There is No Band at Club Silencio *Thoughts on David Lynch and* ***Mulholland Drive***

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What accounts for the feeling of dread and disconnect that follows us out of the theatre after watching a David Lynch film? Mario Falsetto examines the carefully constructed universe of *Mulholland Drive*, looking for clues. He demonstrates how the film fits into (and goes beyond) the cinematic traditions of modernist surrealism and post-modernist stylistic excess.

The moments we remember from a David Lynch film are often those moments that are only tangentially related to the workings of the film's narrative. It's often those things that have the most profound impact in a Lynch film. Lynch has always been as much concerned with the emotions of a scene, or the *feel* or *mood* of it, as he might say, than with anything as concrete as narrative structure or character formation. To have a better understanding of how Lynch deals with narrative issues actually requires an embrace of the non-narrative elements of his art. This can be tricky in Lynch's work since the line that demarcates what is or is not part of a film's narrative is often obscured. Frequently, what we associate with a film's style may be crucial to our experience of the film, but not essential to how the narrative functions. Questions of meaning in cinema have never been restricted to questions of narrative. There are all sorts of things in a film that can have profound meaning or impact, such as the look on an actor's face, or the way an image seems to linger on screen long after it has given up its meaning. Perhaps it's related to that elusive "third meaning" that Roland Barthes talks about, that level of meaning that resides somewhere beyond plot and style. Cinema is an art of resonance. Cinematic moments linger in our unconscious, and they haunt us unaccountably. They become a part of our waking life as much as they are a part of our dreamwork.

Lynch's world is a more abstracted world than that of most other films, and his films are often more concerned with creating moments of archetypal power than in creating engaging characters, although I think they always seem to want to create an involving, even empathetic experience. How precisely does Lynch develop his abstracted, deeply disturbing cinematic universe? What is the relationship between various stylistic or narrative elements in Lynch's films and why do they have the kind of resonance we associate with the greatest art? This essay is an attempt to explore some aspects of these vital questions.

Lynch has often been referred to as one of the few genuine, contemporary surrealists. His concern with the force of the unconscious and how it drives our waking life is central to what makes his work so powerful and seems to connect him to earlier generations of surrealist artists. For Lynch, the unconscious is a real place, as real as anything in our waking life. He frequently talks about chance occurrences, those happy accidents that seem to occur in all of his films, such as the sudden inspiration of Dean Stockwell's use of an electrician's lamp as a microphone in the sublime "In Dreams" sequence in *Blue Velvet* (1986). Apparently, Lynch's career is full of such moments of happenstance. The underlying and surface sexual tension in many scenes in his work also links Lynch to the notion so crucial to both Freudian and surrealist thought: unconscious,

sexual desire determines much of our waking life. Additionally, the idea of the double, so central to both *Lost Highway* (1997) and *Mulholland Drive* (2001), is another key concept that the first generation of surrealists borrowed freely from psychoanalysis.

Mulholland Drive doesn't necessarily feel or look like a dream, at least not all the time, but it certainly incorporates a dream logic aligning it to such surrealist precursors as Buñuel and Dali's *Un Chien Andalou* (1928) and Cocteau's *Blood Of A Poet* (1930). At first glance, the world of *Mulholland Drive* resembles our own universe, although it's obviously wackier. But the oddness of Lynch's universe is the result of many deliberate aesthetic choices. It can be the way Lynch places incongruous elements within the same space, such as the scene of director Adam Kesher (Justin Theroux) and the cowboy (Lafayette Montgomery) meeting at a corral in the Hollywood hills.It feels weird because *Mulholland Drive* is contemporary in time and place, yet the cowboy seems like a throwback to an earlier era when real cowboys were used as stunt men or minor actors in 1930s movies. We feel a sense of displacement, of a time warp, a juxtaposition of elements that somehow don't belong together. It's similar to the *frisson* of seeing Merit Oppenheim's fur-covered teacup and spoon at the Museum of Modern Art, redolent with physical texture and a sense of the uncanny. Lynch may not be a surrealist *per se* – he'd probably reject any such label – but his work and creative process certainly acknowledge something of a surrealist approach to making art.

Mulholland Drive's narrative movement is hallucinatory and elliptical. The theme of fragmented identities and the illusory power and potentially destructive effects that movies can have is woven throughout the film's construction, mise-en-scene, montage and sound. Viewing the film one is reminded how sensual the cinema can be, much like the hallucinatory, erotic power of the films of Josef von Sternberg. Lynch's work has strong connections to the decadent, Sternbergian universe of *Scarlet Empress* (1934) and *Devil Is A Woman* (1935), films that also valorized mise-en-scene, abstraction and sensuousness over narrative logic.

The most unusual aspect of *Mulholland Drive*'s narrative structure is undoubtedly the way we are forced to re-think the entire movie based on the material contained in its final 45 minutes. Whatever we think the concerns of the first 100 minutes are – the tale of the young, wide-eyed Betty (Naomi Watts) who arrives to take Hollywood by storm only to be embroiled in the dark, mysterious world of amnesiac, car-accident victim Rita (Laura Elena Harring) – must be radically revised in the final movement of the film. This aspect of the film, in some ways, is a variation on the narrative/stylistic idea of the retroactive match cut, which alters our understanding of the meaning of a shot or sequence after it is first encountered. The strategy was articulated with the greatest sophistication by Michelangelo Antonioni in his modernist masterpieces of the late 1950s and early 1960s, such as *L'eclisse* (1961) and *L'avventura* (1960), and can also be found in the work of filmmakers as diverse as Alain Resnais, Nicolas Roeg, and Terence Davies. Through some perceptual alteration within the shot, or because of some later narrative development, we are forced to revise our understanding of what has come before. It's a modernist technique that allows the film to keep reinventing itself. Viewers must continually adjust their understanding of the material, either in perceptual or narrative terms, because the meaning is constantly changing. The notion of retroactivity is a key structuring principle of *Mulholland Drive*, but it's not merely individual shots but the meaning of the whole movie that needs revision.

For some filmmakers, the retroactive technique is related to making narrative film approximate how the mind and perceptions work, moving from one space and time to the other, disregarding the notion of linear temporality. Beyond that it relates to the idea of fragmenting information over the course of the narrative. It's also connected to notions of perceptual distraction and phenomenologically being in the world where we are constantly bombarded with sensations whose meaning remains hidden, or which will only reveal itself later. The idea of trying to approximate the ways the mind and body experience time and space is one way that modernist narrative took up many concerns of the avant-garde, converging in beautifully mysterious ways in films such as Antonioni's *The Passenger* (1975), which ends famously with a seven-minute, moving camera shot echoing Michael Snow's monumental work of the late 1960s and early 1970s.

The final movement of *Mulholland Drive* asks us to reinterpret the first 100 minutes of screen time as now being a universe fabricated in the consciousness of small-time, failed-actor Diane Selwyn (Naomi Watts), who lies dying (or dead) somewhere in a run-down apartment in Hollywood. Linking the narrative material of the film's final movement to the material that preceded it becomes critical in terms of how we understand the workings of the film. Of course, crucial as it may be to connect narrative information to the film's internal structures, it is not this alone that makes

Mulholland Drive such a unique experience. As in most of Lynch's other work, the film asks us to attend to every aspect of its construction from colour schemes to camera movement, from music and sound to performance, from lighting to editing patterns, from set design to costume and make-up. In short, every element of the film's construction can be a container of possible meaning.

What's especially interesting in Lynch's film is the way all the material of a scene is presented as meaningful and significant. The hierarchy of significance that we associate with most movies, where some things are to be attended to more than others, is abandoned. We can never tell while watching a scene – at least the first time around – what its most salient features are. It's possible that a seemingly minor detail will turn out be of critical importance. Everything is presented on the same level of significance. It's like some of Robert Altman's soundtracks in his films of the 1970s where the bit players' dialogue is heard over the dialogue of the main characters. Or when Altman's constantly zooming camera picks out details in the background that don't seem to be very important. Antonioni's wandering camera sometimes does the same thing. The process of making meaning thus remains fluid and always open to revision. And there's a kind of democratic notion to it. The viewer has to decide what's most important in terms of the sensations we perceive. It's a way to connect the mechanics of making movies to the workings of human perception. These notions of uncertainty, built-in ambiguity and dissolving hierarchies are in direct contrast to the way the classically "well-constructed" movie operates.

Viewers have been conditioned by years of movie going to try and decipher how narrative works in terms of logical cause and effect. It's at the heart of the classical Hollywood model, and along with other elements, such as the way space and time are organized through the eye-line glance and 180-degree rule, character formation, narrative closure, and screenplay structure, it's been a remarkably resilient form that continues to have an amazing hold on world cinema and television. There have been numerous filmmakers who have explored narrative and what it can do, and exploded the classical model and offered alternatives to it. But no matter how much some films have played with the idea of cause and effect, or with notions of modernist and post-modernist organization, or narrative ambiguity, there haven't been many films that strive to operate in non-rational ways, or in truly surreal fashion as does *Mulholland Drive*. It's an exciting experiment interrogating the nature of narrative.

The disconnected, fragmented structure of the film makes us feel, at times, as if we've entered into the middle of separate narratives. Consider the scene at Winkies restaurant where one man recounts to another his horrifying dream involving a monstrously grotesque man whom he believes resides behind the restaurant and will cause him to die. These sequences, and others in between, have no apparent connection to each other. It seems as if we've entered into the middle of one narrative and then proceeded to a completely different one. Narrative events unfold in the first hour and half with little sense of how one sequence necessarily connects with the other. The logic of cause and effect does not seem to be a part of this Lynchian universe as one bizarre scene follows the other. At the same time, there does seem to be a main narrative of sorts that involves Betty (Naomi Watts), the aspiring actor from Deep River, Ontario – echoing the name of the Deep River apartments in *Blue Velvet* – and Rita, the accident victim of the car crash that begins the film.

One strategy that contributes to the idea of a more abstracted narrative is the way we keep hearing snatches of dialogue within individual scenes, but for much of the movie we are unable to connect these narratives to each other. Not only that, but the segments themselves are so fragmentary and elliptical that we aren't given enough information to fully grasp the narrative context of the sequences themselves. Lynch plays on our understanding of how narratives are supposed to work and our conviction that we grasp what the film is trying to do. On the surface the film plays as if it actually makes sense, even while something inside us tells us we don't really know how things connect.

The idea of narrative abstraction is connected in Lynch's films to concepts of heightened emotions and cinematic excess. Meaning in a Lynch film is more often to be found in its foregrounded mise-en-scene rather than its plot machinations. The film's structure and questions of point of view become much more important than trying to get a handle on who the characters are or what their relationship is to each other. In Lynch's world, the sound of blows is amplified, colors are exaggerated and emotions are heightened. All the stylistic elements we've come to expect, at least since *Blue Velvet* when Lynch's work begins to be most imbued with the idea of excess, are all evident in *Mulholland Drive*. Lynch's work tells us that color is as important as action; that visual and aural texture is as important as character or dialogue; that feeling is as important as the intellect. It

forces us to reflect on how we understand the way we think movies work.

As an example consider the scene where Adam Kesher confronts his wife (Lori Heuring) in bed with the pool man (Billy Ray Cyrus) and pours pink paint in her jewel box as he leaves their house. We know (retroactively) that this scene was formed out of a snatch of dialogue by Kesher at the party – "I got the house and she got the pool man" – and certain colors that are highlighted there. The pink and blue chair in the background of the blue pool at Kesher's house and the scene featuring Kesher's wife with the pool man are ways the unconscious mind might transform that material. The visual design and color scheme carry as much meaning as the dialogue or narrative situation of the scene.

By the time we get to the movie set where Adam Kesher is seen shooting *The Sylvia North Story* with Rita/Camilla, we're not sure what we're watching. *Mulholland Drive* has referenced (at the very least) half a dozen genres or sub-genres including the fetid atmosphere of film noir, murder mysteries, teen movies, musicals, absurdist comedy, melodrama, and identitycrisis movies. It even alludes to the masterpiece of identity-crisis movies, Hitchcock's *Vertigo* (1958). We're an hour and half into the film and we seriously wonder what possible narrative cohesion can materialize to bind these disparate elements and generic references together. When we start hearing the snatches of dialogue from the earlier audition scene as Kesher shows Camilla how to play the scene in an automobile, we have a strange reaction not dissimilar to watching the perplexities of a Maya Deren film. Shots are repeated but since they're in a new context – the shot isn't exactly the same length and the material that precedes and follows it has been modified – it feels new. We get a sensation of defamiliarization; we think we know something but at the same time it feels strange.

Referencing so many genres and the business of making movies makes perfect sense in retrospect since we soon understand that Diane Selwyn's unconscious is responsible for the earlier material. Her world would naturally be a world made up from the movies. Her unfulfilled aspirations to make it in the movies, like so many others before her, have relegated her to the margins of the industry. The heightened, paranoid universe that her unconscious invents makes sense in terms of how the unconscious might transform her waking reality as she sinks deeper and deeper into delusion and psychosis after her relationship with Camilla comes apart.

Mulholland Drive contains deliberately paced, languid editing rhythms that are the result of both a long-take camera strategy and slow editing patterns to create a world that seems more connected to our subconscious than to our waking reality. Space and time have their own logic in the unconscious. The tone also keeps shifting from one scene to the next creating an unstable, ambiguous quality. The sense of veering from highly comic to deeply disturbing material, and everything in between, contributes to the unsettling quality and sense of dread that permeates the film. It recalls the dreamy quality of Stanley Kubrick's *Eyes Wide Shut* (1999), another recent film that also feels like a projection into the interiorized universe of its main character (Tom Cruise). Not coincidently, Lynch shares with Kubrick the notion of creating a "total cinema," to use French film critic André Bazin's phrase, where every element of sound and image is carefully calibrated to work in concert to create a multi-layered, cinematic experience. When Lynch talks about creating a *mood* in his work, he is deliberately simplifying a complex, aesthetic organization that is precisely constructed out of many elements, both visual and aural. His meticulousness is comparable to Kubrick's in its careful attention to every detail, although the range of his concerns seems narrower. Is it an accident that during the shooting of *The Shining* (1980), Kubrick is said to have repeatedly screened an obscure film called *Eraserhead* (1977) by an unknown American director named David Lynch for his friends and crew and called it the most fantastic movie he'd ever seen? The aesthetic overdetermination of *Mulholland Drive, Eraserhead* and *Eyes Wide Shut* is an important aspect of the investigation into cinematic subjectivity at the center of each film. It's also not an accident that texture and tonal instability are key aspects of all three films. Lynch shares with Kubrick a belief that the world we inhabit is a strangely mysterious one and not as accessible to comprehension as most films would have us believe.

Much of *Mulholland Drive* has a brooding sensuality that is often a result of repeated, slow camera moves into dark passageways. There are also innumerable moments where the camera goes into and out of focus to help communicate a character's subjective point of view. In one scene Rita and Betty race toward the camera and the two personalities, in tandem with the camera, create an almost cubist-like reverberating effect which might indicate that the two personalities are merging or shifting back and forth. It's reminiscent of a shot in *Lost Highway* where Bill Pullman's character is transformed into the character played by Balthazar Getty. Other examples of visual texture are some of

the overhead shots of the night-time, Los Angeles skyline that punctuate the film. These shots not only contribute a dreamy, surreal quality to the film, but they force the viewer to think about the issue of point of view, and who might actually own this god-like POV. Shots like these help communicate the idea that we have entered into the mind of a character, although we still don't know whose. It is only in retrospect that we comprehend that Diane Selwyn's consciousness is responsible for structuring much of what occurs in the first 100 minutes of the film.

The out of focus material is particularly interesting on several levels. There is never any kind of smoothness to these shots or any attempt to create a seamless illusionism, something that Lynch could easily have achieved with digital effects – had Lynch had the remotest interest in creating digital effects. For Lynch, it's important to acknowledge the mechanical nature of the film medium, and his insistence when he was making *Lost Highway* on continuing to edit on a mechanical device (the kem) as opposed to a digital system such as the Avid (Chris Rhodley, 237) is a clear indication that Lynch values film over video. What's also interesting about so many of these camera effects is not only that they are noticeable or that they draw attention to themselves, but that they are so *obviously* mechanical. They are visibly the result of someone physically manipulating the camera lens. These moments add a kind of painterly texture to the film in ways not dissimilar to the textures that sound seems to implant on the image in Lynch's work. In *Mulholland Drive* sound helps communicate the perpetual sense of dread we feel throughout much of its running time.

The emphasis on the physicality of things and the film's absurdist tone are two of its strongest strategies. They're evident from the film's earliest moments with the violent car crash, the impact of which is heightened by the exaggerated sound of crashing metal and the intensity of the camera work and editing patterns. The emphasis on the physical continues in several subsequent scenes, such as the first scene at Winkies where the man recounts his horrifying dream, and the scene where the small-time criminal murders the other hood for the black book. The absurdly paranoid tone continues in the first scene at the studio with the Castigliane brothers (Dan Hedeya and Angelo Badalamenti), which is the first time we hear of the actress Camilla Rhodes as one of the brothers (Badalamenti) pulls out a photograph and states "This is the Girl" (who will now be given the lead in the movie currently being directed by Adam Kesher). The bizarre scene is interrupted by several shots which imply that the movies business is not only controlled by organized crime but also by a strange, crippled dwarf in another room, shots that echo the theatrical, heightened spaces and absurdities of *Twin Peaks*.

The emphasis on the physical is plainly noticeable in other scenes, such as the smashing of the limousine by Kesher with a golf club; the fight between Kesher, his wife and the pool man where every blow seems amplified in the extreme; and the scene in which an overweight enforcer arrives at the Kesher home only to be confronted by Kesher's hysterical wife and the white-trash pool man, ending in a chaotic mass of tangled bodies. An interesting element of this scene is the way it begins with the sound of a needle dropping on a recording of Sonny Boy Williams singing "Maybe Baby," adding another element of physical texture to an already violently physical scene. The first word of the song is the elongated "Baaaaby. . ." which follows Rita's words, "maybe, maybe," of the previous scene, as she and Betty call the phone number hoping for some clue to Rita's identity.

Adding this kind of "rough texture" to his film is another way for Lynch to insert himself into the film, to draw attention to the hand of the artist. It's like seeing the artist's hand in some of James Whitney's hand-drawn animations of the 1950s, in contrast to later computer-generated animation where the machine-made quality of the images is so prominent. It's why Lynch seems to want to have a hand in so many aspects of the filmmaking process far beyond the writing and directing chores most auteurs assign themselves. It's why he spends precious time fashioning some of the most elegant furniture in the films himself, or why he works on the sound in post-production, or writes some of the songs, or is intimately involved in the editing. Lynch admires the craft of filmmaking as much as its art. He wants to be engaged in the physical act of making movies at almost every level.

In the film's final movement, what becomes important is how Lynch orchestrates and re-conceives the earlier material so that it now takes on new meaning. During this phase of the film, we keep returning to shots in the room where the body of Diane Selwyn lies decaying as her narrative, in somewhat linear form now, is strung together. We also get frequent point-of-view shots, with the camera lens frequently going in and out of focus to emphasize that her consciousness controls what we now see. The party scene where Kesher and Camilla (Laura Harring) eventually announce their engagement begins

with Diane's limo ride and her stroll, hand-in-hand with Camilla through "a secret path" to the house. Material now comes at a furious pace to alter our understanding of what has come before. There's almost too much of it for the viewer to keep track of. From linguistic snatches of spoken Spanish by the catering crew to Kesher's reference to the "pool man" to a reference to "Wilkins," another party guest. Also at the party, we see Angelo Badalamenti drink a cup of coffee – in the earlier studio scene we see him comically spit out his espresso onto a napkin; we get a shot of the cowboy as a party guest; and we are introduced to Kesher's mother, Catherine "Coco" Lenoix (Ann Miller) and see her gobble down pecans. Of course, the fact that it's Ann Miller has it's own allusions to Hollywood's golden age (as does Lee Grant's role as the ditzy neighbour, Louise Bonner, at the apartment complex in the earlier part of the film).

Interspersed with this party scene is a sequence at Winkies restaurant where Diane is served by a waitress (Melissa Crider) with a "Betty" name tag, and her reference to "this is the girl" as she shows a sleazy hitman (Mark Pellegrino) a photograph of Camilla Rhodes (Laura Harring) to presumably rid herself of Camilla once and for all – if Diane can't have Camilla, no one else will. Also in this sequence, we view a man standing at the counter who we remember as the man with the horrifying nightmare in the first scene at Winkies.

Not all the material is serious, of course. It wouldn't be a Lynch film if it was all dark and disturbing since Lynch sees so much humour in the world. Ann Miller's "Coco" and her pecans are turned into dog turds left by a dog belonging to "Wilkins" in the scene when Betty first arrives in Hollywood. Chad Everett's character at the audition scene is nicknamed "Woody," which seems an apt moniker for the sleazy and highly-sexed character he plays during the audition sequence.

Much of the experience of watching *Mulholland Drive* engages us in play, as we revise the meaning of previously received information. Ultimately, it doesn't much matter if we miss some ideas that Lynch may have inserted. By the time we immerse ourselves in the film's final movement, we've been sucked into one of the wildest, most disorienting bits of cinematic game-playing since *Lost Highway*. But it's the experience of watching the film that is central to Lynch's project, not deciphering each narrative detail. The film's complicated narrative structure is there to make us feel the power of the unconscious. We're meant to be disturbed by the film, to feel as unhinged as its lead character.

Like Federico Fellini, Lynch creates characters who often function as different aspects of the self rather than as integrated, whole characters. They are meant to embody different traits in a self that seems to have no center. Like Sternberg, his actors become another aspect of our dreamwork, abstracted shadows of light and dark on a screen surface, as abstract as the painted silver trees in *Devil Is A Woman* or the exotic presence of Marlene Dietrich. Lynch's world hints at the dark interior worlds that exist for most of us but which we'd prefer not to examine. Lynch lets us go to these dark places in the relative safety of a movie experience. "Relative" because Lynch believes that movies can also be dangerous – as powerful and as therapeutic as any other great art can be, as illuminating and as mysterious.

Mulholland Drive contains two unquestionably great scenes, as good as anything Lynch has given us before: the audition scene and the scene at "Club Silencio" where Rebekah Del Rio lip-syncs to her a cappella version of "Crying" in Spanish, as Diane and Camilla tearfully watch her performance until the heavily made up singer collapses in mid-song. It's a great example of the theatrical strategies we frequently find in Lynch's films and brings together many of the themes that have been explored thus far. It begins with a strange, low to the ground moving camera shot outside the club as the camera quickly moves forward across the desolate parking lot. As the eerie, disturbing shot sweeps us along, the world of the film no longer feels like our own. Inside the theater, a magician acts as master of ceremonies and intones: "No hay banda," "There is no band, everything is tape recorded." We proceed to see musicians play instruments to a sound that clearly comes from another source. It's deliberately fake. The scene examines in a powerfully emotional way the power of the conjuring act of making these illusions we call movies. What's the difference between being moved to tears by something in the real world or by an illusion? For Lynch there is no difference, because there is nothing illusory about the unconscious or the imagination or our feelings. We may not know how things happen; we may not be able to distinguish between the real and the imaginary, but that only adds to the power of the mystery. Even *knowing* that Rebekah Del Rio is lip-syncing Orbison's song "Crying" does not lessen its impact. If we feel something deeply then what does it matter if it is the result of some trick? Knowledge does not negate emotions. The mind cannot turn off our emotions at will or control the emotional self.

The audition scene is crucial because it is a sublime example of how someone can imagine that they can

transform the most banal dialogue into an artful scene. We've just heard Betty and Rita rehearse the dialogue a few moments earlier, and cannot imagine how this can possibly be played for "real" or be in any way moving. Betty's earlier reading with Rita is right out of day-time TV soaps, all surface and cheap emotion. Betty valiantly tries to give her idea of what an emotional scene would be played like before she and Rita break up in convulsive laughter at the lame dialogue. The amazing sequence where Betty really does the audition with Jimmy "Woody" Katz, beautifully played with oozing, smarmy charm by Chad Everett, himself an actor long associated with television, is an astonishing scene. How could that bit of mediocrity turn into this astounding scene? It's akin to some mysterious alchemical process. Lynch understands that great acting is never about pretending. It's always about playing it for real, getting at the truth of the character or a scene in imaginary circumstances. That's why actors are artists, and creating a real character can be on a par with any other creative act, because it elevates the imaginative act to the level of creation.

The intensity of feeling that both performers convey leaves us breathless. The reading has to be better than we can imagine, and it is. Suddenly it feels altogether new. It's the same dialogue, but has a completely different life. It's a breakthrough scene, both for the character Betty plays and for Naomi Watts. In this scene a star truly is born. Lynch's film is an examination both of how Hollywood works on our unconscious and an illustration of young starlet, Naomi Watts, transforming into a major actor before our eyes. Nothing she has done up to this point in the film has prepared us for the astonishing power of her reading. The depth of feeling she conveys is mesmerizing. Her body trembles with intensity as she deeply feels every emotion.

The many ambiguities and mysteries of *Mulholland Drive* extend to seemingly small details such as the character of Louise Bonner, the ditzy neighbour who intrudes into Betty's apartment with her cries of "Someone's in trouble. Something bad is happening here." As played by an almost unrecognizable Lee Grant with overflowing masses of hair and a long cape, she both recalls the horrid, homeless (wo)man of the earlier scene and alludes to the interdictions of countless fairy tales. She becomes the personification of our instinctive self that warns us about the dangers of the world, as much as the homeless (wo)man's horrifying visage becomes the beastly personification of Betty's/ Diane's distorted, dark feelings about Camilla, and her lost dreams of making it in Hollywood. Grant's character may have been one of those things that might have been further developed if the original television pilot had been extended into a weekly series. No matter. Her unknowability is perfect for the film because the idea of knowablility extends to the idea of character as much as it does to any questions we may have about the relationship of one scene to the other. Who are these characters? What is their relationship to each other? What do the characters at the Winkies restaurant have to do with the characters involved in making the movie, *The Sylvia North Story* that Adam Kesher (or is it Bob Brooker) is directing? And what are we to make of the horribly deformed, scary man (woman) behind Winkies that shocks a character to death and who holds what may be a key to the film's meaning (the blue box and blue key), but who remains as enigmatic in the end as the woman with blue hair at "Club Silencio?" If all our questions were answered then *Mulholland Drive* really would be a clever but ultimately a minor work. The fact that the mysteries remain is a sign that Lynch has created a more substantial, enigmatic work that will linger in our conscious (and unconscious) mind for a long time to come.

In Lynch's world, the most privileged resource of human capability is the imagination. In some ways the actual making of *Mulholland Drive* is a concrete illustration of this idea. Not only for the character of Diane who imagines she can be the greatest actor in the world and give the most moving, heartfelt performance at a movie audition, but it extends to the (re)making of the film. Lynch has had to re-imagine his work of art from scratch. He has had to reconstruct it and give it a new form and set of meanings from what he may have intended when he first conceived the film as a television pilot. Out of the old form he was able to fashion a greater, more profound work, with more resonance and deeper power. He has expanded the range of thematic and stylistic issues and created a work with more philosophical weight. In the guise of a mystery film, he has fashioned a document on the nature of experience. In the process he has made a statement not only on the seductive power and cruelty of the film industry, but the deeper mysteries of desire and how our unconscious works.

On one level, *Mulholland Drive* is concerned with how we respond to the best (and worst) in movies. How can a Joseph Cornell fashion one of the great surrealist masterpieces of the last century (*Rose Hobart*, 1936) out of mediocre kitsch like *East Of Borneo* (1931)? Because Cornell knew that the best art always worked in mysterious ways. If it is to penetrate deep

into an individual's unconscious it needs to have the direct power and intensity of a dream. Cornell's radical reworking through montage of images from a B-movie illustrates that any material has the potential to be transformed into an artwork if the imaginative powers of the artist are great enough, and if the form is radical enough. Lynch's *Mulholland Drive* is in a similar tradition. It invokes the seductive power and eroticism of Hollywood movies, and it links the ecstatic power of images (and sounds) to the *experience* of watching movies. It asks (in a non-rational way) why some films make us *feel* so intensely, and so deeply.

The tragedy of Hollywood, as well as its greatness against every rational impulse, is that it can instill the most extraordinary desire in viewers. Each of us can be made to believe that we are capable of the most remarkable things while watching a film. It is the great empathetic art. It can create illusion so complete that we can feel the most extraordinary emotions at the movies. But Lynch also has fun with this great illusion-creating machine. In Diane/Betty's paranoid unconscious, the production company is run by gangsters and strange deformed characters who observe all from enclosed back rooms. The crazy quality of some of these scenes drifts into a Kafkaesque-like implication that the industry is operated for some unknown motive that goes much deeper than the business of making money or creating entertainment. Is it part of some elaborate plot to control our fate? Who could be doing this and for what reason? It's a paranoid vision of the Hollywood power structure, but is it any more absurd than the whole business of making movies where hundreds of millions of dollars are expended on some of the most ludicrous products ever imagined?

At times, movies seem to be able to satisfy all our intellectual and emotional needs. Movies for Lynch are both dangerous and necessary – dangerous because they can be more forceful and frightening and real than anything else in our normal daily experience, and necessary because like most significant art, our lives need the enrichment that only certain kinds of deeply meaningful, urgent experiences can give us. Movies are important to our imaginative lives. Like music and art, they feed our soul. They help us understand who we are and what we're doing here. And it isn't just the great movies that do this. As an earlier generation of surrealists illustrated, bad movies can have as much impact on our psyches as good movies. *Mulholland Drive* reminds us that movies can still put us in an emotionally dangerous, disturbing place. We are reminded of the dark, murky mysteries of the world, the unknowability of the world, as well as the archetypal power of movies.

I think it would be wrong to reduce *Mulholland Drive* to some kind of parlour game where the viewer tries to knit together the various clues, only to decipher the film's narrative structure and offer up a grand interpretive scheme for what things might mean. The film's narrative structure is but one element in a complex aesthetic strategy. Its power and mystery depend on many factors. Ultimately, *Mulholland Drive* is much more than the sum of its parts. Whatever meaning we might propose for such things as the blue key and the mysterious box that it opens, or the homeless man behind the restaurant, can only serve as partial explanation for the feelings the film generates. These narrative details don't necessarily get at what is powerful about the film or why it resonates deep within us long after we've experienced it. *Mulholland Drive* privileges a particular approach to the unconscious and the process of making art. Lynch's film argues that interpreting a work of art is of necessity a limited operation. Some things are best left ambiguous and mysterious like the world we live in. Take away that mystery and all we're left with is some crazy notion that the world makes sense and that we actually know who we are and what we're doing here. What makes David Lynch such an important artist is the way his work forces us to confront the certainties of our lives and contemplate the mysteriousness of being in the world. Added to this is his remarkable control of the medium. He seems to bring out the best in all his collaborators, and because of his attention to the precise details of making movies, a David Lynch film is as elegant in its construction as it is mysterious and profound in meaning.

Mulholland Drive has the urgency of the best art. It reminds us of the experiential power of movies. It offers the tantalizing proposition that the order we crave in our waking life may indeed be illusory, and the seeming chaos of the unconscious the more meaningful reality. It also asks us to rethink how we understand terms such as illusion and reality. That a film can even propose such ideas is the miracle of David Lynch. He is an artist who continues to astonish.

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