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***DAVID LYNCH'S American dreams***

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## 1. Introduction

The legend of David Lynch is built upon a juxtaposition between "a childlike conventionalism and an interest in themes of a psychosexual and surreal nature" (Todd, 15). Jousse claims that Lynch is a "living paradox" (5) in the way he spans artistic disciplines like cinema, painting, music and other art forms. "Thoroughly American although his work is produced by Europeans" (Jousse, 5), Lynch delights in mystifying his audience. Lynch's first love was fine art and although he is best known as a film director, he has never really given up his passion for the art form. He became a director when he famously wished his images to move, in other words, he realized that "painting lacked two dimensions: movement and sound" (Jousse, 9). Lynch would probably describe himself as an expressionist and a surrealist in terms of his poetics, and an eccentric "who operates in defiance of the Hollywood system" (Todd, 8). Although these characteristics inform the horizons of expectations when the audience thinks about Lynch's films, he still managed to found his "auteurist niche within, rather than outside, the post-classical system" (Todd, 14).

In the first part of my paper I will focus on Lynch himself, some of the things that influenced his art and how he is perceived (American dreamer). Then I will give a brief overview of Lynch's filmography (Cinematic world of David Lynch). The first thematically separated part of his filmography includes the films including the sinister side of American society with the Surrealist Symbolism (*Eraserhead*, *The Elephant Man*, *Blue Velvet*, and *Wild at Heart*). The second thematic part represents the crucial, psychedelic stage filled with dreams, daydreams and fantasies (*Twin Peaks: Fire Walk with Me* and *Twin Peaks*, *Mulholland Drive*, *Lost Highway* and *Inland Empire*). The third thematic stage presents David Lynch's atypical films, the science

fiction film *Dune* and the "road movie" *The Straight Story* that has elements of dreams and fantasies.

The second, main part of my paper ("American" dreams) is based on four of Lynch's films that I find to be his best work (*Blue Velvet*, *Mulholland Drive*, *Lost Highway* and *The Straight Story*), where I will try to explore and define his artistic sensibility *via* a series of analyses.

## **2. American dreamer**

In the article in *Parkett* magazine in 1990 entitled "(Why) Is David Lynch important?", a myriad of artists, film critics, writers and art historians discuss the cultural impact of Lynch:

This taboo pleasure in violence apparent in Lynch's films reflects the dual nature of the American nation, which regularly represents itself in terms of good and evil.

(Thierry Grillet, 9).

Lynch only bends and tweaks conventions, careful never to disturb their roots. The most compelling Lynch spectacle is the dance between irony and camp, cowardice and oblivion (David Levi-Strauss, 11).

What we see in a film is what we need to see. The truth is the truth we see. What interested me in David Lynch's films is the absence of God. Someone mentioned this to Lynch. They said "So, your film has neither a beginning nor an end?" He replied that his film has more of a beginning and an end than life does (Christian Boltanski, 10).

For myself, David Lynch's films are important because they illustrate how aspects of

surrealism have infiltrated the daily lives of Americans. Just as Fellini pictured contemporary Italian realism with *Dolce Vita*, Lynch's strength is in the fact that much of the weirdness in *Wild at Heart* is taken from our everyday lives (Peter Nagy, 10).

The first five minutes of *Blue Velvet* have everything I'm drawn to in David Lynch's work.

Take something comforting, familiar, essentially American, and turn up the controls, the visual volume. It's overheated technicolor and every frame would make an exquisite still.

Every detail is picture perfect and it reeks of danger and failure (Laurie Simmons, 2).

It is quite interesting to see what Lynch's fellow artists and theorists thought of his work at the time (1990). Olson claims that "upon viewing *Blue Velvet*, the president of the Seattle Association of Psychiatrists said that David Lynch has an intuitive understanding of human psychology that's at the genius level" (128). Or, as Jarak called him a "hypersensitive psychoanalyst" (2002). It seems that although "his expansive cosmos cannot be contained within a psychoanalytic grid pattern" (Olson, 128), Lynch has become a lot of things to a lot of critics. Schaffner notes that "Lynch's films have been appropriated as paradigmatic case studies by a large number of critics due to their programmatic vacillation between irony and pathos, parabolic ambiguities and narrative indeterminacy" (271). Lynch's films are subjected to a great wealth of interpretations, "though his sustained ambiguity often serves as Rorschach test to one's own critical proclivities" (Cunningham, 2).

In his biography *Weirdsville USA, The Obsessive Universe of David Lynch*, Paul A. Woods introduces Lynch and his strange world with a chapter titled 'All American Martian Boy' and proceeds by describing Lynch's idyllic suburban upbringing like this: "raised in a pastoral version of the American dream, Lynch's earliest memories are of long sunny days; bright flowers and

neatly tendered lawns; early morning birdsongs and family visits; gifts from grandparents and good-natured sibling games; family camping vacations and winning Eagle Scout badges " (7).

Anthony Todd claims that this kind of pastoral setting has become "one of the key signifiers in the reception of some of Lynch's most revered works: *Blue Velvet*, and the television series *Twin Peaks*, its movie prequel *Twin Peaks: Fire Walk with Me* and *The Straight Story*" (15). At the same time a driving force behind more unsettling and nightmarish elements of Lynch's films are traced back to traumatic childhood events, including visits to his grandparents' home in Brooklyn. Woods offers the following quote from Lynch:

In a large city I realized there was a large amount of fear. Coming from the Northwest it kind of hits you like a train. Like a subway. In fact, going into the subway, I felt I was really going down into hell. As I went down the steps-going deeper and deeper into it – I realized it was almost as difficult to go back up and get out than to go through with the ride. It was the total fear of the unknown: the wind from those trains, the sounds, the smells, and the different lights and mood, that was really special in a traumatic way (8).

This dream/nightmare duality has given Lynch impetus for his further creative work. It seems that these kind of contrasts are always related with the places he lived in and they serve to create a certain kind of ambiance for his films.

In Lynch's newest jointly written biography *Room to Dream* (Lynch and K. McKenna) the first chapter is entitled "American Pastoral". Of course, the chapter centres around Lynch's beginnings, in other words, his childhood which is always described as nothing but idyllic.

"David Lynch's mother was a city person and his father was from the country. That's a good place to begin this story because this is a story of dualities. We live in a realm of opposites and Lynch's work resides in the complicated zone where the beautiful and the damned collide" (Lynch, McKenna, 10). It is quite curious that in almost all of books and articles regarding Lynch, his boyhood is always described in pastoral terms and this pastoral tone sets the tone of his ensuing creative endeavours.

According to Leo Marx in his book *Machine in the Garden* (1964) "this pastoral ideal has been used to define the meaning of America ever since the age of discovery, and it has not yet lost its hold upon the native imagination" (3). Marx claims that "inevitably the European mind was dazzled by the prospect" of starting a new life "in a fresh, green landscape of a virgin continent" (3). What had once been thought only as "a poetic fantasy" was now set free from "its traditional literary context" (3).

This "yearning for a simpler, more harmonious style of life, an existence "closer to nature," that is the psychic root of all pastoralism— genuine and spurious" (6) is a result, according to Freud, of "this strange attitude of hostility to civilization" (9). Freud's answer is "that such attitudes are the product of profound, long-standing discontent" (9). Today's "advanced society may be singularly repressive" and this might explain "the addiction of modern man to puerile fantasies" (9). Marx claims that "the sentiments we have considered take on a pathological coloring, as if symptomatic of a collective neurosis" (9).

In his article "David Lynch's Irresistible (and Corrupted) Visions of the American Past", Ebiri claims that America needs David Lynch because of his use of the glorious, imaginary past as a "salve for the fragmentation and anxiety of the present" (2). Throughout his work, Lynch blends

the textures of nostalgia and a desire for simpler times with the transgression of horror, and in so doing "helps us transcend both" (2). In other words Lynch's work is more than just "a cinematic pathway into the past. It is also a way out" (2).

The radical change in the character of society and the sharp swing between two states of feeling, between an Arcadian vision and an anxious awareness of reality, are closely related: they illuminate each other (Marx, 30). Lynch's films also tend to show this duality in his vision of America. This duality principle expresses the relation of the two opposing forces, but they do not exclude each other, on the contrary, they support and complement each other. Light and darkness always carry an instance of each other in themselves. He frequently returns to the notion that rather than functioning as an element of critique, the dark sequences in his films simply serve as contrast to the light elements: "this is the way America is to me. There's a very innocent, naive quality to life, and there's a horror and a sickness as well. It's everything" (Sheen, Davison, 65).

He describes his experience in Philadelphia, a "locus of violence, hate and filth" as "days and nights of extreme danger and intense fear" (Olson, 51), but also as times that gave him inspiration for his future experimentation. Infernal Philadelphia joined with Lynch's idyllic small-town Pacific-Northwest to indelibly imprint the artist with a bipolar, heaven-and-hell vision of America" (Olson, 51). In 1970, Lynch moved to Los Angeles, making "the archetypal American journey from the east to the western edge of the country he so loved" (Olson, 51).

Lynch felt "Philadelphia's oppressive fear evaporate in the Californian sun" (Olson, 51). When asked in an interview what he loves about Los Angeles, Lynch replied: "the light..and the feeling in the air..the feeling of optimism" (Sheen, Davison, 2). Lynch acknowledges as we "move through the world, so the world moves through us; that we experience external phenomena as



internal events and live our lives inside our heads, and over the years, this realization has shaped the many intriguing forms of his art.. Lynch's sense of human consciousness being one with what it observes" (Olson, 50) has shaped his cinematic landscapes.

Although articles and books concerning Lynch's poetics (for example Sheen Davison's *The Cinema of David Lynch: American Dreams and Nightmare Visions*) usually involve the concept of the American dream, it is not used or connected to Lynch in the usual sense of the social mobility in the American society, but rather as his unique way of tackling the world of his films (which is indeed predominantly set in the American environment) *via* contrasts and dualities of his vision of America, which are solidified with his frequent use of dream logic and dream sequences. Lynch's art is realized in this "creative dissonance which has need of this chaos and anarchy, in order to be fully realized" (Gleyzon, 2). For Lynch, any discourse on reality has to take into account this hidden or dark side of life, otherwise it's as illusory as a dream. In fact one can safely maintain that all his films in one way or another are attempts to expose American dreams of this sort" (Lee, 1).

Lynch's body of work is often associated with the concept of dream(ing). In many articles concerning Lynch there is this almost unconscious need to put him in the frame of the dreamlike author (for example David Lezard's "David Lynch: director of dreams"). Lynch also plays a great part in using this *preconception* about himself since he entitled his newest memoir/ biography (2018, alongside Kristine McKenna) *Room to Dream*, although he was once quoted as saying: "I've never really gotten many ideas from dreaming-night-time dreaming-but I love daytime dreaming. I love to sit in a chair and dream about things, and go on a daydream and sometimes ideas come when I do that. I always say I love the idea of dream logic-how dreams can go, and

how even though they're very abstract, you can understand them. So this dream logic is something I really like to think about" (Caldwell, 6).

According to Lynch, "the film is a dream but a structured one" (Chion, 85):

Filmic illusion is operating under the seal of the real: it is the technical animation activating the film that creates in the spectator the impression that, in their succession, these fleeting images are nothing other than his own images, those he experiences in his dream and imagination. The experience of cinema, while affecting to suggest an experience of the real, is close to a dream state in which we are exposed to images we cannot control though we can have the impression that we ourselves are productive of them (Gleyzon, 62).

Lynch's "paradox" lies in the fact that, on one hand, he possesses a certain 'postmodernist irony', readily "playing the serious so seriously, that the audience assume the films must be parodic", but on the other, he happily admits: "I don't really understand the word 'irony' too much" (Rombes, 62). Authors such as Rombes, believe that the audience is ready to accept Lynch's work with all its characteristics - ironic stance, social ethic and the inevitable motion between "sincerity and irony". However, Lynch is too self-contained to react to such mainstream interpretations: "if the postmodern glories in its own ironic artificialness, throwing itself back to the past to resurrect it with a knowing, cynical difference then Lynch's work offers a glimpse of what possibly lies ahead, after postmodernism- how to recover sincerity without losing the critical edge that irony provides" (Rombes, 69).

Fundamentally different fragments of Lynch's poetics have provoked varied opinions and interpretations from different sources. For example, Martha Nochimson believes in Lynch's essentially inherently naive and intuitive approach: "The Lynchian hero must learn to let go, even though such suspension of the will often leads to the initial terrors of the baser aspects of the involuntary within him" (Nochimson, 11). Nochimson has adapted Jung's phraseology of 'collectively unconscious' explaining that a film director like a "surfer in the waves of the collective unconscious makes film to give his audience a place to dream" (16).

Žižek rebuked this notion calling it 'New Age' (3), and decided to take Lynch seriously, with Lacan's help. Žižek "favours Lynch's estrangement of the characters, the effects of which are strangely de-realized or de-psychologized persons" (xiii). Lynch's method, according to Žižek, is "the opposite of the obscurantism or pastiche of arcane topics" (xiii). Nochimson points out that Žižek's typical "lack of obscurantism" and the "let go" and "losing control", provide Lynch with some optimism, despite not being obvious at the first sight due to his films tend to be disturbing on so many levels. There is an element of starting again in Lynch's work which can be found in the crumbling identities of his characters, a belief in a second chance, in new beginnings (his characters often suffer from amnesia and seek a new beginning).

The American Dream(s) that easily turn into nightmare(s) have also found its place in Lynch's opus, posing like a long-promised murmur, elusive and vague, and as such it has an "unconscious influence in American mentality, crystallizing a specific *forma mentis* and, at the same time, differentiating it from the European tradition" (Stiuliuc, 363).

### 3. Cinematic World of David Lynch

David Lynch's cinematography can be divided into three phases, although each phase is not isolated from one another or chronologically defined. The films in the first phase focus on the darker, more hidden side of American society, relying on the elements of symbolism and the surreal. (*Eraserhead*, *The Elephant Man*, *Blue Velvet* and *Wild at Heart*). The second phase is considered to be the most characteristic of David Lynch's work. It is characterised by the use of dreams and dreamlike imagery heavily intertwined with the elements of the psychedelic and the subconscious. (*Twin Peaks* and *Twin Peaks: Fire Walk With Me* - film and series, *Lost Highway*, *Mulholland Drive* and *Inland Empire*). Unlike his previous films, the third phase is less typical of Lynch's work as he explores new themes. It includes the science-fiction film *Dune*, thematically linked to George Lucas's *Star Wars*, and the biographical road film *The Straight Story*, which contains some elements of dream and fantasy.

The films which primarily determine the theme of this degree paper, namely *Blue Velvet*, *Lost Highway*, *Mulholland Drive* and *The Straight Story*, will be looked at more closely in one of the following chapters when analysing Lynch's work.

*Eraserhead* is Lynch's firstborn feature, his first great movie, his first cult status movie, his trailblazer. What can you say about a film which took six slow burning years to make, a far cry from the initially planned six weeks of shooting? According to Lynch "it's a perfect film." With the tag line "A dream of dark and troubling things" *Eraserhead* is set in the midst (against the backdrop) of a dreary, industrially driven neighbourhood strongly echoing the atmosphere of the City of Brotherly Love.

The landmarks of Lynch's neighbourhood were seedy bars that opened early in the day, a prison, a morgue. An atmosphere of anxiety and dread gripped Lynch's soul. The protective walls of Lynch's house were brick, but to him they were "like paper". Philadelphia was a "cocoon" of fear and he "thought I'd never get out of there, ever". Always stimulated by paradox, Lynch started to realize that Philadelphia's crucible of menacing tension was where he needed to be (Olson, 26).

Lynch's relationship with Philadelphia is obviously dark and complex, having lived there with his wife and child after he moved there to study at the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts in 1965. Living there was quite obviously an equally terrifying and exciting time for Lynch considering the main theme of *Eraserhead*: " the challenges for a couple with a young child, insomnia, cohabitation, various fears about domestic life and the relationship with neighbours - all treated in a highly stylized way" (Jousse, 15).

When asked about the story of *Eraserhead*, Lynch was his usual elusive self, but he did say that "It was the world. In my mind it was a world between a factory and a factory neighborhood. A little, unknown, twisted, almost silent blind spot where little details and little torments existed. And people were struggling in darkness. They're struggling in those fringelands and they are the people I really love" (Rodley, 76).

There is nothing special about the plot of the film, notwithstanding its kaffian-beckettian absurdism, its magic lies in a way Lynch connected cosmic and domestic atmosphere and the way the audience propelled it to cult status via the New York's Saturday midnight viewings. It captured the spirit of the time and became imprinted in the cultural memory, with the image of

Jack Nance with his now equally cult punkish-baroque hairdo staring at us from the poster of the film. "*Eraserhead's* success started as a slow burn that eventually set audiences on fire" (Jousse 16).

Lynch's second full-length film, *The Elephant Man*, was a leap of faith in a whole new direction. He moved from "a semi-experimental work distinct for its radical and even disturbing strangeness to a comfortably budgeted Hollywood film with a far more classical narrative" (Jousse 17). Although not written by him (the screenplay was written by Christopher de Vore and Eric Bergren), Lynch still managed to maintain his vision. Lynch has acknowledged that *The Elephant Man* and *The Straight Story* are unique among his films in their attempt "to create pure emotion with images and sounds and to communicate straightforwardly the touching and morally instructive story of the 'lone man'" (Sheen and Davison, 22). Pictured in black and white, just like *Eraserhead*, *The Elephant Man* is set in Victorian England and centres around the character of John Merrick who has a strange elephant-like physical disfiguration, hence the title of the film. The story is un-Lynch-like linear, it follows a classic narrative, but it is also Lynch-like evocative, with dream-like associative sequences at the beginning and the end of the film. Lynch portrayed Merrick as a metaphor for an artist who is "fragile, isolated, exhibited and hidden away in return, and a soul searching for some kind of identity" (Jousse, 20). The search for identity is a recurring theme in Lynch's oeuvre, only this time it is chronologically set in a far away era in a far away country (usually, his identity searching is pure American).

*Dune* is a science-fiction film from 1984. Its genre is not typical of Lynch's previous cinematography and belongs to the third group of Lynch's films (atypical ones). In 1981, the film producer Dino De Laurentiis hired Lynch to adapt *Dune*, the 1965 novel by Frank Herbert, as a film of the same name. After previous unsuccessful attempts by other film directors to bring

their visions to the screen, Lynch wrote the screenplay and directed *Dune*, an epic science fiction film.

The film is set in the distant future. The Universe is under the control of the galactic emperor. The most important commodity in the Universe is a substance called Melange. It is a spice which is said to have the power of extending life, expanding consciousness and is vital to space travel. The extremely harsh desert-like planet Dune is the only source of the drug. The conflict arises as different factions battle for supremacy and control of the planet. At the centre stage is the galactic emperor's son Paul Arteides (Kyle MacLachlan), a young man who dreams prophetic visions of his purpose. It is also worth to notice that *Dune* is Lynch's biggest flop with the audience but also the critics: "*Dune* remained an emblem of negativity in Lynch's mind" (Olson, 206). *Dune* was also a leap of faith for Lynch "but this time it was to lead to a loss of creative control, and problems with the thorny issue of the film's final cut. Lynch wisely never repeated this type of experience again" (Jousse, 26). *Dune* also had at least one positive outcome for Lynch: Kyle MacLachlan, whose "boyish zeal and quirky playfulness" (Olson, 206) will come to the fore in *Blue Velvet* and later in *Twin Peaks*.

Based on the novel by Barry Gifford, published the same year as the film itself was produced, *Wild at Heart* presents Lynch in an out-of-control cartoonish parody of reality.

Lynch said of Gifford's novel: "It was just exactly the right thing at the right time. The book and the violence in America merged in my mind and many different things happened" (Rodley, 228).

Lynch saw it as a hybrid between a road movie and a modern day Bonnie and Clyde romance, but it also related to the atmosphere in modern day culture. *Wild at Heart* is not just a deranged

romance, but a pop-culture mish-mash steeped in iconography; mixing and remixing various references like cinematic DJ to create something subversive and original" (Runyon, 5).

It comes as no surprise that Lynch was one of his most intertextual self here, considering his many allusions to *The Wizard of Oz*. The main character, Sailor, is created as "a rebel with a dream of the Wizard of Oz". Some critics couldn't see "beyond the pastiches", but according to Runyon "maybe that's the whole point. Lynch's films have always taken place in a *bizarro*, a fantasy version of the real world, and what is the parodic, exaggerated Americana of *Wild at Heart* if not another Oz for another Dorothy" (Runyon 8). America's then popular idea of what modern romance was is perfectly "embodied in the film's brutal opening scene" (Runyon 9). Characters are empty with a purpose, they were "reflective of what American trashy pop culture of the eighties was like" (Runyon 10).

*Twin Peaks* is a mystery/horror drama television series created by Mark Frost and David Lynch and premiered in 1990. It became a cult and was one of the top-rated series by both critics and spectators alike. The story begins with the discovery of the body of a young high-school girl Laura in the small picturesque town of Twin Peaks. In subsequent episodes, through flashbacks the spectators learn that Laura has been living a double life. Although a good student, she was also addicted to cocaine and prostituting herself. The series brims with the elements of the thriller, romantic mystery, drama, horror and dreamlike imagery.

As the plot unfolds, the spectators are introduced to the town's folk, whom Michel Chion categorises into three groups that in a way resemble Lynch's own oeuvre. The first group consists of 'ordinary', typical American soap opera characters. They ensure the credibility of the story line (Chion, 101). The second group could be characterised as bizarre because of the way



they choose to dress, the objects they like to use, all in order to make themselves identifiable (Chion, 102). Their behaviour is shallow, their type bears little proliferation. Lynch takes this notion to extremes in his film *Twin Peaks: Fire Walk With Me*, where the only character with functional coherence is Laura Palmer. The third group is inhabited by the surreal characters that belong to the supernatural, parallel dimension that exist in the imagery of dreams and fantasies. They communicate through different realms (Chion, 103). No one from the first group attempts to analyse the psychology of the bizarre and supernatural happenings. The whole technique is packed with motifs and images that meet and overflow at different levels, which makes the composition and the output both mythical and realistic at the same time.

The giant and the dwarf from the spiritual sphere appear to Agent Cooper to offer him advice. In the same series we meet the so-called Log Lady who lives in town and whose words sound like prophecies. In *Twin Peaks*, Lynch creates the 'white lodge' which is a tranquil place of peace and love against the 'black lodge', which is a place ruled by evil and immorality. Here, people meet their look-alike (doppelganger) that devours the souls of the less strong.

Agent Cooper (Kyle MacLachan) has a special role in the series. In order to solve the murder of Laura Palmer, he resorts to different methods. Amongst the information surrounding the murder, Cooper tries to think rationally and logically, to turn chaos into order. To do so, he is not always rational in his actions. To find answers, he twists logic, relying not only on the deductive Tibetan technique, but also on his dreams which are full of surreal and bizarre characters. By resorting to both methods, he puts the emphasis on the irrational, but without losing the rational element. In both the film and series *Twin Peaks*, the psychotic scenes take place in the Red

Room, a location within Agent Cooper's dreams where he meets Laura and surreal, bizarre characters such as Bob and Man From Another Place who inhabit the lodge.

The mysterious characters and atmosphere create an impression of a dream-like state far from reality. Agent Cooper finds information about Laura's murder from immediate reality, but he also intuitively uses his own dreams in the Red Room (Riches, 27). Here, Riches points to Freud who believes that dreams are a source of information about our inner self. However, in *Twin Peaks*, the dreams are a source of information about the outside world, namely about the circumstances of Laura Palmer's murder.

*Twin Peaks: Fire Walk with Me* is a 1992 psychological horror film directed by David Lynch. The film revolves around the investigation into the murder of Teresa Banks and the last seven days in the life of Laura Palmer. The film is seen as a prequel to the television series *Twin Peaks*. The film was greeted at the 1992 Cannes Film Festival with booing and jeers from the audience and it also received negative reviews commercially (Olson, 395).

The film *Inland Empire* belongs to David Lynch's most characteristic phase, centring on its challenging elements of psychedelic and surreal, portraying its characters' delicate psyche that crumbles and evolves into new identities. It was premiered at the Venice Film Festival in 2006 and Lynch was awarded the Golden Lion for lifetime achievement.

The main plot follows an actress named Nikki Grace (Laura Dern) who gets a role in a renowned Hollywood production by Kingsley Stewart (Jeremy Irons). Her co-star is a well-known playboy Devon Berk (Justin Theroux). Nikki's powerful and influential husband reminds Devon about the meaning of marriage, warning him that he would not just stand by if Devon had an affair with Nikki. However, immersed in their character roles during screening, Susan (Nikki)

appears to begin an affair with Devon (Billy). As the plot unfolds, Nikki and Devon learn that they are shooting a remake of an old Polish film, the production of which was abandoned after both leads were murdered, creating rumours of the film being cursed. The plotlines and scenes in the film and the destiny of the main characters begin to entwine and complement each other. The role of Devon/Billy becomes marginalised while Nikki/Susan takes the centre stage. Again, Lynch's style enables him to very successfully merge fiction with reality. The plot becomes more complex and its elements more sensual, bloodier and darker.

A parallel plotline moves from the American setting to 19<sup>th</sup> century Poland. The roles of Nikki and the Polish prostitute Susan from the start of the film intertwine and fully merge (Kovacs, 107). The psychotic nature of the main character can be said to move in two directions and be interpreted in two ways. Firstly, Nikki is a successful actress who eventually takes on the personality of the protagonist that she plays on the stage. Secondly, Susan is affected by the hardship in her everyday life and, in her mind, creates a surreal mental image of herself being a successful actress who is only acting out her real life.

#### **4. "American" dreams**

Lynch's world is first and foremost the world of dreams. Dreamy imagery and a dreamy atmosphere are the key components in David Lynch's films, particularly in those that draw on the psychedelic, such as *Twin Peaks: Fire Walk With Me*, *Mulholland Drive*, *Inland Empire*, *Lost Highway* and the television drama series *Twin Peaks*. I would like to write about some of these in more detail.

Lynch's fascination lies in creating a pervading dark, dream-like and sinister atmosphere in his films, and such states of consciousness can be reached only through imagination and dreams. In an interview on the question what associations the colour black and dreams evoke in him, David Lynch said, "Black has depth... you can go into it... And you start seeing what you're afraid of. You start seeing what you love, and it becomes like a dream" (Rodley, 36). Entering the 'darkness' in his work spontaneously gives a psychoanalytic note, although Lynch remarks that he has no insight into or knowledge about the theory of psychoanalysis (Rodley, 12).

The dream-like, mysterious atmosphere is enhanced by the surreal episodes and by the use of lighting and music. At the beginning of the scenes it is usually totally dark. It becomes lighter very gradually, associated with waking from a dream. The music also plays its part in creating a dream-like atmosphere, such as the music of Angelo Badalamenti, or in *Twin Peaks*, the dreamy voice of Julee Cruise, in her role of the bar singer. The dream-like atmosphere is also achieved by the addition of surreal shots such as Mystery Man in *Lost Highway*, Dwarfs in the Red Lodge in *Twin Peaks* (Riches, 29).

Freud believes that dreams are a source of information about our inner self, while in *Twin Peaks*, dreams are a source of information about the outside world (Laura Palmer's murder). In David Lynch's work, reality and dream do not flow in isolation from one another or are above one another; they merge horizontally, go hand in hand, the fine line between the two seamlessly blends and is absorbed. The Lynchian style is recognised for its dream-like visual imagery. One can often hear about something having a 'Lynchian' atmosphere despite not being David Lynch's own creation.

In this part I will focus on the one of the greatest films by David Lynch, *Blue Velvet*, from his first phase and on *Lost Highway* and *Mulholland Drive*, from his second psychedelic phase, focusing on the characters' duality and reaching into the subconscious. *The Straight Story* is an endearing road movie from the third phase which, although different from his other films, has its own dreaminess contrasting its rational element.

#### 4.1. *Blue Velvet*

##### *Humanity in trouble*

Out of all of Lynch's films, *Blue Velvet* is probably his most famous. In his article "Tied to History", Greil Marcus claims that all people have memories of things they did not experience and that these memories come from all kind of sources, but especially from movies. Marcus calls those memories blank memories and the opening scene of *Blue Velvet* provides that kind of blank memory.

The famous opening of this 1986 picture seems to parody the American fantasy of home, peace, pleasure, and quiet-that is, the all-but-trademarked American dream-but what's most interesting about what's happening on the screen is that it may have no satirical meaning at all.

The title sequence features a blue velvet curtain, slightly swaying from some silent breeze, casting back to the black-and-white velvet or satin backgrounds that provided a gloss for the title sequences of Forties B pictures. The opening theme music for *Blue Velvet* is ominous, alluring, at first suggesting Hitchcock's *Vertigo*, then a quiet setting where predictability has replaced suspense, then horns dash all hints of a happy ending.

Bobby Vinton sings Blue Velvet, his soupy number-one hit from 1963- but with the sound hovering over slats of a white picket fence with red roses at their feet, the song no longer soupy, or for that matter twenty-three years in the past. It sounds clean and timeless, just as the white of the fence and the red of those roses are so vivid you can barely see the objects for the colors. For an instant, the viewer is both visually and morally blinded by the intensity of the familiar, defences are stripped away (2).

After first few idyllic scenes the camera goes down to the ground, to the underbelly secret world of ants and insects, "creatures of absolute appetite" (Marcus, 2), ready to take over the previous arcadian setting. But, according to Marcus "it's the pastoral that stays in mind, not the nightmare bugs and things-are-not-as-they-seem" (2). It doesn't feel like Lynch is trying to deceive his audience, it seems that in over-enhancing his scenes, in "the too-bright images of fences and flowers", Lynch is not trying to "make the familiar strange, but to get his audience to see how familiar the familiar actually is" (Marcus, 2). Some details of this sequence can maybe be traced in Lynch's own childhood and how he remembers it (his obsession with the 50's), but what is "striking about these quiet, burningly intense images is that nothing in them is specific to anyone. They are specific-overwhelmingly specific-only as images of the United States" (Marcus, 3).

The contrast "between the public social reality and its fantasmatic underside seems even more pronounced" (McGowan, 90) than in Lynch's previous films (*Eraserhead*, *The Elephant Man* and *Dune*). The different facets of "fantasy emerge as fully developed worlds rather than remaining, as in *The Elephant Man*, opposing modes of subjective (John Marrick's) experience. As a result, we are able to see their logic in a way we could not in the earlier film" (McGowan, 91).

McGowan claims that the public world we see in the opening scene of *Blue Velvet* is "not the real world but a purely fantasmatic one that corresponds perfectly-even too perfectly- to an American ideal" (91). If this public world represents an American ideal, "its underside represents an American nightmare. What distinguishes *Blue Velvet* from the typical American fantasy is the extent to which it holds these two worlds apart" (91).

In a film that has been described as "shocking", the most shocking thing is its "strain of hopeful romanticism" (Callaci, 2). As much as *Blue Velvet* is a film about darkness lurking beneath the suburban façade it "also acknowledges the rays of light breaking through the cracks" (Callaci, 2). It is this fine line between light and darkness that elevates *Blue Velvet* to a special place in Lynch's oeuvre. The "Lynch dynamic is brilliantly in evidence" (Mitchner, 3) when Sandy tells Jeffrey about the reason there is so much dark in the world:

I had a dream. In fact, it was the night I met you. In the dream there was our world and the world was dark because there weren't any robins, and the robins represented love. And for the longest time there was just this darkness. And all of a sudden thousands of robins were set free and they flew down and brought this blinding light of love. And it seemed like that love would be the only thing that would make any difference. And it did. So, I guess it means there is trouble until the robins come (Rombes, 69).

## 4.2. *Lost Highway*

### *I like to remember things my way*

To fully understand the impact *Lost Highway* had on the audience we have to remember that prior to its release in 1997, Lynch had "completely disappeared from the collective consciousness and media coverage" (Jousse, 76). So, due to his five year hiatus, quite a stir was caused when his new movie finally emerged.

Similar to *Mulholland Drive*, *Lost Highway* is also divided into two parts, but unlike the unequivocally final end that closes *Mulholland Drive* (*Silencio!*), *Lost Highway* remains ambiguous and open-ended (like the open road of its title). The narrative structure that underlines this "unclassifiable work" goes like this: in the first half-hour of the movie we are introduced to couple number one-Fred and Renee Madison (Bill Pullman and a dark-haired Patricia Arquette). Suddenly the movie changes its direction and its main characters and we are introduced to couple number two-Pete Dayton (Balthazar Getty) and Alice Wakefield (Patricia Arquette again, but this time fair-haired). Jousse claims that Lynch uses "a deliberately schizophrenic narrative principle as a ploy to destabilize the viewer, clearly undermining any of the usual identifications a viewer makes when watching a film and blocking any kind of access to the film's meaning" (76).

*Lost Highway* begins with David Bowie's *I'm Deranged* during credits which sets the tone for what is going to happen in the movie. Structurally the film ends the same way it started. In the first scene Fred Madison is in his house when he hears a message:"Dick Laurent is dead!" At the end of the movie we find out that the person saying this message is Fred himself. As Herzogenrath points out it is "not simply that Fred changed from receiver to sender: he is both



sender and receiver, and at the same time..and space!" (7) This kind of ending is similar to *Blue Velvet's* where we are pulled into the narrative through the ear Jeffrey finds, and pulled out of the story by the camera literally coming out of it. *Lost Highway* is a more self-conscious attempt on Lynch's side to construct a film "where beginning becomes an end in an infinite circle" (Jousse, 85).

It is time to introduce the Moebius strip which is something that makes this time-space shift possible. It is a one-sided figure, a surface with only one side, or "a two-dimensional object in a three-dimensional space, it is formed by one strip of paper twisted so that when its ends are glued together the result is a continuous loop." (Jousse, 85). Herzogenrath argues that the figure of the Moebius Strip can be applied to *Lost Highway* in a psychoanalytical way as well, considering Lacan used it as a model to conceptualize the "return of the repressed" (the second part of the film when Fred transform into Pete) but also it can illustrate the way psychoanalysis conceptualizes certain binary oppositions like inside/outside (7). In the case of *Lost Highway* it can be applied to the opposition Fred/Pete.

Reni Celeste goes along in a similar binary opposition manner when describing Lynch's poetics: "Lynch's rewriting American metaphysics, a rewriting that emphasizes the position where violence meets tenderness, waking meets dream, blond meets brunette, lipstick meets blood, where something very sweet and innocuous becomes something very sick and degrading, at the very border where opposites becomes both discrete and indistinguishable" (8).

When advertising *Lost Highway* its production company CIBY 2000 used the term psychogenic fugue in order to explain what happens in the movie story wise. The term is used when describing a mental condition similar to amnesia. Of course, when making *Lost Highway*,

Lynch was not aware that something like psychogenic fugue exists but he went along with the campaign because in his own words: "it has music and it has a certain force and dreamlike quality I think it's beautiful, even if it didn't mean anything" (Rodley, 239). Herzogenrath argues that Fred Madison is actually trying to escape (psychogenic fugue as flight from reality) the threat of castration but he experiences the return of the repressed, thus the hallucinatory state that provokes his morphing into his second identity Pete. The Highway of the title "is exactly this quilting point, this suture that would be necessary for the subject to be inscribed into reality" (13). The title suggests that the highway is lost and consequently normality is gone and the subject experiences psychosis. It is by suturing off the unconscious that "reality for the subject remains a coherent illusion, that prevents the subject from falling prey to the real, that is, falling into psychosis" (Herzogenrath, 8). Lynch makes suture visible, showing the breaks in the chain, "the stitchmarks of identity and culture so often hidden in the seamless selves of Hollywood" (Gleyzon, 149).

The question is what happens to Fred in the end? The film "progresses without interpretation from Renee to Alice, from Fred to Pete and back to Fred again as *déjà vu*" (Gleyzon, 66).

In *Lost Highway* it all starts with a death that is not actually a death (Dick Laurent is dead!), but as we have seen in Lynch's films it is "hard to die for real" (Chion, 203). "No one dies in a Lynch film, as the critics are of one voice to emphasize. Someone can be excluded from a certain visual plan, but only so as to better reappear in another" (Gleyzon, 66).

When asked about what started the initial idea for *Lost Highway*, Lynch answered: "what if one person woke up one day and was another person?" (Herzogenrath, 15). This question of a

second chance is closely tied to "the American preoccupation with an ever new beginning" (Herzogenrath, 15), or the idea of the open road:

So it is that it seems that deliverance from burdensome past is never as liberating as when the non-present is held in the indiscreet discretion of a latency where it makes itself to be less forgotten so that it is not always permissible to hope for new norms. It seems that it is necessary to have at one's disposition a second life which can serve as reserve for one's own posterity, the possibility of making the present more dense by means of repetition or, on the contrary, the emergence of the new (Gleyzon, 66).

The film ends in "psychic limbo, a total dislocation of spatial, physical, and fantasmatic coordinates" (Gleyzon, 142). This is the end of the story as "anti-resolution: knowledge is circular, obsessive, abject. Eschewing closure, lynchian gothic opens up abjection's temporal and existential abyss"(Gleyzon, 142).

#### 4.3. *The Straight Story*

*Remembering what it was like to be young...*

*The Straight Story* is an atypically typical Lynch movie. Although its simple title indicates a simple story, like most things concerning Lynch, it tends to get rather complicated, or in other words, the title is deceptively straight-forward. It is also a word pun, because the film follows a story of a man named Alvin *Straight* and his long *straight* journey from Iowa to Wisconsin to visit his stroke-stricken brother Lyle. The journey is motivated by Straight's straight decision, his aim to mend their fractured relationship before they both die. In the end, he makes peace with no

less than the world. It is probably Lynch at his most graceful and serene self. In an interview following the release of *The Straight Story*, Lynch explained the style he wanted to create in the film:

The story is simple and can be just understood as a man in a landscape; it's actually harder to do than it looks, because there is very little to focus on. And, when you have a few elements to work on, the elements become very important...During the course of the journey we learn more about Alvin Straight. We learn more about his life-not all of his life but fragments of it...It's like what happens in life, when you meet someone, you get a first impression and then you talk further and you learn more things about them. Sometimes you are able to understand things you were unable at the start... Slowly, Alvin Straight, this man that appears so ordinary, starts to increase in stature in your mind. At the beginning everything is a little concealed, but things emerge and gain magnitude (Jousse 54).

As pointed in Jousse, "of all of Lynch's films, *The Straight Story* is perhaps his most American and certainly his most rural. Its American heritage is reflected in the fact that it seems to be a Western without the fighting or guns, more intent on capturing all that majestic and profound in the American landscape" (50). Along the *Wild at Heart*, this is Lynch's only road movie, although more peaceful and contemplative. It follows the movement of its main character through the Midwest on a lawnmower, since due to his advanced age he cannot drive a car.

In his poetic geography-meets-psychoanalysis article "Movement, memory, landscape: an excursion in non-representational thought", Kevin E. McHugh claims that *The Straight Story*

"offers dramatic illustration of the entanglement of movement, memory, and landscape, a creative geography." McHugh calls Straight's journey "a road to reminiscence and reconciliation, an American sublime" (209). The main message of the movie is that people are nothing more than agents passing through and that "collective trace of our passings constitutes the making and remaking the place" (209).

I will try to explore McHugh's thesis further in this chapter. In a DVD insert of *The Straight Story* Lynch warns: "I know that most DVDs have chapter stops. It is my opinion that a film is not a book - it should not be broken up. It is a continuum and should be seen as such."

McHugh states that like Lynch's film, lives and places don't have stops; lives and places are indivisible multiplicities, vibrational unfoldings (210). *The Straight Story's* main subject is movement and the continuum and memory that it brings in its motion. Alvin Straight's journey is set to "construct narrative integrity and self-understanding in older age, which is presumably requisite for finding meaning in the face of oblivion and death" (211). Alvin's free-flowing memories during his trajectory are triggered by the chance encounters that come along his way.

People he encounters on his journey include; teen runaway, a huge group of cyclists, a distraught woman who hits a deer, people who help him when his John Deere breaks down, a fellow WWII veteran and a priest. The events are succeeding one after another with no real culmination. This non-spectacular kind of storytelling is telling, because "the straighter the line of narrative the more aware the audience becomes of the little Lynchian signs and signals that are out of the ordinary for this deceptively unpretentious plot-like a woman with a deer, face distortions, flashes of unexpected" (Chion, 213). When Straight meets a woman who on her journey constantly hits and kills deer that are crossing the road, she complains to him about her

unusual "curse" of this otherwise benevolent and open space. Alvin reassures her by using the animal's dead body for food and puts the antlers as a trophy on his trailer. "On the next evening a group of living deer surround his camp like ghosts" (Chion, 209). This scene is Lynch's idiosyncratic way of destabilising the narrative logic and coherence.

All the people in his strange encounters confide in him because Alvin has "the ability to communicate with silence and his resolve in making this journey elicits respect" (McHugh, 211).

As the film evolves, we learn bits about Straight and his past, but Lynch does not "reduce his journey to a singular explanation" (McHugh, 211). When he meets his fellow WWII Veteran in a local tavern, Straight remembers when he accidentally killed a soldier from his own unit. His memory haunts him, and this conversation serves as one of the most poignant instances of the movie: "That is one thing that I can't shake loose. All my buddies' faces are still young (pause). And the thing is, the more years I have the more they have lost."

There is always a sense of melancholic regret in Alvin's words, so when he is asked by one of the cyclist what he likes least about being old, his answer is: "Remembering what it was like to be young". We can conclude that this journey is not only Straight making peace with his brother, but also Straight making peace with himself. In the early instances of the film Straight is warned (as noticed by McHugh, 212) by one of his friends that with such flawed vehicle he will never pass the Grotto (located in Iowa near Straight's starting point and home town Laurens). Grotto serves as a metaphorical threshold of the journey – by making past that point Straight proves that he has the stamina, endurance and will power to truly go the distance. McHugh observes that "being named the Grotto of Redemption, the Iowa landmark symbolizes Straight's readiness for reconciliation" (212).

#### 4.4. *Mulholland Drive*

##### *Hollywoodland*

According to Jousse, after *Lost Highway* and *The Straight Story*, Lynch started a third phase of his filmmaking "that remains open-ended to this day" (81). *Mulholland Drive* begins and falls into this last category. It was also voted the greatest film of the 21st century by the BBC's poll in 2016. Originally conceived as a pilot for a tv serial to be aired by ABC, Lynch's dream of a second chance (after *Twin Peaks*) of diving into the endless, end-postponing possibilities of the Scheherazade-like medium was crushed to pieces by the producers and broadcasters who didn't like what they saw. Maybe for the better, because *Mulholland Drive*, after Lynch turned the now infamous pilot into a feature film, stands as a true masterpiece in his oeuvre and even attracted "a whole new generation who fell in love with it" (Jousse, 5) to gradually (re)discover his complete filmography. *Mulholland Drive* was produced by the French Studio Canal, indicating the resentment Lynch felt by Hollywood. Still, *Mulholland Drive* is all about "the dream factory"-Hollywood itself.

Like the Hollywood producers who destroyed Lynch's desire to make another TV series, *Mulholland Drive* centres around the character of an aspiring actress Diane Selwyn whose dream of conquering Hollywood turns into a nightmare of, well, *lynchian* proportions. "The film presents Hollywood as a machine able to relentlessly produce fantasy" (Jousse, 84), but also indicates that the greater the magnitude of fantasy fulfillment, the bigger the crash when that dream doesn't come true.

*Mulholland Drive* even begins with a car crash of a woman named Rita who subsequently loses her memory. Her path is soon crossed with that of Betty (who actually turns out to be the previously mentioned Diane Selwyn), who has just come to Hollywood full of hopes and dreams of becoming a famous actress. We can divide *Mulholland Drive* into two parts. The first focuses on Rita and Betty's investigation regarding Rita's amnesia-induced lost identity. Parallel to their private investigation Lynch introduces several sub-plots, one of them concerning Mafia and its relationship to Hollywood, giving the film a noir-ish sense of mystery and black humour. Jousse points out that

the various random signs and clues of the first part, all find a kind of resolution in the film's second part, which Lynch seems to deliberately make brief. This offers an overall reinterpretation of events, facts and character's actions as if all the issues at stake in the story are suddenly compressed and shifted by Lynch, with the sole purpose of 'explaining' the film to the viewer (84).

This sudden shift in narrative happens about two thirds along the way and for many viewers it is "the most striking feature" (Bulkeley, 50) of the film. In this second part of *Mulholland Drive*, once enthusiastic Betty, becomes Diane Selwyn (both are played by Naomi Watts) who unlike Betty is bitter and dark. People from the first half of the movie are still present, but along with the abrupt shift in narrative, they too are now different, with different names and relations to one another. Everything the audience thought they understood in the first part of the film is brought into question in the second part. "Each new scene that follows this profound shift in the narrative takes on an added layer of meaning in its retrospective revelation of what was happening in the earlier scenes, and this in turn creates a mounting sense of inexplicable foreboding as the story builds to a climax (Bulkeley, 51). As noticed by Bulkeley, a similar narrative technique was used



in *A Beautiful Mind* by Ron Howard, who won the best film and best director awards the same year Lynch was nominated for *Mulholland Drive*. Bulkeley concludes that "the different use of this narrative device in the two films is a good measure of the difference between mainstream Hollywood movies and Lynch's distinctive, "Jimmy Stewart from Mars" brand of filmmaking (51).

Most of Lynch's films frustrate the need for rationalization in his audience, but as David Roche concludes "*Mulholland Drive* is trickier and even more perverse as it seems at first to fulfill that desire only to frustrate it in the end" (2). Lynch profoundly enjoys making movies that dwell on mysteries and is (in)famous for not giving any sort of clues or easy fix solutions about them. When the mystery is solved desire dies too (when the audience found out who killed Laura Palmer in the first season of *Twin Peaks*, they lost their desire to continue to watch season two). This frustration of not being able to solve the mystery is why Roche calls his films "films of bliss..They rely on him to fill in the gaps with his own imagination" (3). Lynch himself described his love for unsolvable things this way:

That there is a mystery is a huge thrill. That there's more going on than meets the eye is a thrilling thing. Let's say that you could see something and mistake it for something else-a man walking across a window at night with something in his hand. Maybe you saw exactly what you thought you saw, and all of your imaginings are exactly what is going on. But more often than not, if you were actually able to go in there and see what was really happening, it would be a let-down from your imagination trip. So I think fragments of things are pretty interesting. You can dream the rest. Then you're a participant (Rodley, 26).

Mystery is also directly linked to the childlike innocence as opposed to knowledge linked to adulthood. Like Rilke who called childhood the complete state of being, Lynch states that: "We think that we understand the rules when we become adults, but what we've really experienced is a narrowing of the imagination" (Rodley, 14). So, Lynch in a way represents a form of "regression: from knowledge to innocence, from the objective and rational world of the adult to the subjective and irrational world of childhood" (Roche, 4). Of course in Lynch's case, this regression is seen as a positive thing and plays along with Lynch being regarded as a nostalgic kind of author. David Lynch is a romantic kind of artist and "its mystical vision of art enables him to escape the cynicism of the tyrannical artist by turning the artist into a worker of divine" (Roche, 11).

In *Mulholland Drive*, once naiveté-driven but now indignant actress Diane dreams up a fantastic new life to lessen her guilt after she hires a hitman to kill her more successful ex-lover Camilla. "From the very beginning of *Mulholland Drive*, it's already Diane's dream, and she incorporates everything she sees in reality into her dream" (Lee, 4). The revelation that Betty from the first part of *Mulholland Drive* is actually Diane from the second part can be read as Lynch's indignation against the harsh reality of the dream factory called Hollywood. "It is Diane's version of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, but for her the wonderland is hell in the end" (Lee, 5). In her dream, Diane is actually re-defining herself, but in reality "creative energy is blocked, and the girl's body is ultimately the sign of the industry's putrefaction, the corpse of Diane Selwyn a horrible, disfigured, rotted memento mori for pop culture" (Sheen, Davison 179). The story of *Mulholland Drive* takes place "in an atmosphere of symbolic debacle, a complete loss of identification and the sadly devalued word is inescapable here-madness" (Sheen, Davison 221). This dislocation of reality, or in the case of *Mulholland Drive*, psychosis,

happens when there is no properly human desire at all, because there is no repression. This happens when the subject has "not undergone symbolic castration which is necessary to make distinctions between ideas like desire and fantasy, fiction and reality" (Gleyzon, 72). In *Mulholland Drive*, Diane goes through a psychotic break which initiates her fevered dream or a pre-suicide fantasy in which she rewrites the actual events.

Lynch's retro-land is an "eternal present whose terms are not temporal but imagistic, imaginary, and purely artificial. Its context is cinema, artificiality: a phantasmagoria corresponding to subjective desires and fears rather than a correspondent objective reality" (Gleyzon, 136). In other words Lynchian "weirdness appears theatrically not naturalistically-this is not a simple subconscious mode used to represent inchoate emotions, but the staged quality of the dream. The film concludes by refusing realism and reinstating fantasy" (Gleyzon, 137).

*Mulholland Drive* is a fairy tale of Hollywood and explores our "ability to feel intensely about that which we know is unreal, despite or because of its unreality. The film is not only a nightmare of love, but a nightmare of artifice" (Gleyzon, 143). *Mulholland Drive* provides an "ever-deepening reflection on the allure of Hollywood and on the multiple role playing and self-invention that the movie-going experience promises." (Sheen, Davison, 181), and is full of the signs "both of empty illusion and the fullness of possibility" (Chion, 180).

In the Lynchian universe destruction is never final. Although Diane's initial dream turned into the worst possible kind of nightmare, at the closure of *Mulholland Drive*, Lynch "seeds the darkness with hope when he haunts the screen with radiant, clouds illuminated by brilliant light through which Betty and Rita reappear in the darkness suddenly, as they once were. Despite the narrative triumph of Hollywood's criminal solipsism, traces of better possibilities remain in the

film: the once hopeful aspects of both girls do not die simply because the narrative has run its course" (Chion, 179).

## 5. Conclusion

In my thesis I wanted to show how a film director nicknamed 'Jimmy Stewart from Mars', who co-exists outside the society and its trends, can become a kind of palimpsest whose own divergence creates not only his world, but also delves into and uncovers a wider society and its norms. Numerous books and articles tackle a great variety of themes, maintain their own take and perspective on things, but at the same time they all have Lynch in common.

A good example of the effect that Lynchian poetics have on spectators can be seen in the first, introductory part of his 1986 film, *Blue Velvet*. The very first five minutes of the film can be taken as a figure of speech, a synecdoche for all his work. In one of the scenes, the pristine green lawns, white fences, red roses, are all very American, calming and very real; they made an effect on the spectators, enabling Lynch to become a part of the collective American consciousness.

Each detail, each shot is alluring for a spectator who becomes visually blinded by the familiar, 'the unreal precision of these evocations' (Chion, 6).

Lynch said that for the introductory scene he found inspiration in the atmosphere of the pastoral America in which he himself grew up, as well as in the way childhood was portrayed in his school books. To show this in his films, he often uses so-called 'comic strip'. He said: "I saw life in extreme close-ups" (Chion, 6). This notion is typical of Lynch; it obviously stems from his boyhood days and memories. For example, "saliva mixed with blood (Chion, 6) kind of thing", is

a typical child's association. What follows after a familiar rural scene, typical of the neighbourhood, the idyllic and the serene - in reality it is the 'underbelly' dominated by the insects, the symbols of human deterioration, ready to feed on the previous scene. However, this does not really happen - a spectator remembers what is nice, so his memory is that of the American dream which never becomes a nightmare. This uncovers Lynch's idiosyncratic peculiarity: "the too bright images of fences and flowers, are not a matter of making the familiar strange, but of getting at how familiar the familiar actually is" (Marcus, 3). The scenes, specific to no-one and everyone, remain in our memory as pictures, as symbols of America as we know it.

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## 7. Filmography:

*Blue Velvet* Dir. David Lynch. 1986

*Dune*. Dir. David Lynch. 1984

*Eraserhead*. Dir. David Lynch. 1977

*Inland Empire*. Dir. David Lynch. 2006

*Lost Highway*. Dir. David Lynch. 1997

*Mulholland Drive*. Dir. David Lynch. 1999

*Rabbits*. Dir. David Lynch. 2002

*Six Men Getting Sick (Six Times)*. Dir. David Lynch. 1967

*The Alphabet*. Dir. David Lynch. 1968

*The Elephant Man*. Dir. David Lynch. 1980

*The Grandmother*. Dir. David Lynch. 1970

*The Straight Story*. Dir. David Lynch. 1999

*Twin Peaks*. Dir. David Lynch. 1990 -1991

*Twin Peaks: Fire Walk With Me*. Dir. David Lynch. 1992

*Wild at Heart*. Dir. David Lynch. 1990

## 8. Abstract

David Lynch is the representative of American film modernism and postmodernism. His film work is uncompromising and based on his unique author's vision. His specific visual style with dreamy scenes accompanied by specific sound and music was accepted as the world-renowned "Lynchian" style. His work is the main topic of a number of professional film reviews and books.

In the first part of the thesis, I present a review of David Lynch's films. The first thematically separated part includes the films including the sinister side of American society with the Surrealist Symbolism (*Eraserhead*, *The Elephant Man*, *Blue Velvet*, and *Wild at Heart*). The second thematic part represents the crucial, psychedelic stage filled with dreams, daydreams and fantasies (*Twin Peaks: Fire Walk with Me* and television series *Twin Peaks*, *Mulholland Drive*, *Lost Highway* and *Inland Empire*). The third thematic stage presents David Lynch's atypical films, the science fiction film *Dune* and the "road movie" *The Straight Story* that has elements of dreams and fantasies.

The second part of my thesis examines further four of Lynch's films. (*Blue Velvet*, *Mulholland Drive*, *Lost Highway* and Lynch's atypical film *The Straight Story*).

Keywords: David Lynch, filmography, American dreams.

