheer unexpectedness and suddenness.

The opening sequences of *Punch-Drunk Love* thus pack many of the film's thematic concerns into less than ten minutes. First, the film transforms an actual location in Los Angeles into an uncanny, half-imaginary place. The real warehouse located at 10101 Canoga Avenue

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[14)] Adam Nayman, *Paul Thomas Anderson: Masterworks* (New York: Abrams, 2020), 185.

[15)] Anderson's style in *Punch-Drunk Love* seems to owe much to some of the early films of Jean-Luc Godard, particularly *A Woman Is a Woman* (1961). The combination of red, blue, and white (which evokes the flags of both France and the U.S.), the frequent and deliberate use of lens flare, the sudden intrusions of silence, and the playful subversion of the conventions of musical films and romantic comedies—all of these elements are shared by the two films. Also, both Nayman and Sperb note Anderson's allusions to François Truffaut's *Shoot the Piano Player* (1960). See Nayman, *Paul Thomas Anderson*, 200–201; and Sperb, *Blossoms*, 161.

in the neighborhood of Chatsworth in the San Fernando Valley becomes an anonymous space that stages a close interaction between the protagonist's interiority and the external world.[16) The film's use of multiple visual and aural devices turns an ordinary cityscape into something bewildering and magical at the same time. Second, the sequences establish the strongly passive nature of the protagonist. The car crash, the mysterious musical instrument, and the sudden appearance of a woman in red with a British accent—all of these events happen to Barry as unexpected accidents. He is a man of reaction, rather than of action, to whom events happen suddenly, apparently without any reason. The juxtaposition of the two sequences implies that there is a secret connection between the harmonium and Lena. Indeed, the film later makes it clear that it is always Lena who controls their romantic relationship and implies that she might have been the one who sent the instrument to Barry. A potentially harmonious relationship with a future lover arrives in the form of an accident. Third, the film thematizes the issues of alienation and distance at multiple levels. On the one hand, these sequences constantly change the distance between the viewer and Barry. The camera sometimes looks at this lonely figure from a distance and isolates him in the empty urban space, but it also adopts his point of view to look at the perplexing world that constantly surprises him. An object of scrutiny and sympathy at the same time, Barry becomes a disorienting figure for the viewer. On the other hand, the sequences show at once Barry's yearning to overcome physical distances and his inability to measure an appropriate interpersonal distance from others. While his first phone conversation with the Healthy Choice representative is about their frequent flier miles promotion program—which segues into his later flight to Hawaii—in the second phone conversation he confuses his customer by eliding the boundary between his workplace and his private home. This inappropriate offer of intimacy is then contrasted with his nervousness while talking with Lena in person. The film's expressionist Los Angeles becomes an appropriate stage for showing how this solitary and passive figure overcomes physical and metaphorical distances to become the unlikely hero of this romantic comedy.

2. "Lost-ing and Finding": Dystopia and Utopia, Here and Elsewhere

After establishing the uncanny nature of its narrative space at the beginning, *Punch-Drunk Love* continues to emphasize how Barry cannot feel at home in his hometown. As Sperb remarks, the film often points at the "tension between Barry's two occupations—his work and his family."[17) The viewer can also see that his life is divided between his workplace and his home, the public or professional realm and the private one, and that the fragile boundary

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16) In his shooting script, Anderson emphasizes the "non-descript" nature of this place. Paul Thomas Anderson, *Punch-Drunk Love: The Shooting Script* (New York: Newmarket Press, 2002), 2.

17) Sperb, *Blossoms*, 179.

between the two is constantly threatened, primarily by the medium of the telephone. As has been observed in his phone conversation with a customer in the second opening sequence, Barry himself is partially responsible for bringing the private into the public. But the film also demonstrates the constant intrusion of the one into the other as another manifestation of the contrast between the aggressive nature of the outside world and the passive nature of the central character. Barry runs his novelty business in the warehouse and tries to sell a new product, a toilet plunger called "funger," to his customers (0:10:56)—the name of the product sounding like one of his many unintended malapropisms in the film—but his business talk with the customers is repeatedly interrupted by phone calls from his sisters. And one sister, Elizabeth (Mary Lynn Rajskub), comes into the warehouse and chases him into the same corner where he was seen at the film's beginning. At the birthday party of one of his seven sisters, Rhonda (Hazel Mailloux), they continue to abuse him verbally, calling him "gay boy" and talking about an embarrassing episode from his childhood (0:15:58). Not being able to take it any longer, he ends up smashing the large glass sliding doors of the living room in an outburst of rage. An elderly woman who might or might not be the mother of Barry and the sisters can be seen beside the table, but the overwhelming presence of the sisters makes him extremely nervous and uncomfortable. Through the frames of the broken glass doors, the viewer can see that even a framed picture of Barry on the wall is separated from the photographs of the rest of the family members. He is totally out of place in this unhomely home, a house that could be an intimate space shared by close relatives. Both the repeated intrusion of private matters into the workplace and the transformation of a family space into a space of unbearable estrangement foreground Barry's total out-of-placeness. The boundary between the strange and the familiar is always porous in this uncanny fictional world.

While the workplace is repeatedly invaded by his seven sisters, even Barry's most private space is not safe from the assaults of the outside world. The film shows the inside of Barry's apartment only once. The sequence begins with a point-of-view shot of a newspaper advertisement for a phone sex line that says, "Are you ready for an INTIMATE AFFAIR?" (0:22:36). The film then cuts to the next shot—a very long take that lasts for three minutes and ten seconds—and shows Barry talking with an operator named Janice and then waiting for a girl's call. The camera sustains its attention on Barry as he closes the vertical blinds in the living room and locks the front door of his apartment, implying that this is a very private moment, perhaps "an INTIMATE AFFAIR" between the camera and the protagonist. Barry provides too much private information to the operator, including his credit card number, his street address in Sherman Oaks, his Social Security number, and his home phone number, repeatedly making sure that the information is "private" and "confidential" (0:23:05). His gullibility in this scene is another indication of his inability to measure an appropriate interpersonal distance. While he walks around the room and talks on the phone, the voices coming from the television placed in a corner of the room sometimes seem to echo what he says to the operator and later to a girl named Georgia. The long take of Barry's conversation with Janice is followed by another long take—which lasts for three minutes and twenty

seconds—of his conversation with Georgia, in which he tells her about his business, again taking her into his confidence and jumbling the private and the public together. Both television and telephone are media of communication that transform the distant into the near, the strange into the familiar, and the absent into the present. The intrusion of these distant voices of strangers into his most private space, however, brings about a fatal consequence. First, Georgia begins to call his home and work numbers to blackmail him. And then, after calling his credit card company to tell the operator about "lost-ing and finding" his card and ask her to cancel it (0:33:30),[18] Barry becomes a target of the four brothers sent by the owner of the phone sex service, Dean Trumbell or the Mattress Man (Philip Seymour Hoffmann). The brothers soon come to Los Angeles from Utah, kidnap Barry in front of his house, take him to a bank ATM, and extract five hundred dollars from him. With his phone numbers and addresses already exposed to the enemies, he can no longer feel safe at any place in Los Angeles. The telephone-mediated experience of an intimate affair, a curious mixture of distance and closeness, has led to Barry's further dislocation from the city.

Punch-Drunk Love expresses the protagonist's sense of dislocation by forcing him to wander through the urban mazes of Los Angeles. After his first date with Lena, Barry leaves her apartment and then receives a call from her at the apartment manager's office when he is just about to go out of the building. Characteristically, here again it is a phone call that mediates their relationship, and it takes him back to Lena's room. But before showing their first prolonged moment of romantic intimacy, the film makes Barry wander through the labyrinthine space inside the apartment complex. Several shots in this sequence place him deep in an anonymous space comprised of a series of indistinguishable corridors, doorframes, and "Exit" signs, which trap and disorient him for a while before he can eventually return to Lena's apartment. The space inside this empty building, which is characterized by the endless repetition of the same, is at once a cause and an expression of his disorientation. While this sequence ends with a passionate kiss between the couple, the sequence that immediately follows this one is slightly comical but much more sinister in tone. Fleeing from the four brothers sent by Dean—possibly a diminished version of the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse—Barry runs away from the vacant parking lot of a 99 Cents Only store and wanders through another urban maze. Accompanied by a suspenseful orchestral track that one might expect from a Hitchcock movie, the film shifts to a different narrative register in this sequence. The elongated dark shadow of Barry cast on the white wall of a strip mall building, the roaring sound of the brothers' Ford pickup that chases after him, the dark dead-end alley into which he wanders and the overhead shot that traps him there, and the totally deserted

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[18] The word "lost-ting" is an interesting malapropism that seems to express Barry's lostness in the city. In the scene of the family gathering, when Barry has said, "Business is very food, thank you" (instead of "very good"), the dentist Walter (Robert Smigel), one of his brothers-in-law, has responded, "Maybe you said 'food,' uh, 'cause you're hungry" (0:17:32–0:17:46). This moment of amateur psychoanalysis suggests that language, too, often goes out of his control.

urban streets through which he runs in a futile effort to escape from the consequence of his act in the past—all of these visual and aural elements turn the city into an expressionist nightmare. In the final shot of this sequence, a car dealership shown in the background ironically suggests that Barry is not going anywhere. The city has become an ominous, dystopian place of anxiety for him. Trapped in a situation with no way out, he is like a character in a film noir, a genre that has been repeatedly associated with Los Angeles as well as the aesthetic legacies of expressionist cinema.

Barry's alienation in this uncanny city derives not only from his personality and family background but also from his deep placement in consumer culture. Although Barry himself is a salesman of useless novelty products, the film, from its beginning, has repeatedly emphasized his passive response to the outside world—his call to the phone sex line, too, has been a reaction to a newspaper advertisement. In his book on the relationship between consumer culture and the noir tradition in American literature and cinema after World War II, Erik Dussere discusses "the longing for an alternative to a national landscape rendered artificial by commerce" and formulates the connection between the sense of alienation and the yearning for authenticity:

> The assertion of authenticity, then, is a response to social anxieties about being inauthentic, the fear that one is not an original but rather a copy of the norm dictated by social forces. Alienation is the condition produced by the self so that it can prove to itself that it is not produced by society. . . . Authenticity is . . . a desire motivated by a sense that something has been lost, although it is not necessarily a nostalgic desire. As the nonexistent opposite of a reviled "inauthentic," it is the longing for a vaguely defined and perhaps unimaginable state of affairs, the longing for an *elsewhere*.[19)]

If Barry's alienation and out-of-placeness in the urban space can be regarded as a secret yearning for authenticity and as a response to the fear that his self might be "a copy of the norm dictated by social forces," his deviations from social norms regarding patriarchal authority, capitalist money-making, or public behavior in general might begin to make sense.[20)] Indeed, the film constantly juxtaposes the nightmarish entrapment of the protagonist in a city dominated by commercial culture with his secret "longing for an *elsewhere*," a perhaps impossible dream of a utopian escape.

Significantly, Dussere claims that "the supermarket appears in all sorts of texts at moments of crisis or revelation" both as "[a] real social and commercial space" and as "a metaphor

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19) Erik Dussere, *America Is Elsewhere: The Noir Tradition in the Age of Consumer Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 9, 8.

20) For a discussion of *Punch-Drunk Love* as a postpatriarchal text and of Barry's gender performances in the narrative, see Timothy Stanley, "Punch-Drunk Masculinity," *Journal of Men's Studies* 14, no. 2 (Spring 2006): 235–42.

for the omnipresence of the commercial in American daily life."[21] There are two scenes in *Punch-Drunk Love* that take place in supermarkets, exactly "at moments of crisis" in Barry's life. The first one comes right after his outburst in his sister's house, and it shows him wandering through aisles full of grocery items in a supermarket, an enormous space artificially lit by fluorescent lights and apparently severed from the chaos of the outside world. The use of the wide-angle lens in the first shot again slightly distorts and deepens the interior space. Although the space inside the supermarket constitutes another urban maze in this film, Barry seems comfortable and at home in this commercial space, contrary to what has been observed in the scenes set in Lena's apartment complex and the nocturnal streets. The fourth shot of this scene shows Barry looking at the shelves of canned soup. The smooth movement of Barry through the aisle—Sandler is on the same dolly as the camera—adds a dreamy effect to the shot, as if he is floating in the air. The film then cuts to a point-of-view shot of items displayed on one of the shelves. When the camera begins to show cans of Campbell's soup one after another, the film alludes to Andy Warhol's *Campbell's Soup Cans* (1962), a work of art that was first exhibited in a Los Angeles gallery, an iconic work representing, with its repetition of the same, the significance of consumer culture in post–World War II U.S. society. When Barry takes a can of Healthy Choice soup from the shelf, there is a cut to a long shot of him looking at its label, while, in the background, a mysterious old man, wearing a red garment and carrying a bottle of blue liquid in his shopping cart, looks at Barry. After a brief shot of Barry putting the can back on the shelf, the camera continues to follow Barry's movement with a horizontal tracking shot. As he mutters to himself, "What am I looking for? Please tell me. Talk to me," a mysterious woman dressed in red and carrying a blue shopping basket mirrors Barry's movement in the background until he reaches a tiny moment of revelation and finds what he has been looking for: "Pudding" (0:21:46–0:21:57). The shallow focus of the tracking shot makes it impossible for the viewer to identify the woman, whose relationship with the old man remains another mystery—the repeated combination of red and blue might suggest the old man's magical transformation into the woman who might or might not be Lena. At least, the shot establishes an implicit connection between the woman in red and something that Barry has been looking for. Later in the narrative, the Healthy Choice pudding becomes inseparable from Barry's longing for an elsewhere: his trip to Hawaii and his yearning to be close to Lena. In this scene, the mundane and uniform space inside the supermarket seems to offer a glimpse of a possible way out of the claustrophobic city.

The second supermarket scene comes after Barry's escape from the four apocalyptic brothers. In this scene, Barry, accompanied by Lance, visits a 99 Cents Only store—a dollar store chain that was founded in Los Angeles by Dave Gold—to buy as many cups of Healthy Choice pudding as possible.[22] While the first scene has evoked the images of Warhol's famous

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[21] Dussere, *America*, 31.

[22] In the shooting script, this scene is set in a Smart & Final store, another grocery chain that was founded in Southern California. See Anderson, *Punch-Drunk Love*, 66.

paintings, this scene apparently alludes to the German photographer Andreas Gursky's *99 Cent* (1999), an enormous work of photography that looks like one picture but is in fact a collage of smaller pictures. Discussing this artwork, Peter Lunenfeld points at its complex and ironic relationship to consumer culture: "Painstakingly stitched together from smaller high-resolution photographs that blur the distinction between the real and the hyperreal, the panoramic image is distinguished by its blinding clarity, the subtly amped-up colors contributing to sheer optical overload. A sly critique of consumerism at the turn of the millennium (the more cheap stuff, the better), it was also, at $2.3 million, one of the single most expensive photographs ever sold at auction."[23)] *99 Cent* is characterized by its sheer amount of visual information, which corresponds to both the abundance and the emptiness of the consumer culture it represents. And repeating Gursky's transformation of "the real" into "the hyperreal," Anderson's film seems to turn the dollar store into a magical gateway to a different world. While Barry and Lance run through an aisle of the store, carrying countless cups of Healthy Choice pudding, a mechanical female voice comes out of nowhere and speaks to Barry: "You are on your way. Don't stop now. Don't be discouraged, and don't be sad" (0:59:32–0:59:39).

While these scenes apparently represent the supermarket as a utopian oasis in the middle of an urban desert, however, the place does not provide any actual solution to Barry's predicament. His plan to exchange the pudding for frequent flier miles is discouraged after his phone call to a Healthy Choice representative. Barry has believed that he can buy his way out of the alienating world; he told Lance in an earlier scene that "airline mileage is just like a currency these days" (0:31:58–0:32:02). But the film makes it clear that his desire has been socially controlled, that, to quote Dussere's words again, he has only reacted to "the norm dictated by social forces" in a passive manner. In this media-saturated world, he needs to learn how to overcome physical and psychological distances without being mediated by anything, and that is exactly what happens in the last third of the film.

In showing Barry's transformation from a man of reaction to a man of action, *Punch-Drunk Love* dramatically broadens its narrative space and departs further from verisimilitude, embracing the conventions of both romantic comedy and superhero fiction. The first step is his trip to Hawaii, without recourse to any promotional campaign. Hawaii as it is represented in this film makes a striking contrast with Southern California. Unlike the empty streets of Los Angeles, the Waikiki street from which Barry calls Lena is bustling with a crowd and a procession of performers. When he is finally connected to her room, the phone booth magically lights up, and people begin to cheer, as if to congratulate them on a new beginning of their romantic relationship. The famous kiss scene in the corridor of the Royal Hawaiian Hotel constitutes one more magical moment. Oahu appears here as a perfect paradise for the couple and other tourists, and the film's awareness of its own unabashed romanticization of the island becomes clear when Barry, looking at Waikiki Beach and Diamond Head, says to Lena, "It

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23) Peter Lunenfeld, *City at the Edge of Forever: Los Angeles Reimagined* (New York: Viking, 2020), 218.

really looks like Hawaii here" (1:08:27). Having consolidated his relationship with the heroine, the hero now has to confront his enemies. The second step is therefore his trip to Provo, Utah to defeat Dean, a.k.a. the Mattress Man. After punishing the four brothers for hurting Lena, Barry calls Dean from his office. The film crosscuts between the two salesmen, Barry the good guy and Dean the bad guy, verbally attacking each other on the phone. After the call, Barry runs out of his office and then out of his warehouse, continuing to hold the phone receiver in his right hand. While this outward movement suggests that he does not have to protect himself from the outside world any longer, the receiver's cord, snapped off and dangling from his hand, implies that his relationships with others will not have to rely on the safe distance provided by telecommunications. A call to directory assistance, which becomes Barry's last phone call in the story, leads him to Dean's mattress store. Barry's arrival at Dean's store—with him walking and still holding the receiver in the right hand—is another magical moment that defies realism; it is as if he has run all the way from Los Angeles to Provo. The good guy defeats the bad guy in their final verbal showdown, and he can now return to the heroine.

The film's expansion of its narrative space can be observed at multiple levels in its last third. More than anything else, the narrative's temporary departure from Southern California marks a significant shift. Barry's trips to Hawaii and Utah—associated with Lena and Dean, respectively—are a clear indication that he has learned to overcome physical distances as well as emotional distances when confronting others, that he has come out of the cage of the self. Also, the romantic Hawaii sequence is interesting in that it shows the Pacific Ocean for the first time in Anderson's oeuvre. Since Anderson continues to include images of the Pacific in his subsequent works—*There Will Be Blood, The Master*, and *Inherent Vice*—the sequence expands the space not only of this film, but also of the director's cinema as a whole. Equally important in Barry's liberation from alienation is a shift in the film's representation of telephony. Whether coming from his sisters or from the woman who calls herself Georgia, the bombardment of phone calls has pointed at the contrast between the protagonist's passivity and the aggressive nature of the outside world. To emphasize his passivity further, the film has refrained from using crosscutting or parallel editing in the earlier scenes of phone calls, an editing technique that has often been associated with the medium of the telephone.[24] After Barry's arrival in Hawaii, however, the film begins to crosscut between him and the other party on the phone. This change effectively establishes Barry's active agency in relation to others. No longer a passive recipient of hostile calls, he can now surprise and sometimes bewilder others by calling them himself unexpectedly. His eventual independence from the telephone indicates that he does not need any barrier between himself and the surrounding environment. The film's presentation of an elsewhere, whether it is a distant location or the other party on the

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[24] For a discussion of the importance of the telephone in the development of parallel editing, see Mary Ann Doane, *The Emergence of Cinematic Time: Modernity, Contingency, the Archive* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002), 194.

line, gradually opens up the claustrophobic urban space that has trapped the protagonist.

As the narrative approaches its end, the film's reliance on expressionist topography becomes less conspicuous and then disappears. In the penultimate scene of the film, Barry, now back in Los Angeles, carries the harmonium to Lena's room without getting lost in the maze of the apartment complex. By following Barry's movement closely and dynamically, the Steadicam shots in this scene indicate that he is not an alienated figure left alone in an empty space. He is no longer lost in the city, and he can find his way wherever he needs to go. Just as the romantic relationship with Lena has transformed him from a man of reaction to a man of action, *Punch-Drunk Love* has transformed a nightmarish space of dislocation and disorientation into a hopeful place of love and harmony. The dream of an elsewhere takes shape as a tentative reality in this quirkily romantic fictional world.

Conclusion

The Los Angeles in *Punch-Drunk Love* is thus transformed twice: first into a desolate urban wasteland and then into a magical city of love. With an exclusive focus on the consciousness of a single male character, the film constantly blurs the boundary between the exterior and the interior, the public and the private, and the actual and the imaginary. The city appears here both as an expression of the troubled mind of the central character and as an oppressive reality that bewilders and assaults him with sudden, unexpected accidents. This circular relationship between interiority and exteriority forms the psychological topography of a dystopian urban space with no way out. And the sense of disorientation that derives from this situation turns into the longing for an elsewhere, a longing that makes him wander through the labyrinth of consumer culture for a while but eventually leads him to what he has been looking for. By gradually widening its narrative space, and by showing the protagonist's overcoming of physical and emotional distances, the narrative suggests that the dream of an elsewhere can be achieved not only in a distant paradisiacal island but also in the here and now of an apparently mundane urban space.

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